

**Hansberry a Universal Playwright or a Parochial One: Analyzing *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* in Light of Roger D. Abrahams's Viewpoints**

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**Abstract**

Some critics praised Lorraine Hansberry the African American female playwright, for writing *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* as a universal playwright and some others accused her of betraying African American Literature and her ancestors. By applying the notion of Signification proposed by Roger David Abrahams, the American folklorist in this play, this study reveals Hansberry has continued her contribution to African American Literature and post colonialism; however, this time by expanding her focus on oppression and the oppressed ones in general. Abrahams' notion of Signification is introduced and some stances and examples of it were discovered in the play. Hypothetically this paper concludes that Lorraine Hansberry attains her reputation not only as an African American dramatist but also as a universal author by writing *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's window*.

**Keywords:** Roger D. Abrahams, Lorraine Hansberry, Signification, African American Literature, modern drama

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هانسبری نمایش‌نامه‌نویسی جهانی یا نمایش‌نامه‌نویسی محلی: تحلیل «نشانه در پنجره سیدنی

بروستاین» در پرتو دیدگاه‌های راجر دی. آبراهامز

مریم جلالی فراهانی<sup>۱</sup>

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## چکیده

برخی از منتقدان، لورین هانسبری، نمایش‌نامه‌نویس زن آفریقایی آمریکایی را به دلیل نوشتن «نشانه در پنجره سیدنی بروستاین» به عنوان نمایش‌نامه‌نویسی جهانی ستوده‌اند و برخی دیگر او را به خیانت به ادبیات آفریقایی آمریکایی و اجدادش متهم کردند. این مطالعه با به‌کارگیری مفهوم «دلالت»-که راجر دیوید آبراهامز، فولکلوریست آمریکایی آن را ارائه کرده‌است- در این نمایش‌نامه، نشان می‌دهد که هانسبری به مشارکت خود در ادبیات آفریقایی آمریکایی و پسا استعماری نیز ادامه داده است؛ اما این بار با گسترش تمرکز خود بر ظلم و ستم و به‌طور کلی افراد ستم‌دیده در کل جهان به این مهم پرداخته است. از این‌رو، مفهوم «دلالت» آبراهامز و مواضع و نمونه‌هایی از آن در نمایش‌نامه کشف شده‌است. این مقاله نتیجه می‌گیرد که لورین هانسبری نه تنها به عنوان یک نمایش‌نامه‌نویس آمریکایی آفریقایی تبار، بلکه به عنوان یک نویسنده جهانی با نوشتن «نشانه در پنجره سیدنی بروستاین» به شهرت خود می‌رسد.

**کلید واژه‌ها:** راجر دی ابراهامز، لورین هانسبری، ادبیات آفریقایی آمریکایی، نمایش‌نامه مدرن.

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## **Introduction**

Hodin says *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* follows a man's attempt to challenge political actions, but Lorraine Hansberry uses a white Jewish intellectual to reveal his inability to care about politics within the Greenwich Village bohemian milieu, not institutional racism (٥٤). When Lorraine Hansberry's play opened on Broadway, some white critics were shocked by seeing her protagonist was Jewish rather than black and some African Americans lost hope or even became angry at her. Cater states those critics thought Hansberry was leaving African Americans to become universal writers! Others from both groups kindly supported Hansberry (٦٤).

*The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* portrays many cultural challenges of the time, for instance, women's conflicts and efforts for equality. The women of the play struggle hard to be recognized in a male-dominated chauvinistic society. Sidney criticizes Iris Brustein, his wife, for spending a lot of money on her acting classes. But he is a wasteful man and permanently loses money without consulting or asking her. At last, she is fed up and decides to leave him. Iris's sister Gloria killed herself after her fiancé refused to marry her since she was labeled a "prostitute". Mavis is Iris's other sister and criticizes Gloria both for her prostitution and for her black fiancé. Indeed she is the type

of person who cannot tolerate a different opinion of her own. Another pivotal theme of the play is the revelation of the imperfection of man. The characters all have personal faults and mistakes. Gloria cannot tolerate the challenge of facing her choices and decisions in life. Alton cannot disregard looking at Gloria's past flaws. Iris and Sidney have a lot of conflicts. Throughout the play, these intrinsic mistakes reveal the imperfection of people.

The Underground Press or the Clandestine Press was a movement in the ۱۹۶۰s and it let some independent bohemian newspapers grow. These papers were rather cheap and available to people. One of these popular underground publications in the United States of America was named The Rag in Austin, TX. It belonged to the Underground Press Syndicate and its goal was to use new forms of news media or to develop the old ones. Harvey Wyatt is a minor character in the play who introduces a small, community paper to Sidney. This paper was one of those mentioned in Underground Papers and Sidney likes to make this paper a representative of the Greenwich Village culture .

Some critics such as Duran hold that *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* is not "appreciated well enough" (۷۴). She says Hansberry's reputation is mainly based on *A Raisin in the Sun*, and most critics have often refused to approve *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* because

it is not about African or African American people. But Duran rather regards this as a sign of Hansberry's strength than of weakness. Duran contends that Hansberry is one of the few principal African American writers of the twentieth century who makes attempts to write about the general American experience (in this play it means white experience). Duran says Hansberry does not keep on concentrating merely on her African American background (१३०). Duran confirms those who believe that the composition of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* is a mistake; do not consider the situations of Hansberry's life and how her entry into New York shaped her work. Duran mentions that this play is not plainly about the people of the Village, it is also about a sense of estrangement and alienation from American life in general, and maybe it can be said Hansberry in this play is more concerned about this sense of alienation than she is about Blackness (१३१). Anne Cheney believes the play is not appropriately appreciated because of two reasons. First of all, it is somehow ahead of its time; second, many African American and white people think it would be better for her to keep on addressing African American issues (१३२).

Hodin thinks *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* might be considered Hansberry's reaction to the Absurd movement in the theater (१३३). The Theatre of the Absurd combined clarity with absurdity and

seriousness with humor. It depicted the lack of consistency and unity in lives and the eternal seeking for meaning in purposeless. It revealed life as uncertain, without God or values. Hansberry's play puts two figures together. David Ragin is an absurd character and Sidney Brustein is a socially concerned person. The discussions of the two persons express Hansberry's criticism of searching for meaning. Sidney Brustein's mouthpiece tells the audience and readers one should search for how to live and not the meaning of life. In this, way the readers notice Lorraine Hansberry's devotion to human rights and social values.

As it was expressed limited descriptive studies were done on *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* and none of these critics or researchers have applied Roger Abrahams' notions of "Signification" on Lorraine Hansberry's plays, so this paper intended to fill this gap by doing so.

The central theoretical framework of the study is based on Roger Abrahams' ideas about "Signification". Through applying his ideas to the manuscript of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* and by exploring the language of the play, the process of "Signification" is examined. By doing so, the universal aspects of the play, an accurate picture of bitter oppression, and the rich identity of African American literature are depicted. This study hypothetically concluded that

Hansberry's drama attained its uniqueness and its universal properties from these multicultural voices and cultures. The present study is a quality library-based research and a descriptive one.

### **Discussing Abrahams's Notion of "Signification" in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window***

Roger D. Abrahams is a famous and prominent literary critic, linguist, and anthropologist who made of one the most sustained attempts to define Signifyin(g). Abrahams wrote and published some important books about Signifyin(g) between ۱۹۶۲ and ۱۹۷۶. If the readers consider Abrahams's interpretative evolution, it will help them to perceive the complicatedness of this rhetorical figure. In ۱۹۶۲, he defines the term in a way that other scholars find worthy to accept and repeat. The name "Signifying Monkey" shows [the hero] to be a trickster, "signifying" being the language of trickery, that set of words or gestures which arrives at "direction through indirection." Abrahams describes Signifyin(g) like this:

Signifying seems to be a Negro term, in use if not in origin. It can mean several things; in the case of the toast about the signifying monkey, it certainly refers to the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or



situation. Also, it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures. Thus it is signifying stirring up a fight between neighbors by telling stories; it is signifying making fun of a policeman by parodying his motions behind his back; it is signifying asking for a piece of cake by saying, "my brother needs a piece of cake." (۲۰۰۶، ۲۳۴)

Abrahams indirectly discusses that Signifyin(g) is the black person's deployment of "figurative modes of language use" (۲۰۰۶، ۸۵). Critics and scholars repeated and used this word a lot. Abrahams developed his expansion on the theory of Signifyin(g) in his two editions of *Deep Down in the Jungle* (۱۹۶۲، ۱۹۷۰). Gates states the main part of his discussion is listed as follows,

Signifyin(g) "can mean any number of things; it is a black term and a black rhetorical device; it can mean the "ability to talk with great innuendo"; it can mean "to carp, cajole, needle, and lie; it can mean "the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point"; it can mean "making fun of a person or situation"; it can "also denote speaking with the hands and eyes"; it is "the language of trickery that set of words achieving Hamlet's 'direction through indirection'" and the monkey "is a 'signifier,' and the Lion, therefore, is the signified." (۱۹۸۸، ۶۵)

And at last in his appended glossary of "Unusual Terms and Expressions," Abrahams described "Signify" as "To imply, goad, beg, and boast by indirect verbal or gestural means. A language of implication" (۲۰۰۶، ۸۶). Abrahams says that Signifyin(g) is a

"technique of indirect argument or persuasion," "a language of implication," and "to imply, goad, beg, boast, by indirect verbal or gestural means" (२००६, ११३). He says, "The name 'signifying,' shows the monkey to be a trickster, signifying being the language of trickery that set of words or gestures achieving Hamlet's 'direction through indirection.'" Abrahams believes that "The monkey, in short, is not only a master of technique but he also, a technique, or style, or the literariness of literary language; he is the great Signifier" (२००६, १०).

Henry Louis Gates, the most prominent contemporary African American critic, investigated various definitions of signifying proposed by different critics and writers and highlighted and confirmed merely a few of them as significant and comprehensive among them was that of Roger D. Abrahams (२००६, ३९). Abrahams defines Signifyin(g) as "that set of words or gestures achieving Hamlet's 'direction through indirection' (३६). As we know, the exploitation of implication and indirection in search of truth, as opposed to direct action, is a remarkable theme in Hamlet and different characters use it to attain their own individual goals. Abrahams' usage of this definition and example implies that signification is not merely limited to African literature and can be used by people of various cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities including Whites.

This play considers the notion of oppression and Duran believes this might be regarded either as a positive point or a negative point according to people's viewpoints since this oppression is not related to African Americans. Hansberry also created Sidney Brustein, a white Jewish character. The only African American character was Alton. Sidney as a Jewish minority member has a deep understanding of other oppressed people of the society like African Americans and has sympathy with them. This sympathy and understanding are expressed in Sidney's feelings for Alton. Sidney simultaneously argues with David and offers support and advice for his problems. Sidney somehow aggressively deals with biased prejudices. Hansberry was the daughter of the Black bourgeoisie who was an outcast and stranger in her own Chicago neighborhood and was quite familiar with the voice of the outcast in each cultural milieu. Hansberry also understands if the artist or intellectual wants to do the conceptual work essential to produce, he or she should standouts the society. Similarly, Sid and Iris Brustein, Alton, and David are artistic outsiders. David as a queer man and Alton as a young light-skinned Black man have to carry these burdens. Duran believes Hansberry prefers to shift from the remarkable construct of the race to other constructs that were not as well known to the general public at that time (۸۷).

This research is devoted to applying the notion of signification to *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. Steve Carter argues that Lorraine Hansberry has continued to reveal her objection to the oppressive system of the society in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, but this time she has chosen a different method for presenting the cruelty of the system toward the culture (११२). Carter states,

The surprise and the outrage were unjust since *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* explores many of the same issues that *A Raisin in the Sun* did and continues to attack the same enemy, the oppressive system that enables some to live in luxury while the many just survive and that ruthlessly strives to wipe out ethnic cultures as potential sources of resistance through the concept of the "melting pot." In the earlier and more famous play, the residents of Clybourne Park claimed that it wasn't racism that was driving them to keep out the Younger family but a belief that "people get along better . . . when they share a common background" or, in short, when they melt down into a common blob. The Youngers, while fully aware that the Clybourne Park residents, despite their disclaimer, are virulent racists, fight back as a group of individualists united mainly by their need to struggle against common oppression and to seek a society more open to them and outsiders. (११)

Hansberry has implied her antagonism toward the oppressive system by selecting a white Jewish male character and his wife, instead of an African American character. Since Abrahams confirms implication and

indirection as examples of Signifyin(g), this implication can be considered as an example of signification .

This play is full of contractions and conflicts, particularly between Sidney and his wife. When Sidney mentioned Iris' failure in her occupation saying, "you know perfectly well you won't show up for the audition." Iris got annoyed and answered, "You rotten, cruel, sadist self-satisfying son of a bitch!" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۶۳). On another occasion Sidney mentioned that Iris' psychological treatment was here not helpful, "Iris, honey, you've been in analysis for two years and the only difference is that before you used to cry all the time. And now you scream. Before you cry." Sidney continued his teasing her by saying, "Which amounts to you paying that quack half your paycheck to teach you how to swear. Lots of luck!" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۶۴). According to Abrahams's definition of Signifying, needling is a remarkable example of signification and in the above lines, so many examples of needling and teasing are mentioned.

One of the remarkable points in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* is the contrast Hansberry reveals between the "uptown" viewpoints of Mavis and some of her friends and the points of view of Sidney and others on the Lower East Side. Sidney tries to present the better-off with sarcasm and belittlement. For example, a controversial

moment in the play is when Iris has got a job in a television commercial. Here Hansberry intends to show the ideologies of the bohemian community. The bohemian people like Iris most of the time scorn programs like television commercials, but they accept to do it when they are offered. Here Hansberry exploits material from a bohemian community not African American community and uses it for her purposes.

Iris: (Defensively.) It isn't exactly a show— but it is acting. Sort of. (He stares at her.) It's a TV commercial...

Sidney: (Laughing.) Oh, Iris, Iris.

Iris: (Turning and flinging bag down on couch hotly.) Oh, aren't we better than everybody! Aren't we above? It! Well, I have news: if he gets me that job, I am going to take it. (Hansberry १९६९, २६)

The most important social movement in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* is the bohemian movement or non-conformists. The drama reveals Sidney Brustein and his non-conformist way of life which happens in Sidney's apartment in Greenwich Village. She prefers to describe this time and place as "bohemia" since it is a place where people enjoy living a nontraditional way of life. This sense of relish and carelessness is not only in that society but also in their apartment. This

bohemian trend is even observed in Sidney's way of dressing. He does not pay any attention to others thinking about him. Sidney is in conflict with Iris's sister, Mavis Parodus ideas and prejudices, especially about her prejudice against Anti-Semitism and African Americans. He even calls Mavis "the Mother of the Middle Class itself". At first, Mavis believed that the bohemian culture which is an unconventional way of life is not an intellectual movement as some might think. It takes time till Mavis and Sidney come to a mutual understanding and he can recognize that they have some common features such as "awareness, sensitivity, integrity, and, above all, the capacity for growth." Mavis says,

I am standing here and I am thinking: how smug it is in bohemia. I was taught to believe that-(Near tears) creativity and great intelligence ought to make one expansive and understanding. That if ordinary people, among whom I have the sense at least to count myself, could not expect understanding from artists and whatever it is that you are, Sidney-then where indeed might we look for it all in this quite dreadful world? (She almost sits out, but thinks of the cap) Since you have all so busily gotten rid of God for us. (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۹۹)

According to the definition and examples of signification, ridiculing a person or idea is an example the signifying. Hansberry signifies bohemian ideology. The above dialogue reveals the unsuccessful relationship between Iris and Sidney as well. Iris wanted to show her

new commercial commodity to Sidney, but unfortunately, the device did not work and Iris became ashamed and Sidney made fun of her as usual. So, Iris got annoyed and said, "Sidney, one of us here is a child and it's not me !...I've found out plenty about the world in the last few weeks, and it's nothing like you—or Papa—want it to be...It's not! It's not! There are things talked about, laughed about while you stand there framed by that all! This world, Sidney! It's so dirty" (Hansberry 1960, 10). Their conflicts have shaped a vicious circle! Although they live together and try to be happy, they are emotionally separated. Another instance of insult as an example of signification is when Iris was bothered and insulted Sidney "For someone who thinks that they are the great intellect of all times, the top- heaviest son of a bitch that ever lived" (Hansberry 1960, 20). Sidney turns, "Another step toward mental health!" (Hansberry 1960, 20). Sidney is a character type who suffers from arrogance and bothers people around him a lot. Again Iris answered ,

For someone who thinks they've got the most open mind that was ever opened, you are the narrow-intended, provincial, insular and parochial bastard alive!...And I'll tell you this: I may be whacked up, sweetie, but I really would hate to see the inside of your stomach. Oh-ho I really would! St. John of the Twelve Agonies, I'll tell you. (Hansberry 1960, 24)



Her talking is full of anger, irony, and hatred. As it is implied in their dialogues they have sexual problems as well. When Iris kept talking about their sex problem, Sidney became insane and said, "Iris please, shut the hell up, and I can't stand it when you're on this jag!" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۵۶). Their dialogue is full of insult and goading. They signify upon one another as much as they can. Sidney considered Iris as stupid and told her, "Do you know what "arty" means? Or is it just some little capsule phrase you zing out to try to diminish me since you have nothing genuinely analytical or even observant to say?" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۳۳). Again Sidney said, "Iris, where did you get the idea you know enough about these things to pass judgment on them?" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۳۳). Sidney and Iris quarreled and Sidney implied that Dr. Steiner's treatment of Iris was not useful at all. Sidney mentioned, "Thank you Dr. Steiner! Look, Iris, the world's finest swimmer cannot swim the Atlantic Ocean—even if the analysis does prove it was his mother's fault" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۳۴). Sidney and Iris continued their discussion and conflict. Iris emphasized that she had changed. She said,

Sidney, I am not your mountain girl anymore. I'm sorry. I've changed on you, haven't I? The things you don't know about me! Like, for example, my hair." Sidney answered humorously, "It's a Wig??!" Iris replied, "Idiot! I mean the only reason I wear it like this is because of you. I hate my hair this way. (Hansberry ११६०, ११)

Not only Sidney but also his friends Alton and Wally have noticed Iris' nervousness. Alton said, "What's the matter with her lately?" Wally said, "You should know that. The triumph of the innate tragedy in her soul." And Sidney answered, "She's only half Greek, so she should only be half tragic. Hey Iris, when you come back out, turn up just one side of your face" (Hansberry ११६०, १०). Wally again asked, "What is the other half?" and Sidney answered, "Irish 'n' Cherokee. I am married to – the only living Oklahoma Greco- Gaelic- Indian hillbilly in captivity. If one can think of Iris as being in captivity" (Hansberry ११६०, ११).

Their community is full of needling. They use sarcasm and belittle each other. Alton and Sidney criticized each other severely. They criticize Sidney as well. Alton states, "...Sidney's "conscience" is showing and his readers don't want that. He cannot afford that—he's a businessman now. Let's go before he offers to sell you his glasses!" (Hansberry ११६०, ११). Sidney answered, "Well, hooray the hell for you!...John the Baptist! God bless your selfless, selfless soul! He has

come! He has come to deliver us! (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۳۴). Alton and Max teased each other. They had different political viewpoints. Max said, "Damn, hell! Alton, your main problem is you are a literalist. You were born a literalist and you will die a literalist (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۳۶). Alton answered, "But, Max, a little reality in a painting is not such a bad" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۵۵). Max stated, "And don't give me the Renaissance. I don't care how much time Michelangelo spent on the Sistine Chapel, he was wasting his time, dig? (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۵۵). They cannot bear each other. They boast a lot. Sidney and Max debated political and social problems. Max said, "It's always that way. You revolutionaries are all the same. You stout full of fire and end up full of shit!" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۱۱). They criticize each other in the most severe ways. Alton criticized and belittled Max and said, "You only paint like a savage!" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۳۵). They treat each other childishly. Sidney, Mavis, and David debated social and political issues. Sidney said, "Ah yes! And a new religion has arisen in the West! We are all guilty...Father Camus, we are all guilty...therefore all guilt is equal...therefore no one is guilty...therefore we can in clear conscience abstain from the social act...and even the social thought..." and David answered, "Go ahead! Kid it. It's easier to kid it than face the pain in it" (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۴۵). Although they seem old enough to have sound

polite discussions, they do not treat each other appropriately. After Sidney bothered everybody and David, Alton and Mavis left the party, Iris got irritated and told Sidney ,

Well, that was some dinner party, thank you. What's with you lately, Sidney? Why do you have to pick at everybody? Where did you get the idea it was up to you to improve everybody? What makes you think anybody can live with your insults? (Hansberry ११०, ३१)

In *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, Alton the only African American character of the play is a slave of the system. He understands that the girl he was supposed to marry is a "hooker"! He becomes angry and revokes the future marriage. Alton says ,

C'mon, Sid, we've hung out a long time, don't crap around. Is it true? Is it true she's a hooker? And you were going to let me marry her? Why did not you tell me?" Sidney answered, "It was not my place. It was for Gloria to tell you. She loves you, Alt. Look, I thought you'd be man enough to help Gloria—like you want to help the rest of the world. (Hansberry ११०, ००)

Alton believes that Gloria does not know how to love and in addition, she has been used as a "commodity" by other men particularly the white ones. Alton tells Sidney,

The White one wrapped his trash in tinsel and give it to the Nigger again, huh, Sidney? Don't you understand, man? Like I am spawned from commodities—and their purchasers! How do you think I got the color I am? I got this color from my grandmother being used as a commodity, man! The buying and the selling in this country began with me, Jesus, helping me. (Hansberry ۱۹۶۵, ۱۲)

He implies that his grandmother has been raped and that is why he is a hybrid. He suffers from a long time of oppression and at the time he is fed up with it. Alton continues his speech by remembering his past ,

You don't understand...My father, you know, he was a railroad porter...who wiped up spit and semen, carried drinks and white man's secrets for thirty years. When the bell rang in the night he put on that white coat and his smile and went shuffling through the corridors with his tray and his whisk broom, his paper bags, and his smile...to wherever the white men were ringing...for thirty years! And my mother was a domestic. She always had, Mama did, bits of this and bits of that from the pantry of "Miss Lady," you know. Some given, some stolen...And she would always bring this booty home and sit it all out on the kitchen table...so, we could all look at it. And my father--all the time he would stand there and look at it and walk away. And then one night he had some kind of fit, and he just reached out and knocked all that stuff--the jelly and the piece of ham, the broken lamp and the sweater for me--he just knocked it all on the floor and stood there screaming with the tears running down his face: "I ain't going to have the white man's leavings in my house, no mo"! I AIN'T GOING TO HAVE HIS THROWAWAY...NO MO!"...And Mama, she just stood there with her lips pursed together, and when he went to bed she just picked it all up, whatever hadn't been ruined or smashed, and washed it off and brushed it off and put it

in the closet...and we ate it and we used it because we had to survive, and she didn't have room for my father's pride... (a beat) I don't want white man's leavings, Sidney. Not now. Not ever. I wrote her a note. (Hansberry 1960, 22)

Alton remembers his bitter memories of the past. He remembers all the sufferings, oppression, and suppression his family had tolerated during the past times. He does not like to use the leftovers of the whites anymore. So he decides to break his engagement with Gloria. On the other hand, Alton's negative answer to marriage shocked Gloria and it led to her frustration and committing suicide. Gloria said,

Oh, so he's in a state of shock! Oh, Jesus, that yellow-faced bastard! He is shocked! Look, Sid, I'll bet you two to one that at this instant he is lying dead drunk in the arms of the blondest or blackest two-bit hooker in town. Nursing his shock! Telling his tale of woe! His tale! And she'll be telling it somewhere by morning to the girls and roaring with laughter. Like I'm doing! (Hansberry 1960, 22)

Gloria is shocked by Alton's reaction. Indeed she does not expect this reaction. She considers herself superior to Alton, an African American man. She believes regardless of her being a prostitute, she is white and

so superior to African Americans. Here the unexpected reaction of Alton to Gloria's status can be regarded as an example of signification.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of the discussion, some critics and writers' opinions about *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* were discussed. Some critics advocate not only the play itself but also Hansberry's braveness to write this play. Some writers confirm this play as a man's attempt to challenge political actions and reveal his inability to care about politics within the bohemian milieu. Others believe she has continued her protest against the oppression of the system, but this time it is not about African Americans. It is about ethnic minorities like Jews, queer movements, and prostitutes' status. She reveals the alienation of these groups in society. Some believe she has betrayed her background as an African American writer, and others have the opposite opinion and confirm her national African American tendency.

Some critics hold that writing this play is a reaction to the absurd theater. She has created David Ragin, an absurd character, and Sidney Brustein a socially concerned person. The discussions of the two persons express Hansberry's criticism of searching for meaning. Indeed Sidney Brustein is Hansberry's mouthpiece and she tells the audience and the readers one should search for how to live and not the meaning

of life. In this way, the readers notice Lorraine Hansberry's interest in human rights and social values. This play shows many cultural conflicts of the time for instance women's conflicts and efforts for equality, the social bohemian movement or non-conformism, and the Underground Press or the Clandestine Press. In the next part of the study, the focus is on Abrahams' definition of Signification and it is mentioned that signification means to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. Abrahams states in other cases it can mean making fun of a person or situation or even speaking with hands and eyes. Abrahams argues it can be regarded as a technique of indirect argument or persuasion or even a language of implication.

Some instances of signification have been described in this play, such as Hansberry's implication and her antagonism toward the oppressive system by selecting a white Jewish male character and his wife, instead of an African American character. The contractions and challenges particularly between Sidney and his wife, and their needling and their goading are presented as epitomes of signification. In general, their community is full of teasing and they use sarcasm a lot and belittle each other as much as they can .

In this drama, Hansberry revealed her skill as a universal writer. She has a high ability to introduce various figures belonging to a different



society, minority and nationality. She expressed her tendency toward suppression and oppression in general and not merely oppression educated by African Americans. The notion of signification is traced in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. According to Abrahams definition of Signifying, needling and teasing are remarkable examples of signification and this play is replete with it. It is argued that Hansberry's text represents signifyin(g) through contractions and conflicts, particularly between Sidney and his wife. Sidney tries to present himself as the better off with sarcasm and belittlement. Sidney ridicules others. Hansberry signifies bohemian ideology. Their community is full of needling. All the characters naming, Alton, Malvis, and Gloria use sarcasm and belittle and criticize each other severely. Hansberry introduces Alton the only African American character in the play as the slave of the system. It is described that Alton might be regarded as Hansberry's mouth piece. Alton understands that the girl he was supposed to marry is a prostitute. He becomes angry and revokes the future marriage. Alton believes that Gloria does not know how to love and in addition, she has been used as a commodity by other men particularly the white ones. Alton implies that his grandmother has been raped and that is why he is a hybrid. He suffers from long-time oppression and at the time he is fed up with it. Alton

remembers his bitter memories of the past. He remembers all the sufferings, oppression, and suppression his family had tolerated during the past times. He does not like to use the leftovers of the whites anymore. So he decides to break his engagement with Gloria. On the other hand, Alton's negative answer to marriage shocked Gloria and it led to her frustration and committing suicide. Gloria is shocked by Alton's reaction. Indeed she does not expect this reaction. She considers herself superior to Alton, an African American man. She believes regardless of her being a prostitute, she is white and so superior to African Americans. According to Geneva Smitherman, signification can be the introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected. Here the unexpected reaction of Alton to Gloria's status can be regarded as an example of signification. Through the process of signifyin(g) Hansberry continued her protest against the oppression of the system, but this time it is not merely about African Americans. It is about ethnic minorities like Jews, queer movements, and prostitutes' status. She reveals the alienation of these groups in society.

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