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in honor of
Ray Bradbury

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PREFACE

Midwestern Miscellany XX marks not only the journal's anniversary as an annual publication, but it remains in the tradition of being a true miscellany. The essays in this issue range widely over the places that mark the Midwestern literary landscape, from nineteenth century settlements through the *fin-de-siecle* towns and small cities and on to the great cities that have come to dominate the region, the nation, and the human psyche in our time.

At the same time *Midwestern Miscellany XX* also marks another first: in it are essays that explore the works of two winners of the Society's Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature. The award winners whose work is explored are Don Robertson, winner of the Mark Twain Award for 1991, and Ray Bradbury, winner of the Mark Twain Award for 1992, to whom this issue is dedicated.

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DAVID D. ANDERSON

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KIRKLAND'S MYTH OF THE AMERICAN EVE: RE-VISIONING THE FRONTIER EXPERIENCE

KELLI A. LARSON

Though Caroline Kirkland's early Western sketches charted the course for American literary realism, she has only recently begun to attract the close critical scrutiny she deserves as an artistic innovator in her own right rather than as merely the background from which major figures of the movement emerged. Familiar with contemporary accounts of frontier life such as Hoffman's *A Winter in the West* (1835) and Cooper's *Leather-Stocking Tales*, Kirkland soon discovered upon her own emigration to the Michigan wilderness in 1835 that these early representations, incarnations of the British and American Romantic tradition, bore little resemblance to the actual conditions awaiting the uninitiated settler of the new land. And because they were penned by male authors, these pastoral inventions omitted althogther those trials peculiar to the situation of female emigrants who had exchanged comfortable hearth and home in the East for rustic cabins in the West. In her seminal portrait of pioneer life, *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* (1839), Kirkland subverts the romantic myth of the frontier Eden celebrated in the popular genres of the period as she explores the nature of cultural tradition and the role of women on the frontier.

A number of recognizable literary conventions are seemingly preserved in *A New Home*. Kirkland's familiarity with the emigrants' manual, etiquette book, and sentimental novel is reflected throughout. However, as Sandra Zagarell observes in her introduction to the latest edition, the author employs "existing literary conventions while stretching those conventions to accommodate progressive ideas" (xiii). Thus Kirkland's peculiar brand of literary domesticity, a complex synthesis of both domestic and professional callings, gives rise to a very different sensibility from that of the dominant frontier novelists of the day—particularly

regarding her satiric treatment of the myth of the American Adam, long recognized as a recurring theme and representative image in nineteenth century American literature by critics such as R. W. B. Lewis, Richard Chase, and Henry Nash Smith.

Briefly summarized, the Adam myth refers to the perception of life and history as just beginning for Americans in the new land, a new opportunity with unlimited possibilities to reach complete self-definition within the vast open spaces of America. Lewis describes the new adventurer as "an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling . . . most easily identified with Adam before the fall" (5). Represented in literary figures such as Cooper's noble savage Chingachgook and the celibate frontiersman Natty Bumppo, the new Adam must remain outside of society and familial relationships, fleeing the "complexities" and "corruptions" of modern civilization. He must resist the destructive forces of encroaching and restricting society represented in the negative image of female domesticity.¹

The crucial distinction between the frontier Adam and Kirkland's pioneer narrator is reflected in their differing pastoral visions. The frontiersman is a lone wanderer in the wilderness who leaves little mark on his environment. Pioneers, on the other hand, transform the landscape—domesticating and destroying as they settle. The residents of Kirkland's Montacute clear away, chop down, and block in the wide open space. This continual tension between nature and civilization is exemplified in the conflict between Natty Bumppo and a family of emigrants in Cooper's *The Prairie*. Natty Bumppo, having retreated to the vast emptiness of the prairie in order to escape the uproar of destruction, must again confront encroaching civilization in the oppressive form of the Bush family, an ax wielding clan transversing the untrammelled landscape in search of conquerable territory. Employing various forms of figurative language to expose the rapacious nature of the settlers, Cooper writes:

At length the eldest of the sons stepped heavily forward, and, without any apparent effort, he buried his ax to the eye in the soft body of a cottonwood tree. He stood a moment regarding the effect of the blow, with that sort of contempt with which a giant might be supposed to contemplate the puny resistance of

a dwarf, and then flourishing the implement above his head, with the grace and dexterity with which a master of the art of offense would wield his nobler though less useful weapon, he quickly severed the trunk of the tree, bringing its tall top crashing to the earth in submission to his prowess. (19)

In his powerful depiction of the unconventional attack upon the wilderness by domesticated (and domesticating) "bushes," Cooper emphasizes the irony of a grove of bushes replacing a grove of trees through simile and personification. In an extended reversal, the tree (with its tall top) is compared to a "dwarf" and the son, Asa Bush, to a "giant." As aggressor, he buries "his ax to the eye" and his victim is "the soft body" of the tree. But Asa Bush is no ordinary assailant; he is a conqueror as connoted by "flourishing," "weapon," and "dexterity." He and other emigrants cross the wide open plains of the prairie with their axes slung over their shoulders, like loaded and sighted guns in position for immediate use. Their intended victim is nature; their goal is domestication. And, as Cooper's diction so eloquently conveys, nature is pitifully helpless against such a devastating force. The "soft body" of the tree can put up only a "puny resistance" against the "dexterity" and "prowess" of Asa, who "without any apparent effort," forces it into inevitable "submission."

It is this negative image of civilization, the urge for domestication traditionally delineated as the result of feminine influence, that Kirkland seeks to dispel in her narrative by deconstructing the Adam myth. That Kirkland is familiar with the popular literary convention is evidenced not only by her own manipulation of the Eden metaphor but also by her references to other frontier authors, including particularly Cooper. Although she begins her novel with a traditionally romantic description of the Edenic wilderness through which she is traveling, with its "gosling-green suit of half-opened leaves" and "forest odors which exhaled with the dews of morning," reality sets in quickly in the form of an impassible mire. As if on cue, the Adam hero (a frontier trapper in this instance) steps from the darker recesses of the forest to rescue Kirkland—but not from the savagery of Indians or the threatening jaws of a cougar as his wilderness counterpart Natty Bumppo has done in the past but from an ordinary, inglorious patch of mud. Kirkland's humorous debunking of pastoral myths extends beyond the backwoodsman to also include a

view of Native Americans. Cooper's noble Indian, resplendent in form yet savage in intensity, is reduced in Kirkland's satiric account to a drunken thief, more interested in his next bottle of whiskey than in preserving his native homeland or way of life.

But it is Kirkland's tongue-in-cheek account of her own husband's wilderness adventure with several land speculators that so completely undermines the romantic myth of the manly frontier hero. Off go the would-be Adams on an extended exploration of the vast interior—eager to become one with nature, camp out under the stars, fast for days, and shoot game for sustenance. However after only one day, the little troop, roundly stripped of all its romantic illusions, is hopelessly lost, exhausted, hungry, and in desperate search of an inn or other more comfortable accommodations than that offered by the earlier much desired forest floor. Kirkland recounts that "the party were absent just four days; and a more dismal sight than they presented on their return cannot well be imagined. Tired and dirty, cross and hungry, were they all. No word of adventures, no boasting of achievements" (26). Kirkland adds ironically that it is only after the men experience the "humanizing [civilizing] effect" of tea and bathing that "things brightened a little."

Here, as elsewhere in the novel, Kirkland establishes that it is the practical comfort provided by the female hand, whether it be preparing tea or a bath, that makes living in the wilderness bearable. In addition to field labor, women emigrants are responsible for the cooking, cleaning, child rearing, and any other domestic chores which turn a rude log dwelling into a comfortable home. Again and again, Kirkland undermines the Adam myth by privileging the female role in the new land as domesticator, socializer, healer, and provider. It is the inn keeper's wife who greets the newcomers, arranges their sleeping quarters, and sees to their comfort. It is the women of the settlement who nurse the sick, provide for the homeless and hungry, and comfort those whose loved ones have died.

There is no place in Kirkland's frontier for the isolation and dispassion of the American Adam. Here the wide open spaces are contained by familiar images—comfortable log homes encircled with flower beds, vegetable gardens, and neat rows of fencing. Clearly, Kirkland envisions the new land as Eden, her references to it as such and to herself as "another Eve," as well as

her romantic wilderness descriptions, bear this out. However, it is an Eden after the fall, an Eden which cannot exist without the labors of Eve. With an instinctive understanding of their essential role in the new land, Kirkland's pioneer women both literally and figuratively kill the snakes which infest their gardens.

In contrast to the traditional Adam myth, Kirkland depicts a new way of life in the wilderness which encapsulates both the frontier and pioneer vision—not in opposition but in harmony. Free of the inherent limitations of the myth which imply that only men can value and thus fully engage in the wilderness experience, Kirkland identifies the *universal* need for unlimited space and freedom. *A New Home* clearly illustrates that the American Eve can also appreciate, contribute to, and share in the solitude and sublimity of the American West. In recognizing the desire for "unbounded and *unceremonious* liberty" found only in the wide open spaces of a new land as a "natural and universal feeling" (148), Kirkland is dismissing the pioneer woman's presumed negative relationship with nature in favor of an analysis of that relationship as it really was.

As a revisionist of the traditionally defined masculine frontier, Kirkland's particularly modern concern with the exclusion of the woman's perspective in frontier literature is present in nearly all of her western sketches but certainly never more so than in *A New Home*. Her reinterpretation of the Adam myth in light of the female emigrant experience proclaims Kirkland as a voice in the wilderness, both literally and figuratively, recording her struggle to become accustomed—to belong. And in so doing, she not only called into question a literary tradition that had long sought to exclude the woman's experience but also challenged future generations of readers to re-examine their own traditional assumptions about what frontier women's lives were like.

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1. See Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" for an excellent discussion of the negative role of woman as domesticator and entrapper in American literature and literary criticism.

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GOPHER PRAIRIE, ZENITH, AND
 GRAND REPUBLIC: NICE PLACES TO VISIT,
 BUT WOULD EVEN SINCLAIR LEWIS
 WANT TO LIVE THERE?

SALLY E. PARRY

In many of Sinclair Lewis's novels, landscapes, especially urban landscapes, are described in a romantic way, at least at first. Office buildings tower loftily in the sky and suburbs are replete with perfect homes. Occasionally his characters think back on the pioneer beginnings of these towns and cities and marvel at how far progress has brought them. George F. Babbitt, in his speech to the Zenith Real Estate Board in the 1922 novel *Babbitt*, provides a perfect example of how Lewis's characters celebrate their growing Midwestern towns.

But it's here in Zenith, the home for manly men and womanly women and bright kids, that you find the largest proportion of these Regular Guys, and that's what sets it in a class by itself; that's why Zenith will be remembered in history as having set the pace for a civilization that shall endure when the old time-killing ways are gone forever and the day of earnest efficient endeavor shall have dawned all around the world! (184)

Babbitt, the prototypical American businessman of the 1920s, obviously believes that his city manifests the best qualities of the true American city. But neither it, nor Gopher Prairie, nor Grand Republic, nor any of the other fictional towns that Lewis created, are really as wonderful as their boosters describe them. In looking at Lewis's three major Midwestern communities, we see clearly that the seemingly prosperous and pleasant facades that they present often hide both misery and corruption.

Lewis's novels reveal an ambivalence toward the Midwest.¹ He was born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, in 1885 and was "torn

between affection for the village virtues of simplicity and friendliness and distaste for the village vices of dullness and censoriousness" (Blake 6). On the one hand, he admired the atmosphere of small towns where people were concerned with the welfare of others. Most of the towns he wrote about were relatively new (unlike European cities) and still in the process of defining themselves. On the other hand, these same towns depressed him because, despite their potential, too often the inhabitants tended to perpetuate the social hierarchies, prejudices, and indifference that were prevalent in the cities of the eastern seaboard and Europe. It frustrated Lewis that Midwestern citizens had the chance to create a new and better society, yet spoiled these chances.²

Like William Faulkner and his Yoknapatawpha County, Sinclair Lewis created a fictional area which serves as a vehicle for his critical comments on society. Between 1920 and 1947 Lewis created in his fiction three distinct Midwestern towns: Gopher Prairie, a small town of less than five thousand inhabitants; Zenith, a bustling metropolis of over 360,000; and Grand Republic, an established city of 90,000. He drew maps, relied on architecture and real estate magazines, and devised numerous businesses in order to make these places as close to reality as possible.³ Maxwell Geismar notes that by doing so, Lewis "not only staked out a new state and its language, habits, ethics, and symbols, but a state that is in the process of . . . sweeping cultural change" (71-71). Through his portrayal of these places we can see not only Lewis's mixed feelings about the Midwest area of the United States, but also his concern that the American dream of a better society has become more and more bankrupt. Repeatedly, the values which are seen as virtues in these towns, such as neighborliness, friendship, and industry, are taken to such extremes that they serve as excuses for discrimination, verbal abuse, and even incipient fascism.

Even quite early in his career, Lewis shows an ambivalence about small towns. He was a member of the "Revolt from the Village" movement in American fiction which wanted to debunk the idea that small towns were perfect places in which to live. This is evident in his depiction of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, his first major fictional town. Gopher Prairie makes its initial brief appearance in the 1919 novel *Free Air*. It is here that

heroine Claire Boltwood stays overnight after her car gets stuck in the mud. She feels superior to this small prairie town because she is from the well-to-do metropolitan section of New York City, Brooklyn Heights. Gopher Prairie in 1919 is primarily a farming community with a few businesses. Claire's first impression of it is of faded brick and wooden buildings with a "hopelessly muddy road leading on again into the country. She felt that if she didn't stop at once, she would miss the town entirely" (36-37). Its dinginess is compounded at the only "tolerable" hotel where the "ugliness of the poison-green walls and brass cuspidors" (38) is intensified by the mingled smells of cigar smoke and cooking sausage. She and her father are stared at by bored traveling salesmen who seem to be smirking at the city slickers. The hotel rooms are small and stuffy with no separate baths. There are only three choices for dinner (none very appetizing), and the whole meal is punctuated by questions from the waitress and the others in the dining room about where Claire and her father are from, where they are going, and what they are going to do when they get there. This snapshot of the town shows it at its dirty, ugly, and provincial worst. If Lewis had stopped at this point, it would have remained just a nasty comment on small town America.

However, Lewis goes on to show a more positive side to Gopher Prairie. When Claire wakes up, the sun is shining, a meadowlark is singing, and the nosy, rude people of the night before now seem friendly and positively concerned about her well-being. The waitress offers her and her father an extra helping of breakfast, the garage attendant gives them directions, and several people wish them good luck on their journey. For Claire it is an enlightening and humbling revelation that good people can be found outside of cities. It also shows that Lewis does not want small towns condemned because of their rough appearance.

In his next novel, *Main Street*, Lewis's ambivalence reflects a more sophisticated awareness that a community's virtues, carried to an extreme or viewed from a different perspective, are also its vices.⁴ *Main Street* was written in 1920, just a year after *Free Air*, and shows the town of Gopher Prairie nearly a decade before Claire sees it, from 1912 to 1920. Readers receive their first impressions of the town through the eyes of two new inhabitants. Carol Kennicott, bride of a well-to-do doctor, is from

the city of St. Paul, and wants to give her new home a chance. At first she is impressed by the prairie and the wide and lofty sky as her train approaches the town, but her enthusiasm quickly fades. As she looks out the window of her new house she sees "the Seventh-Day Adventist Church—a plain clapboard wall of a sour liver color; the ash-pile back of the church; an unpainted stable; and an alley in which a Ford delivery-wagon had been stranded" (32). These unappealing sights compound her fears as a new wife, and she longs to run back to St. Paul. In order to bolster her spirits she determines to make a solo tour of the town. It takes 32 minutes. Gopher Prairie is an ugly, dreary place where the buildings mirror the drabness of the inhabitants. The Minnemashie House (probably the same hotel Claire Boltwood will stay in) is a shabby building with a dining room which is "a jungle of stained table-cloths and catsup bottles" (34). There are few signs of life except for some drunken farmers in a saloon, several young men shooting dice for cigarettes in a tobacco shop, and a cat, sleeping on some lettuce in a grocery store. The smells of the town nearly overwhelm her: the "reek of blood" at the meat market, the "stink of stale beer" at the saloon, the "sour smell of a dairy," and the mildewed scent of old letters at the post office (35-37). What depresses Carol all the more is that "in the fifty years of Gopher Prairie's existence, the citizens had [not] realized that it was either desirable or possible to make this, their common home, amusing or attractive" (37). And, as Anthony Hilfer notes, "The physical ugliness of the village . . . reflects its dearth of spiritual values" (161). Even more depressingly, Lewis sees Gopher Prairie not as an anomaly, but as representative of "ten thousand towns from Albany to San Diego" (34).

Carol's vision of Gopher Prairie can be seen as a damning indictment of small towns by Lewis, not only because she is the main character of the novel, but because Lewis strongly identified with her. Carol is based partially on his first wife, Grace Hegger, whose reaction to his hometown of Sauk Centre was very similar.⁵ Lewis also felt like an outsider in Sauk Centre. He told his friend Charles Breasted that in many ways, "Carol is 'Red' Lewis: always groping for something she isn't capable of attaining, always dissatisfied, always restlessly straining to see what lies just over the horizon, intolerant of her surrounding,

yet lacking any clearly defined vision of what she really wants to do or be" (8).

However, Lewis offers an opposing view of Gopher Prairie as well. He juxtaposes Carol's vision of the town with that of Bea Sorenson, a young Swedish woman who has come from Scandia Falls (population 67) to work as a housemaid. Gopher Prairie is the largest place she has ever seen. It is a lovely town where well dressed people shop in over four blocks of stores, not just the three stores of her hometown. The drugstore, which Carol dismisses as "a greasy marble soda-fountain with an electric lamp of red and green and curdled-yellow mosaic shade" (34) becomes to Bea "a soda fountain that was just huge, awful long, and all lovely marble; and on it there was a great big lamp with the biggest shade you ever saw—all different kinds colored glass stuck together. . . . Suppose a fella took you *there!*" (39). The hotel, the motion picture theater, the numerous churches all indicate to Bea that Gopher Prairie is a wonderful place.

As Carol and Bea live there awhile it is obvious that Carol's version of reality is closer to the truth. Gopher Prairie has many of the virtues of small towns, especially friendliness and a sense of decency, but they have been carried to extremes. The friendliness becomes an unhealthy curiosity to know what all one's neighbors are doing, while the sense of decency is transformed into impossibly rigid moral standards which are used as a way to judge everyone's thoughts and actions. The established inhabitants scrutinize every newcomer to town, and try to make each one just like the people already living there. There are some, including Carol and the tailor's assistant Erik Valborg, who do not seem to belong because they want to bring more excitement and intellectual stimulation to the town. The people of Gopher Prairie do not think changes need to be made, or at least they are not in a hurry to make them. In one of *Main Street's* most famous passages, Lewis sums up his accusations against towns such as Gopher Prairie.

It is an unimaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It is contentment . . . the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. It is negation canonized as the one positive

virtue. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God. (265)

One of the more common bromides about small towns is that people are more neighborly and more likely to help in times of trouble. Lewis notes that in popular fiction the tradition is that "the American village remains the one sure abode of friendship, honesty, and clean, sweet marriageable girls" (*Main Street* 264). Although there are some individual instances of friendship and kindness in the novel, most people are concerned only with others in their own social class. Since Bea is Swedish and a maid, most of the women of the town, with the exception of Carol, ignore her and even refuse to come to her wedding. When she and her son, little Olaf, take sick with typhoid, again only Carol comes to help nurse her. Not until a day or two before Bea dies does anyone else evince concern, and even then perfunctorily. Only her husband, Miles, goes to the funeral. The town has already developed such a strong social hierarchy that the upper classes ignore the lower immigrant classes.

Outward moral standards of behavior are often undermined by hypocrisy and self-righteousness. When the schoolteacher, Fern Mullins, is molested by a drunken bully, Cy Bogart, she is called a loose woman. Cy's mother is a devout member of a local church, and it is consequently assumed that her son could never have done anything wrong. Fern is verbally abused for bringing up such unpleasantness, asked by the school board to resign, and forced to leave town. Little wonder that when Carol has a chance to go to Washington, D.C. to work she leaves in a hurry. The town, with its nosiness and eternal judging of everyone and everything, is too stifling a place in which to live. Unfortunately what Carol discovers is that the small-town mind is everywhere; it is not something she can escape from by moving away.

In his next novel, *Babbitt*, Lewis emphasizes this point by presenting the small-town mindset in a large urban setting. As more people moved to the cities in the 1920s, Lewis felt that he should portray a medium-sized city, one that was growing right along with the prosperity of the decade. At first glance Zenith seems to be a bigger and better version of Gopher Prairie but

without the problems. Maxwell Geismar described it as a "Gopher Prairie come of age" (88). The reader's first glimpse of Zenith is in stark contrast to that of Gopher Prairie. The novel opens with these lines: "The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone; sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings" (1). Zenith is the prototypical American city, representing enthusiasm, growth, and progress, as well as the worship of business and the profit motive.⁶ Although we find out later in the same description that there are "tenements colored like mud" and "factories with stingy and sooted windows" (1), Zenith certainly appears to be a better place to live in than Gopher Prairie. Vergil Gunch, a leading businessman, announces that "small towns . . . all want to be just like Zenith!" (119). George Babbitt, the protagonist of this novel, unlike Carol in *Main Street*, really admires his city. This admiration is carried to such an extent that he sells real estate and acts as a booster for the town. As we saw in the quotation at the beginning of this article, George and his friends have great plans for Zenith.

However, the corruption in Zenith is of a more insidious kind than in Gopher Prairie. Because of this Lewis displays less ambivalence. Again, the virtues of the city also cause its problems. There is such an emphasis on business and industry that a mindset is created in which all other values are sacrificed to making money. Anyone who refuses to make such a sacrifice, by giving priority to moral ideals or artistic expression, for example, is regarded as an outsider or even a radical. Anything, whether it be new ideas or new politics, which challenges prosperity is rejected and stamped out. The class consciousness that kept Bea and her husband from having the same friends that Carol did is here in Zenith. But it is not only ethnic background that keeps people out of the top social circles, but also income. There is a decidedly anti-intellectual prejudice as well. Babbitt's son says belittlingly of one Shimmy Peters, a high school Latin teacher, "he's a what-is-it from Columbia and he sits up all night reading a lot of greasy books and he's always speling about the 'value of languages,' and the poor soak doesn't make but eighteen hundred a year" (77). The appearance of money and success is what counts. That is why it is so easy for the Reverend Elmer

Gantry to visit Zenith in Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* and convince the townspeople to attend his church and donate money to his ministry. He appears to be successful and prosperous; consequently, businessmen and women gravitate toward him. However, Gantry and others who run the town use religion for an ulterior purpose, to keep the lower class from causing trouble. As Mr. T. J. Rigg, the famous criminal lawyer, notes, "we believe religion is a fine thing to keep people in order—they think of higher things instead of all these strikes and big wages and the kind of hell-raising that's throwing the industrial system all out of kilter" (Lewis, *Elmer Gantry* 313). It seems that most American churches (at least in Lewis's eyes) "subserve the demands of the real religion—the 'religion of business'" (Friedman 71).

But the promises offered by realtors, ministers, doctors, and business people are all empty. There is the constant refrain of how to get something for nothing. "BIG money. . . NO SPECIAL EDUCATION REQUIRED" (Lewis, *Babbitt* 84). The ministers are no more likely to get a person into heaven than the realtors are to give a family a good deal on a house. The city is one hustle after another, and if a person cannot appreciate this materialism or at least appear to, then his or her perceived value to the community declines precipitously. Even George Babbitt, when he suffers from a mid-life crisis and starts to doubt the credo of more, bigger, faster, is shunned by those who were once his friends.

The most frightening thing about Zenith, however, is that while the businessmen and women all keep talking about 100% Americanism with all that that implies, they are at the same time doing everything to maintain the status quo, even if it means subverting democracy. The working classes have to be kept in their place. Religion is one answer. If that is not successful, then other ways have to be found. In Zenith the Good Citizens' League has been created to prevent anyone or anything from preventing the city from running smoothly. As Vergil Gunch, one of the organizers, puts it, "one of the best ways it can put the kibosh on cranks is to apply this social boycott business. . . . Then if that don't work, the G. C. L. can finally send a little delegation around to inform folks that get too flip that they got to conform to decent standards and quit shooting off their mouths so free" (*Babbitt* 346). When Babbitt balks at

this high-handed behavior, Gunch warns him that "when it comes right down to a struggle between decency and the security of our homes on the one hand, and red ruin and those lazy dogs plotting for free beer on the other, you got to give up even old friendships" (346-47). This none-too-subtle warning is at first ignored by Babbitt; thus, he risks losing not only friendships and social position but business as well. In time he realizes his error and conforms to society's norms so that he can settle down to business as usual. The fascist aspect of the G. C. L. is ignored by all prosperous citizens because they are not adverse to anything that will perpetuate their comfortable way of living.⁷

Lewis's final fictional town, Grand Republic, which appears in his two best novels of the 1940s, *Cass Timberlane* and *Kingsblood Royal*, represents his darkest view of America. In his earlier novels his communities' vices grew out of their virtues. But he recognized the possibility for goodness in these places. In Grand Republic, however, the virtues are truly superficial. The vices and the corruption represented by them are much more powerful. Not as young as Gopher Prairie nor as striving as Zenith, Grand Republic is a deceptively pleasant, self-satisfied city. At first glance, it seems like a grownup version of Gopher Prairie. Judge Timberlane is able to walk through his city and see in "the wooden warehouses and shaky tenements" (12) the frontier village of 75 years ago. He describes his hometown in even more idealistic terms than does George Babbitt. To him, Grand Republic is "a kind of city new to the world, a city for all the people, a city for decency and neighborliness" (12). Yet, as Gordon Milne has observed, there is the same "oppressively conventionalized nature of American society, the pressures which prevent one from being a liberal, an individualist, even a simple 'man of good will'" (7).⁸ There is a drive towards conformity here that takes on frightening dimensions. Cass belongs to the upper middle class and as in Babbitt's society, moving upwards is very difficult, unless a person has money. However, for Grand Republic's Jewish and black citizens, even having money will not help them reach high social status.

T. K. Whipple described Zenith and Gopher Prairie as "cities of the dead and in both the dead are resolved that no one shall live" (73). Grand Republic takes on this mantle as well. In *Cass Timberlane* the city appears to be a respectable community,

but below the surface there is a heavy undercurrent of corruption, particularly sexual corruption. There are many indications that the closed nature of the self-appointed upper class has led to a rise in adultery, spouse abuse, and incestuous desires. The city has developed such an oppressive atmosphere that the only way many of the inhabitants can express themselves as individuals is not through business, like Babbitt and his friends, but through unsanctioned sexual relations.

The majority of the marriages in the novel are full of hatred and despair. Many couples stay together for the sake of appearance and to preserve their social standing, but they take out their frustration in verbal and physical abuse. Cass's best friend, a popular doctor in town, frequents prostitutes and bullies his wife into having sex with him. A leading banker cannot admit his homosexuality and is forced into a loveless marriage while maintaining his lover on the side. Two other people, who are lovers but not married to each other, form a suicide pact rather than return to the pretense of "respectable" behavior. Life in Grand Republic is so regimented that people's public and private lives bear little relation to each other.

In Lewis's next novel, *Kingsblood Royal*, even the respectable facade disappears. Neil Kingsblood lives in Sylvan Park, a beautiful planned community in Grand Republic for up-and-coming young, white, middle-class couples. However, when some leading citizens discover that Neil is not the sort of person they thought he was, the town literally becomes a battlefield upon which is fought a battle of racial hatred.

Kingsblood is a young banker and World War II veteran who accidentally discovers that one of his great-great-great-grandfathers was a "full-blooded Negro" (*Kingsblood Royal* 64). When he makes this fact public, despite his family's objections, Kingsblood finds that citizens of Grand Republic can act not only with contempt but with violence to people who misrepresent themselves as far as the artificial conventions of society are concerned. In American society of the 1940s, as Gunnar Myrdal noted, the common belief was that "Everybody having a *known* trace of Negro blood in his veins—no matter how far back it was acquired—is classified as a Negro" (113). The pleasant facade of Grand Republic hides not only sexual corruption, jealousy, and fear of nonconformity that was evident in *Cass*

Timberlane, but also a strong prejudice against blacks, Jews, and immigrant Scandinavians. In a sense, we are right back to the cruelty and indifference displayed toward Bea Sorenson in *Main Street*. However, in Grand Republic the indifference is replaced by violence and outright hatred. Neil's friends, who assumed that he was a white, middle-class person like them, are outraged at what they see as a willful destruction of their carefully created and comfortable white society. They work in concert to deny him employment and housing, and even try to break up his marriage. Unlike Bea Sorenson, who quietly died, Neil is forced, by gunfire and police, to leave his home. It is as though the Ku Klux Klan came to a bigger version of Gopher Prairie. The Midwestern ideal of creating a place where equality and democracy can exist is totally destroyed by the end of the novel.

Through an examination of Lewis's fictional Midwestern towns, Gopher Prairie, Zenith, and Grand Republic, we can see that in each case the hopes and aspirations that the citizens had for their respective communities have been corrupted by class and ethnic hatred. Lewis's vision of these towns progresses from an ambivalent appreciation of their virtues to an outright despair about their corruption. These novels serve as "his warning that if we have created a high material culture without an equally high sense of beauty and decency and tolerance for individual differences, we have failed utterly" (Grebstein 7-8). The apparently pleasant towns of the Midwest, in Lewis's view, have not grown progressively better with time, but reflect the anger and confusion over the American dream in the twentieth century.

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NOTES

1. Lewis's ambivalence is discussed in Brown 64, Grebstein 9, Love 558-59, and Friedman 72-73, who points out that in Lewis's "Mr. Lorimer and Me," Lewis says "Actually I like the Babbitts" (qtd. by Friedman 72).
2. James Lundquist thinks that Lewis, like Henry James, would have felt "that the most desirable culture would be the blending of what is best in America (willingness to work, to inquire, to move toward honest reassessment, and to accept challenge) with what is best in Europe (appreciation of leisure, enjoyment of art for its own sake, appreciation of privacy, and a sense of history)" (32). See also Parry for a comparison of Lewis's thinking on the United States and Europe.

3. See Schorer 314, Hersey 38, Batchelor's article which reprints maps and diagrams Lewis drew while writing *Babbitt*, and Grace Lewis's letters to Harcourt Brace requesting architecture magazines and books on house plans for her husband.
4. Later in his life Lewis wrote "The Long Arm of the Small Town" in which he seemed to retract some of his bitterness. He recalled his childhood in Sauk Centre as "a good time, a good place, and a good preparation for life" (272). It seems likely that the way he felt about his home town here was colored very much by nostalgia. The piece was written for his high school yearbook nearly 30 years after his graduation.
5. Grace Lewis wrote in detail about her trip to Sauk Centre to meet Lewis's parents in *With Love from Gracie* and the fictional *Half a Loaf*.
6. See T. J. Mattheson for a discussion of how the opening of the novel shows "that religious significance has been perversely assigned to a materialistic pursuit" (37) through language.
7. Lewis was perhaps thinking of Zenith and the sort of mindset it represented when he spoke in his Nobel Prize speech of America and called it "the most contradictory, the most depressing, the most stirring, of any land in the world today" ("American Fear" 9).
8. Geismar describes Grand Republic as a city which has "leaped from clumsy youth to senility without ever having had a dignified manhood" (142-43).

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RAY BRADBURY'S
 "THE KILIMANJARO DEVICE":
 THE NEED TO CORRECT THE ERRORS OF TIME

LOREN LOGSDON

A central idea found throughout Ray Bradbury's fiction is that there are serious mistakes in time that desperately need to be corrected because God or Life or Fate or Circumstance can go very wrong. These mistakes are not the result of an angry God who enjoys the sufferings of mortals, nor are they necessarily the result of deliberate choices made by human beings. In most cases, these errors simply result from bad timing, and they cannot be meaningfully attributed to a deity or even to the logical principle of cause and effect. Instead, some things just happen the way they do, and while it may seem that Fate has played a cruel trick on the people involved, there is really no cruel purpose at work. All of these concerns about the problems of time are at the very center of Bradbury's story "The Kilimanjaro Device," which is the first story in *I Sing the Body Electric* but which appeared first in *Life Magazine*. This study will focus upon Bradbury's "The Kilimanjaro Device" and how it illustrates a most central question about the human condition: How can we best live in time so that our lives are happy, fulfilled, and right?

Before examining "The Kilimanjaro Device" in detail, it would be helpful to establish a standard for the best and highest use that humans may make of time. For that standard, we need to consult the second book of *Walden*, where Henry David Thoreau urges us to be fully alive in the present moment because "God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages." To make us keenly aware of the value of each day and the need to make the best use of time, Thoreau boldly declares, "To affect the

quality of the day, that is the highest of arts." In setting such a high challenge, Thoreau reflects the belief held by the Transcendentalists that the human being has the power to assist God, the Artist of the world, in completing His great art work. Later on, toward the end of that section of *Walden*, Thoreau concludes with the following often-quoted lines:

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.

This passage suggests that there are two dimensions of time. The first is the chronological time that measures one's life, the stream that we all fish in. The other dimension is eternity or all time, the time that is reflected by the stars.

As Thoreau admits, chronological time is "shallow," tricky, and deceptive. This problem with time is described perfectly by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his poem "Days," where the days come one after another, bringing us valuable blessings, wonderful opportunities, and trivial occupations but not helping us to make the right choices. The days are "dumb," and Emerson admits that he takes so little from the bounty that the days bring.

When he wrote *Walden*, Thoreau had faith in a cosmic optimism that no doubt enabled him to minimize the deceptiveness of chronological time or perhaps to regard it as one of the reasons that so many people in his day settled for far less from life than they should have. While Bradbury would agree wholeheartedly with Thoreau's imperative to live fully in the present moment, he would not share Thoreau's optimism about God Himself culminating in that moment. Instead, for Bradbury, one of the real sources of suffering and unhappiness is the matter of bad timing, where things are clearly not right in the present moment.

Some background about "The Kilimanjaro Device" is essential at this point. The reader needs to know that the story is, first of all, Bradbury's tribute to Ernest Hemingway, who is fondly referred to in the story as "Papa." Moreover, the inspirational basis for the story is Hemingway's famous story "The

Snows of Kilimanjaro." A brief survey of the plot of that story will be instructive in enabling us to explain the title of Bradbury's story and the important mission of the narrator.

"The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is about a writer named Harry who is dying of gangrene on a safari in a remote area of Africa. Harry had received a slight wound which he had not properly treated, and gangrene had resulted. The truck had broken down, stranding Harry, his wife, and the rest of the party. Harry is dying a slow but painless death, and it seems clear that no help will arrive in time to save his life. His manner of death—the slow rotting away from gangrene—is consistent with his life because he was a writer who compromised his talent and wasted his life. Harry had many experiences which he should have written about, but he had always postponed his writing to pursue luxury and comfort. He had chosen a life of pleasure seeking instead of using his talent and experiences to the fullest artistic extent. As he is dying, he thinks of all the stories he didn't write, and he blames his wife because her wealth made life too easy for him. However, in the last hours of his life Harry realizes that he alone is to blame and that he has used his wife's wealth as a convenient excuse not to write.

The manner of Harry's death—the rotting away, the messy, filthy death—contrasts in the story with the death of a leopard, whose frozen carcass is halfway up Mt. Kilimanjaro. The leopard was not in its element there, and people do not understand what it would have been seeking at that altitude. To the careful reader, however, the leopard's death is a clean death compared to Harry's. Clearly, the leopard symbolizes the idea of attempting to go beyond one's limits, of striving for a transcendence. By contrast, Harry did not seek to transcend his limits; he was content to live on the plain of life rather than seek the mountains.

Hemingway's story ends with an ironic twist whose details are rather important when examining Bradbury's "The Kilimanjaro Device." Harry and his party have only a remote hope that someone in a plane will come looking for them in time to fly Harry to a hospital. As his condition worsens, Harry begins to hallucinate, and he thinks he hears an airplane approach and land. The pilot is an old acquaintance named Compton, who we suspect is dead. Since the plane is small, there is room only for the pilot and Harry. When Harry is loaded on the plane, his

injured leg is placed in an awkward position because of the cramped quarters. As Compton takes off, he heads strangely in the wrong direction, but that is all right because Harry knows that they are headed for Mt. Kilimanjaro. The dream is ironic, though, because no plane ever came for Harry. The event in his dream that led him to believe he was in an airplane was inspired by the natives lifting Harry's cot and moving it inside the tent. Harry is found dead, with his injured leg in exactly the same position it was in his dream.

From this brief examination of Hemingway's story, there are two major points that we should keep in mind when examining Bradbury's "The Kilimanjaro Device." The first is the obvious use of Kilimanjaro to emphasize the connection between the two stories and to give Bradbury a name for his time machine device. The second point—and one that is equally important—is the desperate need to rescue someone from a death that is messy and wrong. This last idea is especially appropriate because Hemingway did live longer than he should have, and he did, by his own standards, die a messy death. By the logic of imagination, then, Bradbury needs the Kilimanjaro Device, a time machine, to correct a death that was wrong. Since Hemingway did not die at the right time, the essential mission of Bradbury's narrator is to correct the problem, which in effect is to rescue Hemingway from the ignominy of suicide and set matters right.

Near the beginning of "The Kilimanjaro Device," the narrator travels to Hemingway's American place in Sun Valley, Idaho, (the grave is there) and looks for just the right kind of man to talk to. He must not be an old man, and he must not be a young man. He must be a man who is about fifty years old. The emphasis here on timing is crucial, for the "right" man would be about the same age as Hemingway was when he should have died. Also, for this mission to succeed the right man must be a fisherman and a hunter, and he must have an appreciation for Hemingway's literary works and other interests. This significant combination is necessary in order for the narrator to begin his task in just the right way.

But all of the details serve to emphasize that for the narrator to succeed he must have the right timing on everything. In fact, perfect timing is the major issue in the story, illustrating in this

regard that Bradbury is essentially a romantic; he wants perfection in time. However, time is one of the most thoroughly naturalistic forces in our lives and thus thwarts and frustrates the romantic impulse for perfection. In Bradbury's fiction the romantic desire for perfection in time and the naturalistic workings of time form the basis for tragedy in at least two interesting and powerful ways: the impossible love affair and the ill-timed death. Three representative examples will serve to illustrate how this concept of timing is at the very heart of Bradbury's fiction.

The best example of bad timing is found in *Dandelion Wine*, in the story of Helen Loomis and Bill Forrester. In every way except their ages, these two people belong together, but he is thirty-two and she is ninety-five. When Helen first saw Bill, she thought that he was the reincarnation of the man whom she should have loved years ago but lost because of her willfulness. Bill confessed that he had fallen in love with Helen from an old picture of her that he had seen in the newspaper. The more this couple talks, the more we realize that theirs is one of the strangest and yet most beautiful love affairs in all of literature. But there is a deep sadness about this love affair because it is impossible; it is clear that Time or Fate or Circumstance has made an error in bringing together two people who belong to different times. Helen Loomis' solution is to advise Bill Forrester not to live very long, to die when he is about fifty so that when they are reincarnated they can be the same age. Helen Loomis admits that she does not believe in reincarnation, but she desperately needs to turn to something that will enable her to correct the error of bad timing.

The second example of bad timing can be found in one of Bradbury's little-known stories entitled "A Story of Love," in which thirteen-year-old Bob Spaulding falls in love with his teacher Ann Taylor, who is twenty-four. That Ann Taylor feels the same way as Bob does not solve the problem at all; her feelings of love merely demonstrate once again Bradbury's idea that timing in life can be all wrong. In her frank discussion with Bob about their situation, Ann dismisses Bob's request that she wait for him until he is twenty-four. As she explains, that would not work because then she would be thirty-five and a different person.

"A Story of Love" is much too sentimental because the solution is contrived and thus unconvincing. First of all, Ann tries to console Bob by emphasizing that life has compensations or we human beings could not go on living. Second, Bob is conveniently removed from the situation when his family moves to another town. At the end of the story, when Bob returns to the scene of his first love, he has grown up and married. In asking questions about Ann Taylor, Bob discovers that she died about two years after he left town and that she had not married. In describing Bob's wife, Bradbury enables the reader to see that she is beyond a doubt the reincarnation of Ann Taylor, thus confirming the teacher's belief in the compensations of life. The problem with this story is not with the idea of compensation as such; rather it is that in this story the principle of compensation works too easily and too perfectly. Although "A Story Of Love" is not a convincing resolution of the problem of bad timing, it does present the problem rather well.

The third example of an impossible love affair because of bad timing is found in "The Fog Horn," one of Bradbury's finest short stories. This love affair involves a sea monster, perhaps "a million years old," the last of its kind, falling in love with the sound of the fog horn, mistaking that sound for a mate. McDunn, the veteran at the lighthouse, knows about this creature and explains to the young narrator what the monster must have felt when it first heard the sound of the fog horn:

I saw it all, I knew it all—the million years of waiting alone, for someone to come back who never came back. The million years of isolation at the bottom of the sea, the insanity of time there, while the skies cleared of reptile-birds, the swamps dried on the continental lands, the sloths and saber-tooths had their day and sank in tar pits, and men ran like white ants upon the hills.

There is no compensation for this sea monster; there is no escape from the awful loneliness and suffering. When the creature discovers that it has been tricked by the sound, it lashes out in a rage and destroys the lighthouse. After witnessing this incident, the young narrator decides to accept what Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* called the attainable felicities—a wife, a warm and cheerful home, and the security that is represented by the land.

Conversely, a sense of good timing is, to Bradbury's thinking, perhaps the highest kind of wisdom that any human being can possess. As Will Halloway advises his friend Jim Nightshade in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, "Everything in its time." If we can accept that idea and live by it, then we will not waste time wishing we were younger or older. To paraphrase Bradbury, when we are thirteen we will not want to be twenty-five, and when we are fifty we will not want to be thirty-five. Instead, we will be able to live content in the present and act with meaning and purpose in that time. Such vision constitutes the highest wisdom in Bradbury's fiction, and the best examples of it are the narrator in "The Kilimanjaro Device" and Mr. Jonas in *Dandelion Wine*.

Mr. Jonas demonstrates his wisdom when he appears in time to save the life of young Doug Spaulding. Mr. Jonas knows when he is needed, and, through an act of imagination which enables him to understand Doug's problem, he knows what he must do to help Doug. He knows, for instance, that a medical doctor cannot help Doug because he is suffering from an illness of the soul and not one of the body. Mr. Jonas knows that only love, sympathy, understanding, and encouragement can help Doug through his crisis, and Jonas emphasizes that he comes as a friend who knows and understands. Thus as a result of his wisdom, his timing, and his love, Mr. Jonas is able to prevent Doug Spaulding's death, a death that would have been very wrong because it would have been premature. In the highest meaning of Thoreau's imperative, Mr. Jonas does "affect the quality of the day" by acting in time to save the life of a twelve-year-old boy whose death at that moment would have been very wrong. In a very real sense, Mr. Jonas rescues Doug from an ill-timed death.

Doug Spaulding's death would have been very wrong because he would have died at too young an age, but what about a death that happened long after it should have happened? What about a death that is ill-timed because it allows a person to live too long? These questions point us clearly to considerations about the quality of life and, especially, the quality of death. Bradbury's concerns about the quality of death are reflected succinctly in the following passage from his short story "Kaleidoscope":

They came to death by separate paths and, in all likelihood, if there were kinds of death, their kinds would be as different as night from day. The quality of death, like that of life, must be of an infinite variety. . . .

In "The Kilimanjaro Device," Bradbury conveys the idea of the quality of death in terms of what his narrator calls "the wrong grave." Hemingway's grave was the wrong grave because he should have died on January 10, 1954, in a plane crash in Africa. By all rights, Hemingway should have been killed in that crash, but he survived only to live long enough to die at his own hand a few years later.

The narrator of "The Kilimanjaro Device" has the same kind of wisdom, love, and imagination that Mr. Jonas possessed in *Dandelion Wine*. Near the beginning of the story, the narrator and the middle-aged hunter discuss the problem of living too long, or, rather, of not dying at the right time. The hunter agrees that "most of us don't have brains enough to leave a party when the gin runs out. We hang around." The hunter's observation is especially true of Hemingway; he lived too long. Years after the plane crash, when facing a life of misery and suffering, he chose to commit suicide—a death he hated because he regarded suicide as a coward's way out. The hunter points out that in some cases death comes at exactly the right time—in the case of the man who died in his chair waiting for his supper and in the case of the blind and tired old dog who died in the car on the way to the pound where he would have been put to death.

The problem with bad timing here is twofold. First, human beings do not often have clear choices or even any control over their death, for that matter. It may appear that sometimes the timing is right, but in most cases it is not. There are a few notable exceptions in Bradbury's fiction. Great Grandma in *Dandelion Wine* realizes that the time has come for her to die, but she has lived a rich and full life so that death is not something to fear but rather the fitting end to a life well spent. Helen Loomis also realizes that it is time for her to die, but she has lived a long, full life also. Lavinia Nebbs actively courts death in *Dandelion Wine*, but she decides that she wants to live and thus is able to save her life by killing the man who would have killed her. But the above examples are exceptions. In most cases,

in Bradbury's fiction as well as in life, the choices are not all that clear and people do not have adequate control over events.

A further problem is that the road of life does not allow us to see very clearly. We can see behind us, but we cannot see clearly in the present moment or see ahead to what the future may hold. That kind of vision requires the kind of wisdom which most people do not possess. The truly wise people in Bradbury's fiction are few, just as they are in life itself. As Bradbury sees it, our world places so little value on imagination. We need a time machine that will enable us to correct the mistakes in bad timing.

The machine in "The Kilimanjaro Device" works precisely because it is a time machine which will enable the narrator to help Papa get rid of the wrong grave and exchange it for the right grave. But it isn't the machine alone that is needed; the narrator must act with wisdom and imagination. He must, first of all, find out from the hunter at what places along the road the old man has been seen, and then he must go back down the road and find the old man. As he drives down the road, the narrator closes his eyes from time to time, as if in so doing he will be able to deny by will power or emotional force the actual presence of the wrong grave. Through this act of will, he finally succeeds in getting rid of the wrong grave. This is, of course, the first step in finding the old man, and, at a very crucial moment in the story, the narrator looks up at the hillside and discovers that "the grave was gone."

The next step, once the grave is gone, is to find the old man and offer him a ride in the truck, a ride that will enable Papa to correct the problem of bad timing and find the right grave. This particular step is delicate because Papa must be allowed freedom of choice. The narrator must convince him that he should accept a ride in the truck.

Through wisdom and imagination, the narrator has prepared well for this part of the mission. First, his vehicle is a safari truck which he had purchased specially because of its association with Africa and some of Hemingway's fondest memories. The safari truck is appropriate because it is in line with the purpose of this mission: to travel back in time to Africa, January 10, 1954. Another way in which the narrator has prepared was to visit the places that Hemingway loved—Cuba, for one exam-

ple—and stop along the way to hunt and fish. Through these activities he has put himself in Papa's frame of mind. He has immersed himself in the spirit of those places Hemingway loved in order to be close to him.

However, all of the deliberate and careful preparation would be insufficient if one thing was missing. For this mission to succeed, it must be undertaken as an act of love. The narrator's success is directly dependent on his love for Hemingway, just as Mr. Jonas' saving Doug Spaulding's life had to be done out of love. The most delicate moment in the story occurs when Papa asks the narrator if somewhere along the trip the truck turns into an airplane. The narrator confesses that he has never attempted this trip before and that he can't say. In response, Papa asks the narrator why he is doing this. As Hemingway readers know, the question "Why?" should not have been asked here because one of the imperatives in the Hemingway code is "Don't talk rot." As Robert Wilson observes in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," it doesn't do to talk too much about a subject. When Papa asks "Why?" the narrator is so completely into the spirit of Hemingway that he cannot answer the question in words because to do so would inevitably lead to talking rot. He would have to explain that he was on a mission of love, and that would, for Hemingway, spoil the moment and the mission itself. In fact, Papa, himself, realizes that he had gone too far in asking the question, and he says, "I didn't say that." Wisely, the narrator agrees that the question had not been asked.

The narrator's delicate handling of that issue is precisely what convinces Papa that he should accept a ride in the safari truck. It becomes a matter of trust. Papa freely chooses to ride with the narrator because he can trust him and have confidence in him. After all, if Papa is to return to Africa of 1954, he must trust his pilot to handle the plane crash just right so that only Papa will be killed. Papa does not want anyone else to die; consequently, he cannot agree to go on a mission with an incompetent pilot.

When Papa is convinced that he can trust the narrator, he is able to make the choice to return to 1954 and die in the airplane crash that he had previously survived. This choice involves the exchange of graves and, most of all, the replacing of a messy death by suicide with a clean death in a plane crash, a death

that allows Papa some dignity. At the end of the story, Papa's enthusiasm for the mission is conveyed by his assertion that this will be "a great day." Given the choice of a clean death or a messy death, Papa chooses the clean death and thus finds the right grave.

After first reading "The Kilimanjaro Device," one is tempted to question its value or dismiss it as being merely sentimental. Is the story anything more than a moving tribute to a writer whom Bradbury greatly admired? Is it anything more than an impressive exercise in imagination and language? One would have to acknowledge that it is one of the few Bradbury stories in which one encounters a "good" machine, or rather a machine that is used for the highest purpose. Usually, Bradbury's fiction is a record of the human abuse or misuse of machines. One would also have to admit that although the story ends triumphantly there is a sadness when we realize that only through an act of imagination in a work of literature can the errors of bad timing and the wrong grave be corrected. Life itself offers no such means for the correction of errors of timing which often seem as tragic as Hemingway's suicide. In this respect, then, literature has a decided advantage over life.

But literature can offer some help that should not be minimized or ignored. Literature that is truly life-affirming can help us by providing insight into the best ways to live, and in that regard "The Kilimanjaro Device" calls our attention to the importance of timing. One of the ways to try to avoid the errors of time is to live by Thoreau's imperative and thus have no regrets about one's life. Bradbury would agree that if one lived fully in the present moment, as Will Halloway advises in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, then one would not want or need a Kilimanjaro Device. But such thinking is too highly idealistic because in life there are no guarantees, and one would still be left with errors caused by Fate or Chance or Circumstance—with time as naturalistic force. Although these problems with time cannot be overcome, they can be minimized to some degree. "The Kilimanjaro Device" does offer us some help after all, for what fuels that fantastic machine at the center of the story is essentially a careful blend of imagination and love. Although Bradbury does not share Thoreau's cosmic optimism, he does believe that we can make the best use of time through

a life that is inspired by imagination and love. "The Kilimanjaro Device" is a testimony to that great wisdom.

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A RAISIN IN THE SUN:
A STUDY IN AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURE

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Discussions of *A Raisin in the Sun* often link judgements about the play's artistic success or failure to judgements about the play's significance for Afro-American culture. The strongest criticism of the play has been voiced by Harold Cruse, writing as a black nationalist. For Cruse, the play is nothing more than "glorified soap opera" (278). He believes that the play ignores the reality of black life, instead presenting characters who "mouth middle-class ideology" (280)—the ideology of the white world. On the other hand, C. W. E. Bigsby feels that *Raisin* is flawed by the failure of "Lorraine Hansberry's involvement with the plight of the Negro" to be "subsumed here in a more general concern" (165)—a concern for humanity at large. Bigsby argues that this subsumption does occur in Hansberry's second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. For Bigsby, "the poor *A Raisin in the Sun*" (172) only proves his thesis that

The obligation to limit one's scope to the immediate but parochial injustices of racial intolerance has for long sapped the creative energy of the Negro writer. (172)

If criticisms of the play are based on contradictory assessments of the play's relation to black culture, the same opposing views appear in critics who praise the play as a masterpiece. For some, the play's greatness depends on the universality of its characters, human beings who just happen to be Afro-Americans. Another view—one I share—asserts that it is Hansberry's ability to render the specific truths of Afro-American experience that makes possible the play's broader appeal. Universality, I will argue, occurs when an author probes the depths of a specific human situation—not when one creates characters existing in a vacuum outside of any particular social or cultural contest. Be-

fore making that argument, however, I will consider in turn the objections of Cruse and Bigsby.

Some of Cruse's objections are straightforward, "pertinent" questions about the historical accuracy of the play:

But nobody asked out loud some pertinent questions such as "How could a poor ghetto family of Southern origins come by a \$10,000 insurance policy and what Southern Negro insurance company would have covered it for this type of family?" "Since when does this type of Negro family have daughters in college studying medicine and where did the money come to pay for it?" "How did the married son, a taxi driver, come by the connections and the inside political pull and the granting of credit necessary to purchase a liquor store?" (280)

The answer to the last question, of course, is obvious. Walter *doesn't* have the "connections" or the "inside political pull," and loses the family's insurance money to the con man who exploits his ignorance. This con man, incidentally, disproves Cruse's assertion that the play "true to the socialist-realist tradition," presents only "good, hardworking, upright, decent, moral, psychologically uncomplicated ghetto folk" (279) and avoids the reality of shy-sters, "numbers-runners" and their ilk. And Walter, of course, is not a "taxi driver" but a chauffeur. Such quibbles about detail are not, however, finally important. Cruse's questions are not as "pertinent" as he seems to believe simply because a playwright is not obligated to restrict the dramatic givens of her play to some sort of statistical average. As a critic of the doctrinaire quality of the "socialist-realist tradition," Cruse should know better than to require that every aspect of the Youngers be limited to what sociologists consider typical for families of their race and economic condition. Dramatic plausibility is more important than sociological accuracy. It is important to note, for example, that the insurance policy is from the first one of the "dramatic givens" of the play, not a *deus ex machina* that falls out of the sky at the end. Nobody asked the questions Cruse considers "pertinent" because the dramatic movement of the play itself did not allow one to experience such givens as questions.

More important is Cruse's contention that the play's characters

. . . mouth middle-class values, sentiments and strivings: platitudes that are acceptable to whites of the middle classes . . . (280)

—that they “mouth middle-class ideology” (280). There are a number of responses that one can make to this argument. First, the obvious facts of the play, its dramatic givens, classify the Youngers unambiguously as working class rather than middle class. Second, the Youngers do not think of themselves as middle class. When they make strong assertions of their own values, they do so while emphasizing their working class status. Most important, the play itself dramatizes the ways in which the complexities of the black experience in the United States defy the simple classifications of “working class” and “middle class,” whatever validity these terms may have for the white majority.

Robert Nemiroff’s straightforward description of the Younger family “maintained by two female domestics and a chauffeur, son of a laborer dead of a lifetime of hard labor” (xiii) makes clear the implausibility of the effort of reviewers and academics to present the Youngers as “an acceptable ‘middle class’ family” (xiii). Likewise, Nemiroff answers those who transform the “decision to move” into “a desire to ‘integrate’” (xiii) by quoting the words of Mama Younger herself:

Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could. (Act II, Scene 1, p. 93)

Far from voicing “middle-class ideology” throughout the play, the Youngers think of themselves as working people. In Act One, Scene One, Mama tells Ruth

We ain’t no business people, Ruth. We just plain working folks. (42)

And surely it is in part Mrs. Younger’s feeling that “We ain’t no business people” that leads her to spend part of the insurance money on the down payment for a house instead of investing it in Walter’s planned liquor store. Walter Lee, of course, is devastated by his mother’s decision. However, his ultimate recovery of pride is linked immediately to his own assertion of his family’s working class status. It is as though, as he speaks to Mr. Lindner, the very statement of his family’s condition nerves him to affirm his own worth against his own intentions:

Well—we are very plain people. . . .
I mean—I have worked as a chauffeur most of my life—and my wife here, she does domestic work in people’s kitchens. So

does my mother. I mean—we are plain people . . .

And—uh—well, my father, well, he was a laborer most of his life . . .

These comments, although designed to prepare the way for a submission to Mr. Lindner and his committee, instead drive Walter Lee in another direction:

And my father—My father almost *beat a man to death* once because this man called him a bad name or something, you know what I mean?

Yeah. Well—what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of *pride*. (Act III, Scene 1, pp. 147-8)

And when Walter finally states his decision, he underlines the fact that it is his father’s life of labor that makes the crucial difference:

And we have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it for us brick by brick. (Act III, Scene 1, p. 148)

But the play itself forces one to recognize that terms such as “working class” or “middle class” by themselves tell us little about the culture and way of life of Afro-American families. It is one of the strengths of Hansberry’s play that her presentation of black people moves beyond such abstractions. Her characters may be working class in their economic situation and yet “middle-class” in other ways—as in Beneatha’s plan to become a doctor. And Hansberry also sees beyond the either-or classifications of “black culture” and “white culture.” Her portrayal of the Youngers recognizes that Afro-Americans who have lived in the United States for five generations or more have surely absorbed many aspects of the majority culture. Whites may know little about black culture beyond the stereotypes that have been merchandised for mass consumption, but black men and women who work as servants in white homes acquire a painfully intimate knowledge of the majority culture that provides them with a sort of double vision. Hansberry presents characters whose double vision dramatizes the intrinsic duality of the black experience in the United States, a phenomenon captured long ago by W. E. B. DuBois when he commented in *The Souls of Black Folk* that

. . . The Negro is . . . gifted with second sight in this American world,(sic)—a world which . . . only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness . . . One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body . . . (45)

Hansberry's dramatic characterizations may not please theorists interested in minimizing the importance of one of the poles of the dilemma confronted so eloquently by DuBois. But their objections may only indicate she has succeeded in creating characters whose complexities are both true to life and true to the demands of art. Harold Cruse is disturbed because the note on the present of gardening tools describes Mrs. Younger as "our own Mrs. Miniver . . ." (Act II, Scene 3, p. 123). But the reference to "Mrs. Miniver" only dramatizes the truth of DuBois' insightful comment. It may seem strange—even deplorable—that Mrs. Younger can recognize herself as the English white woman "Mrs. Miniver," while she knows nothing about Africa; but Hansberry is not afraid to present such deplorable realities. She knows, and she lets her reader know in a stage direction, that Mrs. Younger's bearing can be best captured by a comparison to

the noble bearing of the women of the Hereros of Southwest Africa—rather as if she imagines that as she walks she still bears a basket or a vessel upon her head. (Act I, Scene 1, p. 39)

Hansberry also knows, however, that such a comparison would be lost on Mrs. Younger herself, who confuses Nigeria with Liberia ("Oh, that's the little country that was founded by slaves way back" Act One, Scene 2, p. 56) and, when Beneatha tells her that her African boyfriend will be coming over, says

I don't think I never met no African before. (Act One, Scene 2, p. 57)

Although some critics interpret such remarks as evidence of Hansberry's ideological confusion, I would argue that these passages display her conscious, skillful use of dramatic irony.¹ Hansberry's political commitments are serious and real, but they do not stop her from recognizing the truths of irony or from laughing at herself. She is clearly sympathetic to the aspirations

of African nationalism, yet she is willing to dramatize the comic aspects of Beneatha's attraction to Africa—for example, Beneatha parading in a Nigerian robe "while coquettishly fanning herself with an ornate oriental fan, mistakenly more like Butterfly than any Nigerian that ever was . . ." (Act II, Scene 1, p. 76).²

While Harold Cruse criticizes the play for its affirmation of white middle-class values, C. W. E. Bigsby criticizes *Raisin* as a play about the "merely parochial" (173) issue of racism, arguing that the "re-assuring resolution" (156) is motivated by politics rather than dramatic necessity.³ According to Bigsby, the move to a new house occurs through "something of a specious *deus ex machina* (159).

Bigsby's suggestion that the play has a kind of fairy-tale happy ending is not borne out by the text.⁴ The dreams that the characters themselves have described will not be realized. As the play ends, Walter has no expectation of having the kind of "day" he describes to Travis at the end of Act II, Scene 2, a "day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they do" (p. 108). He will not do business in those "cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back talking 'bout things . . ." (Act I, Scene 2, p. 73). Ruth and Lena Younger will still have to work as domestics to make ends meet. The question of the financing of Beneatha's medical school plans remains unanswered. It is obvious, from history as well as from the play's text, that the reception of the white neighbors in Clybourne Park will be hostile.

Furthermore, Hansberry does not suggest that Walter's decision to refuse the committee's money implies that he is a totally changed person who no longer values money. As the play ends, he is advising Beneatha "You better marry yourself a man with some loot . . ." (Act III, Scene 1, p. 150). And Beneatha replies, according to the stage direction, "Angrily, precisely as in the first scene of the play" (Act III, Scene 1, p. 150). The most positive comment that the play affirms is Mama's comment to Ruth:

Yeah—they something all right, my children . . . (Act III, Scene 1, p. 150)

The argument that the arrival of the insurance money acts as a *deus ex machina* cannot survive an examination of the text of

the play itself. Far from appearing suddenly out of nowhere at the end of the play, as did the *deus ex machina* in the dramas of ancient Greece, the insurance money functions as one of the dramatic givens of the play. In the third speech of the play, Walter asks "Check coming today?" (Act One, Scene 1, p. 26). Further, the action of the play revolves around the issue of what will be done with the money, not *whether* the money will arrive. The dramatic questions of the play ask whether Walter will "dry up/Like a raisin in the sun," "sag/ Like a heavy load" or "explode," and what will be the fate of the family as he makes his choice. None of these questions are answered by the money itself; its appearance simply makes the questions urgent. The money, that is, acts as a catalytic force rather than as a resolution.

Once one is willing to admit the dramatic power of *Raisin*, it is still necessary to consider the importance of the relation between the play's artistic success and its depiction of a particular—"parochial," to use Bigsby's term—historical and racial situation. Some critics who praised the play most highly have insisted that it has a universal message that has little or nothing to do with black people in particular. Hansberry herself has provided grounds for this view in asserting that her play was "about honest-to-God, believable, many-sided people who happened to be Negroes" (241). In evaluating this comment it is important to remember the context of the fifties, when an assertion of the bare humanity of black people seemed to many to be a revolutionary statement. At a time when Hollywood's servants and comedians provided many people with their only picture of blacks, the assertion that blacks could be "many-sided," complicated human beings was an important statement. Such authorial comments, however, no matter how sincere or well-intentioned, can never be accepted by the critic as a definitive statement. Once a work is completed, it takes on a life of its own as an independent entity. It is understandable that Hansberry would make such a claim, in retaliation against those who wished to pigeonhole her simply as a "Negro" playwright. Nevertheless, the play itself refutes the claim that its characters are "people who happened to be Negroes"—at least if that assertion is taken to mean that the drama would work just as well if the lines remained the same but were transferred to characters from another ethnic group.

If in the fifties it seemed necessary to stress the "universal" elements in *A Raisin in the Sun* to the exclusion of its roots in the Afro-American experience, the iconoclastic sixties required a different emphasis. The play was both praised and condemned as a statement about black people in particular. The criterion of "relevance" demanded not universality but the assertion of the demands of a particular cultural experience. In the eighties it may be possible to see the validity of both viewpoints by recognizing that they are not exclusive positions but partial ones. It is not taken as a denigration of William Inge's artistry to note that someone from outside the U. S. could get an education in "Americana" by reading Inge's plays. Likewise, it is no disparagement to O'Neill to note that he was Irish or to Tennessee Williams to note his connection with the American South. Yet some critics still seem to consider the "black experience" and the "human experience" as mutually exclusive. In the eighties it should be possible to move from the specific to the universal without haste, without polemic, in a kind of leisurely stroll. One should feel free to enjoy all the ways in which Hansberry evokes the black experience with evocative authenticity without denying in the least the universality of the play.

John Henry Raleigh's perceptive comments on *Long Day's Journey Into Night* reveal a truth not only about O'Neill's art but about literary art in general. Raleigh calls *Long Day's Journey* ". . . the finest play (and tragedy) ever written on this continent" (124). In speculating on the source of the play's dramatic power, Raleigh considers its autobiographical elements, then draws this conclusion:

In another sense it does not matter how close to, or how far from, are the facts of O'Neill's life to the facts of the play, for *Long Day's Journey* is more impressive as a cultural document than it is as an autobiographical document . . . The culture is, of course, New England Irish-Catholicism, and it is this that provides the folkways and mores, the character types, the inter-relationships between characters, the whole attitude toward life that informs *Long Day's Journey* and gives it its meaning. As such, *Long Day's Journey* is the great cultural expression of American Irish-Catholicism. (125)

In arguing that *Long Day's Journey* is "the great cultural expression of American Irish-Catholicism" Raleigh, of course,

does not mean either that the play affirms the truth of Catholic values or that it has meaning only for the Irish. He means rather that the play achieves its spiritual depth and thus its universality by probing the depths of the particular culture which O'Neill knew best. Likewise, *A Raisin in the Sun* gains much of its dramatic power from its subtle probing of the conflicts within the black culture.

A number of the examples Raleigh offers to demonstrate the permeation of Irish-Catholic values in O'Neill's play also point to parallel elements in Hansberry's work. For example, Raleigh points out that the characteristically Irish Catholic religious conflicts:

The dualism of religion-blasphemy likewise runs through the Tyrone family. The father—and this is often true of Irish families—is conventionally pious, without any deep commitment to the Old Faith. (131)

The same motif of "religion-blasphemy" also marks Hansberry's treatment of the spiritual world of her Afro-Americans. Mama Younger is a fervent believer in Protestant Christianity, but both Beneatha and Walter challenge her faith with blasphemous denials. Both dramatists reveal their loyalty to their heritage not by one-sided affirmations of belief, but by the depiction of culturally specific conflicts.

A careful analysis of *A Raisin in the Sun* thus demonstrates both its artistic achievement and its truth to the black experience. It is not an accident that the play succeeds as both a work of literature and as a cultural document. Indeed, the play's claim to literary greatness arises from its ability to capture both the complexity and the depth of the Afro-American experience.

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NOTES

1. Lloyd Brown sees an inability in critics of Hansberry to accept her work as thematically layered:

Indeed, there has been a curiously persistent refusal to credit Hansberry with any capacity for irony, and this has led critics to interpret thematic conflicts as mere confusion, contradictions, or as a rather insipid species of eclecticism. (240)

2. In an article about the African influences on the work of selected black American writers, Harold Isaacs points out the early exposure of Lorraine Hansberry to the notion of Africa:

Her father's house was "full of books," and when she was about nine she started reading the Negro poets, and got some of her first and more enduring images of

Africa from their lines, so much so that when I first asked her what came to her mind when she thought of Africa she instantly said "Beautiful mountains, plateaus, beautiful dark people." And these pictures came, she added, "from the poets I grew up reading, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Waring Cuney. I was deeply influenced by them and their images of Africa were marvelous and beautiful." (334)

3. Why Bigsby can consider *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* to be a statement about the human condition even as he describes it as a "portrait of bewildered liberalism" (163) while arguing that *A Raisin in the Sun* is inevitably flawed because of its focus on the "immediate but parochial injustices of racial intolerance" (172) is difficult to understand. In what sense are the difficulties of New York reform liberalism in the late 1950's less "parochial" than the problem of "racial intolerance"?
4. Lloyd Brown is aware the *Raisin* does not end with an "easy promise:"

Despite the pride and ebullience with which the play concludes, it is difficult, even then, to escape the grim reminders of these furniture symbols in the opening scene—the more difficult because the concluding scene is dominated by the same pieces of furniture as they are transferred from the old apartment to the new house . . . The point is that Hansberry offers no easy promise that the old frustration and "weariness" will be left behind, or that there will be inevitable change in terms of socioeconomic achievement and complete human reconciliation. (245)

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DON ROBERTSON'S CLEVELAND TRILOGY

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Some years ago, in an essay in *MidAmerica*, I examined a body of work that I referred to, for want of a better word, as a sub-genre that flourished among Midwestern writers between the Civil War and the Great Depression of the 1930s. This sub-genre, brought to national prominence and artistic enshrinement by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is what I call boys' stories, autobiographical or semi-autobiographical stories that are too frequently confused with stories for boys, usually sub-literary works that appeared frequently during the same period.

Boys' stories—as opposed to stories for boys—first appeared in the decades immediately following the Civil War, the first of them apparently Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story of a Bad Boy*, a fictionalized memoir of his youth in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Following Aldrich, and above all, Mark Twain, the sub-genre was taken up by writers as diverse—and simultaneously, as quintessentially Midwestern—as William Dean Howells, Hamlin Garland, William Allen White, Booth Tarkington, Theodore Dreiser, Clarence Darrow, and Sherwood Anderson, in works that defined the Midwestern experience from the time that the Midwest emerged out of the Old Northwestern frontier through the growth and decline of the towns and the emergence of a new urban gentility.

Out of these novels emerge such memorable names as Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, Penrod Schofield, Tar Moorhead, and in more recent years they have been joined by such youngsters as Studs Lonigan and Augie March, products of a still newer urban ethnic industrial Midwest defined by James T. Farrell and Saul Bellow. Unlike the earlier boys, forever pausing on the verge of manhood, however, both Farrell

and Bellow take their boys into young manhood and beyond, into physical, moral, and perhaps even literary degeneration.

Through the earlier stories, particularly those of Howells in *A Boy's Town* (1890), Darrow in *Farmington* (1904), and Anderson in *Tar: A Midwest Childhood*, as I pointed out in that earlier essay, the evolution of the nineteenth century Midwestern past is clearly defined; at the same time, they define an evolving Midwestern literary consciousness and purpose. In Howells's *A Boy's Town* the Ohio Indians pass reluctantly through on their way to exile in Indian Territory; in Darrow's *Farmington*, momentary stability is apparent; as Tar Moorhead, in Anderson's novel races off into his manhood, the Midwest, its Winesburgs becoming Akrons, is racing into the urban industrial twentieth century, that of Farrell's *Judgement Day* for Studs Lonigan and the increasingly aimless *Adventures of Augie March*.

Perhaps the most important characteristic that each of these novels has in common with the others is that each is tied tightly to time and place, so much so that just as the pre-Civil War Mississippi River becomes not only time and place but dominating character in *Huckleberry Finn*, nowhere is Chicago between World Wars more clearly and actively defined and made vital than in Farrell and Bellow. The city has become the Midwestern reality, the dominant character, place, and era fused into one, simultaneously escape and direction, promise and deterministic force, even as the river had been both for Huck Finn, the country road for the youngsters of *A Boy's Town* and *Farmington*, the railroad for Tar and the young people of *Winesburg, Ohio*.

To this galaxy of boys becoming men and of time, place, and circumstance that combine to define the Midwestern experience in this remarkable sub-genre properly belongs the name of Morris Bird III and the city of Cleveland in the years between 1944 and 1953, between the ages of ten and seventeen, between the parameters of boyhood and manhood, between life and death.

Morris Bird III is the central character in a trilogy by Don Robertson, *The Greatest Thing Since Sliced Bread* (1965), *The Sum and Total of Now* (1966), and *The Greatest Thing That Almost Happened* (1970). The setting of each is firmly, clearly, and literally the Cleveland of those years; each novel is punc-

tuated by a major event in the city's history during those years, and in each the life of Cleveland and of Morris Bird III become one, much as Huck's life and that of the river, Tar's life and that of the town, Studs's life and that of the city become one. And in the background social change becomes an unfolding, impermanent reality, as it had in Twain's St. Petersburg or Hannibal, Anderson's nameless Ohio town in *Tar* or his Winesburg or Clyde, or the reality of Chicago, beyond disguise or fictionalizing in Farrell or Studs Lonigan or Bellow or Augie March.

The first novel of the trilogy introduces nine-year old Morris Bird III, his life limited by the neighborhood, that of Edmunds Avenue at East 90th Street, the family, his younger sister Sandra, his mother, perpetually busy at her secretarial job, his father, the virtually faceless "Voice of Cleveland and Northwestern Ohio" on Station WCCC, the Hough Elementary School, friends, rivals, and in the background the city, the Cleveland Indians, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the war, and, looming over all, the four natural gas storage tanks of the East Ohio Gas Company at the end of East 66th Street, on the bluff overlooking Lake Erie, and the lives lived in their shadow.

Unlike the earlier boys' stories of Howells, Tarkington, Darrow, and Anderson, but appropriately, as in the twentieth century urban milieu of the later writers, the outside world, in an age of virtually instant communications, is simultaneously part of and reflective of young Morris Bird III—never Morrie or other diminutive's—experience. But in the tradition that goes back to Mark Twain, at the heart of the novel is a journey—from East 90th Street to East 63rd and from innocence to the beginning of experience.

Like Twain's river, Anderson's town, Farrell's Chicago, Don Robertson's Cleveland is not realism but reality; his war permeates deeply even into the consciousness of nine-year-olds; Franklin Roosevelt—and Cleveland's Frank Lausche—are as much myth, the substance of folklore and the popular cultural collectibles of campaign buttons as they are of reality; the ethnic mix of Slovenians, Croats, Lithuanians, blacks, and hillicans, as well as the nondescript old Ohio background of the Birds, is as much a part of Morris Bird III's consciousness as League Park, the home of the Indians, and the wartime players who were 4-Fs but nevertheless professionals to be emulated, their cards

to be collected, their names enshrined in the names of the teams of the playground league.

Strange words begin to echo in Morris Bird III's mind—duty, courage, determination, even bravery and self-respect—spoken by his grandmother, brought from the Southern Ohio town of Paradise Falls to care for Morris and Sandra while their parents work, and by Mrs. Dallas, his teacher at Hough Elementary. And somehow they all become caught up in his journey to see his friend, Stanley Chaloupka.

Stanley Chaloupka was, like Morris, a brain; unlike Morris, an indifferent athlete; and they shared a passion for O Gauge model trains. Stanley's father, unlike Morris's, who had lost a foot in an accident, had been drafted; his mother is forced to move in with relatives thirty blocks—an impossible distance—away, and Stanley attends a new school. And then, in October of 1944 Morris begins his plan to cross the world of the East Side and visit his friend.

The trip is conscious rather than controlled, dominated by streets and intersections rather than by a mindless river, but it quickly takes on overtones of Huck's voyage of escape and imprisonment. He plans to go on Friday, October 20, skipping a field trip to the Cleveland Museum of Art; his companion is Sandra, for whom he is unable to bribe an escort to and from school; his raft is a red wagon, rented from Teddy Karam for fifty cents; his provision is a jar of Peter Pan Peanut Butter, his totem, a picture of Veronica Lake.

The journey, like Huck's, is compounded of weariness, danger, enthusiasm, and encounters, as he traverses the thirty blocks of the East Side in 1944, even as Huck had journeyed through frontier America, and Morris ponders some of the words spoken at him and to him by his grandmother and Mrs. Dallas as he pulls the ever-heavier wagon with an alternately excited and petulant Sandra. And then they approach 670 East Sixty-third, and Stanley Chaloupka is on the porch waving.

But then the world erupts in their faces. Of the four tanks, virtually new and certifiably safe, two, leaking for days or hours, explode in Cleveland's worst disaster in its history, resulting in 135 lives lost, among them Stanley Chaloupka's, two hundred buildings, most of them residences, destroyed, millions of dollars in damage. Morris and Sandra and the red wagon survive, all

battered and Morris barebottomed, and somehow they load a badly-burned woman, her burns spread with Peter Pan Peanut Butter by Morris, on the wagon, and then a man, legless before the explosion, his crutches and wheel chair ruined, and somehow they move through the rubble for help, and help comes.

The legless man tells the police that Morris is "The greatest thing since sliced bread;" The wagon, empty, is hit and destroyed by a fire engine; and Morris and Sandra are finally taken home by a Red Cross lady who listens to their story and uses another term, self-respect, and they get out at the corner, knowing that they'll get it at home and that Morris will have to pay for the wagon. Suddenly, somehow, greatest things since sliced bread or not, the world has become smaller, more manageable, and more fearful.

Morris's odyssey, from the neighborhood through the world and back again, is both metaphor and adventure, and yet, like the other boys' stories, less than a footnote in a rapidly evolving America, or, in Morris's case, an inevitably changing neighborhood, Hough district, East Side, and Cleveland. It is also an interlude in a life rapidly unfolding, and in the second novel of the trilogy, *The Sum and Total of Now*, it is 1948, the year the Indians won the pennant and the World Series, and Morris Bird III is thirteen. Again it is the story of a journey and a death as Morris moves inexorably through the post-war popular culture and his own adolescence toward manhood. It is also an exercise in another word and its definition, but now the word has become fake. And the Indians have moved from old, intimate League Park to the monstrous, impersonal stadium on the lakefront, where, under the eccentric leadership of Bill Veeck and the pitching of, among others, the ageless Satchel Paige, they have marched to the top of the standing to stay, however shakely.

But Morris is not merely coming to terms with his adolescent sexuality and the Indians' championship, or the fact that Mickey Jones, the Dynamic Eyeful, is featured at the Roxy Burlesk, and the movement from old, familiar, intimate, to something that defies humanness; Morris must come to terms, too, with human greed and with dying as well as the fact of death itself. The dying is the slow, unfathomable, but perceptible movement of his grandmother, back in Paradise Falls, toward the inevitable; the greed is that of his mother and her siblings for the posses-

sions of their mother not yet dead. The journey with which the novel culminates is that which Morris takes by himself with his own money by train from Cleveland to Columbus and then by bus to Paradise Falls, to confront the fact of his grandmother's dying and her pain as much as her death and to light a match and then another in the barn where his grandmother's belongings are stored and where they burn uninsured, a fire attributed to spontaneous combustion.

And then Morris Bird III returns to Cleveland, to the present and the pennant and the series and a downtown movie with Julie Sutton, his first real date, to see "Johnny Belinda" starring Jane Wyman and Lew Ayres and to hold her hand and to buy her a strawberry milkshake after the show. And he knows he can do what he must in his own personal Now.

With *The Greatest Thing That Almost Happened* Morris Bird III must come to terms with words that go beyond fake to become love and vision and dreams and the East High basketball team where he is almost the star and the National Honor Society which is both honor and confusion and the Korean war and the draft in the background. Morris begins to write in order to figure it all out as his sexuality and his love for Julie Sutton grow. His journeys are both shorter and more intense—up the down escalator to see Julie at Higbee's, where she wrapped gifts; to Collinwood High in the coach's old car, and then by taxi almost madly across and around Cleveland as death—his own—from acute leukemia pursues him. The year is 1952 and Morris is seventeen and finally he begins to read *Raintree County* and Christmas comes. Morris Bird III's world is suddenly larger as he comes to know his father and then he is dead.

In the last novel of the trilogy Robertson moves beyond the escape into the territories or manhood or the city or in seven-leagued-boots across a war-shattered European landscape, as his predecessors, from Mark Twain to Saul Bellow have marked the paths of their boys into manhood and beyond; there are overtones, instead, of Studs Lonigan and the pointless inevitability and finality of death; there are echoes, too, of Holden Caulfield and the ultimate human tragedy that stems from the fact that great things, however possible, often elude the young men of an urban America perhaps stagnant in its maturity. If, more than a century earlier, Howells's young boy becoming a

man had watched the last Ohio Indians move to the West and the Old Northwest become the new Midwest, if half a century earlier Anderson's Tar Moorhead had hustled out of his youth and into a dynamic, promising Twentieth Century, for Morris Bird III, a promising search ended too early, almost happened doesn't count and the young man must accept what he can neither understand nor evade.

Whether Robertson, like Farrell, is too heavy-handed, gloomy, or ridden with pathos is debatable but ultimately beside the point; the territories, the West or the spirit, are as far beyond the reach of Morris Bird III on the verge of manhood as for the boys on the verge of manhood before them, and, Robertson suggests, each like Morris Bird III, aimlessly gallops up down escalators toward the understanding, the escape, the great things forever out of reach in a society that promises what it can never deliver.

Robertson's contributions to the sub-genre of the boys' story take it as far as perhaps it can go, perhaps even beyond that point, as romance becomes an unknowable reality, as Morris Bird III moves from the promise of fulfillment almost happening into an unacceptable, unAmerican, unMidwestern, random, mindless, unthinkable yet inevitable end.

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