The Lady Doth Protest: Re-Wrighting Protest Literature in the Chicago Black Renaissance

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Abstract: Within the Chicago Black Renaissance, a period which lasted from the 1930s to the 1950s, Richard Wright's seminal work *Native Son* was upheld as the classic of the era. However, Wright's portrayal of women is limited and problematic. Thus Gwendolyn Brooks and Lorraine Hansberry reinterpret aspects of *Native Son* through signifyin(g) to create space for the marginalized black female perspective in their works, *Maud Martha* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, respectively. Brooks signifies on *Native Son* by repeating the famous rat scene and replaces Bigger Thomas with Maud Martha, the eponymous character of her novel. She emphasizes a feminist position that espouses that a feminine approach to conflict resolution is more productive than Bigger Thomas'. Lorraine Hansberry takes a more radical approach by utilizing a similar character to Bigger Thomas, Walter Younger, and placing him in family with strong female influences. This example of signifyin(g) emphasizes womanism as Walter’s self-actualization is facilitated by women’s actions. This essay also explores the sociological influences of Richard Wright and the definition and context of signifyin(g) and intertextuality. Through signifyin(g) Brooks and Hansberry are able to utilize the classic work of Wright and make new suggestions for routes to success in an oppressive world.