

HOECAKES AND MATZAH BALLS: A MARRIAGE OF CULTURES

IN THE WORKS OF ALFRED UHRY

by

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(Under the Direction of Hugh Ruppersburg)

ABSTRACT

The following discussion will examine the Southern and Jewish thematic elements found in Alfred Uhry's plays *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* in an attempt to classify the works into a literary genre. Though the plays seem quite different on the surface, several major themes are common to both, including social identity, memory, illusion, tradition versus the modern, and family. Therefore, a discussion of each of the themes is crucial in my attempt categorize Uhry's works. In my conclusion, I will review the implications of these discussions and speculate on the reasons for the presence of these particular issues in the works of Alfred Uhry.

INDEX WORDS: Alfred Uhry, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, Southern Literature, Jewish Literature, Identity, Memory, Illusion, Family

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ALFRED UHRY AS A SOUTHERN JEWISH WRITER

Alfred Uhry admits that, while growing up in Atlanta, he thought of himself as more Southern than Jewish. In his prologue to *Shalom Y'all*, a recently published collection of photographs of Southern Jewish life, the playwright quips, “[my family was]n’t so good at the Jewish part,” but “we really had that [Southern part] down. Baked ham with redeye gravy, fried chicken, turnip greens, grits and gallons of sweetened ice tea were our constants. I never even heard of a bagel until I went north to college” (x). Uhry was born in 1936 to a family of upper-middle class German Jews. In a 1997 interview with David Sterritt, Uhry claims that he ““was brought up pretty much an agnostic”” and describes his family as ““Jewish in background but largely uninterested in Jewish faith and tradition.”” Although his family had assimilated into the mainstream, Southern culture, Uhry, after attending Brown University and settling permanently in the Northeastern United States, became more aware of and fascinated with his Jewish heritage. Uhry reflects that as he got older, he “realized [he] was missing something in [his] life” and that his wife urged him to “find [his] Jewishness” (Sterritt). After a trip to Israel, Uhry discovered that he could “really be part of the Jewish community” and that he “should be, because that’s what [he is]” (Sterritt).

Given the playwright’s background, Uhry’s audience must wonder how this dual identity is reflected in his works. Are the plays essentially Southern, with themes and ideas that are generally associated with this particular genre? Are they Jewish? Or are they a mixture of both, revealing Uhry and his characters as complex people with

complex social roles and identities, unable, like some Americans, to fit neatly into a defined box?¹ In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to define what the genres of Southern literature and Jewish literature really are. Critics of both Southern and Jewish literature have argued about the practicality and reliability of defining themes common to the genres. Richard Gray, in his book *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region*, notes this argument about the South as a region, and its literature as a definable entity: “Anyone who chooses to write about the American South is almost immediately confronted with a problem. Is there such a thing as the South, a coherent region and an identifiable culture that can be sharply differentiated from the rest of the United States?” (xi). He describes critics on one side of the argument claiming that “the South is not significantly different from the rest of the nation, offering at most a minor variation from the American norm” and those on the other asserting the “notion of [the South as] a homogeneous place . . . complete and whole” (xi-xii). Acknowledging this debate, Gray devotes his book to the second argument and “offers . . . a series of notes towards a definition of the Southern idea . . . written in the belief that the South is primarily a concept, a matter of knowing even more than being, and as such a part of the currency of our language and our perception” (xii).

¹A similar attempt to characterize Uhry’s *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is found in Gary Richards’ “Scripting Scarlett O’Goldberg.” Richards suggests that, due to the similarity of the play’s structure to Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is, in part, Southern, despite its Jewish themes. Rather than discussing structure, the present argument will be based strictly on thematic elements found in both *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* and *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Bonnie K. Lyons discusses the same debate in regard to Jewish literature. She wonders if it is practical “to talk about American-Jewish fiction rather than analyze the work of each writer separately” because of the disagreement among critics over the reality of a distinct Jewish genre. She first quotes Frederick R. Karl, who states that “[American-Jewish writers] are American writers, not Jewish writers . . . and to speak of them as ‘Jewish American’ is to homogenize what should be particularized”² (61). Others, however, claim that the genre has “so strong a unifying commonality that Jewish writers are ‘curiously transnational’ and [their works] ‘form one literature’”³ (Lyons 62). Lyons maintains that, despite the debate, a definition of Jewish literature is helpful, and her essay devotes itself to the “trac[ing] of common patterns . . . and unifying similarities” within Jewish literature (62).

Like Gray and Lyon, I believe that an examination of the common themes found throughout Southern and Jewish literature is necessary in order to classify Uhry’s works as either inside or outside of a particular genre. According to Gray and Lewis P. Simpson, the themes of Southern writing are closely related to the tragic and complex history of the region (Gray 218, Simpson 70-71). Simpson describes the developmental stages of Southern literature, which began with a “pastoral reaction to modernity” (69). This beginning led to an idealization of the South and therefore caused what Simpson describes as “an apostasy to memory and history,” or a betrayal of the truth of the South’s legacy (69). In reaction to this stage, Southern writers “inaugurated a struggle to

² Lyons takes this quote from Karl’s book entitled *American Fictions 1940/1980: A Comprehensive History and Critical Evaluation*, page 7.

³ Lyons quotes Richard J. Fein’s essay, “Jewish Fiction in America,” page 407.

comprehend the nature of memory and history,” attempting to recover the history of the South (70). Because of these motivations that lie in the effort to preserve the Southern heritage, Southern works often deal with themes such as memory, illusion (specifically about the past), identity, and tradition.

Jewish literature, like Southern literature, was born out of a cultural history of oppression and sadness. Richard J. Fein writes that “exile has been the great Jewish experience” and that therefore “both [Jewish and Southern] writers are concerned with the individual who feels a past which he can neither shake off nor assuredly relate to his present dilemmas and possibilities” (407). In light of this history, Jewish-American literature often contains themes dealing with identity, including issues of assimilation and searches for a cultural awareness that was often lost in the Americanization of the Jews. Andrew Furman discusses the trend of assimilation in the Jewish-American population in his book *Contemporary Jewish American Writers and the Multicultural Dilemma*. He asserts that in the 1970’s and 1980’s, “the proliferation of Jewish families into increasingly mainstream (read, WASP) neighborhoods, dizzying intermarriage rates, and waning synagogue affiliation . . . offered observers . . . ample evidence that Jewish Americans were well on their way toward complete and utter assimilation,” a process of Americanization that often results in a complete or partial loss of the Jewish cultural identity (17). According to Furman, “Jewish Americans have all but abandoned the Jewish side of their hyphenated identities” (17). Sylvia Barack Fishman also notes this trend, claiming that “having a Christmas tree is more common than any Jewish ritual: four out of five mixed-married households (one spouse not Jewish) have a Christmas tree, compared to fewer than three percent of inmarried Jews who affiliate with some kind of

temple” (126). She also describes the practice of assimilating into the mainstream American culture as a “family tradition, sanctified by generations. It is their American-Jewish heritage to live in an area where there are some Jews (but not too many), to affiliate with organizations that are Jewish (but not too Jewish), and to have friends of many types” (147).

Within the South, assimilation seems to be even more common. Melissa Fay Greene documents the cultural trend in Atlanta during the middle of the twentieth century. First, she describes the cultural makeup of the Atlanta elite of the time: they “lived in exclusively white and Protestant enclaves; they socialized at the exclusively white [clubs] The well-born business leaders were Democrats, Elks, Masons, Rotarians, and Shriners; they were Methodists, Presbyterians, or Episcopalians” (30). In the words of Ivan Allen, Jr., the mayor of Atlanta from 1962 to 1970, ““It was not a particularly colorful group”” (Greene 30). Many of the people in the Jewish community of Atlanta wanted to blend in to this majority white population by hiding their Jewish identities, at least in public; thus, the “drive to assimilate became a fine part of the fabric of [Atlanta]” (Greene 75). Like assimilated Jews in the rest of America, “Southern Jews had gone to great lengths to reform and smooth over disconcerting idiosyncrasies and to make themselves familiar and acceptable to the surrounding sea of gentiles” (Greene 174). Like Uhry, “most Southern Jews in the 1950s were descended from Jewish Southerners and considered themselves Southerners first” (Greene 164). Because of this trend of Jews Americanizing themselves by minimizing their cultural heritage, Jewish American literature often seeks to reclaim the lost identity of the Jewish American community.

Apart from the issues of identity revolving around assimilation and the claiming of a distinctly Jewish lifestyle, American-Jewish literature often reveals characters who thrive on continuous social interaction and close familial relationships. Lyons claims that “central to the issue of the Jewishness of American-Jewish literature is the inheritance of . . . a particular way of experiencing and reflecting the world,” including “the sense of people, a cohesive group bound together by ties of memory and history, by outer limits and hostility and inner meaning and mutuality” (63). She goes on to assert that “the [Jewish] world-view is deeply and pervasively social rather than individual, oriented toward the group rather than any one person” (63). This social world-view is reflected in various themes in Jewish literature that revolve around family.

Given the defined categories of Southern and Jewish literature, it is now possible to attempt to determine Alfred Uhry’s place within these two traditions. Uhry is the author of several plays, including *The Robber Bridegroom* (1975) and *Little Johnny Jones* (1982), each an adaptation for the stage of another writer’s work; *Parade* (1998), a historical musical based on the trial and lynching of Leo Frank; *Driving Miss Daisy* (1987); and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* (1997). The first three works, since they are either based on the work of another writer or a historical event, do not give Uhry the flexibility to create and manipulate characters in a way that reveals his true style and genre as a writer. They are, for the most part, reproductions or variations on another writer’s style, or a creative view of a historical moment. As original works, however, *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* provide situations, characters, and plots that are created entirely by Uhry, and they are therefore the most useful of his plays for this discussion and classification.

The first and most famous of these two plays, *Driving Miss Daisy*, was received with mixed reviews after appearing on the New York theater scene in 1986. While one critic, expecting the play to be “theatrically too dreary for words,” left the theater claiming, “Wow, *Driving Miss Daisy* is a good play” (Shewey 24), another points out the ridiculous disparity of the employer/employee relationship between the two main characters and the fictional, idealized world that the play portrays (Mason & Viator). The plot of the play centers around two main characters, an elderly Jewish woman named Miss Daisy Werthan and her African-American driver, Hoke. At the beginning of the play, Hoke is hired by Miss Daisy’s son, Boolie, as the result of a car accident for which Miss Daisy is blamed. The prideful Miss Daisy resents Hoke’s presence, first claiming that she does not want “some chauffeur sitting in [her] kitchen, gobbling [her] food, running up [her] phone bill” (*Driving Miss Daisy* 7), and commenting later that people will think she is “trying to pretend [she is] rich” by having a driver (15). As the play develops, however, a friendship grows between Hoke and Miss Daisy. By the end, the proud, elderly woman tells Hoke that he is her best friend, and she allows him to spoon feed her when she is unable feed herself, an act that seems to be meant to represent the end of her stubborn and resentful discrimination.

The Last Night of Ballyhoo was commissioned for the Atlanta Olympic Arts festival in 1996. Like its predecessor, the play received mixed reviews. According to Shewey, Uhry does an excellent job of “allow[ing] ethical dilemmas and class tensions to arise without turning his characters into stick figures or the drama into a predetermined ‘issue play’” and in “creating a stage full of characters so rich they all seem like leading roles.” Richard Zogland heralds the play for the way it “creat[es] a believable family that

seems both quirky and emblematic; explor[es] issues of Jewish self-hatred; giv[es] hints of *The Glass Menagerie* and then tak[es] a sharp right turn.” Critics of the play, however, dislike the prominent place of Jewish culture in the play and describe it as “saccharine” and “gooily religious” (Taub 189). The play centers on the household of an upper-middle class Jewish family in Atlanta and is set in 1939, a time when the Southern city receives national attention for the premiere of *Gone with the Wind* and the world is on the brink of a Second World War. *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* follows the family as they face difficulties involving their place in society as assimilated Jews, their prejudices against Jews of non-German descent, and the trials of growing up. The family’s comfortable lifestyle is threatened when an Orthodox Jewish young man from New York, Joe, enters their lives and shows interest in one of the daughters. As a result, the family faces the difficult decision of either continuing to live their lives by comfortably ignoring their Jewish heritage and assimilating into the mainstream, or accepting Joe’s challenge by confronting their Jewishness and willingly accepting their dual roles as both Southerners and Jews.

Though the *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* may seem quite different on the surface, several major themes are common to both plays, including social identity, memory, illusion, tradition versus the modern, and family. Because both plays revolve around these themes, it seems likely that they are issues that are important to Uhry and his style as a writer. Therefore, I believe that a discussion of each of the themes is crucial in my attempt to place Uhry into a specific literary tradition. The section on each theme will include both a discussion of how the issue manifests itself within the two plays along with a placement of the general theme into a specific genre

based on a review of scholarly sources. Interestingly, each of these major themes is one that is characteristic of either Southern literature, Jewish literature, or both. In my conclusion, I will review the implications of these discussions and speculate on the reasons for the presence of these particular issues in the works of Alfred Uhry.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Identity, one of the most prominent themes found in both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, is a topic that is both inherently Southern and inherently Jewish. In *The Burden of Southern History*, C. Vann Woodward asserts that “after Faulkner, Wolfe, Warren and Welty no literate Southerner could remain unaware of his heritage or doubt its enduring value” and that “it would seem more difficult than ever to deny a Southern identity, to be ‘merely American’” after the Southern Renaissance (25). According to Simpson, from the beginning of Southern history, “Southern states were beginning to offer a strong resistance to modernity, imagining themselves—idealizing themselves—as a providential and chosen community struggling against dispossession by modern history” (14). This effort to establish the South as an entity completely separate from the rest of the country led and continues to lead Southern writers to create characters who display this desire for an identity that is representative of the region. William C. Harvard also describes the importance of the “renewed search for Southern identity” in the creation of the literature of the Southern Renaissance (416). The literary movement “set forth the essential questions about the South and Southerners that would occupy the minds of those Southern men and women of letters . . . as they sought to understand and portray men and women as Southerners, and the South as a social, political, and cultural historical entity” (Harvard 417). This search for the Southern

identity creates a “lasting value because of its ability to convey universal truths about man, nature, and society . . . distinctly and uniquely Southern” (Harvard 417). The emphasis that Southern writers place on identity often manifests itself in characters who struggle to know their place in society and who long to make a distinct contribution to the world in which they live.

The theme of identity is important in Jewish literature as well. Fein describes a “double consciousness” that exists in a Jewish-American as he “moves in a curiously critical way between cultures . . . as if he lives and writes in the nation of which he is a citizen, yet he resides somewhere else” (407). The literature of this genre, then, is “filled with curious ironies about being Jewish, uncertain about that identity which remains a puzzle, neither disappearing nor revealing itself on a level of some gratifying self-knowledge” (Fein 414). Jewish-American characters therefore live with an “uneasiness . . . that they must change their half-Jewish lives by shedding their Jewishness entirely or by making a new claim upon it,” which leads to insecurities about their identities as individuals and as a culture (Fein 414-415). Biale, Galchinsky, and Heschel further this argument by characterizing the Jewish writer as “a liminal border case, neither inside nor outside” a specific culture (8). This meshing of American and Jewish cultures in the literature of the genre results in themes dealing with “problems of acculturation and assimilation, and the radical questioning of the traditions and values of both cultures” (Lyons 63). As characters struggle to decide whether they want their identity to be that of “a secularized American, an assimilated Jew, or a Jewish alien on the margin of a secular national culture reflective of a chiefly Christian past,” they are creating a literary theme characteristic of the Jewish genre (Marovitz 315).

The theme of identity in *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* reveals both of the plays as Southern and Jewish. Though on the surface the plays seem to be simplistic and lighthearted, upon closer examination one finds layers and layers of complex relationships and rivalries that arise from characters struggling to identify themselves and their places in their surrounding world. Characters in each of the plays are assigned by society to certain roles due to their ethnicity, their religion, or their background, and the two plays are made much more complicated and intricate as those characters struggle against the boundaries and limitations of these roles. Characters may be considered outsiders by one group of people and insiders by another, and they often seek to find their way into new positions, causing disparity among those who oppose the change. The resulting conflicts in the plays range from the Southern racial and religious struggles between Caucasians, African-Americans, Jews, and Christians, to more specifically Jewish issues of assimilation and prejudice within the culture itself.

First and most obviously, Hoke and Idella, as poor African American servants, are denied distinct identities from the other characters of *Driving Miss Daisy*.⁴ Miss Daisy discriminates against Hoke from the beginning, treating even the idea of a black man as something she does not want to allow in her home and in her life. Despite her adamant claims that “[she] is not prejudiced,” Miss Daisy determinedly tells Boolie that “what [she] do[es] not want—and absolutely will not have is some—some chauffeur sitting in [her] kitchen, gobbling [her] food, running up [her] phone bill” because she “hate[s] all that in [her] house” (7). In the midst of her assurances to Boolie that her cook, Idella, is

⁴ Hoke and Idella remain outsiders throughout the play, as they are never shown apart from Miss Daisy or her family in situations in which they would be insiders.

different, she interjects that she has found “nicks and chips” in her wedding china and has “seen [Idella] throw silver forks in the garbage more than once” (7). Later, when Miss Daisy believes that Hoke has stolen a can of salmon, she reveals that she has not changed her views: “[Servants] are like having little children in the house. They want something so they just take it. Not a smidgin of manners. No conscience” (16). She refuses to allow Hoke and Idella, as African-American servants, to be insiders in her world.

Hoke is not oblivious to his identity status as an outsider among his white employers. When he first meets Boolie, Hoke describes his treatment by a former employer who wanted him to buy for “twenty five cent apiece” some old shirts and collars that looked “nasty like they been stuck off in a chiffarobe and forgot about” (9). Because of Hoke’s identity as a black employee, this employer assumed that he would not know that “the whole bunch of them collars and shirts together [were not] worth a nickel” (9). She did not think of him as a person who would want nice, clean things, but as someone who would take anything that she sent his way. She saw Hoke as an easy way to make some extra money off some old rags. Hoke obviously recognized her attitude, as he relayed the story to Boolie in disgust and described how he promptly got another job “fas[t] as [he could]” after the episode (9). Later, Hoke addresses Miss Daisy’s condescending attitude, revealed when she does not want to allow him to stop and relieve himself on their trip to Mobile: “I ain’ no dog and I ain’ no chile and I ain’ jes’ a back of the neck you look at while you goin’ wherever you want to go” (26). Hoke understands his identity as an outsider in Miss Daisy’s world.

Despite Miss Daisy’s haughty demeanor toward Hoke and Idella, she and the other Jewish characters in both of the plays are outsiders in the mainstream, Southern

society, as well. As *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* opens, one immediately discovers the irony of a Jewish family decorating for Christmas, a traditional Christian holiday. As “the only Jews on Habersham Road,” the Freitags and the Levys are most certainly outsiders in a non-Jewish neighborhood (21). However, they do what they can to “be like everyone else” (50). They celebrate Christmas, they boast about living at “the best address in Atlanta” with “half the membership of the Junior League” (21), and, while realizing that they are “not right up there at the tip-top with the best set of Christians,” they claim to “come mighty close” (11). Unfortunately, though, no matter how successful the family is, how far back their Southern lineage goes, or how much they are willing to assimilate into the non-Jewish culture, the fact of their Jewishness remains, and they are thus outsiders in Atlanta. Evidence for their exclusion is found as Sunny describes being kicked out of the Venetian Club pool because “Jews weren’t allowed” to swim there (51). She claims that “there’s not much [she] can do about [being Jewish]” (50), and whether she likes it or not “she can’t hide” her heritage (51). Lala, too, bemoans her inability to escape her outsider status, wailing, “Look at my hair! Look at my skin! Look at my eyes! . . . I try and I try and no matter what I do [my Jewish heritage] shows and there’s just nothing I can do about it” (56). The Freitags and the Levys are outsiders because of their ethnic and religious identities, and both realize the futility in trying to escape their roles.

Just as the two families in *Ballyhoo* are separated from the rest of the Atlanta community because of their Jewish identities, so are Miss Daisy and her family. Although Miss Daisy's naivete allows her to deny the difference that exists between her

and mainstream Atlanta,⁵ readers are able to view the reality of the chasm in the scene of the bombing of the Temple. While Miss Daisy attempts to convince herself that the bombing is a mistake, claiming that “they meant to bomb one of the Conservative synagogues or the Orthodox one” rather than the Reform Temple, Hoke is aware that the bombing occurred because the Jewish population is outside the mainstream community of Atlanta: “A Jew is a Jew to them folks. Jes like light or dark we all the same nigger” (30). He understands that, just as he and Idella are outsiders in Miss Daisy's world, she, as a Jewish woman, is an outsider in the larger world of the South.

Boolie and his wife, Florine, are like the Frietags and the Levys of *Ballyhoo* in that they do what they can to blend in with the mainstream population of the city. In December, the Werthans celebrate Christmas like the majority of people in the community, even though Miss Daisy does not. Boolie wishes his mother a “Merry Christmas” while listening to “Santa Baby” at the beginning of a phone conversation about supplies he needs for a Christmas party (19). Miss Daisy and Hoke condescendingly comment on the extensive decorations around the Werthans’ house, and, despite her unwillingness to admit her own ostracism from the mainstream community, Miss Daisy is quick to point out Florine’s differences: “If I had a nose like Florine, I wouldn't go around saying Merry Christmas to anybody” (20). The elderly woman also claims that the Garden Club and Junior league would never accept Florine because of her Jewishness. Later in the play, Boolie admits the discrimination that he faces in the Atlanta business world. In response to Miss Daisy’s invitation to the Martin Luther King,

⁵ For more on Miss Daisy's idealistic and naïve perspective, see the section entitled “Illusion.”

Jr. banquet, Boolie claims that he cannot attend because it would hurt his company. According to Boolie, the business is already at a disadvantage because of his identity as a Jew and a Southerner. He states that prospective customers believe that “as long as you got to deal with Jews, the really smart ones come from New York,” and that another strike against him would result in his customers “throwing business to [the New York Jew] Jack instead of ole Martin Luther Werthan” since “that’s the way it works” (32). Boolie’s attendance at a Civil Rights banquet would reveal his sympathies towards the black population, and the controversy would hurt his relationships with the white businessmen of Atlanta. Because of his identity as a Jew, he cannot afford to take an unpopular stand on such an issue. Boolie realizes that he is and always will be at odds with the rest of the Atlanta population, despite his attempts to assimilate.

Although the theme of Jews as outsiders in the non-Jewish world of the South is portrayed in the plays, perhaps the most intriguing identity conflict in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is found in the clash within the Jewish culture, revealed through the character of Joe Farkas. Joe, as an Orthodox Jew from the North with ancestors from Eastern Europe, has an identity that is very different from the others in the play. First and most obviously, all of the characteristics that make the Levys and the Freitags outsiders in a non-Jewish world apply to Joe as well. Because he is Jewish, he cannot obtain the acceptance of the majority of the Atlanta population. However, Joe is an outsider to the other Jews in the play as well. He is Orthodox, while the others are more assimilated. He is from the North while the others are Southerners. And, finally, his ancestry lies in Eastern Europe, while the others claim to be descendants of German Jews. All of these factors work

together to try to prevent Joe from gaining acceptability not only in Atlanta, but within the Jewish community of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* as well.

First, Joe's Orthodox views on the Jewish culture and practices place his identity at odds with that of the Freitags and the Levys. During his first encounter with the family, he reveals that his family does not celebrate Christmas, but that they do honor Passover. An obstacle is immediately erected between him and Lala, as she does not even know what Passover is. Boo reminds her of the one time they "went to the seder supper . . . over on Boulevard or somewhere," acknowledging that "it was very interesting" (23). Her vague and aloof language, though polite, suggests that the holiday means nothing to Boo or her family, and her condescending attitude is reinforced when she tells Lala to "be tolerant" (23). Soon after, Boo drops her politeness as she refers to Joe behind his back as a "kike" with no manners (26). When talking with Sunny, Joe comments that he does not understand why her family tries so hard to hide their heritage. He is proud of being Jewish and condemns Sunny for her "Jew-hater talk" (92). He, as a practicing Jew, is an outsider in a family of nominal, assimilated Jews.

Secondly, Joe is an outsider among the other Jews in the play because he is from the North. *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is filled with images of Southern pride and heritage, including everything from the premiere of *Gone with the Wind* to a debutante-like ball. Proving one's Southern lineage is important to the Freitags and the Levys, as is revealed by Boo's apparently recurring⁶ claim that their "great-grandma's Cousin

⁶ Readers know that this assertion is one that is made often in the household because Lala and Reba are able to join in and recite the last half of the statement with Boo.

Clemmie was . . . the first white child born in Atlanta” (11) and Peachy Weil’s boast that his family has “been in Louisiana for a hundred and fifty years” (81). The deciding factor in the Weil’s approval of Peachy’s marriage to Lala is the fact that they “know what [they’re] getting . . . all the way back on both sides” (94). Joe, on the other hand, is perceived as an outsider in the Southern world from the beginning. Boo’s first question to Joe, “is this your first visit to Atlanta?”, reveals that she immediately makes the assumption that he does not live in the South (15). Even after the family learns that Joe lives in Atlanta, they continue to treat him as an outsider. Boo and Reba talk with him about New York, and when they comment on his non-Southern name, he admits that he “seem[s] to be a rare bird down here” (19). Sunny later accuses him of being raised differently than she was, imagining that he “grew up in a Jewish neighborhood” where he was “like everybody else” (50). As a result, she claims that he cannot understand the pain of being Jewish. In the words of Lala, Joe is merely a “New York kid tryin’ to suck up to his boss” rather than “someone who belongs [in the South]” (57).

The final way in which Joe represents an outsider among the other Jewish people in the play is in his ancestry. Because Joe’s family is from Eastern Europe, he is considered to be “the other kind” of Jew as compared to the Freitags and the Levys, who have a German background (42). A distinct conflict exists between the two different groups, as those with German ancestry discriminate against those with Eastern European ancestry. Reba claims that the Russian Orthodox Jews, like Joe, look different than the German Jews. Each group has separate social organizations as well, such as the A.E.Phi sorority, which “nobody but the [Russian Orthodox Jews] belongs to” (11), the Progressive Club, an organization for Russian Orthodox Jews, and the Standard Club,

exclusively for the German Jews. Peachy insinuates that very few Russian Jews are toilet-trained (87), and Joe describes the difference to Sunny by claiming that she “smell[s] like a rose and [he] smell[s] like a salami sandwich” (92). Joe is therefore an outsider because of his ancestry, his Orthodox traditions, and his northern background.

Many different identity struggles, therefore, exist within both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. While the Freitags and the Levys cannot identify with the white majority of Atlanta because of their Jewish heritage, they are insiders compared to Joe because of their identities as Southerners and as ancestors of German Jews. Joe, however, is an outsider in the world of the Freitags and the Levys because he is Orthodox, a northerner, and a descendant of Russian Jews. In *Driving Miss Daisy*, Miss Daisy and the Werthans have identities as white, upper class citizens of Atlanta, while, like the families of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, they are discriminated against because of their Jewishness. However, even though they experience this prejudice from the non-Jewish majority, they are reluctant to change their stubborn and condescending attitudes towards Hoke and Idella. The conclusions of the plays reveal different outcomes in this social identity theme. In *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, the tables are turned as Sunny and her family are faced with the realization that they have ignored their Jewish identities and decide that they want to learn more about some of the Jewish traditions. Suddenly, Joe possesses the desirable identity as he teaches the others, now outsiders to his world, about the religious customs of their ancestors. Borders separating the characters begin to disappear because the family allows itself to experience Joe’s identity. In *Driving Miss Daisy*, however, the necessary role-reversal does not happen to its fullest extent. Although changes begin to occur in the characters, Miss Daisy, Boolie, and Hoke are left

at the end of the play still comfortably within the boundaries of their respective identities, unwilling to make much of an effort to change the limits of the employer/employee relationship. Even though they have become friends, Hoke is still serving his employer as he spoon-feeds her. Although the process has begun, the viewer of the play will never see the two characters allowing themselves to move beyond these roles that society has assigned to them.

MEMORY

The importance of identity gives rise to pride in historical heritage, which helps to create the identities of Southerners and Jews. This emphasis on the past leads to a strong presence of the theme of memory in both Southern and Jewish literature, and, like identity, this theme is prominent in both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. By looking at the past, writers are often able “to discover or reconstruct some viable relationship to the Southern tradition as it differed from that of other sections of America” (Young 263). However, in Southern writing, memory is not always an accurate portrayal of historic events, but is more of a “restoration, perhaps a reconstruction” of the past (Simpson 70). In *Writing the South*, Gray discusses the importance of creating the past through memory in Southern literature. Gray asserts that, through memory, “the present actively shapes the past, not merely remembers it but reinvents it” (181). Later, Gray claims that “the past and its interpretation [in Southern literature] is to make . . . readers feel quite frequently as if they had been caught in a Chinese box of fictions, in which everything comments on its own origins, making, and development” (183). Memory in Southern literature is filled with idealistic nostalgia and illusions, creating a historic Southern identity that is proud, noble, and tragic.

Memory is also a prominent theme in Jewish literature. Fein claims that both Jewish-American and Southern writers “are concerned with the individual who feels a past which he can neither shake off nor assuredly relate to his present dilemmas and possibilities” (Fein 407). This history creates the Jewish identity and holds together a culture that is spread across the world in what Fein calls the “Diaspora experience” (415). Lyons asserts that “while most American literature posits the United States as a new beginning . . . Jewish memory is long and profound . . . the linked themes of time, history, and memory pervade American-Jewish fiction” (76). Like its role in Southern literature, the past, along with the memory of this past, helps to create an identity for Jewish writers and aids in unifying a people who are in danger of losing a culture. In both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, Uhry uses the characters’ memories to reveal their insecurities and inner conflicts. Often, as is so characteristic of memory in Southern literature, characters distort or idealize their memories in order to create for themselves a more positive self-identity and reputation.

During *Driving Miss Daisy*, Miss Daisy mentions the years that she and her family spent in poverty on Forsyth Street a total of four times (7, 12, 15, 27). In her reminiscing, she often idealizes the past and informs others that things were better in her youth, despite her family’s lack of money. She uses her past to answer arguments about her pride and her stinginess with money, despite Hoke’s protests that her circumstances are different now so she does not have to live as if she were still in poverty. During the ice storm power outage, Miss Daisy seems unusually cheerful as she tells Hoke that using candles “remind[s] her of gaslight back on Forsyth Street” and that it “seems like [they] had ice storms all the time back then” (27). In another scene, while traveling to Mobile

in the car with Hoke, Miss Daisy remembers her first trip to Mobile as a child on a train. Later, when they become lost, she laments to Hoke that “[she] should have come on the train. [She]’d be safe there. [She] just should have come on the train” (25). It becomes obvious to the readers that Miss Daisy is living in the past rather than in the present, and that she is idealizing and changing her memories of that past to suit her purposes and fulfill her needs.

The Freitag and the Levy families in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* also place a great deal of emphasis on the memories of past events, and, just like Miss Daisy, they often exaggerate or idealize these memories to fit their purposes. First, Lala seems unable to get over her failure in college. She panics every time anyone mentions her time there, and she almost gives up her date with Peachy solely because he mentions speaking with a girl who had shared a dorm with Lala and who had “rushed Sigma Delta Tau with [her]” at the University of Michigan (83). Lala’s memory of her rejection by the sorority, however, changes according to the impression that she wants to give others when she is describing it. At first, when Lala is defending herself against her mother’s advice to call Peachy, and Boo reminds Lala of her time at college, the girl adamantly insists that her rejection “wasn’t [her] fault” (10). When Boo points out that Lala “didn’t prepare for Rush Week,” Lala responds that she was accepted into a different sorority (10). In this case, Lala wants the others to believe that the rejection by Sigma Delta Tau was not such a negative experience and that she was not so upset over it. However, when she does not want to go to Ballyhoo because of the reappearance of a girl who knows of her past, Lala is not so quick to dismiss the event. She is horrified that someone familiar with her time at college has surfaced, and she insists that she “won’t go to Ballyhoo and have people

laugh at [her]” (84). In this scene, Lala obviously feels that her brief time at college is something to be ashamed of, thus revealing the inaccuracy of the previous relation of the memory. Lala, in a typically Southern fashion, distorts her memories in order to suit her purposes.

Boo also uses her memory of past events to excuse present-day situations. She blames Lala’s unpopularity solely on a case of the measles during the first week of kindergarten. Boo claims that her daughter was “the cutest little baby there ever was” and that she “had so many birthday-party invitations in nursery school that [Boo] ran out of ideas for presents to give” (12). However, because Lala was out of school for the first week of kindergarten, she missed the period of time when children were forming attachments and friendships, thus sealing her fate as an unpopular person. It is obvious that this episode from Lala’s past is not the only reason for her social problems, but Boo manipulates that memory to make her current situation more bearable. In the same scene, Boo downplays an embarrassing memory of her own by relaying it to Reba in a more positive manner. Reba accuses Boo of homesickness on her honeymoon that caused Boo’s husband to “bring her back home . . . five days early” (13). Boo, on the other hand, insists that her sister's assertion is “the silliest thing [she] ever heard in all [her] life” and that “[her husband] was called home for a business meeting” instead (13). In retaliation, she accuses Reba of pretending to be sick on her wedding night, and Reba responds with her own version of the memory: “[she] felt flushed” and she “didn’t want [her husband] to catch anything” (14). The two women, like Lala, manipulate their memories to serve their purposes for a particular situation. Memory is thus a prominent theme in both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, and, as is common in

Southern literature, the characters' memories are often distorted in order to invoke a particular image of the past.

ILLUSION

Closely related to the theme of memory and the tendency of Southern memory to reshape history is another Southern theme in both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. As previously noted, according to Simpson's *A Dispossessed Garden*, many Southern authors idealize the Southern past. Simpson illustrates this idealization by describing the tendency of Southern writers to portray the details of plantation life and slavery in the Old South as a "literary imagining of a pastoral plantation situated in a timeless 'Old South,' a secure world redeemed from the ravages of history, a place of pastoral independence and pastoral permanence" (17). This distorted view of reality often envelops the "organic relationship between master and slave" who "exist in harmony always" (44). This idealization often occurs, according to Simpson, in an effort to "authenticate the historical existence of the South as a special historical case—a chosen nation" (54). Gray also notes the South's "fierce compulsion to identify the great days of the patriarchal order with the time before the war," whether or not the reality of these "great days" truly existed (89). Writers, and Southerners, for that matter, would idealize the South's history to justify their pride in the heritage of the region. Facing reality would mean admitting the flaws in the core of their identity as Southerners. Uhry seems to follow this distinctly Southern pattern of idealizing situations in both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* in his creation of an idealistic world where complicated issues are resolved simply and quickly. In both plays, this theme of illusion is revealed first with individual characters' idealistic viewpoints and then more broadly

with the over-simplistic resolutions to the complex relational conflicts between both Miss Daisy and Hoke and the *Ballyhoo* families and Joe.

Miss Daisy often seems to view the issues of society in a simplistic and naïve way, not bothering to face complicated situations maturely. For example, Miss Daisy refuses to acknowledge the reality of the bombing of the Temple. She repeatedly tells Hoke, “I don’t believe it” and “it’s a mistake” and confidently assures him that the crime has nothing to do with racism or hatred (30). She questions the reliability of the police officer, asking “how do you know that policeman was telling the truth?” and then, after telling Hoke that she “[doesn’t] want to hear any more about it,” claims that she feels fine (31). She denies the reality of the situation. In the same scene, she refuses to believe Hoke’s story about the lynching of his friend’s father, as well. Hoke describes for Miss Daisy an episode from his childhood in which he and his friend Porter found Porter’s father “hangin’ up yonder [from a tree] wid his hands tie behind his back an’ the flies all over him” (30). She asks him why he told her that story, and when he responds that “disheah [Temple] mess put [him] in mind of it,” Miss Daisy replies, “Ridiculous! The Temple has nothing to do with that!” (30). She wants to believe in an illusion that Southern blacks and Southern Jews are not linked by acts of racist terrorism, and she cannot deal with the destruction of that illusion.

In *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, Lala views the history of the South in an idealistic way. She is fascinated by *Gone with the Wind* and its portrayal of the South as a romantic paradise, complete with large plantations, beautiful parties and clothes, and carefree, happy slaves. After her second viewing of the movie, she ironically asks her mother, “Isn’t it a dream?” (47). Even as her statement reveals the movie as an illusion

of the historical South, Lala begins to obsess about the fictional and idealized world that it portrays. She proclaims that she will write a book about Atlanta during the Reconstruction period with a plot that seems curiously similar to that of the book on which the movie is based. In some ways, Lala even attempts to be Scarlett O'Hara. She flippantly uses Scarlett's famous phrase, "fiddle dee dee," when responding to Joe's inquiries about offending her two beaux by taking another boy to the premiere (18), and her ability to juggle several men at once is reminiscent of Scarlett's behavior at the barbeque at Twelve Oaks in *Gone with the Wind*. Later in the play, Adolph refers to Lala as "Scarlett O'Goldberg" and tells her that she'll be "the belle of the ball" (55) when she shows off her dress that she buys for Ballyhoo (55). The dress itself is "very *Gone with the Wind*, with a hoopskirt so wide she can barely get down the stairs" (54). Lala's obsession with the antebellum South reveals her desire for an idealistic world and her belief in the illusion of the region's idealistic history.

Although the play seems to criticize Miss Daisy and Lala for their ignorance and nostalgic romanticism, both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* address the resolution of complicated and difficult situations in an idealistic and simplistic manner. Mason and Viator criticize *Driving Miss Daisy* in their review of the play entitled "Driving Miss Daisy: A Sociosemiotic Analysis" for "an internal conflict between the ideology of a black/Jewish alliance and the reality of divergent social interests of Southern blacks and Jews" (55). According to Mason and Viator, if Uhry is attempting to portray the formation of a friendship between a poor, African-American man and a rich, elderly, Jewish woman, he seems to oversimplify and idealize the obstacles that the two would have to overcome in such a relationship. Uhry dismisses

conflicts of interest, political differences, and other such problems, leaving only two lonely people in search of friends.

Vann and Caputi, in their review of the film adaptation, argue that the movie is very similar to *Song of the South* and others, where “good natured, unflappable, subservient, and folksy, Hoke is a White dream, the ‘Uncle Tom’ who unflinchingly knows his place and genuinely worships those who boss him around while consistently neglecting to notice his humanity” (80). Just as in Joel Chandler Harris’s Uncle Remus stories, the employer/employee relationship (or the master/slave relationship) is simplified as each character quietly and docilely accepts his role. The employer is firm but kind, while the employee, for the most part, unquestioningly and trustingly submits to his authority. The idealistic relationship grows as each treats the other as a member of his or her family, but only within the bounds of the roles to which the two are assigned. In *Driving Miss Daisy* this phenomenon is seen as the play closes with the “best friends,” Hoke and Miss Daisy, in a charming and bittersweet scene. Miss Daisy, too weak and senile to take care of herself, allows Hoke to feed her instead. Although the two characters seem to develop to some extent throughout the play, their roles remain basically unchanged. Even in his old age, Hoke is still serving Miss Daisy, though under the guise of friendship rather than servanthood.

Just as the resolution of the relationship between Miss Daisy and Hoke is simplistic and idealistic in *Driving Miss Daisy*, so is the Freitags’ and the Levys’ willingness to adopt the changes that Joe brings to their lives at the end of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. As previously discussed, throughout the entire play, Lala, Boo, and Reba are highly suspicious of Joe as a Northerner, a Jew of Russian descent, and a follower of

the Orthodox traditions of Judaism⁷. The Levys and the Freitags are perfectly happy with their lives as assimilated Jews, enjoying celebrating Christmas and singing Christmas carols. They are merely “tolerant” of Joe and his traditional views, and Lala refers to the rituals as “boring . . . ish-kabibble” that she barely remembers participating in when she was younger (23). Joe recognizes this tension, telling Adolph that Boo does not like him because he’s “too Jewish” (67). However, Joe feels just as strongly about the family’s assimilation as they do about his Orthodoxy. He asks Sunny if her family is really Jewish, and then observes that the Christmas tree means that they “don’t wanna be,” despite Sunny’s defensive protests (50).

However, two short scenes later, Joe and Sunny have made up, and they are with Sunny’s family performing the traditional Jewish Sabbath ritual. The reader is unable to make any connection between the conflicts of the entire play up to this point and the harmony of the final scene. It seems unrealistic that, because of love, this sort of simplistic resolution could occur between people who are so different in so many ways. Perhaps the final scene is the representation of Sunny’s dream from the end of the preceding scene and not to be taken as a literal occurrence. Otherwise, the scene seems just as idealistic as Joe’s suggestion to Sunny that she should “think of something really good and [they’ll] just make it happen” (98). Realistically, “making something happen” in this scenario, if possible at all, would be very complicated and difficult. Just as he does

⁷ For more on this division between Joe and the three women, see the section entitled “Social Identity.”

in *Driving Miss Daisy*, Uhry creates the illusion of an idealistic resolution to a situation that is, in reality, not at all ideal.

TRADITION VERSUS THE MODERN

Incorporated into both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is the inherently Southern theme of Tradition versus the Modern, also known as Old South versus New South. In the introduction of *I'll Take My Stand*, Ransom asserts that the goal of the Agrarian contributors to the collection was to “support a Southern way of life against what might be called the American or prevailing way” (xxxvii). The Agrarian ideology holds that “under a fully developed industrial system, the individual’s identity is reduced to that of a producer and consumer of material goods,” and it upholds a simpler, often more pastoral way of life (Harvard 420). Karl summarizes the attitude of the movement by claiming that “if Southerners succumb to temptation – heavy industry, loss of regionality – then the South will not differ from the rest of the nation” and that “the introduction of machines into every form of life . . . will result in a form of life which will . . . destroy Southern values” (15). Gray notes the struggle that many Southerners face in this conflict, claiming that “motives were mixed . . . the same Southerner could, at one and the same time, look back with nostalgia to the rural past and forward with hope to the industrial future” (89). While the Old South is often identified with the simple tradition and innocence of pastoral life, the New South is “condemn[ed by the Agrarians] . . . both for its mechanism and its abstraction: as a system in which life was controlled by engines and, at the same time, as a place where people were seduced by labels, and thought in terms of ‘names’ rather than ‘things’” (156).

Although Southern agrarianism in its most obvious form of pastoral themes and images of nature is not incorporated into *Driving Miss Daisy* or *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, readers of the plays will find the trend manifested through the common rivalry between tradition and modernity. As an elderly Southerner, Miss Daisy Werthan could represent the Old South tradition with her adamant refusal to accept the modern, industrial world that surrounds her. She is highly resistant to change, a characteristic that is found on the first page of the play as she argues with her son, Boolie, that “[he] should have let [her] keep [her] old La Salle” rather than trading the eight-year-old vehicle in for a new car (5). She claims that the car accident with which the play opens occurred because of the new car and that the La Salle “never would have behaved [that] way,” despite protestations from her son that “cars, don’t behave” (5). When Boolie informs her that he will be hiring a driver for her, she again states her preference for things from the past: “I was brought up to do for myself. On Forsyth Street we couldn’t afford [servants] and we did for ourselves. That’s still the best way, if you ask me” (7). Miss Daisy refuses to admit that change can be beneficial, just as most agrarian themes oppose industrialization and modernization.

As the play progresses, Miss Daisy continues to resist change. Even though it is not safe for her to drive any more and, as Boolie claims, “she knows it, but she won’t admit it” (10), she tells Hoke that she does not need or want him (11). As he drives her to the Piggly Wiggly one day, Miss Daisy gets angry over the route that Hoke takes, even though it is faster and more direct. She “want[s] to go the way [she] always go[es],” and repeatedly exclaims to Hoke that “[his way] is wrong!” (13). Modern technological advances are difficult for Miss Daisy to accept as well. At one point in the play, Hoke

and Boolie are discussing a new car that is air-conditioned. Hoke, knowing Miss Daisy well, explains to Boolie that “she says she doan’ like no air cool. Say it giver her the neck ache” (22). Miss Daisy is living in the past and is reluctant to let go of the older, simpler way of living. Perhaps these tangible examples of Miss Daisy’s resistance to change are signifiers of her resistance to accept Hoke as a friend and an equal. The plot of the play revolves around Miss Daisy’s stubbornly condescending attitude towards Hoke, and, despite her positive progression, in the end, she can accept him as a friend only within the bounds of his relationship to her as an employee. Her resistance to change affects the resolution of her friendship with Hoke.

If Miss Daisy is representative of the Old South, her son, Boolie, depicts the New South in the way he appreciates change, industrialization, and modernization. In many of the scenes in which Boolie appears, he is often surrounded by technology. When the reader is first introduced to Miss Daisy’s son, Uhry is careful to note in the stage directions that he “sits at a desk piled with papers, and speaks into an intercom” (8). Later in the play, Boolie is once again found at his desk, although this time he “speaks into his phone in answer to intercom buzz” (26). While Miss Daisy is slow to accept changes in the world around her, Boolie seems to adapt easily. His willingness to modernize his business is evident in his Man of the Year acceptance speech when he notes that “seventy two years ago [his father and his grandfather] opened a little hole-in-the-wall shop . . . with one printing press” and that the company “managed to grow with Atlanta and to this day, the Werthan company believes [the people of the company] want what Atlanta wants” (31).

Boolie and his wife accept the changes that the modern world brings to their personal lives as well. At the Werthan's Christmas party, Miss Daisy and Hoke discuss the lights that decorate the house, and Miss Daisy quips, "everybody's giving the Georgia Power Company a Merry Christmas" (19). While they are talking, Hoke notices that the Werthans have seen them and, in response, "Mist' Werthan done turn up the hi fi" (21).⁸ Boolie knows of his mother's aversion to technology, and he flaunts his use of it. Decorative lights and hi fi stereo systems are representative of modern technological advances that would never be found in Miss Daisy's home. Finally, Boolie turns down a chance to go to Mobile for his uncle's ninetieth birthday so that he can go to New York for a business convention and see *My Fair Lady*. The choice he makes between family and the chance to go to New York City seems to represent his choice between the old, fading traditions of the past and the new, bustling industrial world. Boolie, unlike his mother, has given up the old and is moving ahead with the modern age.

At one point in the play, it seems as if Miss Daisy and Boolie have switched their respective roles as representatives of the Old South and the New South. Miss Daisy, through her relationship with Hoke, begins to take an interest in the Civil Rights Movement. Because of this interest, she buys tickets to a banquet at which Martin Luther King, Jr. will be speaking. Her interest in this movement is surprising in and of itself, given her reluctance to accept anything new and different and her love for the way things were in the past. She seems to be moving forward. Boolie, on the other hand, takes Miss

⁸ It is also interesting to note that Uhry makes a point of describing the songs that are being played on the "hi fi" system: "Santa Baby" and "Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer," two relatively modern Christmas songs.

Daisy's usual role in resisting change by refusing his mother's invitation to attend the banquet with her. Although it is a business decision on his part (he believes that attending the banquet will harm his relationships with other businessmen), his refusal to go reveals that, rather than truly changing with the times, he does only what is necessary to preserve the reputation of his business. Furthermore, even though Miss Daisy's attendance at the Civil Rights benefit seems to be a step in the right direction, she idealizes the Movement. She shows her excitement by exclaiming to Hoke that it is "wonderful the way things are changing," but she is willing to help the cause only if it means attending banquets and fundraisers, not if it means changing her life to any great extent (34). She treats him like a friend in private, but she is oblivious to his desire for equality in public. Miss Daisy does not understand that she is undermining the very effort that she is trying to support when she assumes that Hoke would not want to go to the Civil Rights benefit. She insults him further by asking him at the last minute, on the way to the banquet, instead of properly extending the invitation in advance. Even though the reader is hopeful that Miss Daisy's attendance at the event signals some sort of change in her stubborn attitude, Hoke's reply to Miss Daisy's excitement, "things changin', but they ain't change all dat much," seems to apply more to Miss Daisy's attitude than to society (34). Miss Daisy has changed throughout the play and is moving towards an acceptance of Hoke as a friend and an equal, but, unfortunately, this process is far from being complete.

The theme of the fading pastoral life clashing with a newer, more industrialized world is also present in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. Uhry uses the contrasting personalities and world-views of Lala and Sunny to demonstrate this tension. Lala, along with Boo and Reba, represents the tradition, simplicity, and history of the Old South. As

previously discussed, Lala is obsessed with *Gone with the Wind*, a movie that exemplifies and idealizes the Old South. In the opening scene, readers are introduced to Lala as she reveals her excitement over the premiere of the movie, swooning over Clark Gable's presence "less than five miles from [her] house" and claiming that "tonight is the most important event in the history of Atlanta!" (7). Later in the play she sees the movie a second time, and, in response to teasing from her uncle, Lala quips, "Nobody can take in a masterpiece in one viewing. I came away with so much more tonight! I could watch it a thousand times" (45). Lala is obviously taken with the movie, revealing her obsession with the Old South, its values, and its traditions. The first line of the novel Lala is writing also betrays her dismay over the loss of the Old South way of life: "From where she sat atop the weathered buckboard wagon, Ropa Ragsdale could see the charred and twisted remains of her beloved plantation" (10). She romanticizes and idealizes the South of the past, seeming at times to wish that she could revive the fictional culture of that era.

Along with Lala and her idealistic obsession with the Old South, Boo and Reba also represent the Southern resistance to change. Rather than looking to the future and being concerned with worldly affairs, modernity, industrialism, and productivity, the two women are consumed with issues traditionally important to women in the Old South: bloodlines and social appearances. Boo's frequent referral to Lala's great-grandmother's cousin Clemmie⁹ and her advice that Lala should "use [her] connections and [her] birthright to make something of [her]self instead of mooning over nonsense" reveals the emphasis that the woman places on heritage (11). Boo believes that family history and

background are very important and can make a difference in one's acceptance in the South. When Lala is debating with her mother about the boy with whom she should attend the Ballyhoo dance, Boo is quick to point out Peachy Weil, "a Louisiana Weil" from the "finest family in the South" because, as she claims, "there is nothing wrong with good bloodlines" (8). Lala's choice, Ferdy Nachman, is not acceptable because, according to Reba, "his father picked his nose during his own wedding ceremony" (8). Boo later comments that "it would be a shot in [Lala's] arm to [her] situation to be seen at Ballyhoo with a Weil from Louisiana" (38). The two women believe that coming from an old, Southern family is an advantage for any boy whom Lala wants to date.

Sunny's attitude towards Ballyhoo and the role of women in society reveals her character to be the opposite of Lala, Reba, and Boo. While her cousin and the two women obsess over Ballyhoo and Lala's date, Sunny tells Joe that "Ballyhoo is asinine" and that it consists of "a lot of dressed-up Jews dancing around, wishing they could kiss their elbows and turn into Episcopalians" (30). In taking Joe to the dance, she makes a non-conformist choice, despite Lala's condescending reference to him as "a pushy New York Yid tryin' to suck up to his boss" (57). Joe is everything that a traditional date to Ballyhoo is not, in that he is from the North and is therefore unfamiliar with Southern traditions and expectations. Much to Lala's dismay, Joe has never read *Gone with the Wind* and has no desire to see the movie. The women have to explain to him what Ballyhoo is because, as Lala exclaims, "of course you are a Yankee!" (24). Joe is also a practicing Jew, not assimilated like most of the Southern Jews known to the Freitag and Levy families, and his background is Russian, rather than German. Poking fun at her

⁹ For specifics, see page 11 of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, and refer to the

family's emphasis on bloodlines, Joe jokingly tells Sunny that he has "Royal Russian blood . . . there's a story in the family about [his] great-grandfather and the czarina's grand-niece, or was it [his] great-grandmother and the czar's third cousin . . . either way you should know you're going to the movies tomorrow night with part of a prince" (54). Joe is also comfortable in the kitchen, which is something that the women have never heard of. According to Boo, Adolph "has never crossed the threshold of a kitchen in his life," and her surprised reaction to Joe's admission that he can cook and wash dishes reveals that she does not know many, if any, men that do. He is the opposite of Lala's date to Ballyhoo; Peachy is "someone who belongs there . . . a Louisiana Weil!" (57). Sunny, unlike Lala, Boo, and Reba, is not inhibited by desires to keep with the tradition and heritage of the Old South.

Sunny is not afraid to defy the molds of tradition in other ways as well, as she is willing to change with the world outside of the South. Instead of staying at home in the Deep South and assuming the role of homemaker that women were historically expected to take in that region, Sunny is a junior "with an A minus average" at Wellesley (29). Although Reba claims that "higher education can lead to insanity," Sunny avidly pursues her degree in sociology, and readers find her studying Upton Sinclair and Eugene V. Debs several times throughout the course of the play (41). Sunny uses her time at college to develop her mind and work towards a career. In contrast, the brief glimpse that readers see of Lala's time at college involves only social functions, including her rejection by the sorority, with no evidence of her intellectual pursuits. In this respect, Lala strives to fit the conventional role of the Southern woman, that of socialite and housewife, while

footnote on page 16 of this discussion.

Sunny is willing to forego the traditional conventions to adapt to modernity and escape a predetermined role. As Lala so aptly summarizes, “[Sunny] got the brains” and “[she] got the moxie” (22).

FAMILY

A final theme common to both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is the importance of family. Lyons suggests that family, and the importance of talk within the family community, is a prominent theme in Jewish literature. She asserts that “the [Jewish] world-view is deeply and pervasively social rather than individual, oriented toward the group rather than any one person” and that therefore “the heart of Judaism is the family—the biological family and the wider family of the Jewish people” (63). Although the familial relationship within Jewish literature may not always be positive or uplifting, it is often emphasized as important, playing a pivotal role in revealing other important issues and themes. This Jewish theme of family is prominent in both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*.

Throughout *Driving Miss Daisy*, the reader is reminded of the close relationship between Boolie and his mother. At the beginning of the play, Boolie reveals his desire to take care of his mother through the act of finding a driver so that she will be safe. Despite her protests, Boolie insists that Miss Daisy will not have to do anything, and that he will conduct “all the interviewing, all the reference checking” (6). Later in the play, when Miss Daisy insists that Hoke is stealing from her, Boolie promptly arrives at her house upon her request, even though he believes that she is being foolish. Boolie insists that he wants to be left out of the situation, but, when Hoke arrives, the diligent and concerned son immediately tells the driver “I think we need to have a talk” (17). His devotion to his

mother withstands and exceeds his judgment of whether or not something should be done. In another scene, during an ice storm, Boolie calls his mother out of concern for her. When she answers, his relief is obvious as he exclaims, “thank goodness!” (27), and he worriedly advises her not to “go anywhere” (28). In the end, when Miss Daisy suffers from dementia and is in a nursing home, Boolie’s devotion does not waver. He takes care of selling her house, although he claims that “it feels funny to sell the house while [Miss Daisy’s] still alive” (37), and he visits her consistently enough to know that the day that Hoke goes with him is “one of her good days” (38). Family is obviously important to the Werthans.

The entire plot of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* centers on the theme of family and expression and communication within a close-knit family. Only through the interactions of the extended family household are readers able to see the complexities of the conflicts and struggles that the characters experience. Through devotion and loyalty to his sister, Boo, and his brother’s wife, Reba, Adolph supports both of the women and their daughters in a culture in which women rarely had the means to support themselves. Adolph discusses with Boo how Sunny’s father, Simon, did the same for them all when their father died, insisting that “maybe [Simon] had to support [their mother], but he didn’t have to put [Adolph] all the way through Tech and ... buy [Boo] that trousseau [she] raised such hell over and all that damn sterling silver,” even when Simon had very little money (35). Both Boo and Reba treat the girls as their own and rarely show favoritism to their own daughter over the other, an element that is revealed when Reba is quick to fix Lala’s gown after it gets ripped, even though Boo is Lala’s mother. Because the reader is able to see the intimate discussions that occur within the family, he is privy

to knowledge about Sunny's father, Lala's insecurities, Boo's and Reba's desires for their daughters to be happy in life, Adolph's love for and loyalty to his dead brother, and Sunny's feelings towards Joe. Without the closeness of the Frietag family, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* would be void of all other themes and issues. The theme of family is thus crucial to both of the plays.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this analysis of both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, it becomes clear that both plays address common themes and issues, and that the prominent common issues—identity, memory, illusion, tradition versus the modern, and family—are either Southern, Jewish, or a combination of both. It is therefore clear that the two reflect a mixture of Southern and Jewish themes and cultures. The theme of identity in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* incorporates several strongly Jewish issues such as assimilation and prejudice within the Jewish community. Because of the emphasis in this play on one family's search for its Jewish identity, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* reveals itself as more Jewish than Southern. The characters of *Driving Miss Daisy*, however, deal more with a Southern identity relating to race and class as they come to terms with and blur the lines around the boundaries that are assigned to them by the Southern society. While the theme of assimilation and discrimination against the Jewish community is present in *Driving Miss Daisy*, the play's focus is not on the characters' search for their Jewish heritage, but on their struggles with interracial relationships. It is therefore more Southern than it is Jewish.

Perhaps the differences in the plays lie in the differences in their settings. *Driving Miss Daisy* covers the period of time from 1948-1973, years crucial to American history

due to the Civil Rights Movement. Uhry's decision to focus on race relations in a play about an elderly woman and her chauffeur during this time period seems to be an automatic thematic choice. A play involving a search for Miss Daisy's Jewish heritage would have seemed out of place and, in some ways, trivial in light of social changes going on in the immediate neighborhood of the play's setting. *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, however, takes place in 1939, a year of great importance to the world in that it was the eve of a Second World War, a horrific era for the Jewish community. Uhry's decision to portray a family that is coming to terms with its Jewish identity prior to this period of Jewish history seems poignant and highly important to his audience, who, of course, know what is to come in the years following the time of the play. The play becomes a tribute to Uhry's own heritage and, perhaps, a tribute in respect to the unspoken tragedy of the Holocaust as well.

The question of why Uhry chose these two time periods still remains. Perhaps the answers lie in the writer's own quest for his Jewish identity and in his own recent realization that "[being Jewish is] nothing to be ashamed of" (Witchel 5). In this search, perhaps he feels that he is becoming more "Jewish" and less "Southern" as a person, and this belief is revealing itself through his works. In an interview with Paul Rudd, Uhry claims that he "[does not] want to do Southern again," but he responds to a joke that he is "like Mel Brooks and Tennessee Williams combined into one person" because "[his plays] are Jewish and . . . Southern" (Rudd 38). He writes in *Shalom Y'all* that when people ask him "if Southern Jews are more Southern than Jewish or the other way around," he does not know how to answer, as "the practices of faith intermingle with regional customs and traditions. Last names [in the South] may have been Goldberg or

Stein, but first names were often Betty Lou and Sister or Buddy or J.W.” (xi). Only Uhry’s future plays will determine the true direction of his interests, but, for now, the thematic mixture found in his works reflects the writer’s own dual identity as a Southern Jewish man.

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