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### Caricature and How It Relates to All:

#### An Analysis of *Driving Miss Daisy* by Alfred Uhry

Despite all of the progress society has made towards racial equity, there has been an increasing countermovement calling for a return to form in America pre Civil Rights Movement. In his three-person screenplay, *Driving Miss Daisy*, Alfred Uhry depicts the blossoming relationship between Hoke Coleburn and Daisy Werthan, the mother of Boolie Werthan—her son—in America’s Civil Rights Era. Uhry, through his employment of caricature, symbolism, and plot-structure makes clear social commentary on the interplay of class systems alongside racial and ethnic minorities, he highlights how dehumanization and oppression are institutionalized and present within the everyday life of humanity; moreover, he gives hope to the ideal of minority solidarity, moving forwards together to spark societal progress.

In order to understand what Uhry's content presents, it is crucial to understand the context regarding his work’s setting. The play takes place from 1948 to 1973, with the Civil Rights Movement as important pieces of background, affecting the characters’ life. For Daisy’s part, much of her behavior was in response to how the “German-Jewish community sought to blend in to [sic] Southern society, dropping dietary laws and other practices that separated them” (Willis). She viewed this as a desertion of culture, yet, paradoxically, she assimilated and internalized the

racist and antisemitic views of the new culture around her. For Hoke, he faced both overt and institutionalized racism in the form of segregation with public facilities, housing, schools, etc. alongside voter suppression on account of being “unable to pass voter literacy tests,” a subtler form of racism (History.com Editors). Yet they both still faced the same issues of extreme violence as was the case with Daisy’s temple bombing or the lynching of Hoke’s friend’s father. One must consider these dynamics and their interplay when analysing the complexities of Uhry’s *Driving Miss Daisy*.

In the first “scene” of the screenplay, Uhry seamlessly weaves together multiple layers of commentary through expert diction and wordsmithing. One such example is when he writes of how Daisy employs a stereotypical cognitive dissonance when it comes to her housekeeper, Idella, citing that “[she] is different.” Furthermore, this follows a heated conversation between her and Boolie where she “[groped] for a bad-enough word” in supposed replacement for the n-word, displaying a unique aspect of diction: the omission of words rather than the choice thereof (Uhry 4). Within these two examples, Uhry clearly shows Daisy’s overt racism, speaking to old beliefs of discriminatory cultural isolationism. Through the characterization and subtle criticism of Daisy’s behavior, he implicitly urges his audience to examine their own behavior. It also serves as a form of meta-commentary regarding society’s quick tendency to discriminate against others while regarding those close to them as “different,” or rather, an exception.

During the first time with Hoke as Daisy’s driver, they discuss automatic cars. With the line “any fool but me [can run it], apparently,” Uhry foreshadows Daisy’s later breakdown and Hoke’s consolation of said breakdown. Zooming out to their caricatures, the imagery of a black man consoling a jewish woman is notable, as it reverses the imagery one might associate with

the Civil Rights Movement: the Jewish community aiding the African-American community.

Uhry expands on this with Hoke's statement that Daisy can "probably do alotta things I cain' do," highlighting their socioeconomic disparity. In this statement, Uhry comments on socioeconomic privilege with a faint reference to its uses. By doing so, he implies one should use this privilege and criticizes those who do not.

Now, it is important to discuss the significance of Uhry's extended metaphor of Hoke "driving" Daisy. The wording itself in this context is very reminiscent of a slave driver, a position often viewed as one of a race traitor; however, this is juxtaposed with the connotation of Hoke—the black community—"driving" Daisy—the old Jewish community—forward into solidarity and improved circumstances. When referring to how long it took to initially convince Daisy to let him drive her, Hoke said that it "only took six days" the "[same amount of] time it take the Lawd to make the worl" (14). Here, Uhry's use of biblical allusion serves to further unite the characters and, by extension, their respective communities through faith. Uhry reveals that through solidarity between those othered, humanity can progress forward as a better whole. Additionally, he implies that this solidarity can be found through spiritualistic avenues such as faith.

In a stressful moment between Hoke and Daisy, she refuses to let him "make water" (31). In his only moment of anger throughout the entire play, Hoke responds, pointing out the extent of Daisy's dehumanization of him:

I ain't no dog and I ain' no Chile and I ain' jes' a back of the neck you look at while you goin' wherever you want to go. I a man nearly seventy-two years old and I know when my bladder full and I getting out dis car and goin' off down de road like I got to do. And I'm takin' de car key dis time. And that's de end of it. (32)

From this point on a marketed shift in their relationship occurs to the point he is feeding her pie at the last moments of the screenplay on page 51. Moreover, it is not improbable that with Daisy left by her lonesome, she had much time to reflect. In this instance, Uhry uses the plot-development of the play to illustrate how standing up for oneself can be the start of an important change. With this passage, Uhry shows the unsavory aspects of society in regards to the interactions between a supposed superior group of people and a supposed inferior group of people. Yet, he also shows how advocacy and self-reflection can mitigate this dichotomy.

With all of the above considered, it is clear that even via the constrained medium of a three-person play, Uhry has expressed the deep truth of the dehumanization and oppression institutionalized throughout the everyday life of humanity. In the modern day, where these truths stand to be re-concealed, Uhry encourages his audience to think critically about their own relationships and think introspectively on their behavior lest they be akin to early Daisy in her thoughtless internalized prejudice.

## Works Cited

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