

# Blind Henry and the African American Experience in Ray Bradbury's Detective Trilogy: *Death is a Lonely Business, A Graveyard for Lunatics, and Let's All Kill Constance*

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The year 2020 marked the hundredth anniversary of both the birth of author Ray Bradbury and the inaugural season of Negro League Baseball. That same year, the dangerous rise of white supremacist groups led to the growth and strengthening of the Black Lives Matter movement. The convergence of these diverse events makes this an appropriate moment to revisit Bradbury's early and only baseball short story as a jumping-off point to examine the role of African-American identity in his body of work. In an earlier article, I characterized this short story as follows:

Early in his career and living in a multiethnic Los Angeles community, Ray Bradbury explored issues of race in "The Big Black and White Game," first published in 1945 and later included in his science fiction/fantasy collection *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. Written two years before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major-league baseball, the tale is a straightforward account of racial prejudice surrounding a baseball game between the white guests and the black servants at a Wisconsin Hotel.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Donatich, "The Horror of the Blank Page in Bradbury's *Death is a Lonely Business*," *The New Ray Bradbury Review* 6 (2019): 105.

<https://doi.org/10.18060/28536>

***The New Ray Bradbury Review***, Issue 8, September 2024.  
Published by the Ray Bradbury Center, Indiana University Indianapolis.

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Forty years on, the complicated position of African American culture within Bradbury's canon is redefined in 1985's *Death is a Lonely Business*, in which Henry, the blind African American friend of the narrator, plays a crucial role in capturing the killer. Henry later returns to help his friend solve crimes in *A Graveyard for Lunatics* (1990) and *Let's All Kill Constance* (2003). University of Liverpool's Professor David Seed identifies these three later works as "a trilogy of novels about Hollywood that focuses on death and endings."<sup>2</sup> Although this well documented interpretation is accurate, I maintain that the trilogy also incorporates the African American experience into the carnivalesque world created by Bradbury and based on his boyhood encounter with Mr. Electrico and the latter's challenge to "live forever."

One significant link between the game in Bradbury's early baseball tale and his youthful encounter with Mr. Electrico is that both stories are based on real events that occurred within a four-month span in 1932. Bradbury biographer Sam Weller notes that the Bradbury family spent their summer vacation that year at their usual location, Lake Delavan in southern Wisconsin, where they were spectators at a baseball game between the white guests and the black employees of their hotel.<sup>3</sup> The following Labor Day weekend, twelve year old Ray Bradbury would both attend the funeral of his Uncle Lester Moberg, who had been fatally shot by a robber during the week, and meet Mr. Electrico at the Dill Brothers carnival in his hometown of Waukegan, Illinois.<sup>4</sup> With minor variations in detail, Bradbury has told the story of his fateful encounter with Mr. Electrico numerous times both in print and at speaking engagements. In one of his last interviews, the writer recounts leaving his uncle's graveyard burial and running towards the tents of the carnival:

Mr. Electrico was down with the carnival at the bottom of the hill. And by God, I got there and he was sitting on the platform out in front of the carnival and I didn't know what to say... he looked at my face and said, "Would you like to meet those people in that tent over there? Those strange people? And I said, Yes, sir, I would.... He took me in... I met the Strong Man, I met the Fat Lady, I met the trapeze people, I met the dwarf and the skeleton. They all became characters later in my life."<sup>5</sup>

This unique phenomenon of "running away from death" and "running towards life" would forever be recalled by Bradbury as the defining moment that both sparked and shaped his writing career.<sup>6</sup> In their seminal text *Ray Bradbury: The Life of Fiction*, Bradbury scholars Jonathan R. Eller and William F. Touponce confirm "the importance of understanding carnival as perhaps *the* central and unique aspect of his authorship throughout his career" and characterize Bradbury's writing process as the "carnivalization of genres," a term influenced by the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque in literature.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Mr. Electrico's traveling show fits Bakhtin's definition of "folk festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers" that will inspire Bradbury to create a

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<sup>2</sup> David Seed, *Ray Bradbury. Modern Masters of Science Fiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Weller, *The Bradbury Chronicles: The Life of Ray Bradbury* (New York: William Morrow, 2005), 51-53.

<sup>4</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 55-59.

<sup>5</sup> Sam Weller, *Listen to the Echoes: The Ray Bradbury Interviews* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2010), 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> Weller, *Listen*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan R. Eller and William F. Touponce, *Ray Bradbury: The Life of Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 5.

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“vast and manifold literature of parody” during his long career.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, in the same interview published in 2010, Bradbury admitted that “until a few years ago, I’d forgotten about that funeral.”<sup>9</sup> Thus far, however, the significance of the connection between the events of the summer and fall of 1932 has yet to be investigated fully enough.

Furthermore, Bradbury acknowledges that in the summer of 1932 he “had witnessed that baseball game” and his story “The Big Black and White Game” was “probably eighty-percent true.”<sup>10</sup> Consequently, “some familial ties between the events of that summer may be assumed and examined.”<sup>11</sup> As a boy, Bradbury had three Swedish uncles on his maternal side that moved from Massachusetts to Waukegan in 1898.<sup>12</sup> Philip, Lester, and Inar Moberg all lived and worked near the Bradbury home when Ray was a youngster.<sup>13</sup> In “The Big Black and White Game,” the white team’s “young swede named Moberg” resembles Bradbury’s “strikingly handsome young” uncle, Lester Moberg, who would soon suffer a tragic death.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, he was also a “veteran of the First World War” who “worked as an attendant at the Veterans Hospital just south of Waukegan.”<sup>15</sup> Moberg’s war service connects him to both his nephew and Mr. Electrico, who tells Bradbury that the youngster was his “best friend in France in 1918” and died “in the battle of the Ardennes forest that year.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, “the story is told from the perspective of twelve year old Douglas, which is also Bradbury’s middle name. So we can infer that the twelve year old boy in the stands who overhears the gradual emergence of the racial biases of his parents and fellow white spectators is a part of the same twelve year old who loses an uncle and meets Mr. Electrico at the close of the 1932 summer.”<sup>17</sup> Both the young Bradbury and his fictional alter ego Douglas “gravitate towards marginalized groups that exist on the fringes of society.”<sup>18</sup> Bradbury finds Mr. Electrico and his troupe setting up their tents and flags on the outskirts of Waukegan, past the graveyard and “down the hill toward the shoreline of Lake Michigan.”<sup>19</sup> Before the game begins in “BBWG,” the black baseball players and their coworkers leave the hotel through the “back door of the vast kitchen” to reach the ball field, while their wives and girlfriends take their seats in “the far left section of the bleachers.”<sup>20</sup> Neither the black team nor the carnival performers “are considered to be equals by the residents of their respective communities; both are valued as a form of entertainment that serves

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<sup>8</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Weller, *Listen*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Weller, *Listen*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Donatich, “Horror,” 105.

<sup>12</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ray Bradbury, “The Big Black and White Game” in *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953), 128; Weller, *Chronicles*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 55.

<sup>16</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 58.

<sup>17</sup> Donatich, “Horror,” 106.

<sup>18</sup> Donatich, “Horror,” 106.

<sup>19</sup> Weller, *Listen*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 32.

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as a distraction from their everyday lives.”<sup>21</sup> Overall, the common threads joining these events allow race relations to be added to “the themes of life, death, and immortality that have always been associated with Mr. Electrico and the prominence of carnival imagery in Bradbury’s works.”<sup>22</sup>

In “The Big Black and White Game,” Bradbury’s first non-fantasy short story, the central character and star player is the black team’s first baseman Big Poe, whom Bradbury modeled after “a kind black man - the popcorn salesman in the pavilion during the evenings” from his hotel that summer.<sup>23</sup> Although he never acknowledged that Big Poe is named after one of his favorite writers, Bradbury’s lifelong admiration and reverence for the works of Edgar Allan Poe is well-documented. Therefore, the star player’s name can also be read as an inside joke that might be better explained in a line from Bradbury’s story poem at the end of his 2004 story collection *The Cat’s Pajamas*: “Poe’s eyes with mine do some wry joke exchange.”<sup>24</sup> Behind the powerful hitting of Big Poe, the black team takes an early lead in the game. When it quickly becomes apparent that the white team has no chance of winning, the white spectators’ deep-seated prejudices against blacks begin to surface. Douglas is told by his mother that the black players are “the most inconsiderate people,” while the lady seated next to them complains that “Those Negroes are too big for their britches” and “the hotel service has been simply terrible.”<sup>25</sup> Sensing the rising racial tension against his fellow teammates, coworkers, and friends, Big Poe purposely strikes out his next three at bats. Nevertheless, in the bottom of the fifth inning, the white team’s Jimmy Cosner purposely spikes Big Poe in the ankle with his cleats while running out a high pop-up that was dropped. Despite his injury and Cosner being called out on the play, a limping Big Poe continues to play and convinces the umpire that Cosner should remain safe at first base. Notably, the Swede “Young Moberg” is the next batter at the plate when the black pitcher Long Johnson catches Cosner off first base and throws the ball to Big Poe.<sup>26</sup> Big Poe exacts his revenge by hitting Cosner in the back of the head with the ball as he runs to second base. Although both teams rush onto the field, violence is averted and everyone quickly leaves the field. That evening, however, none of the white guests attend the annual Cakewalk Jamboree held by the black employees of the hotel. They all remain inside their cottages, except for Douglas, who sneaks out after hearing music coming from the dance pavilion. With his “nose pressed against the window, looking in for a long, long time, silently,” Douglas watches the black men in tuxedos laughing and dancing with black women in gowns and gloves.<sup>27</sup> The “wonderful music” that captivates the youngster is the same tune that Big Poe sang earlier that day while warming up before the game:

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<sup>21</sup> Donatich, “Horror,” 106.

<sup>22</sup> Donatich, “Horror,” 106.

<sup>23</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Ray Bradbury, *The Cat’s Pajama’s: Stories* (New York: William Morrow, 2004), 229.

<sup>25</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 132.

<sup>27</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 133.

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“—gonna dance out both of my shoes,  
When they play those Jelly Roll Blues;  
Tomorrow night at the Dark Town Strutters’ Ball!”<sup>28</sup>

The “Darktown Strutters’ Ball” is a popular 1917 song by the African American Canadian composer Shelton Brooks that was “recorded by The Original Dixieland Jazz Band and became an instant hit.”<sup>29</sup> The Cakewalk Jamboree, boycotted by the white guests, enables the physical enactment of Brook’s “Dark Town Strutters’ Ball.” The story ends with Douglas going to bed “without telling anyone” what he saw that night.<sup>30</sup> The segregated party and the silence of the twelve year old narrator intimate the racial divide that existed in 1932 America. Significantly, the titular use of *game* in “The Big Black and White Game” highlights the young Bradbury’s confusion over the racism he has witnessed, and his attempt to make sense of this traumatic experience the best way he can, as part of a game.

Notably, interwoven within Bradbury’s fictionalized recollections of the harsh reality of African American life are also several signifiers pointing towards his youthful fascination with magic and carnival life. One Bradbury critic, Anita T. Sullivan, notes that “The Big Black and White Game” “emits a breath of fantasy by the use of images throughout the story which link the Negro baseball team with black magic.”<sup>31</sup> However, the designation of these elements of fantasy as simply “black magic” suggests something unwholesome and sinister that overlooks the subtextual interplay between a novice writer’s attempt to reconcile a troubling event from his past with his childhood love of magic. Indeed, the young Bradbury had vowed to become “the world’s greatest magician” after seeing Blackstone the Magician perform several times at the Genesee Theatre in his hometown of Waukegan between 1928 and 1931.<sup>32</sup> After attending his uncle’s funeral in September of 1932, Bradbury ran towards the carnival carrying “a ball and vase trick” that he “had ordered through the mail from Johnson Smith & Co. as an excuse to see Mr. Electrico.”<sup>33</sup> In “The Big Black and White Game,” there is some slippage between these events as the narrator, like Bradbury, is recalling important childhood moments “after all these years.”<sup>34</sup> For example, the exchange between the black pitcher and his catcher during Jimmie Cosner’s fifth inning at bat incorporates imagery suggesting a carnival magic act:

Long Johnson on the mound did a slow serpentine windup. It was like a snake on a limb of a tree, uncoiling, suddenly darting at you. Instantly Johnson’s hand was in front of him, open, like black fangs, empty. And the white pill slashed across the plate with a sound

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<sup>28</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 123.

<sup>29</sup> Matt Micucci, “A short history of ... ‘Darktown Strutters’ Ball’ (Shelton Brooks, 1915),” *Jazziz Magazine Online*, 10 Oct. 2017, <https://www.jazziz.com/short-history-darktown-strutters-ball-shelton-brooks-1915>.

<sup>30</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 133.

<sup>31</sup> Anita T Sullivan, “Ray Bradbury and Fantasy,” *The English Journal* 61, no. 9 (1972): 1309–14, <https://doi.org/10.2307/813228>.

<sup>32</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 41, 49, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Ray Bradbury, “Inspired to Greatness by Mr. Electrico,” *Guideposts Magazine*, June 1991: no. pag., <http://www.guideposts.org/better-living/entertainment/books/inspired-to-greatness-by-mr-electrico>.

<sup>34</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 121.

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like a razor [...] The catcher, like a black magician, his white teeth gleaming, opened up his oily glove. There, like a white flower growing, was the baseball.<sup>35</sup>

The baseball seems to materialize out of nowhere through a sleight of hand trick, while the black fangs of a snake and the slashing sound of a razor suggests a more dangerous carnival illusion. Furthermore, the pregame activities of both teams connote a carnival-like atmosphere. Big Poe, like the Strong Man, “took a double fistful of bats, bundled them on his huge bull shoulder, and strutted along the first base line.”<sup>36</sup> On his first at bat, he “picked up the bat in one hand like it was a toothpick” and becomes a “greased machine pivoting” as he hits a towering home run.<sup>37</sup> Conversely, the white team’s Jimmie Cosner is a circus clown with a “freckled face and red hair” who was “clowning on the diamond” and “balancing a bat on his forehead.”<sup>38</sup> Significantly, African American history and carnival magic briefly mingle when the black team’s second baseman “Emancipated Smith” throws out a runner trying to stretch a single into a double “with a white pellet in his dark, dark hand, waiting.”<sup>39</sup> Smith’s nickname underscores President Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves, while the white pellet in a dark hand conjures up the three cups and a ball sleight of hand trick. Consequently, these examples of slippage between events from Bradbury’s childhood offer an opportunity for a comprehensive examination of the African American presence in his oeuvre.

Although his childhood experience with racial prejudice would soon become overshadowed by his meeting with Mr. Electrico, as a budding writer Bradbury continued to write realistic short stories dealing with racial issues. Despite the selection of “The Big Black and White Game” for the *Best American Short Stories of 1946* anthology, Bradbury found that his postwar stories overtly dealing with discrimination against blacks were being rejected by magazines because “publishing decisions were still being made on the basis of fear rather than quality.”<sup>40</sup> Three of these stories from the mid to late 1940’s, “Chrysalis,” “We’ll Just Act Natural,” and “The Transformation,” would not be published until they were included in Bradbury’s 2004 story collection *The Cat’s Pajamas*. In the dark tale “The Transformation,” racism and the carnivalesque collide in a Southern town when Steve Nolan, a white racist, is abducted by carnival workers and covered completely in permanent black ink by Carnival Tattoo Man Sam Nash so that he will forever resemble the victims of his horrific crimes. Nonetheless, Bradbury’s tales of race and bigotry written in the genres of science fiction or fantasy found publication as either a chapter of a novel (“Way in the Middle of the Air” from *The Martian Chronicles*) or included in a story collection (“The Other Foot” from *The Illustrated Man*). In “Way in the Middle of the Air,” the entire Black community of a segregated Southern town prepares to leave Earth on the last rocket to Mars; while “The Other Foot” examines the reactions of several residents on a Black populated Mars upon learning of the imminent arrival of a white survivor from an atomic war devastated Earth. Many literary critics have acknowledged the uniqueness of these science fiction tales for this period. For example, Robin Anne Reid notes that Bradbury’s “The Other Foot” is told “from

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<sup>35</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 123.

<sup>37</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 123.

<sup>38</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 125.

<sup>39</sup> Bradbury, *Golden*, 128.

<sup>40</sup> Eller, *Becoming*, 113, 235.

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the point of view of an African American couple, Hattie and Willie Johnson” and provides “an image of ‘blackness,’ of an Africanist presence in the future, that is striking for the time in which he wrote the story.”<sup>41</sup> More recently, independent scholar Steve Gronert Ellerhoff goes even further in his excellent analysis of these two Mars tales noting that Bradbury “emerges as a white enemy of white supremacy and early ally to Afrofuturism” which he defines as the “aesthetic movement blending science fiction with African diasporic experiences.”<sup>42</sup> This type of recognition, greatly ignored during the mid-twentieth century, contributes to the inclusion of African Americans into the American literary landscape and highlights the need for further analysis into the cultural significance of these early tales.

Within this paradigm, the veiled threat of lynching that exists in both of these stories can be connected to the original 1945 version of “The Big Black and White Game.” Samuel Teece’s involvement in the mob killings of blacks in “Way in the Middle of the Air” is insinuated through the “ring of hemp rope coiled on the car floor” and his employee Silly’s shout from a moving car headed for the rocket: “‘What you goin’ to *do* nights, Mr. Teece?’”<sup>43</sup> Conversely, Black Mars resident Willie Johnson in “The Other Foot” takes “a long thick hairy rope coil into which he fashioned a hangman’s knot” with him to meet the white survivor from Earth.<sup>44</sup> In the original version of “The Big Black and White Game” that appeared in *The American Mercury*, someone shouts: “‘Lynch ‘em! Kill ‘em, kill ‘em!’” after Big Poe hits Cosner with the baseball.<sup>45</sup> *The American Mercury* was a literary magazine published monthly in New York City from 1924 to 1981 that critiqued the American scene and featured some of the most important writers through the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>46</sup> American publisher and journalist Laurence E. Spivak purchased the magazine in 1939<sup>47</sup> and served as its editor from 1944<sup>48</sup> to 1950 when he sold it.<sup>49</sup> However, changes in ownership in the 1950s turned the magazine into an anti-Semitic and racist publication, which led to the magazine spending the last 25 years of its existence in decline.<sup>50</sup>

Unfortunately, Bradbury must concede to editorial pressure to avoid controversy and omit this reference to lynching from the version of the story published in *The Golden Apples of the Sun* in order for his story to reach a wider, mainstream audience. In his 1999 introduction to *The Illustrated Man* entitled “Dancing, So As Not To Be Dead,” Bradbury’s discussion of the

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<sup>41</sup> Robin A. Reid, *Ray Bradbury* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 50.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Gronert Ellerhoff, “White Supremacy and the Multicultural Imagination in Ray Bradbury’s Afrofuturist Stories of Mars,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 44.4 (Summer 2021): 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 1950, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 132.

<sup>44</sup> Ray Bradbury, “The Other Foot,” in *The Illustrated Man*, 1951, (New York: William Morrow, 2001), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Ray Bradbury, “The Big Black and White Game: A Story,” *The American Mercury* (Aug. 1945): 235.

<sup>46</sup> Vincent Fitzpatrick. “The American Mercury,” *Menckiana* 123 (1992): 1–6

<sup>47</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, Volume V: 1905-1930* (Harvard University Press, 1968), 22.

<sup>48</sup> Dan D. Nimmo; *Newsome, Chevelle, Political Commentators in the United States in the 20th Century: A Bio-critical Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 311.

<sup>49</sup> Mott, *History*, 24.

<sup>50</sup> David Austin Walsh, “The Right-Wing Popular Front: The Far Right and American Conservatism in the 1950s,” *Journal of American History* 107.2 (September 1, 2020): 411–432.

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publishing history of “The Other Foot” reveals his frustration over the difficulty of selling postwar stories dealing with race:

It was long before the Civil Rights movement, the Cold War was starting up, and the House UnAmerican Committee was holding hearings headed by Parnell Thomas (Joseph McCarthy arrived later). In such an atmosphere no editor wanted to land on Mars with my dark immigrants. I finally gave “The Other Foot” to *New Story*, a Paris-based magazine edited by Martha Foley’s son, David.<sup>51</sup>

Martha Foley, a New York literary editor and Bradbury supporter, had selected “The Big Black and White Game” for the *Best American Short Stories of 1946* anthology and would later choose “The Other Foot” for its 1952 volume.<sup>52</sup> Her endorsement “provided the only literary recognition that Bradbury’s more controversial stories achieved prior to *Fahrenheit 451*.”<sup>53</sup> Conversely, during the same period that he found it almost impossible to sell individual stories dealing with race and difference, Bradbury achieved some success within the genre of detective short fiction. From the mid to late 1940s he sold “some fifteen stories for pulp detective magazines such as *Detective Tales* and *Dime Mystery*.”<sup>54</sup> However, Bradbury’s dislike of his early detective stories, which he referred to as the “walking wounded,” would keep him away from the genre for decades.<sup>55</sup> His decision in the early 1980s to write his first detective novel, a genre which “itself has extensive historical roots in cultural time,” will provide the perfect opportunity to examine the character of Blind Henry as a conduit for situating African American culture within Bradbury’s canon.<sup>56</sup>

After the success of 1953’s *Fahrenheit 451* and his increasing prominence in the literary world, Bradbury would write less short fiction as he began to concentrate on the various media adaptations of his work, which included radio, television, film, plays, and comics. By 1956, Bradbury’s groundbreaking advances in science fiction had ended, and he began to focus his creative energies on fantasy and “a gently reflective form of realism.”<sup>57</sup> It is within this paradigm for realism that I hope to show that Blind Henry and the African American presence become part of the legacy of Mr. Electrico. The first archival volume of Bradbury’s incomplete writings (*The New Ray Bradbury Review* no. 3 (2012)) offers some new insight into the creative process that led to the conception of the character of Blind Henry. These writing samples, in the form of story openings, character sketches, first lines and titles, are described by editor William F. Touponce as “Bradbury’s literary DNA.”<sup>58</sup> Some of these writing fragments from the 1940s and 1950s reveal Bradbury’s early attempts at introducing African American characters into his fiction. His method

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<sup>51</sup> Ray Bradbury, introduction to *The Illustrated Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), vii-viii.

<sup>52</sup> Eller, *Becoming*, 113, 240.

<sup>53</sup> Eller, *Becoming*, 240.

<sup>54</sup> Eller and Touponce, *Ray*, 331.

<sup>55</sup> Ray Bradbury, *A Memory of Murder* (New York: Dell, 1984), 8.

<sup>56</sup> Eller and Touponce, *Ray*, 414.

<sup>57</sup> Jonathan R. Eller, *Ray Bradbury Unbound* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 93.

<sup>58</sup> William F. Touponce, ed. Archival issue of *The New Ray Bradbury Review* 3 (2012): 13.



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for inventing a particular character within a specific setting is exemplified in the piece entitled “The Colored Shoe Man”:

He stood waiting for the street car, any street car, no particular color or time or shape that streetcar, as long as it had people on it going somewhere. If a streetcar went west first, he'd take it. If one went East, well East he'd go. He had a large canvas box slung to the sidewalk at his shiny black and white shoes and his face was gentle, serene and the colour of coca-cola. White watch-springs of hair curled up on his round skull. His slender hands were covered with soft white gloves and he was humming.

He was a shoe salesman.<sup>59</sup>

The streetcars convey a city scene, and the unnamed black character is identified by his profession and the freedom of movement he possesses to travel either east or west. The shoe salesman's “serene” and “gentle” countenance gives him a certain sense of dignity, while his humming implies that he is at ease with himself and comfortable in his surroundings. His “coca-cola” skin intimates the black man's “americanness;” like the soft drink, he is an integral part of our society. Furthermore, the symbolic interaction between blacks and whites are visible upon his body. He wears “shiny black and white shoes,” has “white-springs of hair” upon his head, and his “slender hands were covered with soft white gloves.” Although William F. Touponce notes that “The Colored Shoe Man” is “typical of the way in which Bradbury worked on generating minor characters for longer novel projects,” the descriptive fragment is also unique for its portrayal of a black character at a time when “blackness” was virtually ignored by white writers.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, a close reading of another fragment from this period entitled “Grammy” uncovers issues of race imbedded within a familiar Bradbury theme:

She smelled like a lemon and she smelled like cinnamon and bone dust, that was Grammy. The town people turned their children another direction when she passed. She was the recipient of stiff nods from people walking alone. She lived in her house with a crystal chandelier, a tired dog who slept 24 hours a day, and a gramophone that played WHERE DID ROBINSON CRUSOE GO WITH FRIDAY ON SATURDAY NIGHT, sung by Al Jolson [sic] and recorded during the first world war.<sup>61</sup>

The image of the sweet, elderly grandmother is a fixture in many Bradbury short stories and novels that recreate, in varying forms and genres, Bradbury's childhood home of Waukegan, Illinois. The first three sentences, nonetheless, focus on the negative response of the residents to the odorous mixture of old age and kitchen cooking that envelops grandma. Similarly, a discerning sense of smell plays a pivotal role in the unnamed narrator's ability to solve the crimes committed in 1985's *Death is a Lonely Business*. Blind Henry's keen nose identifies the intruder stalking his tenement as the Venice pier psychologist A. L. Shrank, the killer whose foul stench has earned him the nickname “Armpits.”<sup>62</sup> The remainder of the paragraph places the scene in 1928 Green Town, Illinois, the fictionalized version of Bradbury's childhood hometown. The crystal chandelier,

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<sup>59</sup> Touponce, *New Ray*, 28.

<sup>60</sup> Touponce, *New Ray*, 66.

<sup>61</sup> Touponce, *New Ray*, 20.

<sup>62</sup> Ray Bradbury, *Death is a Lonely Business* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 166.

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gramophone, and Al Jolson recording will be reconstructed in the living room of Spaulding family home in 1957's *Dandelion Wine*. As Mrs. Spaulding nervously waits for her twelve year old son Douglas to return home, her younger son Tom notices "the chandelier with the crystal bobbins gleaming quietly" and the "silent phonograph" on which the brothers had played "Al Jolson and Two Black Crows records to exhaustion."<sup>63</sup> In 1985's *Death is a Lonely Business*, the narrator references a routine from the comedy team Two Black Crows when he is mistaken for the police:

"You, you wouldn't happen to be the fuzz."

"No, just the Goofer Feathers."

"Unh?"

"Remember the Two Black Crows?"

"Huh?"

"Nineteen twenty-six. Two white men in blackface talked about Goofer Feathers.

The Fuzz. From peaches. Forget it."<sup>64</sup>

Bradbury's nostalgic recollections of old Hollywood and the early days of radio appear in many of his works and have been the subject of countless essays and interviews throughout his career.

Similarly, Bradbury recalls being fourteen and roller skating in Los Angeles to attend "an Al Jolson radio broadcast" where he was "stunned when Jolson leaped off the stage and seized the roller skates" off his lap.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, both Jolson and the comedy duo the "Two Black Crows" are examples of popular early twentieth century white entertainers known for performing in blackface.<sup>66</sup> The negative repercussions of this form of entertainment on African Americans continue to the present day and have merited scholarly research devoted solely to it. E. Patrick Johnson notes that minstrelsy is one of "the tropes of blackness that whites circulated in the past" that has "historically insured physical violence, poverty, institutional racism, and second-hand citizenry for blacks."<sup>67</sup> As Bradbury matures as a writer, fragments such as "Granny" indicate an effort to reevaluate some of his fond childhood memories and their relationship to the modern day problems afflicted upon African American society.

Furthermore, the capitalization of the song title in "Granny" draws attention to the complicated relationship between the white imperialist Crusoe and his Afro-Caribbean servant Friday, which has been the subject of numerous essays, books, and films. Notably, Al Jolson also starred in a musical stage parody of Daniel Defoe's classic novel, in which a millionaire "falls asleep and dreams of being Robinson Crusoe" and "His chauffeur, Gus Jackson (Jolson) becomes his man Friday."<sup>68</sup> Called "exotic" by reviewers and billed as a "Musical Extravaganza," *Robinson Crusoe, Jr.* opened a fifteen-month national tour at the Nixon Theatre in Atlantic City

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<sup>63</sup> Ray Bradbury, *Dandelion Wine: A Novel*, 1957, (New York: Avon Books, 1999), 41, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 206.

<sup>65</sup> Ray Bradbury, "L.A., How Do I Love Thee?" in *Bradbury Speaks: Too Soon From The Cave, Too Far From The Stars* (New York: William Morrow, 2005), 219.

<sup>66</sup> Leonard Maltin, *Movie Comedy Teams* (New York: Signet Books, 1970), 319.

<sup>67</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>68</sup> Herbert G. Goldman, *Jolson: The Legend Comes to Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 86.

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on August 28, 1916” with Jolson playing the role of Jackson in blackface.<sup>69</sup> By the end of the tour, Jolson’s performance would earn him billing as “The World’s Greatest Entertainer,” a title that would forever be interconnected to his stereotypical portrayal of blacks on stage.<sup>70</sup> Almost seventy years later, some African American dignity taken by Jolson will be figuratively reclaimed by Blind Henry when he is referred to as the “World’s Greatest Blind Man” for his role in catching the killer in *Death is a Lonely Business*.<sup>71</sup> Lastly, the World War One recording date of Jolson’s tune provides another link between the young Bradbury and Mr. Electrico, who claimed that the twelve year old, in a previous life, was his “best friend in France in 1918.”<sup>72</sup> Overall, “Granny” exposes a layering of multicultural significance that crosses various mediums while simultaneously incorporating Bradbury’s memories of his twelve year old self.

Significantly, there are also Bradbury story fragments in the Donn Albright Collection that pertain to the creation of Blind Henry that have yet to be published in their entirety. These writing samples from the 1940s and 1950s are identified by either a folder title or the opening line of the fragment. The first mention of a black character named Henry occurs in the opening line from an untitled mid-1940s one page piece: “We have a colored man named Henry in our house.”<sup>73</sup> In *Death is a Lonely Business*, which is set in 1949 Los Angeles, the narrator refers to Henry as “the blind colored man” only once in the text, the moment prior to his entrance into the story.<sup>74</sup> In attempting to create authentic characters for that period, Bradbury would later defend his use of the word “colored” in his 1999 introduction to *The Illustrated Man* by acknowledging “that’s what they were called when I wrote “The Other Foot” in 1949.”<sup>75</sup> Another untitled fragment dated June 2, 1953—“She heard Henry come tap tap along the dark hall”—sounds very much like Blind Henry using his cane on his nightly patrol through the halls of his building in search of the intruder Shrank in *Death is a Lonely Business*: “Henry stood tall and shook his cane at the darkening halls where the lightbulbs were burning low and the souls were guttering out.”<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the notion that Henry might have been originally conceived as a victim of Shrank is suggested by the folder titled: “How Simple to Murder a Blind Man.”<sup>77</sup> As a result, Bradbury’s incomplete writings offer valuable insight into his expanding and evolving literary conception of race relations within his own work decades before postcolonial theory would create a discursive space for this type of discussion.

1985’s *Death is a Lonely Business*, Bradbury’s first novel since 1962’s *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, introduces readers to his first and only reoccurring African American character, Blind Henry. Henry resides in the same downtown L.A. tenement at the corner of Temple and Figueroa where the unnamed narrator, a young writer, used to live. The narrator notes the diversity of his former home when he returns to the building to check on his friends:

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<sup>69</sup> Goldman, *Jolson*, 88, 339, 89.

<sup>70</sup> Goldman, *Jolson*, 90.

<sup>71</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 231.

<sup>72</sup> Weller, *Chronicles*, 58.

<sup>73</sup> Touponce, *New Ray*, 125.

<sup>74</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 102.

<sup>75</sup> Bradbury, introduction to *The Illustrated Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), vii.

<sup>76</sup> Touponce, *New Ray*, 115; Bradbury, *Death*, 109.

<sup>77</sup> Touponce, *New Ray*, 93.

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There were three Chinese on the first floor along with the usual Chicanos, and on the second floor one Japanese gentleman and six young men from Mexico City who owned one white ice cream suit—each got to wear it one night a week. There were also some Portuguese men, a night watchman from Haiti, two salesmen from the Philippines, and more Chicanos [...] The second was mostly Fannie with her 380 pounds, along with two old maid sisters from Spain, a jewelry salesman from Egypt, and two ladies from Monterey [...].<sup>78</sup>

Henry is an important member of this “small Ellis Island, adrift with people from some sixteen countries.”<sup>79</sup> Although the narrator repeatedly uses the word “glad” to describe how he feels returning to see his old friends, Henry stands out from the other “invisible or half-visible people” in this multiethnic tenement because he is a “very special blind man.”<sup>80</sup> Bradbury avoids using Henry’s handicap to cast him as one of the stereotypical victims usually found in detective fiction. Blind Henry is also not a “magical, mystical Negro,” the term used by filmmaker Spike Lee to describe when an “African-American character is imbued with special powers... ‘for the benefit of white people.’”<sup>81</sup> Robin Anne Reid, one of the few Bradbury critics to discuss Henry in any detail, astutely observes that he is “one of the most capable” and “third most important character” in the novel.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, what makes Henry special is his fiercely independent nature:

He had everything memorized. In his pride he had counted and could recall every pace in this block and the next and the next, and how many steps across at this intersection or that [...] no dark glasses, no cane, his mouth counting to beats, to turn in at Al’s Beer and walk steadily and unswervingly through the crowded tables toward an empty piano stool, there to sit and reach up for the beer that was automatically popped in place by Al before his arrival, to play exactly three tunes—including the “Maple Leaf” sadly better than Cal the barber—drink the one beer, and stride out into a night he owned with his paces and counts, heading home [...].<sup>83</sup>

Henry is comfortable in his surroundings. He likes to travel alone and carries a “wad of bills in his hip pocket.”<sup>84</sup> Although Henry does not use a cane for walking outside, he begins to carry one for protection during his patrols through the dark halls of his tenement. Initially, his “peppermint-striped cane” recalls the harmless prop used by Mr. Electrico to “hit the tent” and warn the sideshow performers to “Clean up your language” before entering with the young Bradbury.<sup>85</sup> However, Henry’s cane is a “weapon” with a rounded tip that contains “a good weight of lead.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 100-101.

<sup>79</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 100.

<sup>80</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 101.

<sup>81</sup> Susan Gonzalez, “Director Spike Lee Slams ‘Same Old’ Black Stereotypes in Today’s Films,” *Yale Bulletin & Calendar* 29.1 (2 Mar. 2001): no pag., [archives.news.yale.edu/v29.n21/story3.html](http://archives.news.yale.edu/v29.n21/story3.html).

<sup>82</sup> Reid, *Ray Bradbury*, 93.

<sup>83</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 103-4.

<sup>84</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 205.

<sup>85</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 103; Weller, *Listen*, 33.

<sup>86</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 103.

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Before the narrator's final confrontation with the killer at the Venice pier, Henry lends the cane to his white friend for his protection. The sharing of this wooden cane against the common enemy of their multiethnic community overturns the earlier image of a baseball bat as a violent weapon against blacks from the original *American Mercury* version of "The Big Black and White Game" in which "Men snatched up yellow maple bats" after Big Poe hits Cosner with the baseball.<sup>87</sup> Notably, this sentence would also be removed from the story before its publication in *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. Similarly, the images of a lynching rope in "Way in the Middle of the Air" and a hangman's knot in "The Other Foot" are both reduced and neutralized through Henry's "remembrance twine [...] a dark string" whose "knots" record the phone number of the paper that publishes the lonely hearts ads placed by the killer to lure his potential victims.<sup>88</sup> Blind Henry's cane and remembrance twine act as metaphors for breaking down the historical barriers between blacks and whites.

The passage describing Henry's routine also notes his ability to play Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" better than Cal, the white barber who claims to have received piano lessons from the African American composer as a youngster. Joplin's "compositions fueled the ragtime craze that led thousands of middle-class whites to buy pianos, collect sheet music, and enjoy, for the first time, the pulse of black vernacular culture."<sup>89</sup> Although he plays badly, he gives "love glances at the waiting black and white, white and black keys" at the piano that he keeps in the corner of his barbershop.<sup>90</sup> The emphasis on the black and white keys connotes the power of music to create harmony between the races. When it is revealed that his student-teacher relationship with Joplin is a lie, and his autographed 1915 photograph with the composer is a fake, Cal flees town and sends his piano to the narrator's apartment. Cal knows that the young writer appreciates music and will keep the shop's landlord from selling it to collect his overdue rent. Indeed, music plays a significant role in the lives of several of the narrator's friends. Outside the tenement, Pietro Massinello "toted a portable windup phonograph which he set down at street corners to play *Tales from the Vienna Woods*."<sup>91</sup> Former opera singer Fannie Florianna, in her second floor apartment, tells the writer that she "has a new recording of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*" and the two spend "a glorious two hours with Mozart."<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, at the seaside mansion of the reclusive 1920's film star Constance Rattigan, the writer's other close female friend, a phonograph is playing "dance music by Ray Noble, from London, in 1934, some Noel Coward tunes" and there are "a stack of records that seemed to never want to stop dropping."<sup>93</sup> As for Henry, it is only fitting that he later moves to New Orleans, "the most European and African of North American cities" where "music developed in the form of blues and ragtime" and "musicians improvised and embellished musical styles until these styles emerged, by World War 1, as jazz."<sup>94</sup> The gift of music, which crosses racial, social, and economic lines, is one way that African Americans participate in Mr. Electrico's

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<sup>87</sup> Bradbury, *American Mercury*, 235.

<sup>88</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 201-2.

<sup>89</sup> Eric Bennett, "Scott Joplin" in Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 1066-67.

<sup>90</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 61.

<sup>91</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 102.

<sup>92</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 99, 108.

<sup>93</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 180.

<sup>94</sup> Eric Bennett, "New Orleans, Louisiana," in Appiah and Gates, 1418-19.

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mantra to “live life to the fullest” by using our “talents [...] the gifts God has given us.”<sup>95</sup> The novel ends with the narrator realizing that, he too, can “live forever” by being happy, getting married, starting a family, and writing “damned fine books and be loved.”<sup>96</sup>

Henry returns in 1990’s *A Graveyard for Lunatics*, in which Bradbury parodies the “madness of the Hollywood studio production system.”<sup>97</sup> Set in 1954 at Maximus Films, the narrator, now a screenwriter, enlists Henry to help make sense of strange occurrences related to the mysterious death of the former studio head James Arbuthnot twenty years earlier. When he returns to his old residence in downtown Los Angeles looking for Henry, the screenwriter finds that the tenement is scheduled for demolition. After not seeing each other for a couple of years, the two men hug, and Henry offers his young friend a drink:

He yanked a table drawer open and extracted a large bottle of the finest whiskey.

“You drink this?”

“With you, yes.”

“That’s what friendship is all about!” He poured. He handed the glass to the empty air. Somehow my hand was there.

We waved our drinks at each other and tears spilled down his black cheeks.

“I don’t suppose you knew nigger blind men cry, did you?”

“I know now, Henry.”

“Let me see.” He leaned forward to feel my cheek. He tasted his finger.

“Salt water. Damn. You’re as easy as I am.”

“Always was.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite the differences in age, race, and background, the last two remaining tenement friends have a unique bond based on both friendship and shared loss. Henry is comfortable enough around the writer to refer to himself as a “nigger blind” man, which today some would view as akin to saying “nigga... a term capable of signaling friendly salutation.”<sup>99</sup> Conversely, the narrator offers Henry a place to stay in the “spare room in my garage, where I type,” which is a very private space for a writer.<sup>100</sup> Henry accepts even though he knows that “it’s all white out there.”<sup>101</sup> As the two men subsequently race through various sets and offices at Maximus Studios it becomes quite apparent that the Hollywood film industry is also “all white out there.” Although there is some diversity inside the company, for example, Jewish studio head Manny Leiber, German director Fritz Wong, and female film editor Maggie Botkin, Maximus Films is predominately a white male enterprise. Moreover, the cinematic misrepresentation of various ethnic groups is uncovered when Henry and the writer stumble into an underground 1920s film vault inside a secret tunnel that connects Green Glades cemetery and Maximus Films. The titles on the reel canisters—“*The Squaw Man*, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*, *The Black Pirate*”—exemplify the negative racial stereotyping of Native

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<sup>95</sup> Bradbury, “Inspired.”

<sup>96</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 226.

<sup>97</sup> Eller and Touponce, *Ray*, 348.

<sup>98</sup> Ray Bradbury, *A Graveyard for Lunatics: Another Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 194-5.

<sup>99</sup> Randall Kennedy, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 5.

<sup>100</sup> Bradbury, *Graveyard*, 196.

<sup>101</sup> Bradbury, *Graveyard*, 195.

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Americans, Asians, and African Americans during Hollywood's early days.<sup>102</sup> Blind Henry's 1954 Hollywood journey highlights a positive interracial friendship while also illustrating the lack of African Americans, both behind and in front of the camera, as the reason that they seldom "live forever on bits of film."<sup>103</sup>

Henry makes his last appearance in 2003's *Let's All Kill Constance*. Set in 1960 Hollywood, the story focuses on the disappearance of aging movie queen Constance Rattigan, who fears for her life after receiving two "Books of the Dead," one a 1900 Los Angeles telephone directory and the other the star's long ago discarded personal address book.<sup>104</sup> Henry joins the writer and Detective Elmo Crumley's search for Constance to find out whether or not she is a potential victim or the actual killer. Significantly, Henry's presence signifies the positive changes for African Americans that will occur during the Civil Rights movement. The narrator finds Henry outside of Grauman's Chinese Theatre standing in the cement footprints of the great Bill "Bojangles" Robinson:

He was standing exactly where he said he would be: in Bill Robinson's "copasetic" dancing footprints, not banished to that long-gone nigger heaven but out front where thousands of passing whites could see.<sup>105</sup>

Bill Robinson is the "African American vaudeville performer, tap dancer, and movie star, considered the most famous African American entertainer of the early twentieth century."<sup>106</sup> Henry is "a perfect fit" in Robinson's footprints; he represents the long overdue recognition of African American accomplishments in the entertainment industry.<sup>107</sup> Although the specific origin of the word "copasetic" (more often found as "copacetic") is unknown, Robinson is credited with inventing and popularizing the expression "Everything's copasetic," which meant "life is great."<sup>108</sup> By living life to the fullest doing what he loves, Robinson exemplifies the fulfillment of Mr. Electrico's maxim to "live forever."

The passage above also contains the problematic phrase "nigger heaven," which the *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* cites as "an American slang expression for the topmost gallery of a theatre, so called because in certain parts of the United States, Negroes are arbitrarily forced to sit in these cheap seats."<sup>109</sup> *Nigger Heaven* is also the controversial title of the 1926 novel about life in Harlem by white author Carl Van Vechten. Since its publication, the hotly debated novel has been both condemned and applauded by black and white intellectuals, critics, and readers. Furthermore, *Nigger Heaven* contains a definition of copasetic, spelled "kopasette" and meaning

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<sup>102</sup> Bradbury, *Graveyard*, 203.

<sup>103</sup> Bradbury, *Death*, 5.

<sup>104</sup> Ray Bradbury, *Let's All Kill Constance: A Novel* (New York: William Morrow/Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 10.

<sup>105</sup> Bradbury, *Let's*, 127.

<sup>106</sup> "Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson," in Appiah and Gates, 1627.

<sup>107</sup> Bradbury, *Let's*, 128.

<sup>108</sup> Appiah and Gates, "Robinson," 1627.

<sup>109</sup> Carl Van Vechten, introduction by Kathleen Pfeiffer, *Nigger Heaven*, 1926, (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2001), x.

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“an epithet somewhat stronger than all right.”<sup>110</sup> Spanning seventy-seven years, *Nigger Heaven* and *Let's All Kill Constance* demonstrate an intertextuality that offers an added dimension of cultural significance to Bradbury's images of blackness, whose creation, in the form of black characters and stories, was an ongoing, evolving process that spanned his entire writing career.

Lastly, the game of baseball becomes a metaphor for the strides made by African American athletes in the field of sports. As Crumley drives his car backwards out of the storm drain that runs beneath Grauman's Theatre and comes out two hundred feet in front of Constance's waterfront mansion, he tells the writer that “Satchel Paige said don't look back. Something may be gaining on you.”<sup>111</sup> Leroy Robert “Satchel” Paige became “the first African American pitcher in the American League, and the first representative of the Negro Leagues to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.”<sup>112</sup> “Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you” was his response to fans who wanted to know his true age when he was still pitching well into his forties.<sup>113</sup> Previously, in “The “Big Black and White Game,” baseball was a segregated game that transformed balls, bats, and cleats into objects used to commit violence. Now, fifty-eight years later, baseball denotes racial harmony, and the game is elevated to an art form by players like Paige. In addition to being one of the greatest pitchers of all time, Paige was also the consummate performer who knew the importance of entertainment in both the Negro and Major Leagues:

Gus Greenlee promised that Satchel would strike out the first nine batters he faced. Bill Veeck dropped him onto the diamond from a helicopter. Charlie Finley set him up in the bullpen with a rocker and a nurse. As masterful as his owners were at hamming it up, he was better—calling in his fielders, talking trash to Josh Gibson, stretching out his walk to the mound until every fan in the stadium noticed and applauded.<sup>114</sup>

Paige's athleticism, showmanship, love of the game, and apparent agelessness, reinforced by his appropriately titled 1962 autobiography *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*, convey the qualities encouraged by Mr. Electrico's message to the young Bradbury.<sup>115</sup> When viewed together, Blind Henry's participation in Bradbury's detective trilogy underscores the need to make African Americans part of Mr. Electrico's literary universe.

Throughout his long career, Ray Bradbury attempted to incorporate important aspects of African American culture into his fictional world. Beginning with the 1945 short story “The Big Black and White Game” and culminating in the 2003 novel *Let's All Kill Constance*, Bradbury's images of blackness during this period play a significant role in his literary response to Mr. Electrico's challenge to “live forever.” As both a Bradbury critic and lifelong fan, I concur with William F. Touponce's assessment that Bradbury “engaged in an attempt to recover and to preserve

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<sup>110</sup> Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven*, 286.

<sup>111</sup> Bradbury, *Let's*, 187.

<sup>112</sup> Marian Aguilar, “Leroy Robert ‘Satchel’ Paige,” in Appiah and Gates, 1477.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 1478.

<sup>114</sup> Larry Tye, *Satchel: The Life and Times of an American Legend* (New York: Random House, 2009), 273.

<sup>115</sup> Tye, *Satchel*, 264.



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some of the richness of human experience.”<sup>116</sup> I hope that my research will aid in restoring some of the African American experience that has been thus far marginalized in Bradbury scholarship.

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<sup>116</sup> Touponce, *New Ray*, 7.

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### Abstract

Throughout his long career, Ray Bradbury attempted to incorporate important aspects of African American culture into his fictional world. While living in a multiethnic Los Angeles community early in his career as a short story writer, Bradbury explored issues of race in “The Big Black and White Game,” first published in 1945 and later included in his 1953 collection *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. Written two years before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major-league baseball, the tale is a realistic account of racial prejudice surrounding a baseball game between the white guests and the black servants at a Wisconsin Hotel.

Four decades later, the complicated position of African American culture within Bradbury’s canon is redefined in 1985’s *Death is a Lonely Business*, in which Henry, the blind African American friend of the narrator, plays a crucial role in capturing the killer. Henry later returns to help his friend solve crimes in *A Graveyard for Lunatics* (1990) and *Let’s All Kill Constance* (2003). This crime trilogy incorporates the African American experience into the carnivalesque world created by Bradbury, so that across nearly sixty years—from “The Big Black and White Game” to *Let’s All Kill Constance*—Bradbury’s images of blackness play a significant role in his literary response to Mr. Electrico’s challenge to “live forever.”

**Keywords** African American culture, race, *Death is a Lonely Business*, crime fiction