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Theatricalism in the plays of William Saroyan

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University of Hawaii, 1990

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THEATRICALISM IN THE PLAYS OF WILLIAM SAROYAN

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN DRAMA AND THEATRE

MAY 1990

By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend particular thanks to Dr. Dennis Carroll, for his guidance throughout the writing of this dissertation; and to Ronald J. Mahoney, librarian at the Henry Madden Library, California State University at Fresno, and to the librarians at the Fresno County Free Library, for their gracious assistance in providing access to their Saroyan collections.

ABSTRACT

William Saroyan (1908-1981) was one of the leading American playwrights to attempt to create an alternative form to realism in the theatre. This concern led him to adopt various dramatic and theatrical techniques used in Symbolism, Surrealism, and Expressionism, as well as elements from popular American entertainment, such as vaudeville and the circus, without limiting himself to any particular dramatic movement. His stylistic variety makes it difficult to classify him according to the established norms of playwriting, but his plays can be explained by the term theatricalism, used by John Gassner to explain some plays and productions that intended to create "histrionic reality," as opposed to the illusory reality of realistic theatre. Gassner's definition of theatricalism provides a theoretical basis for understanding Saroyan's published theatrical plays.

Saroyan's plays show changes in theme and in dramatic and theatrical techniques. In the 1930s Saroyan fulfilled his initial intention to introduce the American theatre to themes about Americans in American settings. During this period he employed a variety of dramatic and theatrical techniques, including lighting, music, dance, and performance modes. In the 1940s he focused more on theatrical experimentation, exploring one particular technique in each play, while thematically his presentation of American lives and settings became more allegorical and symbolic.

In the 1950s he continued experimenting with one particular technique in each play, while seeking to universalize his presentations of character and exploration of themes.

Saroyan's experimentation with theatricalism is inseparable from his thematic exploration of the interplay between illusion and reality. He chose nonrealistic dramatic structures and techniques of theatricalism to affect the audience and suggest ways of using the creative imagination to improve human nature and create a humane community.

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PREFACE

William Saroyan is one of the most important playwrights of the mid-twentieth century who attempted to challenge the realistic tradition in the American theatre. His attempt continued throughout his long literary career, during which he experimented with a variety of theatrical techniques.

Saroyan's ambition as a playwright was great, as great as his proclamation of his own genius. He once told his son Aram that his writing was

an attempt to find out if a work of writing can be achieved out of a special program that will somehow have both freedom and form, for as you may know, I have for a long time been concerned about these opposites. I have wanted to find out if it is possible for me at any rate to balance them in a new work. (Balakian, "Saroyan on Saroyan" 358)

Throughout his career Saroyan tried to fulfill this task of creating a style of theatre and playwriting that combined "both freedom and form."

Many critics contend that Saroyan failed in this attempt, and never established his own dramatic style, or "essential Saroyan," as Balakian puts it. Saroyan's style, however, lies in the experimentation itself--an experimentation to test the boundaries of the theatre. Saroyan believed that realism had limitations that prevented it from fulfilling his purpose in writing. Although he did write some realistic plays, most of his published plays fit better

with the goal of the theatricalists, who in a broad sense strive to explore theatre activities through various nonrealistic theatrical techniques. In this dissertation I will discuss Saroyan's theatrical plays from the point of view of a theatricalist, stressing theme, dramatic structure, characterization, and the various theatricalist techniques Saroyan employed.

A variety of valuable research works is available on Saroyan. Edward Halsey Foster's William Saroyan provides a good introductory overview. David Stephan Calonne's William Saroyan covers Saroyan's published writings, with good insight. In his dissertation, "The Dissolution Process in the Early Plays of William Saroyan," Robert George Everding discusses both selected realistic and nonrealistic plays of Saroyan, stressing their dramatic forms. His careful analysis of Saroyan's plays provides insight particularly into their dramatic structure. Kenneth Lyon Fitts in his dissertation, "The Comic Vision in the Published Plays of William Saroyan," discusses the use of theatricalism in Saroyan's play as a comic technique, but tends to overlook any changes or development in Saroyan's use of theatrical techniques in various plays.

In my dissertation I will focus on theatricalism in Saroyan's published plays, and will focus on those plays that particularly feature theatricalist techniques, except for a few theatricalist dramatic sketches. Saroyan also wrote a number of unpublished plays. His unpublished works are held by the William Saroyan Foundation and kept at the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley, and I was not granted access to these works.

Because I had a chance to examine only a few copies of unpublished plays and miscellaneous writings found in other collections, I have chosen not to discuss Saroyan's unpublished works. I will discuss the published theatrical plays in chronological order, in order to examine any development in Saroyan's theatricalism.

My major research was done at four libraries, including the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley, the Henry Madden Library at the California State University at Fresno, and the Fresno County Free Library, in Fresno, California.

I have divided my work into five chapters. In Chapter 1 I briefly discuss biographical information about Saroyan as it relates to his use of theatricalism in his plays and set out a definition of theatricalism. In the following three chapters I have grouped the plays according to their chronological order: the 1930s, the 1940s, and the 1950s and 1960s. Each period shows some differences in the use of theatrical techniques. In the plays written in the 1930s, Saroyan was able to create a great emotional effect from theatricalism. He seemed to write according to his inspiration and imagination. In the plays written in the 1940s and 1950s, Saroyan began to be more aware of the theatrical effects, and carefully used them to reinforce his themes. The plays became less emotional and more symbolic and allegorical. In the plays written in the 1960s he attempted to deal with certain themes in his plays either symbolically or allegorically and used theatrical techniques to

embody them. While he continued to write for the theatre until he died in 1981, his plays were mostly unpublished and unperformed, and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the plays written in that period. Accordingly I have limited my discussion to his published theatrical plays through 1960.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

William Saroyan was one of the most promising young writers to emerge on the American literary and theatrical scene in the 1930s and the 1940s. He burst into public prominence in the mid-1930s, and remained there until his death in 1981. He launched his long literary career in 1934 with the publication of a collection of short stories, The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze. This book, the title story of which was awarded the O. Henry Memorial Award for the best short story of 1934, immediately brought him both fame and fortune, thereby resolving a variety of his driving hungers, including actual periods of near starvation, the need for artistic respect, public recognition, and self-expression.

At that time he was a twenty-six year old Armenian-American, who had come to San Francisco from Fresno, California, to realize his dream to be a writer. Prior to The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze he had only published some poetry and short stories in the Armenian journal Hairenik [Fatherland], published in Boston (Lee and Gifford 317). The next year, 1935, he wrote a one-act play, the Subway Circus, which was published later as part of the contents of Razzle Dazzle (1942), a collection of sixteen experimental dramatic pieces. Thus he began his career as both a short-story writer and playwright almost simultaneously, and throughout his career he

moved freely among the genres of short story, novel, play, and autobiography, in a prolific and almost ceaseless pursuit of self-expression and self-creation.

William Saroyan wrote dozens of plays during his life, including both published and unpublished works. His first major play, My Heart's in the Highlands, was produced by the Group Theatre in April 1939. Upon receiving a favorable critical and popular response, its run was extended. In October 1939, The Time of Your Life was put on stage by the Theatre Guild. The latter play earned him both a Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. It was the first play to win both. However, in the flamboyant manner that generally served as his public persona, he refused the Pulitzer "because he didn't like wealth patronizing art" (Najimian-Magarity 108).

In the following years, Saroyan wrote several other plays, including Love's Old Sweet Song (1940), Sweeney in the Trees (1940), Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning (1941), The Beautiful People (1941), Get Away Old Man (1943), Jim Dandy (1947), Don't Go Away Mad (1949), Sam Ego's House (1949), A Decent Birth, A Happy Funeral (1949), The Cave Dwellers (1957), The Dogs or The Paris Comedy (1960), Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All or The London Comedy (1960), and various other plays. Saroyan usually wrote quickly, as well as voluminously. He wrote My Heart's in the Highlands in three days ("To Be a Writer" 105), The Time of Your Life in six days (Floan 14), and his ballet-play, The Great American Goof (1940), in exactly thirty-three minutes

(Nathan, Entertainment 44). He wrote about "five hundred short stories (by his own count) between 1934 and 1939" (Foster 38), and a number of plays, both full-length and one-act, between 1939 and 1943, although many were never produced. In fact, throughout most of his career Saroyan wrote many more plays than were produced or even published. By his own account:

After the first two plays in 1939 came "Love's Old Sweet Song" with Walter Huston, "The Beautiful People" with Eugene Loring, "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning" with Canada Lee, "Get Away, Old Man" with Richard Widmark, "Hello Out There" with Eddie Dowling, "The Cave Dwellers" with Eugene Leontovich, and that's all on Broadway. In London in 1960 I wrote, produced and directed "Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All." In 1961 I wrote, produced and directed three plays under the general heading of "Trash Along the Wabash." These performed works constitute less than a quarter of the plays by me in manuscript. ("How to Write a Great Play" 5)

Saroyan's plays typically received two different responses from the critics. On the positive side, George Jean Nathan, for example, acclaimed Saroyan's work, pointing out clearly the features of his plays that proved attractive to many critics. Nathan considered My Heart's in the Highlands, The Time of Your Life, and The Beautiful People to be "dramatizations of emotion," and stated that they "as such are essentially much more readily assimilated than emotion dramatized in terms of thought--or, more usually, what passes for thought" (Entertainment 50). Furthermore, he expressed his belief that Saroyan had "the dramatic gift of making his

emotional syrups not only palatable to the most realistically minded auditor but immensely moving" (Entertainment 54). Similarly John Dolman wrote that "Jim Dandy is a pioneer effort in a field that seems to promise enormous potentialities for the future. . . . Saroyan has shown us a range of opportunity in the theatre that we have been missing" (75).

However, other critics expressed a less favorable judgment. For example, the director and critic Harold Clurman represented the reaction of a larger set of critics who, although initially intrigued by Saroyan's plays, soon lost their taste for them. Clurman mentioned that "When I read My Heart's in the Highlands, I was captured by its freedom, simplicity, hobo charm, delicate sentiment, and humor" (Fervent Years 228). On the other hand, he did not value the merits of The Time of Your Life as much as those of My Heart's in the Highlands. The Time of Your Life, he explained, "annoyed me more than it amused me. There was about it a certain self-indulgence, a flagrant braggadocio of undiscipline, a thoughtless and almost cheap bathos that I could not abide" (Fervent Years 251). Clurman added, "When Saroyan discussed the play with me, I enjoined him to write with more precision and plot line."

These two opinions were echoed by other theatre critics. A minority of reviewers praised Saroyan's plays, while others simply dismissed them. In Broadway in Review John Mason Brown wrote: "Without being freakish or objectionably arty, Mr. Saroyan has managed to widen the theatre's horizons by escaping from facts and reason and making the unintelligible seem intelligible" (186). Those

critics who praised the plays were infatuated by their poetic, emotional effects, as well as by Saroyan's dramatic style, which is free from the constraints of any particular dramatic movement. They admired the freedom of Saroyan's talent, which enabled him to use imaginative theatrical techniques to portray vividly the dramatic situations and themes of the plays.

This new dramatic style, however, often puzzled other critics, especially those who were anxious to classify Saroyan's work according to the established modes of playwriting. Despite the obvious charms of Saroyan's plays, many considered them devoid of necessary dramatic form and coherent, psychological characterization. For example, in his review of The Time of Your Life, Richard Watts wrote that the play is "formless, plotless, and shamelessly rambling" (New York Theatre Critics' Review 1940 464), and he was one of the critics who liked the play. Otis Ferguson, while praising some aspects of My Heart's in the Highlands, saw it as

one of those frank evasions of the demands that a play be made like a play which tact rushes in to cover with the term experimental drama. The play shoots off at some vague cosmic angles in the later section and this padding of the original idea has muffled its clear effect without adding anything (the old Saroyan trick of making his meaning high and inscrutable when he hasn't any). (New Republic 98 [1939]: 379)

Saroyan, however, was well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the dramatic forms that he adopted for writing his

plays. He expressed a strong disapproval and disappointment at the plays produced on Broadway, and gave notice of his intention to create his own unique dramatic style. He described his intentions as follows:

twenty years old and in New York for the first time, I visited the theatre, and how it stank. And I read some of the Burns Mantle collections of the so-called Best Plays and what crap they were. . . . I loved the theatre, I wanted to see some real theatre for a change, why shouldn't I myself at least give a hint what the theatre might be? . . . The hint was . . . namely, lay off the interpreting and fancy talk and fretting about form and detail and tradition and go on in and do what you think you ought to do. ("To Be a Writer" 104-105)

Thus after having a few short stories published, he set out to create "real theatre." The result was My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life.

It is clear that Saroyan from the outset intended to write his plays against the realistic mode of playwriting. This was a deliberate aim on his part. Successful communication for Saroyan meant success in giving "a hint" about what the theatre should be, as he saw it. Throughout his literary career, Saroyan tenaciously kept to this standpoint of providing "hints" in writing plays. He neither developed his own formal theory about drama and theatre nor adhered to the particular practices of any dramatic movement of his time. Principally he wrote plays inspired by his own spirit of experimentation, and that spirit prevented his theatrical writing from solidifying into a predictable pattern.

Saroyan continuously sought to explore the unlimited domain of drama and theatre by revolting against the tradition of realistic drama and by employing various theatrical techniques in experimental ways. The versatility of his plays and theatrical experimentation makes it difficult to classify his writing according to the criteria of the various twentieth-century dramatic movements, such as Expressionism, Symbolism, or Surrealism. Saroyan certainly did not intend to commit himself to any of these dramatic movements. Instead he believed in the free exercise of the all-encompassing and transforming possibilities of the individual imagination.

Saroyan's opposition to a realistic mode of playwriting is best allied, for theoretical understanding, with the idea of theatricalism. In defining theatricalism in Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama, the critic and theatre historian John Gassner quoted Saroyan's explanation of his play, Sweeney in the Trees. In the preface to the play Saroyan writes:

A play, a dream, a poem, a travesty, a fable, a symphony, a parable, a comedy, a tragedy, a farce, a vaudeville, a song and dance, a statement on money, a report on life, an essay on art and religion, a theatrical entertainment, a circus, anything you like, whatever you please. (106)

Gassner thought that this quotation explicitly captured the spirit of theatricalism. Gassner classified modern drama and theatre into two major trends: in his terms, realism and antirealism. He

considered realism as the modern classical form, and the other nonrealistic dramatic forms as theatricalism.

Realistic dramatic art, whatever its limitations, has been to modern theatre what Shakespearean dramaturgy was to the Elizabethan period. . . . The nonrealistic modes of theatre fall more or less under the one category of theatricalism. But theatricalism has not yet acquired any classical configurations because it has not found a consistent form. The idea of theatricalist art has been with us throughout the century, but its various formal and stylistic manifestations have been tentative, elusive, or fractured--as many an expressionist play, for example, has been fractured. (Directions 140-141)

Gassner's definition of theatricalism can be summarized as follows: theatricalism is initially defined as any dramatic or theatrical practice that in a broad sense opposes modern realism. It cannot be defined by referring to any particular set of necessary characteristics in the way that most other modern dramatic and theatrical movements can. Theatricalism is more pluralistic than any of them because it includes anything outside of the category of realism. By nature, it is a category that tries to accommodate all the experimental varieties of theatre that oppose the realistic tradition, and so it is a category whose definition must be open-ended and pluralistic. The devices of theatricalism are unlimited. Hence it is easier to define it by its objectives than by its techniques. What differentiates theatricalism from other dramatic movements are its different objectives.

The primary objective of theatricalism is stated by Gassner as follows:

For the theatricalist, the object of action and of all other "imitative" elements is not imitation but creativeness, and a special kind of creativeness at that. The realists would agree, of course, as to the value of creativeness. But the theatricalist goes one step further, and that step is the truly decisive one for the theory and practice of pure theatricalism. (Directions 141-142)

According to Gassner, theatricalists pursue the creation of "histrionic reality." This is a concept opposed to the notions of illusion and representation in realistic plays. Realistic theatre relies on what Gassner calls "illusionism." It attempts to represent, onstage, an illusion of offstage reality. Theatricalists seek to show that whatever is created in the theatre is a distinct reality from that which exists outside the theatre. Whatever character the theatrical experience possesses is not due to its attempt to represent some experience from elsewhere. On the contrary, the theatrical experience has a reality that exists and takes on meaning within its own self-defined context.

Saroyan did not mean to argue that everything outside the theatrical experience is devalued. What Saroyan sought in his plays is histrionic reality. He sought to provide an experience designed by creative activity, with the aid of dramatic and theatrical means, that is no less real or important than the representation of realistic illusion.

The theatricalist's further step away from realism is the belief that "dramatic action is not an experience offered as a slice of real or imaginary life, but histrionic reality. Performance should be openly histrionic" (Directions 145). Theatricalist theatre, that is, should be avowedly self-conscious and express recognition of its existence in and as theatre, and not pretend to be presenting a slice of reality outside the theatre. Bernard Hewitt, in his History of the Theatre, observed that "theatricalism frankly accepted the fact a play is performed on a stage for an audience; it made no attempt to create an illusion of life. . . . An audience should come to the theatre to enjoy its intensified theatricality, not to forget that they are witnessing a performance" (117).

However, this does not necessarily mean that theatricalist theatre is completely devoid of realistic elements. As Gassner points out, "it is unnecessary to banish all illusionism from the theatre in order to retheatricalize it. It is indeed almost impossible for the stage to avoid conveying some degree of illusion, unless the work is extravagantly playful and not intended to be taken seriously at all" (Directions 161). Neither realism nor theatricalism totally excludes the elements of the other. Whether a play is a theatricalist work or a realistic one is determined by its emphasis and by whether it concentrates on maintaining illusion or breaking it.

Saroyan shows both extreme and moderate tendencies in his theatricalism. In Razzle Dazzle he experiments with extreme theatricalism. He subtitles the collection The Human Ballet, Opera

and Circus or There's Something I Got to Tell you. Being Many Kinds of Short Plays as Well As The Story of the Writing of Them. These short plays are also individually subtitled as a ballet-play, a ballet-poem, an Italian opera in English, a dream for the stage, a vaudeville, and so on. In his longer or full-length plays, Saroyan does not show that extreme tendency toward using theatricalism. Instead of experimenting with theatricalism for its own sake, he attempts to incorporate the theatricalism as part of his plays, in order to either reinforce his themes or enhance the emotions expressed in the play.

This theatrical tendency in Saroyan's plays was determined principally by two things--Saroyan's perception of the nature and role of theatre, and the themes of his plays. Saroyan's plays, as with most of his writings, result largely from his experiences as a child, an experience of a harsh reality. William Saroyan barely knew his father, Armenak Saroyan, an Armenian minister and poet, who wrote poems in Armenian. In The Bicycle Rider in Beverly Hills Saroyan claimed that one of the main reasons for him to become a writer was because his father was one too (Foster 12). Armenak died when William was three years old, and his mother could not support the family or keep it together. At the age of three, Saroyan was sent to the Fred Finch Orphanage in Oakland, with his brother and two sisters, so that his mother could work ("Impressions of William Saroyan" 7). His family did not reunite again until he was eight, and they always remained quite poor.

Considering his difficult childhood, it is very likely that the theatre, in particular his youthful experiences of the circus and vaudeville (Saroyan, "The Circus" 20), provided Saroyan with a sense of fun and happiness that he might not have been able to realize in his daily life. The circus, vaudeville, the music and stories and remembrances of his relatives--these were areas in which Saroyan could see his dreams and wishes fulfilled. In fact, Saroyan expected and demanded of the theatre and of his own works the same effect that he had received from these early experiences. It was natural then for him to use in his plays the theatrical techniques of the circus and vaudeville. It is thus no surprise that his very first dramatic piece is named Subway Circus: a Vaudeville (1935).

Above all, Saroyan believed that the theatre should be entertaining. He stated in the preface to Razzle Dazzle:

The theatre--all theatre--should be fun, from beginning to end, inside and out, backstage and front, but it isn't. . . . By fun I do not mean trivialness. Real fun is incapable of being trivial, and nothing human has greater dignity or more importance than fun, or livingness. I mean ordinary, everyday, natural fun. (xvi)

The greatest entertainment, the greatest recreation, he argued, is the histrionic re-creation of experience in the creative imagination. Nathan once quoted Saroyan's ideas on using a bare stage for The Hero of the World (1940). In a letter to Nathan, Saroyan wrote: "Why should there be scenery on a stage? A bare stage is enough

in its own possible illusion. It can represent anything to the imagination. I think I've got something there!" ("Saroyan: Whirling Dervish of Fresno" 305). The theatre is best suited, Saroyan felt, to offer the audience, actors, playwrights, and all involved, a chance for recreation in an environment created just out of the imagination.

He wrote a similar statement about the importance of fun in plays in the preface to A Decent Birth, a Happy Funeral:

The only noise on a stage that I am able not to regard as offensive is the noise which is inevitable when people are having fun: music, singing, laughing, dancing, playing. In short, staying alive is what's tragic; hurting, killing, being hurt or committing suicide are esthetic sensationalism and backwardness. Can there be, then, an exciting and powerful drama in which all behavior is reasonable or tries to be, and no one is spiritually tortured or physically annihilated? (210)

Such a view led him to explore and employ theatrical techniques that could provide fun: the unreal, fantasylike, transformation of experience into "theatrical reality." In an article titled "Two Theatres," in Theatre Arts, written early in his career, he contrasted two theatres--the theatres of the real world and the stage. He wrote:

Everything that goes on in the artificial theatre . . . is again a part of the only real play. . . . That play, though, is too big, too complicated, too endless, too contradictory, formless, meaningless, crazy, brutal, and lovely, and everything else to be entertaining to a human being. . . . So we have the other theatre and the other play. . . . Most

of all, though, I have liked the play. That is, the granted unreality, as when children say Play like. (793-794)

He believed that real life outside the theatre is always harsh, and that the theatre should be a place where people can see their dreams and visions realized.

Saroyan is distinguished from many of the playwrights who were his contemporaries by the content, as well as by the treatment, of the thematic matter of his plays. He often dealt with the life of simple and good-natured people in their varying individual situations, whereas the playwrights who were his contemporaries dealt with matters concerning the changing social and political problems of the 1930s and 1940s. Although he seemed to remain aloof from those problems, he was not totally indifferent to them. However, when he expressed his concerns about those problems, as in Jim Dandy, Sam Ego's House, or The Slaughter of the Innocents, he expanded his theme. He transformed existing difficulties into the problems of the well-being of the whole human race, instead of narrowing them down to the problems of particular people at a certain time. For example, Jim Dandy and Sam Ego's House do not concern only America, although he mentions that Sam Ego's House is about America and its dream. Similarly Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All, or the London Comedy is not presented in a way that limits its focus to London bankers. His focus was always on the possibilities of human beings to transform their existence and their environment from a harsh, inhumane one to a true home or haven. Especially he was concerned with the

different ways and difficulties involved in pursuing an ongoing quest to live a happy and worthwhile life.

Saroyan believed that having a good nature should lead to a good life. Throughout his career, he maintained the belief that possessing good-heartedness should lead to happiness. However, Saroyan often expressed strong doubts as to whether the world is set up in such a way as to fulfill that moral obligation. All of his plays have moments of great anger or bewilderment about the failure of human beings to create a world in which the good prosper. This is strongly presented in Saroyan's recurring use of the catch phrase "something's wrong somewhere." This realization is first voiced by a young boy, Johnny in the early play My Heart's in the Highlands, and is echoed by the grandfather in the late work, Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All.

In contrast to this unsatisfactory reality Saroyan offers histrionic reality. As Kenneth Lyon Fitts points out, Saroyan is interested in the creative act itself, "since the act is a positive force through which the artist contacts others" (90). The theatre, at least, should remain an area where dreams of innocence, compassion, and community that are unfulfilled outside the theatre can be realized-- in the hope that those dreams can then be extended to the world outside the theatre, or failing that, in the hope that at least the theatrical experience will have provided a brief respite from the harsh onslaughts of reality. This thematic matter heightens the allegorical nature of many of his plays, such as Sam Ego's House.

Saroyan discussed his desire to write stories, in a passage that he might have had in mind in writing his plays as well: "I started to write in order to improve myself, and then went on to write in order to improve everybody else. That must surely be the long and short of it, as far as I am concerned" ("To Be a Writer" 101).

Saroyan attempted to provide solutions or cope with the problems of life by solving a more fundamental and yet challenging problem: improving human nature. His solution is that human nature does not need improving, that the most fundamental aspects of human character involve compassion, creativity, and playfulness. However, Saroyan considered that most people's lives, and most societies, are structured so as to alienate themselves from this fundamental nature, as is implied in the phrase "something's wrong somewhere." Unlike some of his contemporaries, whose plays sought changes in external forces such as social and political systems, Saroyan turned his interest to the personal and yet universal aspects of human nature.

In an article "How to See," Saroyan wrote that "The problem of the world is inevitably the problem of each person in it, and the place to start improving is in each person" (206). Thus Saroyan's ultimate intention seems to be that the theatre should provide a place where people can reestablish contact with the positive aspects of their nature, and provide "an emotional expression of universal experience" (Balakian, Armenian-American Writer 13).

Saroyan has often been charged with false optimism, with maintaining a deliberate ignorance of his time, and with escape

from the real concerns of life. Edmund M. Gagey criticizes Saroyan's plays as "often infantile, repetitious, and unduly naive, showing little contact with the real world" (118). William Fisher describes Saroyan as "politically and economically blind" (337). The critics of his time were more used to realistic plays that dealt with the social and political problems of the 1930s and 1940s, such as the plays of Clifford Odets. Saroyan seemed either to ignore or avoid current pressing problems, and to provide the audience only with escapism. A common charge against his works was that they deliberately fostered naive, mindless ignorance. Joseph Remenyi, for example, complains: "The burlesque performance of his writing is often pointless because there is no focusing intelligence to support it. . . . Saroyan is gossiping about goodness" (96). In a slightly kinder manner, Mary McCarthy notes that Saroyan "is still able to look at the world with the eyes of a sensitive newsboy and to see it eternally brand-new and touched with wonder. The price is that the boundaries of this world are the boundaries of the newsboy's field of vision" (Sights 46).

In the preface to Love's Old Sweet Song, Saroyan defended his plays as follows:

By mindlessness I believe the critics mean absence of specific instruction to society or the state on how to behave, and presence of immediate living. In the play form, among other things, there must be play. It is impossible to exclude thought or belief or faith from a play, but these things are in a play after living is in it, and they are in a play as tone, not as things by themselves. Since the theater is not an adult continuation school, those

who come to the theater must be entertained before they are instructed. The difference between my thinking, it would appear, and the thinking of others is that mine operates from beginnings long ago and not from headlines and news in today's paper. What appears to the glib and superficial mind or sensibility as mindlessness is, in reality, a depth and fullness so far removed from cheap thinking that it bewilders. The critic with political bias, for instance, cannot accept my thought simply because it puts him out of work. (164)

The type of criticism Saroyan had in mind here is exemplified by Eric Bentley's description of Saroyan in The Playwright as Thinker as a "slickster troubled with immortal longings" whose plays express "a lower-middle class mentality" (12). All Saroyan's work is soft at the core, Bentley claimed, "because he is in his work a moral and aesthetic appeaser" (13). It is not the case, however, that Saroyan was a mindless appeaser, but rather than he sought to be a playwright who aimed at entertaining people while improving them. The actual object of his writing was self-transformation. He wanted to teach himself how to live. As David Stephen Calonne states:

Through the play of art the self makes contact with the deepest realities of life. Drama is an entrance, a magic opening into another world, and the theater is the place where the miraculous transformation of chaotic reality into form and imagination occurs. It is this relationship between reality, imagination, and the search for true being that Saroyan's plays seek to explore. (74)

Through his plays Saroyan was able to envision the person that he would have liked to be. In desiring to teach himself and others

about the proper way to live, Saroyan explored various aspects of living with a good heart, despite widely different, harsh circumstances. He sought to present various manifestations of the same theme--living with purity of heart.

In essence Saroyan only had one theme--the boundless good nature of the human heart. But the boundlessness of that nature, and hence of Saroyan's theme, means that it is ever capable of new transformations. It is those transformations that Saroyan sought to express with theatricalism. As McCarthy observes: "Though Saroyan's work is all of a piece, and the same themes and symbols recur, you will rarely find a constellation of symbols repeating itself, you will rarely get the same effect warmed up for a second serving" (Sights 47). In addition, by showing through theatrical techniques that theatre reality is histrionic--an ever new creative performance--Saroyan sought to teach us that reality offstage is also continually being created, and that in both instances the best creations should involve good-hearted, serious, fun.

CHAPTER 2
THE 1930s:
SUBWAY CIRCUS (1935), MY HEARTS IN THE HIGHLANDS (1939),
AND THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE (1939)

As a reaction to the realism then prevailing in the American theatre, and in an effort to express his vision of the interplay of reality and illusion, which serves as one of his major themes, Saroyan displays a great stylistic variety in his plays. His multifaceted approaches to and expressions of his themes are presented by an abundance of theatrical devices. The most notable theatrical devices he repeatedly employs involve the use of setting, music, lighting, and a performance mode composed of pantomime, dance, acrobatics, and monologue. This compounding of various elements in his theatrical plays also originates from his notion that "a play--any work of art--should be several things, all inseparable, all integrated, all constituting the whole" (Sweeney in the Trees Preface). As a result, he experimented with many elements even from the circus and vaudeville. In this chapter I will discuss Saroyan's three earliest plays and their theatricalism: Subway Circus, My Heart's in the Highlands, and The Time of Your Life.

Subway Circus, My Heart's in the Highlands, and The Time of Your Life display Saroyan's interest in exploring new realms of the theatre. Subway Circus, Saroyan's very first dramatic piece, is

extremely theatrical and has most of the theatrical techniques that he would use in his playwriting. The play shows Saroyan's persistent thematic concerns and standpoint on the world of the theatre, but it particularly reveals his experimentations with theatricalism.

In My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life, Saroyan's two most popular plays, the theatrical techniques are better incorporated in reinforcing theme and mood. While the meaning of Subway Circus is abstract and vague and its theatricalism complicated, My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life are less abstract and less vague and deal with more concrete subjects, specifically, Johnny's family life and the dreams of the customers in Nick's bar. The theatricalism of these plays not only highlights the mood but also strengthens the thematic meaning and expresses distinctions in character.

Subway Circus: A Vaudeville (1935)

Subway Circus: A Vaudeville, a one-act play in ten scenes, was released within a collection of plays, Razzle Dazzle (1942). The play is based on his impression of New York (Lee and Gifford 11). Saroyan said once that as a twenty-year old in New York, going to work each day, "the people on the subway to me were everything else in the world as well as people. One was a potato, one was an onion, one was a lizard . . . and I wanted to write a book, an important book called the Subway" (Basmadjian 146). Instead he

wrote this dramatic piece, in which he already shows the kind of play and the concept of the theatre that he would explore in the future. As the title indicates, in this play Saroyan experiments with the nature and techniques of a circus. Various incidents, fantastic or realistic, occur simultaneously, and the spectator is momentarily relocated to a world of fantasy and illusion.

George R. Kernodle, writing of Saroyan's theatrical work in general, points out a recurring feature that is very apparent in Subway Circus: "Saroyan is as much interested in dreams as any of the Surrealists--indeed all his plays have a dreamlike quality. He is constantly playing with illusion and fantasy" (201). The spectator is never led to believe that the incidents seen on stage are real. Saroyan is not what Gassner might have called an illusionist: an author of plays that the audience is expected to see as representations of reality. However, as Kernodle points out, Saroyan is not a Surrealist. According to Kernodle, unlike Surrealists, who use dreams as therapeutic devices, Saroyan "uses dreams to release the spontaneous creative power of a soul that has discovered God. Further, his plays are constantly concerned with how dreams become reality" (Kernodle 201). Thus Saroyan floats back and forth between realities and fantasies, and his plays seek to entertain the audience while attempting to suggest on stage universal and perpetual truths.

Saroyan believed that like a circus, the theatre is a place where a spectator can watch ordinary daily life in a different way. In "How to See," Saroyan argues:

People seem to see only the most grotesque images of life and the world, skipping over the magnificences of the ordinary . . . the objects of reality deserved only to be known through the images of the various letters of the alphabet joined together in a word to stand for the symbol of the objects: its name. Leaf. Cow. Human being. Gorilla. That is why circuses are continuously fascinating to everybody, no matter how old or young, how undeveloped or cultured. Words written or spoken have almost no part in the reality of a circus going on. (205)

Everyday events, by virtue of the manner in which they are brought forth from the busy context of our daily lives, are shown as magical and enlivening. The theatre then becomes a place where ordinary activities are transformed and shown as wondrous.

This concept of the theatre led Saroyan to experiment with various theatrical techniques in attempting to make his plays visual, alive, stimulating, and, above all, different from the realistic plays of his time. Saroyan dislikes what he considered to be the lack of playfulness in most plays. In the preface to Razzle Dazzle he writes, "the theatre--all theatre--should be fun, from beginning to end, inside and out, backstage and front" (xvi). It is that quality that he attempts to capture on stage and awaken in the audience. This emphasis on play, as Calonne points out, both distinguishes Saroyan's dramatic work and greatly confounded his early audiences (73).

Saroyan's view of the theatrical event and the meaning of the theatre differs from those of traditional realistic playwrights. To

him a theatrical event is a means by which both the performers and the spectators meet and experience a transformed world, which is created as a counterpart to the daily, ordinary, and conventionally accepted life of a human being.

Saroyan's plays often present dreamers in pursuit of self-creation, attempting to realize self-fulfillment in community with other dreamers. That community is symbolized by the theatrical community of audience and performers creating a histrionic reality, which can serve as a model for the creation of a humane community outside the theatre. In writing about The Time of Your Life, Gassner noted this hope of Saroyan "that in the theatre, if not in the real world, the gathering forces of evil could be stayed long enough for his audiences to recall their essential humanity" (Masters 699).

By using theatrical devices to highlight and focus our attention on ordinary, common activities and their histrionic potential, Saroyan attempts to create in his theatre the same effects--fun and playfulness--that a circus is able to create. A circus transforms common activities into experiences full of excitement, drama, and wonder. Since external constraints prevent most of our daily experience from revealing those qualities, Saroyan wants his theatre to be a place where they can be expressed, and he invites the audience to partake in the playfulness of his theatrical writings.

What almost everyone else seems to consider the real world is described by him as an uninhabitable place for the truly living. Art in general, and the theatre specifically, thus present an opportunity

for the truly living to create a livable place, a world which they can joyfully inhabit. The theatrical world may be an illusion, but it is a hospitable one, in contrast to the world outside the theatre.

A performance, for Saroyan, does not have to be the embodiment of a play, in the sense of a playscript, but can be any kind of playing that fascinates the spectator and that can "approximate the simultaneity and disorder of events in the world" (Razzle Dazzle 461). Saroyan was fascinated by the everyday process by which people create their worlds of experience out of "simultaneity and disorder." In Don't Go Away Mad, Saroyan writes: "Out of ignorance and desperation, poverty and pain, for instance, emerges intelligence and grace, humor and resignation, decency and integrity . . . I don't know why or how precisely this sort of thing happens, but I do know that it does happen" (25). Theatrically he sought to present examples of that creation process. It is up to the playwright, he thought, to provide a sufficiently entertaining variety of play from which the spectators and performers could create histrionic reality.

The spectator plays a major role in many of Saroyan's plays, perhaps most noticeably in Subway Circus, Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, and Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All. He wanted the audience to be conscious of its role in the creation of histrionic reality. Just as someone going to a circus would expect to attend with an attitude conducive to joining in the excitement, in contrast to the conventions of realistic theatre, Saroyan felt that theatre goers should be aware that more is demanded of them than

passive observation. Theatre goers should come to the theatre with the same excitement that they would bring to a circus; and playwrights should reward them with similarly entertaining experiences.

In his notes to Subway Circus, Saroyan further explains his fascination with the medium. The circus, by being predominantly physical and nonintellectual, reveals the spiritual truth about the human animal, he claims (Razzle Dazzle 460). It expresses our animal reality on earth can be joyous and enlivening. Saroyan argues, the circus has created at least a momentarily habitable world for performers and spectators. It does this by overwhelming their critical intelligence, through spectacle and by bombarding their senses, and thus by inviting them to join on an emotional level in creating the world.

The circus is even entitled to dramatic review by the theatrical press, Saroyan claimed, although it relies mostly on physical rather than verbal expression. What a circus format does theatrically is make obvious an often overlooked fact of all theatre: that the enjoyment and understanding of it can never be passive. The audience must be conscious of the fact that it is part of the theatrical experience. The very least a playwright can do for an audience in return is to make the experience fun, to provide some unexpected spectacle or amusement or joy.

The circus combines all forms of human entertainment in one. Similarly Saroyan uses the circus metaphor "to suggest some of the potentialities of our theatre" (Razzle Dazzle 464). Through theatrical

devices, he seeks to bring together various arts and crafts related to the theatre but not specifically employed by it. In utilizing a variety of entertainment forms, the Subway Circus shares similarities with the circus, while thematically it deals with the relationship between real life and illusion.

In Subway Circus, subtitled A Vaudeville, Saroyan opposes realist theatre and experiments with alternative approaches. He rejects the well-made plot of realist plays and instead composes a plot or dramatic structure by using a series of events that are either loosely connected or complete in themselves. The characters are types or symbols. They are neither three-dimensional nor individualized, because Saroyan intends to highlight a general truth about human nature and experience rather than focus on individual psychology and a particular experience.

Saroyan's primary interest lies in presenting a complete world in the theatre, and in the development of theatrical devices that can effectively serve his purpose. In this play, however, he does not consistently use any of the particular theatrical devices, such as monologues, music, and lighting that he emphasizes in his later plays. Instead he explores additional techniques, essentially of physical movement, taken from vaudeville, Surrealism, and Expressionism.

Subway Circus is made up of ten short scenes. Its dramatic structure is not based on cause and effect of any action. In fact, the ten scenes of the play have no obvious relation to each other, but compose a circular play designed to show the whole world. Saroyan

proclaimed that "There is only one theatre, the world. Only one play, mortality. Only one player, man" ("Two Theatres" 793). Thus in this respect, a well-structured plot, one with exposition, complication, climax, and resolution, is not necessary. It is not plot itself that is important, since all plots are seen as fundamentally one: the one play, mortality. What is of interest to Saroyan is how to present an ordinary event as an extraordinary one and how to make the audience experience their living more fully and freshly.

Unrelated scenes may serve as a dramatic structure for Saroyan in the sense that this is the way the world is made. Any event can reveal some aspects of the one true play, the ongoing circus. In an important sense, Saroyan deliberately tried to write plays with similar subjects over and over again in order to present new possibilities of drama and theatre.

The dramatic structure of Subway Circus is similar to that of the plays of Expressionism. In discussing the characteristics of Expressionist drama, Walter H. Sokel states that the "plots are disjointed and confusing, or cease to be recognizable as such. . . . The extremism and distortion of Expressionist drama derive from its closeness to the dream. In its crude aspects, Expressionism is dramatized daydream and fantasy" (xiii-xiv). The dramatic structure of Subway Circus is similarly "disjointed and confusing." Often in Expressionist plays, such as Georg Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight, a major character goes on a journey, comes across different situations, and reveals various subjective perceptions in response to each event and situation. Similarly in Subway Circus,

each scene unfolds like a panorama. Together the scenes are designed to present the dreams of passengers in the subway. Although Subway Circus shares some dramatic and theatrical techniques with Expressionism in presenting subjective images and in dramatizing daydreams and fantasy, it lacks extreme and distorted images, which are a primary feature of Expressionist plays. While adopting various techniques from Expressionism, Surrealism, and Symbolism, Saroyan uses them to create a different effect in his theatre--a histrionic reality. This is shown in Subway Circus by the importance of the role of the spectators.

The actual audience is a major character in Subway Circus, and goes through experiences similar to those of the protagonists in Expressionist plays. In Subway Circus, however, the subjective perceptions and reactions of the audience are not described onstage. Subway Circus is built on the assumption that the theatrical activity includes the spectator as part of the whole event. This idea is further developed in such later plays as Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning.

While there is no character or incident that ties all the scenes together, each character represents a facet of the "one player, man." Characters in each scene, passengers on the subway, are types. Each scene has a main character who is essentially a dreamer, some minor characters, and a painted backdrop. The basic scene of the play is a portion of the inside of a subway train, and the stage is divided into two sections, one representing the subway and the other the dream world. A painted backdrop indicates the locale of

the dreamer. The basic sound effect is the sound of the subway, moving at various rates of speed and stopping. Those are the recurring elements in Subway Circus. When each scene ends, the characters resubmerge into the subway, a symbol of the real world that exists outside of the theatre. Except for the common elements shared by each scene, the play has no dramatic structure based on a unified, dramatic action.

Subway Circus has neither an exposition nor a resolution. It merely displays a series of spontaneous and seemingly unrelated events. It may appear that the incidents are randomly ordered and could be rearranged at will. However, the incidents are arranged to suggest the recurring patterns of human experience. The first scene of the play is titled "Questions and Answers." This scene provides the play with the theme that we need to question things which are taken for granted.

In this scene, a teacher asks a boy a typical school question: "If a farmer has seven apples, and he gives away three apples, how many apples remain?" (468) The boy answers: "What kind of apples?" The boy's answer is quite unexpected and seemingly inappropriate to the question. However, the boy's attitude is what Saroyan seeks: an imagination or a spirit that does not take for granted ordinary ways of thinking and rejects education or whatever forces shape our ways of thinking in unquestioning accordance with accepted norms and views.

Saroyan believed that the ordinary way of looking at things prevents us from experiencing them in a fresh manner and further

prevents us from experiencing ourselves and the world as alive. In one of his later plays, The Cave Dwellers, a character named the Queen remarks: "I intend to stay alive as if this were the morning of the first day and I a young girl with the world to seek" (58). Unexpected surprise is one goal that Saroyan hopes to achieve in his plays, by using theatrical devices to dislocate the usual patterns of thinking and experiencing.

The last scene of Subway Circus ends with a peddler meeting the morning: a new beginning of the recurring cycle of passage. In between these two scenes are presented various events of life in New York, happening around the subway. Thus the dramatic structure is not only linear but also circular.

Subway Circus is, according to Saroyan, an attempt to describe "the world of one man at a time: the inner, the boundless, the ungeographical world of wakeful dream" (Razzle Dazzle 464). No one scene captures the whole of one person's experience, but taken together the ten scenes are meant to be a "theatrical history of life on earth" (Razzle Dazzle 462). In this theatrical microcosm of the world he describes various events that unfold on the borderline between fantasy and reality.

In the middle of a realistic scene i, subtitled "Questions and Answers," a moment of silence is followed by a magnified whisper of a boy's voice over a microphone, thus creating a Surrealistic effect.

Scene ii, subtitled "Man, the Acrobat," contains no dialogue, and the only action is the movement of a crippled man. The setting of

this scene is as follows: "A back-drop on which is painted an abstract city over which a trapeze swings and makes shadows. The city is full of large staring eyes. The stage is a dance floor" (470). As soon as he appears on stage, the cripple begins to dance:

The CRIPPLE walks to the Center of the dance floor and in the dim light casts away his deformity, casting away his coat. He lifts himself out of his crooked body and stands tall and free. A slow sentimental waltz. A WOMAN walks to him from the darkness. They dance. THE CITY and THE WORLD stare and speak: one word: over a microphone: Look. Look. Look. (470-471)

The audience witnesses the cripple's transformation into a dancer right before its eyes, and the imaginary voices of "Look. Look. Look." are heard on stage. The theatrical technique of having a character undergo a transformation before the eyes of the audience is also used to good effect in later plays, including Jim Dandy, in which Fishkin transforms into Jim Dandy, and Sam Ego's House, in which three young men are transformed from guardian angels to soldiers to Mr. Urge's sons. It is a particularly effective visual technique to suggest the transformative possibilities of the theatre, of our dreams, and of ourselves.

In scene iii, subtitled "The Lovers," Saroyan presents young lovers. The dreamers of the scene are a stenographer and a clerk, who are seated together in the subway. The backdrop is an empty movie screen:

The GIRL is at the desk typing. The CLERK brings her some papers, moving automatically, and goes away without even noticing her. . . . The CLERK returns with more papers and this time notices her. . . . He would like to speak to her, but cannot do so. (Staring at her his feeling is articulated).

THE VOICE: Mary. I love you, Mary. I love you because you are here with me, because you are so small and sad, because you work so hard, . . . At the river we will take off our clothes and swim together.

THE GIRL: Well, what are you waiting for?

THE BOY: Nothing. (He goes away.)

(THE GIRL begins to type again. The scene darkens and the empty screen fills with moving pictures of Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Fredric March, Paul Muni, and a couple of others. Flashes of each, all silent, while the girl types and stares.) (472-473)

In their dream, another dream and reality are juxtaposed. The scene ends when the girl turns down the boy's proposal:

THE GIRL: I'll love you. We won't get married. I don't want to be anybody's wife. We'll go to a hotel tonight. (She stares at the empty screen.) (475)

These young lovers prefigure the young lovers of many plays, such as Dudley and Elsie in The Time of Your Life, and a young girl and a boy delivering milk in The Cave Dwellers.

Some scenes in Subway Circus involve a more realistic treatment, such as the social revolution scene and the Harlem scene. These realistic scenes have more dialogue and fewer instances of

theatrical use of music and dance. Nonetheless they are essentially theatrical. They are interpolated with sudden music and nonmusical sounds, which break the continuity of events on stage. For example, in the social revolution scene:

THE FLUNKEY: Comrade, you are a jackass. You are ignorant. You do not know what is going on in the world. They are fat with eating while we starve. . . . They go to five-dollar operas while we go to ten-cent movies. They--

(He drops the tray. Smash. Silence. The fine people stare at the rebel, stunned, amazed, horrified. A scream or two: Traitor, traitor.) (483)

Moreover, the painted backdrop for this scene is Expressionistic and Surrealistic, and evokes the proper mood for the scene. On the backdrop for this scene are painted, among other things, a king, a queen, a troop of soldiers, "one impossible coat of arms," and "one winking eye (the eye winks appropriately during the events of this episode" (478).

In the last scene, subtitled "The Morning Song," an Italian fruit peddler shows up and sings "O Sole Mio." The play ends when the song is over and the peddler is back in the subway.

Some purely theatrical scenes of Subway Circus, like the scene of "Man, the Acrobat" and the last scene, are devoid of dialogue. They portray the dream world only through sounds and movements.

The characters of Subway Circus come from various strata of society and have various backgrounds, and they are meant to suggest the variety of the human character. Thus the world that the play creates is a world in which the spectator is expected to feel and experience life as a whole. It is not a world where the audience is expected to listen passively to the words of characters and see only one aspect of reality being presented as though it were all of experience.

Saroyan believed that the theatre is a place where people can look at common and usual incidents with a fresh vision. In "How to See," Saroyan wrote: "It is an illusion that people with normal eyesight are able to see. The theatre exploits this illusion and either gives vision new depth or a fresh dismissal" (203). This kind of experience is also more enjoyable for the audience than watching realistic staging and acting, which are more likely to confine our imagination. Saroyan declared that "As I see it, the basic trouble with the American theatre is that the element of 'play' has been completely forgotten by American playwrights and completely left out of their plays" (quoted in Krutch, Rev. of The Time of Your Life 506). He sought to restore some fun and freshness to the theatre by using nontraditional structures and techniques.

In addition to the unconventional dramatic structure, the theatricalism Saroyan employed in this play draws particular attention. He experiments with various theatrical techniques from other theatre movements. The theatrical devices used in scene two are reminiscent of those of Surrealism: the transformation of a

cripple into a dancer and the sound of the city delivered through a microphone. In scene iii, the marionette-like movement of the clerk is Expressionistic. The movement reveals the callous feeling of the clerk for the girl and is reminiscent of scene five of Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, in which Yank faces a procession of gaudy marionettes at a corner of Fifth Avenue. The movement changes later into a gentler style, when the clerk falls in love. Even their dialogue is telegraphic, which is the verbal style of Expressionistic plays and speaks of the deadening mechanization of human beings. In the Harlem scene, the rhythm and tempo of movement change according to the mood. All the theatrical techniques employed in this play primarily contribute to illuminating the histrionic nature of the theatre, like a circus in which the spectator watches the events as a spectacle.

The "dreamer" in each episode of the play is picked out by a spotlight, just as the circus spotlight moves from ring to ring, highlighting one performer after another. The continuing sound of the subway train links the episodes and suggests the continuing context of reality, which is really only the union of all our partial individual dreams. The continuing sound of the subway is a modern urban transformation of the continuing sound of the life force. The individual dream episodes are momentary surfacings in the movement of this life force. The subway is the real world existing underneath the theatrical episodes. It is not the conventionally real world of particular jobs and places and histories, but it is what Saroyan considered reality: the underlying

fundamental human character that is revealed differently in various episodes. In Razzle Dazzle he writes: "No one could possibly create anything more surrealistic and unbelievable than the world which everyone believes is real and is trying very hard to inhabit. The job of art, I say, is to try to make a world which can be inhabited" (63-64).

The unconventional dramatic structure that Saroyan has chosen for this work turns out to be thematically appropriate as well as theatrical. One of the central themes of the play is that the interplay of dreaming and reality that constitutes the subway circus is the essence of all our lives, and that in turn each of us can be identified with each of the characters in the play, at different times and in different situations. The dramatic structure is designed to suggest the unity underlying the various particular events of our lives. Each episode reveals one aspect of our character, and together they suggest the depth and wholeness of human nature.

Theatricalism in Subway Circus distantiates the audience from the theatrical activity and seeks to make the audience aware of the nature of histrionic reality, and by extension, of their personal role in the creation of any "reality." Robert George Everding expresses a similar view on the goal of Saroyan's plays:

Saroyan's goal is not a precise moral or political statement, but an alteration in the way an audience views reality. The playwright's endings lack the decisiveness of the thesis play and destroy rather than affirm the spectator's rapport with the world. Yet, the response of wonder contains the seeds for

establishing a new rapport. . . . Saroyan attempts to rekindle the viewer's awareness of his existence and of the potential for living life more fully. (33)

Saroyan also pursues an intimate relationship with the audience and believes that to be the nature of the theatre. He states that "The very nature of play and theatre asks for intimacy, definite contact between those playing and those being played to" ("How to See" 203). Histrionic reality, like all our realities, Saroyan sees as a communal creation. It is not something objective for spectators to observe passively. By using theatrical devices he seeks to awaken people to the challenge of living consciously with a passionate awareness of the wondrous aspects of human nature.

My Heart's in the Highlands (1939)

My Heart's in the Highlands is based on Saroyan's short story, "The Man with His Heart in the Highlands" (1936). At the suggestion of William Kozlenko, the editor of The One-Act Play Magazine, Saroyan converted the story into a one-act play and then expanded it for the production by the Group Theatre in April 1939 (Fitts 1). The play was scheduled for only five performances as part of the Group Theatre's experimental program; however, favorable response enabled it to run for six weeks (Floan 97). Later Saroyan extended the play to a full three acts. The discussion in this section is based on the full-length version.

As with Saroyan's later plays, his very first produced play,

My Heart's in the Highlands, received two different critical responses. George Jean Nathan described the original Group Theatre production as "bonny, imaginative, and utterly fascinating" (Newsweek 1 May 1939: 45), and Brooks Atkinson called it "an amusing, tender, whimsical poem" (New York Times 14 April 1939: 29). On the other hand, some critics expressed their irritation with the play, mainly because it did not observe a familiar dramatic structure. In his review, Charles Angoff described the work as "this banal tale, told in language devoid of eloquence and constructed so loosely that it creaks all the way through" (North American Review 247 (1939): 365). This review illustrates how some critics attempted to evaluate the play using the criteria of conventional playwriting. In his Newsweek review, Nathan expanded upon his defense of the play:

The majority of the reviewers, while praising the play, complained bitterly that they couldn't discern any clear meaning in it. Which struck some of the rest of us like complaining bitterly over the absence of any clear meaning in Brahms' sole scherzo in E flat minor, the Black Forest in the early morning sunlight, a good hamburger with onions, or human life itself. (45)

Irwin Shaw, who watched the performance on the opening night of the play, remembered it as "very stylized and lovely, the perfect production, wonderful cast" (Lee and Gifford 227). In her review, Rosamond Gilder most appropriately described My Heart's in the Highlands as a play "in which music, light, color and movement have been woven into fresh and engaging patterns" (Theatre Arts

June 1939: 396). When the play was presented in Paris in 1954, it also garnered two kinds of responses. While some reviewers objected that My Heart's in the Highlands was not a play because it did not have any plot, development, and movement (Falb 58), an anonymous reviewer wrote that Saroyan ventured into a new "formule d'expression théâtrale qui no doit rien à l'habileté ni à la 'technique' et qui va chercher la poésie où elle se trouve, dans la vie quotidienne" (Falb 59).

In the preface to My Heart's in the Highlands, Saroyan writes that "The greater reality, the truer, deeper and more pertinent reality of a people and place can be established--by isolation, emphasis, and magnification--only by men of good will, good vision, and great humanity" (xii). This claim foreshadows one of the central thematic concerns of his writings--the interplay between illusion and reality. Saroyan sought to explore the interplay between the business of socially accepted reality and the dreams and illusions expressive of a deeper reality. In his plays, that exploration was conducted by using a variety of theatrical techniques. Furthermore this passage from the preface is an early version of a challenge that Saroyan states more openly in later prefaces, a challenge directed to three different groups: authors, characters, and audience or critics. "Good will, good vision, and great humanity" must be present in the authors of plays before they can truly recognize and then present onstage the essential underlying reality of a human being; they must be reflected in the characters so presented onstage; and just as importantly, the

audience must be attuned to these values before they can fully appreciate and evaluate the plays. Of course, "good will, good vision, and great humanity" are vague concepts, and occasionally, especially in his later prefaces, Saroyan seems to equate possessing those qualities with agreement with Saroyan and the valuation of Saroyan's plays.

The theme and the purpose set forth in this preface to My Heart's in the Highlands permeate his later major plays as well. In all his plays, and particularly in My Heart's in the Highlands, he attempts to show good human beings trapped in "lousy" (in Saroyan's term) reality, in circumstances forcing them to live contrary to their real natures. Their harsh situations seem to isolate them from other people and from the accepted "good things" in life, and yet by contrast their difficult environment enables their good natures to be emphasized or magnified. Their acts of compassion and playfulness stand out all the more because of the contrasting difficult circumstances. These are characters who are acting as they do not out of greed for gain or for returned favors, but out of their underlying natures and beliefs about how human beings should relate. They seek "a value that goes beyond the limits prescribed by the indifferent world and allows them to cope with the circumstances of their existence" (Fitts 84). Thus a Saroyan play tries to show not so much "the inequality indiscriminately arising from the indifference of the external world as it does . . . the individual's ability to turn even this into a vehicle for the expression of human dignity" (Shinn 187).

My Heart's in the Highlands is principally concerned with four major characters: nine-year old Johnny; his father, an impoverished, unknown poet; Jasper MacGregor, an old Shakespearean actor with a glorious past but with less hope for the future; and a decrepit old Armenian woman, Johnny's grandmother, who cannot speak English. In Act I, MacGregor happens to pass by Johnny's house and asks Johnny for some water to drink, later requesting some food from Johnny and Johnny's father. Johnny goes to a nearby store run by Mr. Kosak to get bread and cheese on credit, as has been all their recent "purchases." Though he is initially unwilling, because of his own approaching bankruptcy, good-natured Mr. Kosak eventually gives Johnny what he wants. Johnny in essence "purchases" these goods with his own good nature, by spending some time and care listening to and entertaining Mr. Kosak. Discovering some similarities between them, in spirit, experience, and circumstance, MacGregor stays with Johnny's family and receives some food from the neighbors for playing music on his bugle.

In Act II, a mailman delivers a poem Johnny's father had submitted to The Atlantic Monthly, and the fact that it has been rejected for publication is revealed. MacGregor is taken back to the Old People's Home. In Act III, a more enfeebled MacGregor returns to Johnny's house, only to die there. Unable to pay their back rent, Johnny's family is evicted from their house.

As the synopsis of the play shows, the events in My Heart's in the Highlands are a curious mixture of ordinary events and fantasy:

a boy goes to the store, a mailman delivers a letter; a bugle recital turns into an offering procession, the speech by the father in response to the letter becomes an impassioned monologue. This mingling of ordinary and extraordinary events is in fact typical of all of Saroyan's plays, reflecting his beliefs about the interrelationship between illusion and reality, between surface and 'true' reality. However, the ordinariness of the principal events obscures the expected traditional dramatic structure of realistic theater. Instead of complications and resolutions, there is only what Thelma J. Shinn calls "a recognition and acceptance of the contradictions of life" (185). While the dramatic structure of traditional plays, including realistic plays, is often based on the main character's action and its conflict either with other characters or other forces, the dramatic structure of Saroyan's plays is more often designed to reveal a good-natured character's perception and transformation of the world. Accordingly dramatic structure and characterization are not so important.

The contradictions Saroyan is more concerned with showing are "men of good will, good vision, and great humanity" in their hardships, and their undaunted, high spirits and dignity, which still enable them to keep their dream worlds in the midst of a harsh reality. This requires a good bit of will and a "will to goodness;" a good amount of vision of the possibilities of the transforming imagination and a vision of goodness; and a great feeling of commonality, of underlying human identity. He expresses this concern in a very lyrical, poetic, and often playful manner.

Saroyan can easily combine ordinary and fantasy scenes in his plays because of his belief that value is created in their interplay. Ordinary events have value as they express underlying realities, which are real to the extent that they emerge and are recognized in everyday events. Among Saroyan's most common techniques, as James Justus notes, is

first juxtaposing, then merging, two orders of reality: the eccentric, the unusual, the singular, and the familiar, the usual, the commonplace. In the astonished mingling of the two orders comes the blurring of distinctions and mankind stands revealed in unity, as the eccentric grows familiar and the familiar becomes an object of awe. (216)

Again, inside and outside the theatre, participants and observers of events must possess good will, vision, and humanity to create and to recognize value in experience.

Unlike realistic theatre, where the exposition and resolution of the plot are central to the meaning and progression of the play, the movement, the emotion, and the meaning in Saroyan's plays are presented through theatrical moments expressing the characters' fantasies, musings, and reactions to events. These moments are staged with a variety of playful, nonrealistic techniques. This is primarily to express Saroyan's conviction that what is important is the interplay of the obvious everyday event with the revelation of one's dreams or illusions. Saroyan finds illusion to be a source of strength in facing harsh reality.

Saroyan is also interested in creating characters who are essentially simple, good-hearted people. He is not interested in creating characters who are either individualized or psychologically realistic but in presenting characters who express the human ability to enliven, transform, and establish value in ordinary, simple life and community. His first reaction to any event, whether banal or momentous, is to look through it to see what it reveals about the people involved, and through them what it reveals about human nature. For example, a scene in which Johnny goes to Mr. Kosak's store to purchase some food on credit does not present any incident, but reveals the good nature of Mr. Kosak.

Saroyan's propensity to portray good-natured people in his plays is related to his wish-fulfillment about the relationship between father and son, as presented here in the relationship between Johnny and his father, Ben Alexander. Ben and Johnny are an idealized father and son, whose relationship is based on love. The father-and-son motif in Saroyan's plays is as open as the characters' good nature in My Heart's in the Highlands, as pointed out by various critics, including Foster (13), Sievers (247), and Gagey (118). Johnny's father is a poet, like Saroyan's father, and Johnny is reminiscent of the young Saroyan himself. In spite of their harsh circumstances, Johnny and his father are able to express their joy of living and to keep their dignity and resolute spirit because of their love for each other. Saroyan lost his own father at the age of three, and yet his longing for the love of his father seems to have lasted throughout his life. Saroyan once claimed that he

became a writer because his father was a writer, who passed away at the age of thirty-six, before his literary talent was publicly recognized (Hamalian 37). In other writings, Saroyan expressed mixed feelings about the fact that he could outlive his father.

Since a traditional dramatic structure was not utilized by Saroyan to show the good nature of the characters, so traditional character development was not as necessary for presenting the theme. Johnny is the only character to develop during My Heart's in the Highlands. In the final scene, Johnny reveals a growing awareness of the harshness of human life, realizing that "something's wrong somewhere" (100). He has in fact matured. However, this recognition is not likely to change his actions and nature, as it generally would in realistic plays. Johnny's good-heartedness now is that of his father, MacGregor, and Kosak. It involves an awareness of the strength and oppressiveness of the outside world, and the ability of that world constantly to thwart one's hopes.

At the beginning of the play, Johnny is a naive, innocent, and good-natured boy; his good nature is, in fact, simply natural. This is presented theatrically in his mode of performance and acrobatics. His actions are the unconscious play of a healthy young boy. By the end of the play, he has matured. He has experienced great anger and is aware of the potential sorrows of the world, but he remains undaunted, still capable of creating his own Highlands. In his realization that "something's wrong somewhere," Johnny has learned the fundamental Saroyan truth about levels of reality, of

needing to seek the actual meaning and value of people and events beyond their surface appearances.

The most notable characteristic of My Heart's in the Highlands is its theatricalism. Character development, theme, emotional impact, and the progress of the play are all presented primarily through techniques designed to heighten theatricality. Saroyan relies on theatricalism to enhance the theme, atmosphere, and emotional tone of the play. Brooks Atkinson described the play as "an eruption of high spirits in honor of the living," and "almost a dance of harvest" (New York Times 7 May 1939: 1), and those "spirits" and "dance" are most fully expressed by the theatricalism in the play. Various theatrical techniques are employed, including those involved with setting, lighting, music, stylized mode of performance, actor's movements, and monologues.

The setting of My Heart's in the Highlands is far different from the usual realistic settings, which are described in detail and cluttered with familiar objects, with the purpose of providing an environment for an action by creating an exact image of a real location on stage. The action in the play happens in two places: a house on San Benito Avenue in Fresno, California, and Mr. Kosak's nearby grocery store. In his comment on the first Broadway production of the play, Edmond Gagey compared the setting to that of the medieval miracle play, because the setting showed two places on the stage simultaneously (Gagey 113). On the other hand, Joseph Wood Krutch in his review said "the setting looks as though it might have been conceived by Mr. Dali in a mood of unwonted

cheerfulness" (Nation 6 May 6 1939: 538). However, the setting of My Heart's in the Highlands is designed neither to be like the setting of the medieval miracle plays, which aim at showing two actions simultaneously, nor to be Surrealistic.

The setting of the play, with the aid of theatrical techniques such as lighting and music, aims at creating a lyrical mood in the play. Harold Clurman, in discussing the Group Theatre's production, also commented on the setting:

The Group's basic style consisted in forming a conception of the material at hand and so presenting it that it would appear consistent with the quality of reality mirrored in the play's text. Thus if the set for My Heart's in the Highlands was obviously not "true to life" it was because the director believed the play called for a different type of stage picture to achieve the reality of its author's vision . . . quite remote from the actual places they were supposed to represent. (Fervent Years 251)

Simplified in design and using minimal props on stage, the setting is presentative rather than realistic, as Shinn notes (186). It is designed just enough to show where the action takes place and to give evidence of the poor, real world where the characters live. Johnny's house is depicted as follows: "There are no other houses near by, only a desolation of bleak land and red sky" (3). These bleak and poverty-stricken surroundings show not only the harsh and impersonal reality they have to face, but they also create a revealing contrast with the warm, lively dream world where their fearless spirits dwell. The bleak land makes a good contrast with

the Highlands, where MacGregor mentions that the hearts of his mother and his mother's mother reside. It also makes a good contrast with the poetic world in which Johnny's father lives, and even Mr. Kosak, when he is freed to do so by the imminent failure of his "real" business.

The setting also creates an emotional tone for the play, a tone with a variety of elements. Saroyan presents the setting almost as a paradigm of a simpler, rural America, matching his presentation of the community in the play as a simpler, cooperative ideal, and of the characters in the play as simpler, kinder human beings. The setting reveals that no one in the play owns much, so no one needs to be protective or envious, and thus they are free to share goodheartedly what they do have. Of course, the play was written when much of America was still suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, and Saroyan's setting and characters reflect a fairly common ideal of that time.

This sparse setting, however, is also used in the play to create the invisible setting of the characters' dream worlds. This transformation occurs especially when combined with the aid of lighting and music, which are almost invariably used together in this play. The attempt to express what is really the invisible settings of their fantasy worlds, which are inhabited simultaneously and parallel to their "real" worlds, appeals to us with its emotional effect more than any realistic settings on the stage itself could do. According to Saroyan: "A suggestion of a familiar scene is enough for a stage because there is no importance in the familiarity, and

once its existence and reality has been agreed upon, the beholder of a stage-set may forget it and watch the play" ("How to See" 203). In addition to the "suggestion" of a place, Saroyan adds audiovisual effects, to evoke certain moods with different colors of lighting and various natural and man-made sounds.

The search for emotional impact rather than intellectual understanding is a characteristic intention of many of Saroyan's plays. Emotional connection, a feeling with the characters, is considered a more fundamental way of relating than through the intellect and a better way of gaining access to the underlying truths of human nature.

Although the geographical surroundings are desolate and bleak, the opening scene has the tone of peaceful and rustic sentiment, enhanced by various sound effects such as train whistles and bird calls, as well as by the lighting and music:

JOHNNY, aged nine, but essentially ageless, is sitting, dynamic and acrobatic, on the steps of the porch, dead to the world and deep in thought of a high and holy order. Far away a train whistle cries mournfully. He listens eagerly, cocking his head on one side like a chicken, trying to understand the meaning of the cry and at the same time to figure out everything. He doesn't quite make it and when the cry ends he stops being eager. (MUSIC #2) A fourteen-year-old **BOY** on a bicycle enters at back center. . . . **BOY** exits right. He sits down again and listens to a small overjoyed but angry bird. After making a brief forceful speech of no meaning, the bird flies away. From inside the house is heard the somber voice of **JOHNNY'S FATHER** reciting poetry of his own composition. (3-4)

As can be seen in the above description, Johnny's imagination takes him back and forth between reverie and reality, and music enables the characters to cross the boundaries between these two worlds, as well as signals the audience about the crossing. The music sets up the lively mood of the opening scene more effectively than any realistic description could do, especially with the aid of other sound effects such as a train, a bicycle, and a bird.

Saroyan's choice of sound effects here is important. Some of the effects are repeatedly used in his later plays as well, including for example, train whistles and bird calls in Sam Ego's House. Train whistles, bird calls, the bell of a bicycle messenger, are all powerful icons and carry emotional overtones. Train whistles signify adventure and travel and also sorrow, departures, and loss. Bird calls suggest nature and a natural way of things existing peacefully together on their own terms. The bicycle messenger bell calls up visions of a youthful and simple life. Train whistles and bird calls touch the emotional bases of the human and the natural worlds respectively. Johnny, "like a chicken," exists naturally and passively in the world, accepting and dealing with what is given in his experience, without thinking of deeper or hidden possibilities. These theatrical devices, rather than dialogue or dramatic exposition, are used to establish emotional tone, theme, and character.

Next one hears "the loveliest and most amazing music in the world: a solo on a bugle" (5). The music is "My Heart's in the Highlands." The bugle music has an even greater effect on Johnny

than the bird calls. With this music, the lighting also changes from amber to a greenish color, creating the fertile mood of the Highlands.

The lighting of My Heart's in the Highlands is composed of three basic colors: green, amber, and magenta. The basic lighting is amber, suggesting the light of day. The green color links the overall mood of the scene to the joy of the characters' lives or their reveries. It is the color of the Highlands, of the characters' hopes and dreams. The life-enhancing character of the Highlands is thus reflected by the green lighting, suggesting an oasis within the dry amber of their everyday experience. The magenta lighting reveals imminent threats or dangers. When Johnny's father delivers a monologue on the War, the color on the stage changes to this magenta.

Thus the main function of the lighting as well as the music is to create transitions between the everyday events of the play, its surface reality, and what to Saroyan is more important, the Highlands--the expression of the characters' inner reality. The theatrical devices express the characters' evaluations of the events occurring on stage. Changes in music and lighting accompany emotional changes in the characters, as they pass into their dreams and fantasies.

Another theatrical technique is to add an emotional tone, usually of either sorrow or joy, to the performance of the characters by having them assume other performance modes. In Act III, before he collapses and is taken back to the Old People's Home by

an ambulance, MacGregor recites lines from King Lear, lines Lear recites while he wanders in the wilderness. Johnny turns somersaults like an animal. The performance of other types of behavior by the characters anticipates the transformation of roles occurring in "plays within the play" found in Saroyan's later works, such as Jim Dandy, Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, and The Cave Dwellers. In My Heart's in the Highlands, this technique does not break the illusion on stage, as the transformation of characters does in the later plays. Instead it highlights the mood of the scene.

Exuberant behavior is highlighted in Johnny's performance. While his performance mode is mostly realistic, he often incorporates elements of "play" into his acting style, including dancing, acrobatics, and somersaults. This playful acting style of Johnny's is closely associated with the expression of joy in his life. His natural character enables him to enjoy the transient happy moments, as they occur. When Johnny finally gets the bread and cheese on credit from Mr. Kosak's store, he celebrates the occasion by tossing them to his father and MacGregor. Even as the poor situation of their real life grows worse, in contrast their spirits become more enlivened. Thus Johnny, and his father as well, are able to celebrate the beginning of another day in spite of the "For Rent" sign being hung outside of their house.

As the SUN rises, a big solemn smile comes over his face. He looks out of the corner of his eye at the morning's light as if it were a quiet friend with whom he was on

terms of perfect understanding. As the light increases, this play between JOHNNY and the sun grows, like a theme of music, bringing him to his feet, turning his face to the light. He lifts his arms, and very solemnly begins turning somersaults. He then runs around the house lickety-split and returns on the other side, almost dancing. (37)

The play here is between two natural entities: Johnny and the sun. The scene expresses the joy that allows human beings, when left free to act naturally, to meet the same newness of every day with feelings of fresh rejoicing. Both Johnny and his father turn somersaults, although his father cannot do it well. Saroyan here uses acrobatics, rather than dialogue, to express emotion and to create an emotional connection with the audience.

It is important to note that Johnny's father still attempts to do the somersaults. Age and experience have constrained his physical abilities but not his will to express feelings of joy. Johnny's father, and MacGregor too, are not constrained by common fears of looking foolish, undignified, or childish. When they feel like a child, their actions uninhibitedly express that emotion. In his initial introduction Johnny is described as "aged nine, but essentially ageless," for in the Highlands Johnny, his father, his grandmother, and MacGregor are all freed from the constraints society assigns to particular ages and circumstances.

When these characters take part in the celebration of the joy of living, by dancing and turning somersaults, they momentarily turn the stage into a playground and psychologically invite the audience to join in their celebration.

Johnny continues to go through various kinds of acrobatics until the mailman delivers to them the rejected poem of Johnny's father. The stage direction reads:

All this time, of course, . . . Johnny has been going through various kinds of acrobatics, walking on the porch railing, leaping down, turning somersaults, standing on his head, and so forth. Some of his questions have been asked while he has been standing on his head. A postman's sharp whistle is heard in the distance. (53)

With the delivery of the letter, the intrusion of external reality, the playful movements and the celebratory atmosphere come to an end and a grim reality is restored as they return to their actual roles.

In the beginning of the play, Johnny's movements are natural and acrobatic, like a playful animal. By the end of the play, reflective of his character's growth, these physical expressions of joy--moments in the Highlands--are more scarce, hard-won moments of self-expression in the face of an increasing awareness of the constraining power of external forces. Johnny is growing up, like his father into the knowledge that moments of self-realization, when his innate good-heartedness can be freely expressed, are not easy to come by and thus are all the more precious. On this level, the play is also a more traditional tale of the loss of innocence, while Johnny learns that living in the Highlands is an achievement, rather than a natural right.

In addition to the exuberant behavior of the individual characters, two group scenes display the joy in the characters' lives

created by sharing things with others. These communal scenes thus elevate the mood to the religious and spiritual. They reflect Saroyan's belief that self-realization also involves the realization of the true worth and nature of others. The essential role of community in self-fulfillment is developed more fully in the later plays, but even in My Heart's in the Highlands, the expression of individual good-heartedness and the realization of one's own nature involves the allowing of others to express their own natures.

Saroyan has often been accused of being a rather unintellectual writer. For example, Foster wrote that "Much of the work is entertaining without making any substantial intellectual or imaginative demand on the reader" (11). Pointing out the similarities between William Saroyan and Jack Kerouac, Elaine Mary Stern explains Saroyan's anti-intellectual tendency as follows:

The initial component of the conservatism of Jack Kerouac and William Saroyan is an obvious bias against knowing based simply upon intellect or reason. After all, spontaneity, stream-of-consciousness, and fragments of thought rather than logic, reasonableness, and discipline is thus deep and pervasive, since reason was not to be counted on as a means of literary communication. (29)

Saroyan's anti-intellectual tendency was intentional and he deliberately substituted emotions and energy for clarity and depth of thought. This does not necessarily mean that he lacked ability and depth of thinking. It means that he insisted upon feeling the experience of living, wishing to operate and address an archetypal level of existence, one beneath and beyond the intellect. Everybody

knows the true reality of their lives intuitively and emotionally, he tells us: "Everybody knows what it [truth] is and like God it is not very possible to get into words. . . . Everybody knows within himself what it is" ("Two Theatres" 795).

In "How to See," Saroyan addresses the folly of an uncritical belief in reason and the intellect:

Nobody is educated to see. Before a child has even begun to know objects as themselves he is taken to school and asked to know the words that stand for the objects. This continues from kindergarten to grade school, and from there through high school and college, so that by the time a child may be said to have gotten himself an education, he is away over to hell and gone in meaninglessness.
(205)

Saroyan seems to believe that education, especially uncritically acquired knowledge, hinders our understanding of the real meaning in life. In a later play, Sweeney in the Trees, a character named Jim Lark tells of an idyllic time of his life spent living in a tree, and says, "Except for a small amount of public schooling, I'd probably be living in a tree now" (176). It thus becomes each person's challenge and responsibility to find something new and fresh in daily events. This involves living more on an emotional than an intellectual level, and is why a primary goal of Saroyan's plays is to create an emotional connection and community with the audience.

The emotional impact of the play and the intimate relationship with the audience is sought primarily by theatrical means. In "How to See," Saroyan claims that "The depth of vision which the theatre

sometimes provides is not organically optical--the vision is not the eye's, it is the spirit's." He adds, "What is important, however, is for whatever is intended to be felt sharply to be set in reality sharply--a problem of space, color, and light" (203).

In My Heart's in the Highlands the emotional impact is highlighted in two scenes where Johnny's neighbors are drawn by MacGregor's music and offer food to him. In Act I scene iv, various characters come to MacGregor to listen to him play his bugle:

MACGREGOR gets up and begins to blow into the bugle. . . . Eighteen NEIGHBORS gather in front of the house and cheer when he finishes the solo: "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes"; CARPENTER, center; TWO LOVERS, left; MEXICAN MAID, left; BLACKSMITH, left; ONE CHILD, left; COWBOY, left; TWO CHILDREN and MOTHER, center; LINEMAN, center; POSTMAN, FISHERMAN and BAKER, center. (27)

This scene also carries the implication of spiritual communion among MacGregor and Johnny's neighbors, which parallels the communion between the performers and the audience. Their processional movements on stage have both a visual and emotional impact.

In the next scene, which is the continuation of scene iv, people leave and return to the place, bringing food for MacGregor:

MACGREGOR, JOHNNY'S FATHER and JOHNNY sit on the steps and remain in silence, and one by one the people, except the POSTMAN, return, bringing food to MACGREGOR: an egg, a sausage, a dozen green onions, two kinds of cheese, butter, two kinds of bread, boiled potatoes, fresh tomatoes, a melon, tea, and many other good things to eat.

MACGREGOR: Thank you, my friends, thank you. (He stands solemnly waiting for absolute silence, straightens himself, looks about him furiously, lifts the bugle to his lips and is irritated by the swift and noisy return of **ESTHER KOSAK**, bringing an eggplant. He frowns at her. There is a general "Sh." . . . When there is silence, **MACGREGOR** plays "My Heart's in the Highlands, My Heart is not Here." The **PEOPLE** weep, kneel, sing the chorus, and go away. (30)

Monologues in My Heart's in the Highlands also enhance the theatricalism of the play. Two of the most notable monologues are given by Johnny's father and MacGregor. Johnny's father is enraged by the return of his poem, which symbolizes the rejection of the possibility of true self-expression by the constraining forces of the external world. In a long monologue he criticizes the human condition that does not allow a warm heart or high spirits. Saroyan's anger, like his joy and other emotions, is not directed toward specific individuals. He seems to believe that all we can offer each other as specific people is an attempt at emotional communion. His anger is directed to the human propensity to create circumstances that defeat our own well-being. His characters most often are angered by the apparently senseless complications that we create for ourselves that limit our possibilities of positively transforming ourselves and the world. Johnny's father angrily declares:

Go ahead, kill everybody. Declare War on one another.
Take the people by the thousands and mangle them. Their

poor hearts and their poor spirits and their poor bodies. .
. . Go ahead. Fire your feeble guns. You won't kill
anything. There will always be poets in the world. (59)

Though full of fury, he refuses to be beaten. This scene also presents the one essential character difference between Johnny and his father. Ben's awareness of the potential of the world to disrupt dreams and of the difficulty of abiding in the Highlands tempers his good-heartedness. By the end of the play, Johnny is learning that anger.

The sentiment created by the monologues is mainly frustration with the outside world. The final recitation of MacGregor, in his enactment of the death scene from King Lear, also reflects his sorrow for that world. It is a lament for the world, where he feels that he was "a man more sinned against than sinning" (96). His final acting scene remains touching and tragic, but he is not portrayed as a victim of his fate or of the harsh world. Rather he seems to fulfill his self-image, his idea of himself as an actor, to the final moment of his life. Monologues in the play thus distinctively show the emotional estrangement of the characters from the real world, as well as express the characters' dreams and unfulfilled wishes.

All the theatrical techniques employed by Saroyan in this play essentially contribute to creating a poetic and lyrical mood that realistic settings could not effectively create. John Mason Brown noted in his review:

If Mr. Saroyan has dispensed with plotting as commonly understood, it is because he wants mood in the theatre to serve as the equivalent of melody in music. . . . In My Heart's in the Highlands Mr. Saroyan and the Group Theatre have extended the theatre as a medium. . . . They have fused words and actors and colors and sound and design into an evening's entertainment which enables the stage to evoke in an audience those tangible, yet intangible sensations which are among the wonders and delights of music. (Broadway in Review 188)

This mood is enhanced by music and lighting in particular. Stylized performances and monologues enable the characters to express their inner worlds, their dreams, and their frustration with the real world. Theatricalism in My Heart's in the Highlands is thus used to create poetry in the theatre, a lyricism that not even poetic language could create in realistic plays.

The Time of Your Life (1939)

About a month after the opening of My Heart's in the Highlands, Saroyan wrote the first draft of The Time of Your Life, in six days in New York. He wrote the play at the encouragement of George Jean Nathan and John Mason Brown, who had voted for My Heart's in the Highlands as the best play of the 1938-39 season (The Time of Your Life Preface). After reading an early version, before it was produced, in a review in Newsweek Nathan described the play as "one of the most cajoling scripts I have read in some time and with proper casting and direction should prove something of a genuine stage treat" (12 June 1939: 35). After revising it four

or five times, Saroyan turned The Time of Your Life over to Harold Clurman to produce, only to be turned down. Clurman later confessed that it was a serious error to reject the play (The Fervent Years 252).

Saroyan then took the play to Eddie Dowling, who had told Saroyan that he would produce any play Saroyan wrote. Dowling accepted the play and had it presented by the Theater Guild. The Guild chose as director Bobby Lewis, who had made such a success directing My Heart's in the Highlands, and Lewis stylized the production in the same lyrical fashion. He set the play in a cocktail bar and approached the play as a fantasy. The result was "a New Haven tryout almost unparalleled in the annals of theatrical disaster" (Lee and Gifford 231). Thereupon Dowling and Saroyan directed the play together. They made the set a regular bar and replaced several cast members (William Bendix for Karl Malden as Nick, Gene Kelly for Martin Ritt as Harry, Celeste Holm as Mary L) (Lee and Gifford 231-236). Dowling took the leading role of Joe. The show opened at the Booth Theater on October 25, 1939, and ran for 185 performances. Brooks Atkinson later observed:

Since the Time of Your Life conformed to none of the familiar rules of playwriting in 1939, it gave the Theatre Guild serious trouble. The first production was scrapped; it was dull, baffling, and pointless, but the second production, directed by Eddie Dowling and Mr. Saroyan, gave the diffuse script form, rhythm and reality. (Atkinson and Hirschfeld 150)

Mixed reviews surrounded the New York production. The play was described as "a reverie in a barroom" (Atkinson 464), "more of a melody than a play" (Brown 465), and "all crazy, by ordinary measurements of play construction" (Chapman 464). Richard Watts's review reveals the perspective of most of the drama critics on the play:

A sort of cosmic vaudeville show, formless, plotless, and shamelessly rambling, it is a helter-skelter mixture of humor, sentimentalism, philosophy and melodrama, and one of the most enchanting theatrical works imaginable. Pulling together these stray, curiously lyric meanderings on life, love and the world into one touching and eloquent whole is not so much the central character of a boozy interlocutor at a philosophical minstrel show or the sentimental bar-room wherein most of the talking takes place, but the author's genuine and moving love for the human race. It is a real and passionate love, not an idealistic literary conceit, and it fills all of "The Time of Your Life" with the glow of true affection. (464)

The production was highlighted by the excellent performances of Eddie Dowling as Joe and Julie Haydon, who played the role of Kitty Duval, a streetwalker. Richard Lockridge described their performances as follow:

Mr. Dowling's performance is one of his best, subtly understated and perceptive, apparently casual and yet rich with character. Julie Haydon plays the role of the prostitute with that kind of frail strength which gives all of her performances so great an appeal. (463)

Later productions of the play have received similarly mixed reviews. While some critics attack the play for its formlessness, others praise it for its originality and for the emotions it evokes.

The theme of The Time of Your Life is essentially the same as that of My Heart's in the Highlands: the value of attempting to live a true-hearted life, one in keeping with one's own nature, despite adversity. Both plays address the difficulties involved in realizing one's own nature and dreams, given the constraints of the external world. Both plays contrast reality with the characters' fantasies and attempts at self-expression.

However, there are several important differences in tone and meaning between the two plays, primarily traceable to their different settings and characters. The later play is more openly social in its concerns, and the constraints of the outside world are weightier and more apparent.

As in My Heart's in the Highlands, The Time of Your Life deals with people who long to pursue their dreams despite a harsh reality. They come from various backgrounds but possess the same good nature. These good people include Harry, a would-be comedian whose comedy does not make people laugh, because of the vivid description of harsh reality in his monologues; Wesley, "a colored boy" who is on the brink of starvation and yet shows a noble and natural spirit when given a chance to play the piano; Kitty Duval, a streetwalker with the dream of a sweet home; Tom, an innocent youth who faithfully serves Joe, who helped him through difficult times; Dudley R. Bostwick, another youth who

desperately attempts to reach his girlfriend, Elsie; Krupp, a cop torn by the corruption in the world and his place in it, who yet adapts himself to reality without becoming totally corrupt; and many other characters with similar dreams in search of a place to realize them.

In spite of their different backgrounds, all these characters share with one another the same good-hearted nature and similarly sorrowful experiences in the world outside the bar. They all know that this outside world contradicts their illusions and is a direct threat to their achieving self-realization through their dreams. All the characters in this play, especially those mentioned above, come to Nick's bar still holding on to the dreams and wishes of this particular time of their lives. They are in escape from the constant threat of the harsh and uncontrollable reality of the outside world. But the news of war is reported to them by the newspapers that a small boy brings into the bar to sell. The ongoing war embodies the harsh reality of the world outside the bar and reveals that reality is uncontrollable and inhuman. These people, unable to find their proper places outside of the bar, are able to find a haven in the peaceful open atmosphere of the bar. For instance, Harry and Wesley come to the bar to look for jobs and are at first rejected by Nick, but gradually they find their places in the bar and are able to exhibit their talents, and themselves, to a greater extent than they had been able to in the outside world. The use of these many characters, with their comings and goings, though, hinders the emergence of a tight dramatic structure.

The lack of a well-made dramatic structure, however, is certainly not the same as the absence of structure. There are loosely tied-together dramatic actions involving relationships among the various characters. Based on the interactions among the characters, Bernard F. Dukore points out that the play is not plotless:

Joe makes possible the marriage of the nice, dumb Tom, whose life he once saved and who serves as his general factotum, and Kitty, a pure-in-heart prostitute; and the personification of the American spirit, Kit Carson, kills the personification of evil, Blick, who blights the happiness of everyone at Nick's San Francisco saloon where most of the play is set. (165)

While these interactions compose a kind of dramatic structure, it is not a traditional one. In other words, there is no single dramatic action that constitutes a major dramatic structure that is related to and incorporates all the characters presented.

The relationship between Tom and Kitty develops throughout the play, and seems to be the major dramatic action. Yet it has no influence on many of the other happenings in the play, such as the relationship between Dudley and Elsie and the coming to social consciousness of Krupp. The various incidents in the bar relate to each other, and the characters interact only by chance--by their chance happening in the bar at the same time.

An inspection of the separate episodes that make up the structure of the play reveal certain patterns. Patrons arrive at the bar beaten and broke, and the bar provides a place for them to

reestablish themselves through their fantasies. For example, Kitty Duval tells Joe that she is a burlesque queen, and Kit Carson defines himself through the tall tales he relates to the people in the bar. However, the bar is merely a haven, a temporary mooring, and is not free from the intrusions of the outside world, as represented by the newspaper and Blick. By the end of the play, the characters realize the need to take the strength they have developed in the bar back into the outside world, in order to achieve a full integrity of character. Thus Kit Carson is able to shoot Blick and the two new couples of Kitty and Tom and Elsie and Dudley leave the bar for their new lives.

Saroyan has purposely chosen an episodic dramatic structure for The Time of Your Life. The purpose of the play does not lie in showing the development of a single unifying action, but in displaying and juxtaposing scenes from the lives of various people in a way that expresses deep emotional truth. There are seldom any resolutions in one's own life either; character and the experience of good-heartedness assume greater importance than the events themselves.

Saroyan here is directly opposing the dramatic techniques of realist playwrights who manipulate characters and events on the stage to make everything come out neatly. Martin Esslin describes a multifocal technique of playwriting, which he sees at work in Gerhart Hauptmann's The Weavers, Elmer Rice's Street Scene, and Eugene O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh, as well as in The Time of Your Life. This multifocal technique is related to the development of a

style of play construction according to an "organic form which, of necessity, had to follow the subject matter" (Reflections 21).

According to Esslin, in plays that adopt a multifocal technique, the acts form "a series of loosely connected snapshots, with characters emerging from the crowd and then sinking back into it, half-finished episodes out of which the total picture gradually coalesced, like a mosaic, which is composed of thousands of tiny colored stones" (21-22). In addition Esslin points out that "the multifocal snapshot technique makes the playwright concentrate on a single static segment of time" (22).

The Time of Your Life follows just such a pattern, by linking multiple tableaux that consecutively highlight different characters from the crowd that passes through the bar, and by focusing on the moment of each character's particular time of life. This method is similar to the one in Subway Circus in which each scene focuses on a particular dramatic situation. As Esslin says, we see only a snapshot of a particular time of these characters' lives, and the snapshot blurs around the edges, hinting at life outside the bar. The theme emerges most clearly through the emotional experience of the play. This again reflects Saroyan's interest in the particular person or episode only as revelatory of an underlying common emotional truth, and also explains why again Saroyan is more interested in using theatrical techniques to create emotional impact rather than intellectual understanding, although in some of his later, more allegorical plays, he uses theatrical techniques to achieve both purposes. The Time of Your Life thus seeks to present

a moment of life for various people and is deliberately composed of the juxtaposition of originally unrelated incidents involving overlapping groups of characters.

Nick's bar in essence functions like a kaleidoscope. It is the instrument which throws together the jumbled mismatched customers who wander into the bar, each incomplete, with their own jagged edges. From these individual pieces coalesces a coherent and beautiful picture: the ability of human beings in communion to create a place where they can develop and express the positive elements of human character. What is of particular interest here is the growth in Saroyan, in the short period between writing My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life, of a social feeling. Johnny, his father, MacGregor, and the other characters of My Heart's in the Highlands can join together in a communal expression of good-heartedness, but their good will and humanity is essentially an individual concern. In The Time of Your Life, the community is essential to the development of any single individual's humanity, expressed most clearly by the dynamics between the couples Kitty and Tom and Dudley and Elsie.

In the long Act I, we are introduced to most of the major characters of the play. One by one the focus shifts to each one as he or she comes into the bar. We meet thus a group of people happily involved with their own business, which stimulates their interest and provides them with a chance at self-development not available outside the bar: Willie, who is deeply preoccupied with a pinball machine, as if the game were a duel between himself and his

destiny; warm-hearted Italian Nick, owner of the bar and ready to serve anyone who comes in, with a drink or a meal or a job or a place to feel at home; Joe, who finds meaning in every moment of his time and values others' lives as much as his own. Nothing in particular happens in this scene. It only shows a slice of everyday life in this San Francisco bar, which has the unexpected ability to transform itself into a fantasy world, and on the fringes of which appear the harsh outside world.

Into this bar come people like Kitty, Dudley, Harry, and Wesley, with their dreams and problems brought in from the outside world. The focus of the play moves from one character to another while each of them talks about his or her life. In these seemingly isolated surroundings, the characters appear to find a haven where they can safely dream their dreams. Their dreams, however, are constantly contrasted with the reality of the outside world, which is never completely out of mind or view.

At the very beginning of Act I, we see the unhappy responses of Joe and a drunk to the headlines in the newspapers. Later Blick and Lorene break into the scene from the outside world, disturbing the serene, peaceful atmosphere of the bar. Not only in Act I but also in the other acts, we see primarily the behavior of the characters and their talk about their dreams, and the juxtaposition of their dreams with a heartless reality. In Act II Joe talks about the meaning in his life: giving up "all kinds of little stupid things, for all kinds of little stupid reasons. Proud, selfish, ordinary things" (73), and living "a civilized life, a life that can't hurt any other life"

(77). Later in the Act Krupp and McCarthy come in with their particular problem, the longshoremen's strike, from the outside world again. In Act III Kitty is overwhelmed by her emotions, as she begins to realize that her dream may be realized with Tom. Here again, a young sailor intrudes, showing up at Kitty's hotel room as a customer. Act IV presents the dramatic meeting of Dudley and Elsie, and yet their meeting is not as romantic as an expected meeting of lovers because of Elsie's mention of the sorrowful reality outside the bar. In Act V Blick, an impediment to the realization of the dream of Kitty and Tom, is removed and the peace of the dream world is restored, as celebrated by Willie's delightful and comic victory over the pinball machine. In fact Lawrence Langner cites Saroyan as saying during rehearsal that "the climax of the play is the pinball machine. If you don't have a good pinball machine, the play has no climax" (323).

Thus the dramatic structure is loosely connected, by shifting character relationships and foci. This results in the gradual emergence of a theme: that the attempt to live a good-hearted life requires the freedom for self-realization found in dreams and fantasies, but the successful fulfillment of that quest also requires that the self found in fantasies be reconnected to what actually exists outside. Hence at the end of the play, all the characters leave the bar, implying that they are ready to begin again.

There is no real hero in the play, as each of the characters is able to act heroically at times in pursuit of their dreams. Most of the characters are not strongly individualized, since what is of

interest is not their specific experiences but the fact that they represent of good-heartedness. Above all, their psychological reality in different situations is not as important as their dreams. Their places in the real world are more or less characterized by their social functions. They can be said to be type characters who are either good or bad. It is only in their dream selves that they become fully human, as in their dreams their individuality is enlivened by connection with universal human emotions.

Most characters in The Time of Your Life, except for Blick, are meant to be innocent, rather naive, good, and, above all, in Saroyan's eyes important--great personalities. They are great because of their expression of good-heartedness, and their passion for their dream, whatever their social functions may be in the world outside the bar. Kitty is

full of hate for the poor world, and full of pity and contempt for its tragic, unbelievable, confounded people. She is a small powerful girl, with that kind of delicate and rugged beauty which no circumstance of evil or ugly reality can destroy. This beauty is that element of the immortal which is in the seed of good and common people. (29)

Dudley is

irritated by the routine and dullness and monotony of his life, apparently nobody and nothing, but in reality a great personality. He is a great personality because, against all these handicaps, what he wants is simple and basic: a woman. This urgent need . . . is the force which elevates him from nothingness to greatness. (39-40)

It may be almost impossible to act out these stage directions, but they reveal what kinds of type characters the roles are.

These characters in The Time of Your Life are distinguished not only by their good natures and dreams but also by their lively spirits, which elevate their good natures to noble and dignified ones. Kitty's self-introduction to Joe as a former burlesque queen is not intended to deceive him about her identity, but to express her vision of herself, her wish-fulfillment. Wesley asks for a job rather than merely charity from Nick, in spite of being on the brink of starvation. The jobs which he asks for, cleaning, dish-washing, and so on, reflect the impact that society has made upon him, in contrast to the freedom to realize himself that he experiences in Nick's bar, represented by his growing confidence in playing the piano. Perceiving the everlasting sorrow in the world, Harry makes a desperate attempt to present comic scenes to make people laugh. Even Nick, the owner of the bar, who has trouble facing up to his own dreams, which are symbolized by his ever-present racing form, does not reject Harry and Wesley, and reveals his anger toward Blick. In this isolated bar, the basic humanity of each character and their aims in the world are magnified and emphasized, creating a beautiful mosaic picture of coexisting dream worlds.

As there is a parallel between the themes and the characters of My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life, there is also a similarity in the use of theatricalism in both plays. Like the house, landscape, and store of the former play, the setting of the

bar in The Time of Your Life has metaphoric meaning. Nick wonders why his old honky-tonk attracts all these people:

I run the lousiest dive in Frisco, and a guy arrives and makes me stock up champagne. The whores come in and holler at me that they're ladies. Talent comes in and begs me for a chance to show itself. Even society people come here once in a while. I don't know what for. Maybe it's liquor. Maybe it's the location. Maybe it's my personality. Maybe it's the crazy personality of the joint. The old honky-tonk. (Pause.) Maybe they can't feel at home anywhere else. (51)

This is Nick's description of his own bar, as he perceives it. The bar, however, also has the meaning of a place which serves its customers as a kind of shelter where their dreams and illusions appear to be realized--their dreams shattered and unattainable in the outside world. Joe sees in the bar "an isolated corner of the world in which he can escape the painful enigma of life and can fulfill his desire to help rather than hurt others" (Everding 116). It does indeed have its own personality, coalesced from the mosaic of characters and episodes it shelters. It is a place where they can accomplish their self-realizations. Saroyan's description of the bar in Act I reveals this aspect of the bar as a haven,

every man innocent and good. . . . No one is competing with anyone else. No one hates anyone else. Every man is living, and letting live. Each man is following his destiny as he feels it should be followed; or is abandoning it as he feels he should forget it . . . a sense of the human body and spirit emerging from the world-imposed state of stress and fretfulness, fear and awkwardness, to the more natural

state of casualness and grace. Each person belongs to the environment, in his own person, as himself: WESLEY is playing better than ever. HARRY is hoofing better than ever. NICK is behind the bar shining glasses. JOE is smiling at the toy and studying it. DUDLEY, although still troubled is at least calm now and full of melancholy poise. WILLIE, at the marble game is happy. The ARAB is deep in his memories, where he wants to be. (60)

This peaceful view emphasizes the image of the bar as a fantasy world--an everyman's home where everyone lives up to his or her nature and talent, and respects others. This characteristic of the setting is highlighted by the choreography, which is not completely written out in the play. The stage direction shows that the bar is a self-contained setting in itself, a shelter from grief, despair, and frustration, but one constrained by the reality of the outside world.

The Highlands are a place for individual self-fulfillment. It is where the hearts, the essences, of the characters dwell. At the end of My Heart's in the Highlands, the characters are forced to leave, in search of their own self-expression and fulfillment. Nick's bar is also an area for self-realization, but unlike the permanent residence of the Highlands, it is only a temporary way station on the journey towards creating a coherent way of living, one in touch with the deepest sources of human emotion and value. This temporariness is suggested even by the title of the play. Nick's patrons must pass through the bar, must be given a place to dream, in order to develop their true nature, but they cannot abide there. They must move back to the world outside the bar to achieve full integration

of character. Thus they voluntarily leave the bar at the end of the play.

What Saroyan now sees as essential to self-development is a sense of community, a social relationship. The characters now can only move on together. Corresponding to the lyrical, rural individualism of the Highlands metaphor, the bar is an equally strong urban, communal symbol--a San Francisco waterfront bar, dive, and honky-tonk. Saroyan does not give a detailed description of the setting. He simply writes that "Nick's is an American place: a San Francisco waterfront honky-tonk" (19). The setting is realistic in appearance, but metaphorically the setting creates the world of reverie.

In this setting it is the music and a variety of sound effects that create both the world of reverie and reality. The governing mood of the play is represented by the music, especially the repeated playing of "The Missouri Waltz." As reality and illusion coexist in every act, the sound effects also play on two different levels. On the one hand, the music from the phonograph, piano music, harmonica songs, and solo songs reflect or enhance the atmosphere of the particular dramatic episode. For example, according to the stage directions: "At the very beginning of the play 'The Missouri Waltz' is coming from the phonograph. The music ends here. This is the signal for the beginning of the play. Joe suddenly comes out of his reverie" (22). Variations of "The Missouri Waltz" are repeatedly played "dreamily and softly, with perfect orchestral form, and with a theme of weeping in the horns repeated a number

of times" (28). This use of music is associated with the dreams or memories of the characters. In his review in the New York Post, John Mason Brown noted that the incidents create a series of different emotions, which takes the place of a plot. This comment suggests that the emotional impact of the situations was greater than that of the dramatic structure. Similarly Richard Watts's review in the New York Post of a 1955 revival of the play discloses the successful impact of music and dance in The Time of Your Life:

my second favorite scene has no words, but weaves a haunting spell as an old Arab plays a harmonica, Samuel Benskin [Wesley] joins him at the piano and Harold Lang [Harry] goes into his dance. So far as I'm concerned, it's a moment of curious magic. (390)

Unlike in My Heart's in the Highlands, the music in The Time of Your Life is not specified. Wesley plays the piano out of his spontaneous mood; it comes from natural self-expression. Accordingly when Nick asks him if he can play the same music that night that he had just been playing, Wesley answers "I don't know for sure, Mr. Nick, I can play something" (60). Since Wesley's music is his self-expression in praise of life, when Blick comes into the bar and yells that the streetwalkers should be banned, "The music stops. The mechanical toy runs down. There is absolute silence, and a strange fearfulness and disharmony in the atmosphere now" (62).

On the other hand, nonmusical sound effects, like mechanical noises from the pinball machine or whistle sounds, operate in

accordance with the intrusion of reality in the scene. At the play's opening, the noise from the pinball machine fills the realistic scene. Whenever there is an intrusion from the outside world into a scene, it is accompanied by either unmoody, natural sounds, or mere silence. Thus the different music styles alternate according to the situations, and signal the characters' crossing of the boundaries of the two different worlds: that of reverie and that of reality.

Another notable theatricalist feature in the play is the choreography, both that of individual characters and of the ensemble. The most striking use of choreography as a technique to present character and character development is Harry's dancing. As Harry repeatedly attempts to amuse people and restore laughter to the grim world, he constantly busies himself dancing according to his mood of each moment. He comes to the bar dancing. His dance changes from a natural style to an awkward one depending on his feeling and the atmosphere of the bar as well. His physical grace theatrically presents the amount of spiritual grace then being enjoyed by the patrons of the bar. When Wesley faints from hunger, Harry dances "a goofy dance, which Harry does with great sorrow, but much energy" (48), and even more noticeably he is able to dance without any music. He constantly creates and improvises his dance, as if he ascertained and defined his existence in the dance movement. Sometimes his dance changes to a pantomime to describe the situation.

In all its variations, Harry's dance and performance mode have a dual role. Just as with Johnny's movements in My Heart's in the

Highlands, Harry's choreography, even more than his speeches and ordinary interaction with other characters, expresses him, his nature, and state of being at each particular time of his life. In addition, it composes an important part of the setting, even during the episodes when Harry is not the dramatic focus.

Besides the dance, Harry relies on the monologue as a means of self-expression, as well as a comic device. Like the monologues of MacGregor and Johnny's father in My Heart's in the Highlands, Harry's monologues concern the events of the real world, such as the war and a difficult decision about what to do with a nickle. Harry's effort to entertain people in a comic manner with sad stories creates only a bitter smile of recognition in the hearts of the audience, as it does with the longshoreman McCarthy. Harry's dancing in this play frequently contains a sad tone, a counterpart to Johnny's acrobatics and somersaults, with their celebratory tone in praise of life itself. This difference in tone is reflective of the greater realization of the impermanence of the fantasy life of the bar and the oppressiveness of the world outside the bar. Harry's dance is the hard-won grace of human maturity, not of youthful spontaneity. In his review of the 1939 production in New York, John Mason Brown singled out Gene Kelly, who as Harry "proves himself a dancer of remarkable grace and versatility as a jobseeker on the waterfront" (465).

Many of the theatrical techniques in The Time of Your Life have similar functions to those in My Heart's in the Highlands. The theatricalism in The Time of Your Life, however, does not

contribute to creating an overall lyrical atmosphere in the play, as it did in My Heart's in the Highlands. As in the earlier play it is designed to create an emotional intimacy with the audience. In both plays the theatrical elements bear much of the burden of interpretation of character and thematic development, which is born in more realistic theatre by plot and dialogue. In addition, in The Time of Your Life the theatricalism is used even more strongly to present the constant juxtaposition of dream and reality, and to highlight the coexistence of moments of grief and happiness in life.

The theatrical devices are used to signal the temporariness of existence in Nick's bar, with changes in their usage signalling changes in episode and character. They are also the playful means of bringing the audience to life. The theatricalism in this play particularly contributes to the establishment of an intimate relationship between the stage and the audience, by the creation of an emotional effect on the audience. The audience is meant to experience and share feelings with the characters onstage, as if they too were customers in Nick's bar.

The 1930s: A Summary

In Subway Circus, Saroyan establishes his intention to create a type of theatre opposed to the conventions of realist playwriting. His first work for the theatre shows his commitment to using theatricalism to create a total theatrical experience, a histrionic reality, shared by performers and audience. That reality must

entertain as well as present a theme. Hence the theatrical devices in these early plays are designed more to achieve an emotional effect rather than intellectual understanding. The dramatic structure is episodic and characters are types in Subway Circus. These characters present different aspects of every individual, such as the lover, the revolutionary, and so on. The theatricalism of the setting and episodic structure are designed to awaken in the audience an emotional sense of the depth of the human nature that we all share, and an awareness of the complexity of individual dreams that forms the ongoing circus of life in which we all participate.

In both My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life, Saroyan focuses more on particular people in a particular environment. In My Heart's in the Highlands he describes Johnny's family, in poverty yet preserving their undaunted spirits with nobility and dignity. He uses relatively few characters in this play to express his beliefs about human nature. Whatever their real situation may be, the major characters occasionally are able to dwell in their dream world: the Highlands. Johnny and his father are forced to move out of their home, and yet, because of their spirit and their contempt for the real world, the future they face, which should be demoralizing, does not seem to be totally hopeless or desperate. Although there are some threats from the outside world or reality, represented by news of the war and the intrusion of the nursing-home manager, there is no real villain who

devastates their dreams. They move on at the end of the play still determined to dwell in the Highlands.

In The Time of Your Life people with various backgrounds associate with one another, and present and share their own dreams, in a bar which serves as a respite from the outside world. Their dreams appear to come true in the bar, which becomes a haven enabling them to nourish themselves through their dreams. Threats come intermittently from the outside world, represented by the headlines about World War II and by Blick, the head of the vice squad. These threats are still not insistently intimidating, because they can be either sublimated, like the war in Harry's monologues, or removed, like Blick. As in My Heart's in the Highlands, the characters in The Time of Your Life experience self-realization through their dreams, even though it is only momentary. Still, through the progress of the play, because of the time spent on developing their dream selves in the bar, when the two young couples leave, they are better prepared to face reality, and moreover to realize their dreams in the outside world.

In these plays of the 1930s, Saroyan attempts "to introduce American reality to American dramatic art," as he states in the preface to My Heart's in the Highlands. He seems to find the American reality in the everyday lives of Americans, and to create an American dramatic art based on vaudeville and the circus. Kenneth Lyon Fitts points out that:

From vaudeville comes the influence that helped Saroyan shape his concept of dramatic action and his approach to characterization. From the circus comes an influence of the spectacle in Saroyan's concept of theatre as well as a supportive influence for his concept of dramatic action.
(49)

While his theatricalism in these three plays shows the influence of Expressionism and Surrealism, most notably in Subway Circus, Saroyan attempts to create a more distinctively American drama in terms of both dramatic material and theatrical techniques. The monologues, the dance routines, musical solos and interludes, songs, jokes, and physical humor of these plays owe more to the traditions of vaudeville than to the legitimate theatre. Along with lighting, music, and setting, the theatricalism of these three plays is designed to create an emotional effect on the audience, as well as to serve as playful flourishes. They entertain the audience while they present Saroyan's thematic concerns with the interplay of illusion and reality in the creation of a livable world. The use of theatricalism to establish allegorical meaning is explored further by Saroyan in the plays of the 1940s.

CHAPTER 3

THE 1940s:

THE GREAT AMERICAN GOOF (1940), SWEENEY IN THE TREES
(1940), ACROSS THE BOARD ON TOMORROW MORNING (1941),
JIM DANDY; A FAT MAN IN A FAMINE (1941),
AND SAM EGO'S HOUSE (1947)

Before the end of 1939, a most memorable year for Saroyan, he finished another full-length play, Sweeney in the Trees, which was presented by the Cape Theatre of Cape May, New Jersey, in 1940. Saroyan's ardent enthusiasm about drama and theatre led him to write several plays, both realistic and theatrical, during the early 1940s. Furthermore he established his own theatre at the Belasco in 1941 to produce his plays himself, although it lasted only about a year.

Saroyan's plays written in the 1940s did not achieve as much critical and popular success as The Time of Your Life, and yet his fame continued to grow. The Beautiful People had a rather long run on Broadway, marking 120 performances, and Saroyan won Hollywood's Academy Award for his original screenplay of The Human Comedy in 1943. However, Saroyan's propensity to be outspoken about his literary talent and unconventional way of writing plays provoked some critics, who did not hesitate to make

harsh judgments of Saroyan's writings. Joseph Remenyi, for example, wrote:

Saroyan is not uprooted but he has no roots either. He is creating his own roots while he creates his own art. Probably it is due to this immense task that there is scarcely ideological or artistic growth in his work.
(96)

Although this criticism has some truth to it, Remenyi was approaching Saroyan's writing through the traditional canons of playwriting. As for Saroyan, in defying the traditional norms of playwriting he showed the same spirit as some of his characters, and throughout the 1940s he used different theatrical techniques to test the limits of the theatre. He followed his own free inspiration rather than adhering to any discipline.

Saroyan was preoccupied with searching for his own unique theatrical style in the 1940s. Razzle Dazzle, published in 1942, is a collection of sixteen short, experimental dramatic pieces, including Subway Circus and The Great American Goof. The collection discloses the variety of dramatic and theatrical techniques that appear in his full-length plays. These include an unconventional dramatic structure, use of type characters, stylized performance mode, and unrealistic settings, all of which contribute to breaking the unseen fourth wall of the realistic theatre. They also contribute to building an intimate relationship between the performers and the audience, which is created not only for its own sake, but also for enhancing the theme and the emotional effect of the plays. After

all, his idea of the nature of theatre had not greatly changed. During the 1940s, however, he sought ever new ways of using theatricalism to express character and embody his thematic concerns.

Saroyan continued to portray poor, beautiful, simple, and good-natured people, as the title of The Beautiful People, produced in 1941, overtly suggests.

The Great American Goof (1940)

A Number of Absurd and Heroic Events in the Life of the Great American Goof, a one-act ballet-play, was presented by the Ballet Theatre in New York in January 1940. In this play Saroyan experimented with ballet as a theatrical device. He did not explore the techniques of dance from the perspective of a dancer or choreographer but was concerned with the effects that dance can create. A primary effect of dance is the dislocation of reality. In The Great American Goof he uses the ballet form, including the choreography of other characters in the play besides the title role, to create a dream world.

In the notes for the first performance, Saroyan wrote:

No demand is more difficult to fulfill than the fierce demand of the world to be inhabited. . . . If the world is uninhabitable--if it is no fit place for a man of honor and dignity--what place should the living inhabit? . . . The world which everyone other than myself seems to have

identified and accepted as *The World is in reality a figment in a nightmare of an idiot.* (63)

Saroyan attempts to create an inhabitable and beautiful world in the theatre as a counterpart to the uninhabitable world outside of the theatre. To Saroyan an inhabitable world means a "poetic and wonderful" world, as he writes in the note, and dance can be used to create that world, for dance, like the circus, touches the visual, emotional and physical senses of the human animal and dislocates our rational fears and concerns that make the world uninhabitable.

Although Saroyan named *The Great American Goof* a ballet-play, it has the elements of many Expressionist plays, in which the world is presented through the subjective perception of the main character, here the great American goof. *The Great American Goof* is composed of a series of episodes, which tells the story of the Goof's life and in which the Goof experiences almost nothing but sorrow, disappointment, and frustration. The great American goof is described as:

a nameless young man who is delighted to be alive, curious about all things, eager for understanding, full of affection, love, comedy, sorrow, anger and all the other things which are part of man's identity, excepting that strongest of all in him is affection. (67)

The Goof begins a symbolic journey, "in a world full of people" (67). He meets a beautiful woman and tries to make her happy, without success. His efforts include dancing, acrobatics, and wrestling with her. Then he sees "an important-looking man, who looks like a

dummy" (68), who becomes his consultant in the journey of his life. The Goof goes through various experiences: he attempts to change the world by giving an address to the mob--and is put in jail for instigating a riot; after escaping from jail, he attempts to entertain people by singing for them; and he finds a job. He keeps moving from one activity to another in seeking meaning for his life, until he meets the woman again and declares that he will continue to work to change the world.

These episodes are presented both verbally and theatrically. For example, after failing to obtain love from the woman, the Goof tells the Dummy that he will pursue "facts" in the world:

HE: Yes, sir. From now on, facts. No poetry. (He turns to the woman.) I have a scheme. Don't worry. (He turns.) World, here I come. (The world consists of eleven or twelve people, two of them women, three children, pushing and beating each other. He arrives and watches, helps here and there where help is needed. Watches some more. Amazed. Decides to speak.) Ladies and gentlemen. (Everybody stops fighting excepting the children.) And children. (The children stop fighting.) I am your friend. I am here to help you. There appears to be a loss among you, I should say, of--equilibrium.

ONE: Equi what?

HE: Librium. Therefore, the time has come for a return to spiritual calisthenics.

ONE: Cali what?

HE: Sthenics. The program that I bring you is a new one. The Five-Century Plan.

ONE: Plant?

HE: Plan. If you will stop hitting each other over the head, in five centuries each of you will be--

ONE: Dead?

HE: No. Immortal. That is all. (A policeman arrives briskly. Takes the Goof by the shoulder.)

POLICEMAN: You're under arrest.

HE: What for?

POLICEMAN: Inciting to riot. (70-71)

As this excerpt shows, each episode has a short dialogue with mimetic action. Unlike Subway Circus, the scenes of The Great American Goof do not have backdrops to specify the location, nor is the background music specified.

Each scene changes as the characters come in and out. For instance, when the Goof decides to write about his life, various people come to him asking him to write about their lives. Among them, an immigrant comes in and takes his hand off his heart and dies. The play quickly passes through a series of events that begin and end in a similar rapid fashion.

In The Great American Goof, Saroyan presents the life of the Goof, which is not only a nightmare but also an ephemeral dream. The idea that life is but an illusion is discussed by the Goof and the Dummy:

HE: I don't see any fun in working. I want to resign.
From now on, philosophy.

DUMMY: What's philosophy?

HE: I don't know, but I don't want to be dead.

DUMMY: Everybody else is.

HE: I don't want anybody to be dead.

DUMMY: There isn't time to be alive.

HE: There must be.

DUMMY: That's an illusion. (80)

The character of life as an ephemeral dream is symbolically presented in the quickly passing scenes, and in the Surrealistic presentation of the life of its characters, such as that of the immigrant. However, what Saroyan intends in the play is not to represent the difficulties of living in this world but to transform those difficulties into a theatrical presentation of an archetypal life, in which the audience can identify themselves with the Goof and undergo a more fundamental experience of their lives through the theatrical expression. The aim of the play, as Saroyan writes in the preface, is to delight the eye and ear of the audience by presenting a refinement of the human body and spirit. Saroyan relies on dance and mimetic movements as a medium of artistic expression, and on the visual impact of the physical movements of performers rather than on language as a medium. The dramatic situation or its location is described by the choreography.

In the preface to the play, Saroyan describes at length his attendance at a ballet in Covent Garden, and concentrates more on his companions in the audience and their excitement than on the ballet itself. Dancing is a way of freely expressing emotion and spirit unclouded by the intellect, and it brings forth an emotional response from the audience. It is that excitement of a community sharing in the delight of pure physical grace and refined spirit that Saroyan sought to create theatrically.

The Great American Goof is Saroyan's most comprehensive attempt to use dance and choreography as the primary performance technique for all the characters in a play. In many of his plays, he incorporated dances and acrobatics as one of the major theatrical devices. They were mostly improvisational elements in his plays, like Harry's dancing in The Time of Your Life, and most often were used to express the nature of the characters, many of whom used dances or acrobatics as a means of expressing their joy of life. In The Great American Goof, dances and acrobatics not only express the nature or emotions of the Goof, but also are designed to increase the artistic effect of the performance of the play.

The events in The Great American Goof represent various aspects of human experience, which are repeatedly confronted in different forms, such as the woman, the realms of art, religion, work, riotous living, and so on. All these partial aspects prove to be unfulfilling, and can be of no help to the Goof unless he transforms them by personalizing them through his own creative imagination, in the spirit of a challenge. It is only at the end of the play, when

the woman smiles, that the Goof recognizes that the value of human living lies in the creative imagination. He then becomes truly alive. The Great American Goof says: "I don't want people to be dead, that's all. What's the use being born if you have to be dead all your life" (81). At the end of the play, the Goof says: "I'm going to begin again. From the beginning. . . . I'll change the world--you wait and see. . . . It may take six or seven thousand years, but I'll change it" (88). The change that he refers to is not the changing of the world, but an inner change and change in the way of looking at the world. Thus he makes it the task of his life to awaken the joy of life in everyone, as he is a young man "who is delighted to be alive."

Dancing is also used as a theatrical embellishment of the play's theme. The specific choreography can be filled in nightly, in performance, by the improvisations of the actors. Presumably dances would change nightly, depending on the frames of mind of the performers. This technique of allowing for differences in each performance is related to the idea that each performance has its own significance as an actual event. This theory is further developed in Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, in which Piper, a waiter, directly tells the audience: "Well, all I can say is, I'm glad you came tonight instead of last night because what happened last night wouldn't make anybody ask, What's this stuff mean? . . . Before you arrived tonight, it was the same here as last night" (231).

However, it is questionable how effectively the dancing can present the theme of the play. As noted, Saroyan in his preface was

concerned mostly with the spectators' reactions to the ballet. Similarly for a successful communication of theme and emotion, The Great American Goof must be attended by spectators who are open to its potentialities. The spectators must take an active role in creating a meaning for the theatrical experience, by interpreting the meaning of the dance. Moreover in The Great American Goof Saroyan intends to create an aesthetic value in the performance, through refined physical movement, as in a ballet. In addition he hopes the audience has been awakened by the theatrical devices to the possibilities of histrionic reality, in which the performer, through dancing in a variety of unrelated episodes, is supposed to present a character who is delighted to be alive, curious, full of affection, love, comedy, sorrow, and anger.

Like Subway Circus, the dramatic structure of The Great American Goof is episodic and the characters are types or symbols. The subject of the play again is the relationship between reality and illusion, here in the aspects of physical reality and spirit. Illusion functions as a catalyst that enriches the real world by changing people's perceptions of their potentialities; spirit enlivens physical being. It is supposed to allow both the performers and the spectators to imagine a livable world, and that dream is needed before such a place can be created. Similar to his view of a circus as a place in which physical activities are transformed so that their wondrous aspects are apparent, Saroyan in The Great American Goof explores the possibilities of using ballet to transform physical activity into spiritual expression. The burden of this exploration is

borne by the theatrical elements of the play, which help break down the barriers between performers and audience.

Sweeney in the Trees (1940)

In Sweeney in the Trees Saroyan continued to resort to theatricalism to portray ordinary, poor, and innocent people and their dreams. Sweeney is an apparently rich young man who has rented an office in an old building. On the same floor Miss Elix, a singing teacher, and Shakepierce, an old poet, have their own offices next to Sweeney's. Sweeney has placed an advertisement in the newspaper, offering an unspecified job for one person. Various kinds of people come to Sweeney's office to get the job, only to find out that the work consists of doing whatever they like to do, but they will not be paid for their work. In his office they observe that Sweeney is kicking around money, which he says is not real. For fun at first and to work out their angers, frustrations, and anxieties about success and survival, they join Sweeney in kicking around the money, with excitement and contempt. Later, when leaving the place, Sweeney throws away more money for them to kick around. While kicking this money around, they realize that it is real, and share it proportionately. Then all of the visitors leave Sweeney's office, just as they had come there in the beginning of the play. But they are changed now, spiritually reborn, with different outlooks toward the outside world, after their experiences in Sweeney's office.

Saroyan presents two themes in Sweeney in the Trees. The first is that people should not enslave themselves in pursuit of materialism, as represented by the money that Sweeney kicks around. Instead they should work to achieve their dreams. Those who come to Sweeney's office to get the job are greatly in need and have had their dreams suppressed by this need. They are caring, joyful people, and yet, Sweeney thinks, have wasted their lives in working to get money. Miss Elixia notes that "everybody is so wonderful and wasted" (168). Shakepierce, who shares Sweeney's opinions on life, advises Luke, one of the characters who comes to Sweeney's office for the job, that "Work is for slaves. The living were never intended to work. The human body was never intended to be exerted, except for great living" (138). This does not mean that one should spend one's whole life in hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, but one should live every moment of life as fully as one can.

In contrast to the goals and pressures of society, Sweeney emphasizes the importance of living up to one's own nature, cherishing dreams, and realizing them in one's living. He acknowledges the necessity for money in daily life, but he believes that that need is not a sufficient pretext for people to sacrifice their lives to it. In respecting "the ugliness and treachery of money" (170), human beings lose their dreams, innocence, and nobility. Thus Sweeney derides Miss Elixia, by accusing her of pretending to teach singing to Alice, her student, just to be paid, regardless of Alice's singing ability or Elixia's love for her own work.

Sweeney wants to help these poor but innately good-hearted people realize their dreams. This involves two gifts: before helping them with the gift of money, he wants to teach them that money is not everything and cannot always get them what they need. He expresses his contempt for materialism by kicking around the money on the floor and encourages the others to join him in doing so, and then he provides them with as much money as they truly need. He first shows them that their overwhelming focus on materialism, their great desire for money, is wrong and runs contrary to their true natures. By showing them that a happy life is achieved in the realization of good-heartedness and community, he contrasts the emptiness of their desires for materialism with their real needs, which he then helps them to meet, by providing both money and an opportunity for communion.

While learning this lesson from Sweeney, all the good-natured characters in the play come to experience a true communion in Sweeney's office, and consequently feel that they are at last fully alive. The true communion is experienced while they talk about themselves, their experiences, and their dreams, share food, and sing together in praise of living.

When characters come to Sweeney's office in response to his ad or some other call, they begin to talk about why they want the job and what their dreams are. In sharing their experiences and dreams, they regain a true connection to themselves as well as to others. Shakerpierce watches these people enjoying a true communion and states that "I don't care a great deal about people.

My spirit shrinks from their faces. However, in this room, in this company, in the presence of this tree, I find my spirit in sweetness and grace" (141-142). This sweetness and grace are felt not only by Shakepierce, but are also shared by all the other characters in the scene.

The true communion among the characters is symbolically presented in their sharing food, a motif appearing in several Saroyan plays. In My Heart's in the Highlands the community of neighbors is symbolized by their creation of an offering feast to be shared with Johnny and his family and MacGregor, in response to MacGregor's bugling. An important moment in Jim Dandy involves the characters sharing a loaf of bread. In Sweeney in the Trees, upon discovering that Luke is hungry, Shakepierce orders hamburgers and coffee for Luke and others in the office. He satisfies not only their physical hunger with the food, but also their spiritual hunger with the communion created by their sharing the food. This true communion is highlighted most strongly at the moment when all the other characters join Alice in singing. This occurs right after they have been kicking the money around, thereby freeing themselves from material obsessions. Alice believes that she cannot sing well, but she tries again, as her mother encourages her:

MISS ELIXA'S piano-playing now reaches the beginning of a delightful yet somber aria which ALICE sings. She sings

magnificently. She sings the whole aria. . . . First SWEENEY, and then, one by one, everybody joins ALICE in singing.

SHAKEPIERCE: Now, I am ready to sleep. (He stretches out on the couch and goes to sleep.) (183)

The singing is the expression of the exalted spirits of the characters in the scene. As Harry's dancing is accompanied by Wesley's piano playing in The Time of Your Life, Perez and Consuela start to dance in this scene, in a natural expression of their joy, while the others sing. Perez and Consuela can dance beautifully only when they feel alive and true to themselves, which they experience when they join the group of singing people. On other occasions, when they had been well paid and applauded for their dancing but had not felt at home with themselves or their surroundings, their dancing had suffered.

Singing and dancing together is an expression of the characters' spiritual exaltation in sharing their joy in living. This does not mean that it occurs only at conventionally happy moments; at Shakepierce's death the other characters join in celebration both of Shakepierce's own life as well as the joy and wonder present in everyone's life. The scenes of communal singing present brief moments of communication in their lives. In these moments they all forget their monetary concerns and feel at peace with themselves and with each other, feeling only love and understanding for one another. This scene is comparable to the scene in Act I in The Time of Your Life in which everyone is

preoccupied with his or her own pursuits, creating a peaceful and harmonious picture and transforming the bar into a haven.

This is also a moment that conveys a religious tone, as it symbolically expresses spiritual rebirth. In the scene in which Shakepierce dies, the other characters are spiritually reborn. Witnessing the beautiful communion of their exalted spirits, Shakepierce welcomes the opportunity to rest in sleep for good.

The second theme Saroyan pursues in Sweeney in the Trees is the need to recognize the presence of eternity in each passing moment of everyday life. This theme is highlighted in a speech by Shakepierce in which he captures the passing moments in his life, with appreciation. He declaims:

(Looking at his vest-pocket watch) At twenty-two minutes to twelve, may I ask how, on this rainy day, in this broken-down building, in this room which has been vacant eleven years that I know of, with phone bells ringing, it has come to pass that two young men--one hungry, and the other most likely out of his head or on the verge of greatness--in the presence of a third who is asleep--how it has come to pass, I say, that these three are gathered together--is it for the purpose of loud talk, or what? (138-139)

Shakepierce knows that life is, after all, composed of all these passing moments, and he fears that we miss these moments most of the time without being aware of them.

Similarly Pipitski, a Russian waiter, talks about losing the moments of his life by misdirecting his energies:

PIPITSKI: . . . This is the idea, the idea is this. I must go back to work. Work! For what? Money? How much money? Not enough. Food? Always. Money? Never. Therefore, I gamble. Why? For enough money. Enough for what, Little Father? That is the question. Enough for what?

JIM: What?

PIPITSKI: I don't know. Enough. There is never enough. . . . I beg of you. There is so much to lose every minute.

JIM: So much of what?

PIPITSKI: Life. Life. Am I alive? (166)

The characters in Sweeney in the Trees are being asked to instill value in every passing time of their lives by imbuing it with the fundamental human aspects of compassion and communion.

In Sweeney in the Trees Saroyan describes some essential truths about human character and experience. He presents them not through a dramatic action but through various situations. The different situations in the play separately reveal variations on a pattern of self-discovery, as each character learns something of the relative values of money in comparison to their common humanity. Beneath the surface realities of an old poet, a Russian waiter, or a dance team, the same essential humanity--an inborn good nature--is revealed, and the possibility of experiencing true community and compassion is based on the awareness of that commonality.

Saroyan thus was not greatly concerned with individual characterization in Sweeney in the Trees. The characters in the play are basically divided into two character types--those trying to

actualize their good natures and those who are living out their inauthentic, bad natures. In this play all the characters are good except for Helen, Sweeney's wife. She is described as a threat to Sweeney, criticizing him for kicking around the money.

Sweeney does not belong to either group. He is the symbolic figure of a dream-keeper. He is another of the typical protagonists in Saroyan's plays, who love dreamers and like to give things to those in need and feel that by doing so they fulfill their roles in life. As Kernodle points out, in many of Saroyan's plays, the characters are of two types: dream keepers, who have faith in themselves and create that faith in others, and characters who are brought from doubt to joy, through the activity of a dream keeper (200).

Sweeney protects the dreams of the poor people who come to his office from the harsh reality outside. He confesses, "I love its [the world's] dream and its dreamers" (197). He nurtures the dreams of poor people and helps them to realize their dreams by freely giving them money and by teaching them a lesson--the contempt of money, so that they can keep their spirits alive in wealth or in poverty.

The theatrical devices used in the play are basically similar to those in Saroyan's previous plays: monologues, singing, and dancing. In addition, in Sweeney in the Trees, Saroyan heavily relies on the use of symbols as a theatrical device. Sweeney, a symbol of a dream keeper, grows and guards a tree in his office. The tree in Sweeney's office symbolizes his faith in human potential and in the value of nurturing one another. The tree has grown in the office for

thirty years. However, it is small in the beginning of the play, and grows so big in a day that Sweeney can swing back and forth on the tree in Act III. It grows as Sweeney's faith in the beautiful spirits of the other poor characters grows. Sweeney hides himself in the tree, and tells Miss Elixia that he fits in the tree better than in the world. The tree provides Sweeney with protection from the outside world by providing him with a place to be himself away from external demands and intrusions, and it also provides him with a means by which he can shelter all who come to him. The other characters come to Sweeney in search of work, money, and security. He provides them instead with the place and freedom to seek self-realization and the fulfillment of their dreams.

Among those who come to Sweeney is Jim. He comes to Sweeney to look for a job, gets it, and takes a nap on the couch right afterwards. Jim's last name is Lark, a bird's name, and in keeping with his name, he mentions that he actually once lived in a tree. A bird in a tree has a symbolic meaning of freedom and, by extension, of a person who has achieved freedom, and Jim acts more freely than the others. He is not restrained by external concerns.

Similarly Sweeney compares Shakepierce's death to the achievement of freedom, and compares him to a bird. He describes the scene as follows: "I saw him with an infinity of space around him, like a bird. He's dead" (184). In the end of the play, a white bird flies out of the tree as all the people leave the place. This white bird, like Noah's dove, thus symbolizes the birth of a new spirit and new life.

In addition, the play has people from all levels of the social scale: a poet, a gambler, dancers, young lovers, Luke and Evangeline, a postal messenger, and so on. These are familiar characters that Saroyan often describes in his plays. They are closer to type characters than individualized characters and are primarily identified by their social functions. This variety of characters is present in the play to show that underneath any surface individualities in circumstances, economic status, ethnic background, and so on, everyone shares the same possibilities of good-heartedness and innocence. Thus he suggests the elemental identity uniting all people beneath and beyond socially created differences and difficulties.

Monologue is not greatly used in Sweeney in the Trees, except by Pipitski. In his monologues, he reveals his inner conflict between the desire to live up to his conscience and his self-contempt for his gambling habit. However, his monologues are comic in tone, like Harry's in The Time of Your Life, mostly because his self-examination in the monologue contradicts his actual behavior:

Enough. There is never enough. I burst with kindness. I gamble. I throw away my life. I lose. Always. There is no horse in the world that will not lose if I bet on it. This is the idea, the idea is this. I am ignorant. In the end I sit at a table and eat. I eat and eat. I read the newspaper and eat. I beg of you. There is so much to lose every minute. (166)

In a dialogue in Act II, Perez and Consuela express their sorrow about not creating a deep level of understanding with their audiences. Although it has the form of a dialogue spoken by two people, it is in effect the same as the voice of one person, revealing the basic identity of the members of the dance team and suggesting the identity of us all.

CONSUELA: There is a difference between good and bad. It is shameful to be applauded for either.

PEREZ: After that we danced better every night, but the applause grew less and less.

CONSUELA: And now, when we can really dance, we can't get a job in a saloon, even.

PEREZ: We are ready to do any kind of work.

CONSUELA: In a saloon, even.

PEREZ: Any kind of work at all.

CONSUELA: We are dancers.

PEREZ: But we are ready to do any kind of work. (To CONSUELA) Wife. (He stands, bows. CONSUELA stands, curtsies, takes his hand).

CONSUELA: Husband. (They begin to dance, while Shakepierce watches them). (174-175)

In both cases, the monologues of the characters disclose their failure to reach understanding with others or the outside world, in which they can find no place of comfort that naturally shelters

them, like a tree. This was also Harry's problem as expressed in his monologues in The Time of Your Life.

Saroyan uses music, singing, and dancing to portray the changing mood of the characters and the scenes. Miss Elixia's piano playing reflects her changing mood, as does Alice's singing. However, the singing has more significance than the dancing in Sweeney in the Trees. While arguing with Miss Elixia, Sweeney states that:

I am displeased with the sound of my voice, the galloping idiocy of my words. I want no meaning in words. It is an accident that we speak. We improved that accident a little by breaking into song. We should be silent for years and do nothing but love one another. By that time maybe we shall have something to say. (172-173).

If we can better express the truth of our lives and our spiritual experience in singing rather than in words, it is because, Saroyan suggests, singing creates emotional communion, as opposed to the discriminations of language. It is singing which expresses the characters' exalted spirits and their joy and communion.

When the people in Sweeney's office experience momentary freedom and communion in their lives, they express it in songs--a better tool than the spoken words. Similarly in My Hearts in the Highlands, rather than anyone's speech, MacGregor's bugle is the sound that initiates a communion. Songs are what birds use to express their natures, and human songs, Saroyan is suggesting, are undisguised and natural expressions of our nature and emotions.

Dancing and acrobatics in Sweeney in the Trees reinforce the emotions expressed in singing. Dance is used as a means of elemental self-expression. Again Saroyan relies on dancing rather than words to reveal the positive elements of human character. Just as so often with Saroyan and his own plays, Perez and Consuela are not always understood by their audience, who give them great acclaim for a poor performance.

Both the dances of Perez and Consuela and the acrobatics of Kiori Okada and his son Kiroki Okada reinforce the atmosphere of their situations. For instance, the two Okadas' acrobatics, after Shakepierce's death, are performed as if they celebrated his death as an achievement of freedom.

KIROKI: (Pointing at Shakepierce, speaking in Japanese) Is he dead?

OKADA: (In Japanese, lifting the boy and holding him overhead, like professional acrobats. They continue various acrobatics until the end of the scene) He was an old man. (185)

Similarly at the end of the play, when a white bird flies out of the tree, Okada and his son do acrobatics in celebration of their freedom and joy of living.

Saroyan does not use lighting effects in this play. Lighting functions in Sweeney in the Trees primarily to illuminate the stage, and not in accordance with the changing circumstances. Lighting can be a more effective device in more lyrical plays, such as My Heart's in The Highlands.

Given the symbolic nature of Sweeney in the Trees, it is the theatricalism that makes this play vital and appealing. In the preface to the play, Saroyan describes Sweeney in the Trees as "a play, a dream, a poem, a travesty, a fable, a symphony . . . a theatrical entertainment, a circus, anything you like, whatever you please" (106). As he states, the play is a mixture of everything. He attempted to create a new work of art by combining the use of symbols to illustrate ordinary activity and express his familiar themes about illusion and reality. In this play he has a more specific focus than in some of his other works: the inhumanity of the economic system and the striving it encourages to acquire things at the expense of our more fundamental shared nature. In addition Saroyan discusses the theme that every passing moment of our lives reveals eternity in its repetition. This theme is first suggested in The Time of Your Life, and is further developed in Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning. In terms of theatricalism, in Sweeney in the Trees Saroyan uses in particular his established techniques of song and dance, in combination with a new exploration of theatrical symbolism, to highlight certain moments and to reinforce the theme by creating an appropriate atmosphere.

Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning (1941)

After an unsuccessful production of Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning at the Pasadena Community Playhouse in February 1941, Saroyan formed his own theatre at the Belasco

Theatre in New York, and produced the play in 1942, without much success. Many critics expressed confusion about the meaning of the play as well as the theatrical techniques used. Louis Kronenberger described the work as "hopelessly bad" (252); both John Mason Brown (253) and John Anderson (253) found it boring; and Brooks Atkinson, who liked several things about the work, described Saroyan's direction as "compounding a felony" (254). Howard Barnes wrote that "His mysticism is muddled instead of enlightening. His symbolism is theatrically inept" (254). Richard Lockridge remarked:

Mr. Lee [Canada Lee in the role of Piper] is allowed to say, directly to the audience, that some of what the audience is seeing may be a little hard to understand. . . . Heaven knows it is hard enough, at its worst meaningless and sometimes pretentious. Mr. Saroyan demands too much concentration and rewards it too seldom. (254)

Similarly the Times reviewer of a 1962 London production wrote: "Mr. Saroyan is a poet of profound simplicities who tends to inflate the simplicity and leave the profundity to look after itself" (18). Eric Keown of Punch noted: "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning is more incidentally amusing [than Talking to You] but just as hard to de-code. It starts with the ancient gag of a waiter in a restaurant suddenly noticing the audience, and bringing his boss to help him entertain us until the customers arrive" (537).

Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning is set in a restaurant-bar in New York City. Various kinds of people come to the

restaurant and talk about ordinary things: Wall Street, the Waiters Union, the Philippines. Fritz, a cab driver, enters with a woman who is having a baby, and remains there, chatting with Jim, a bartender. Soon a young man comes into the bar. He asks them if they have seen tomorrow's paper. Further he announces that according to tomorrow's paper they are all dead. When Jim tries to go out to get a later edition of the newspaper, the young man says that there is neither a street nor people outside. Jim goes out of the bar to check on the world outside, and returns, saying that there is nothing outside--no street and even no cab. Upon being asked, the young man mentions that his name is Callaghan Mallory, which was the name of the baby who had just been born in the bar. Then Harry enters the restaurant. He asks the young man his name, and upon learning that it is Callaghan Mallory, Harry announces that he is the young man's father. Jim runs out of the bar, checks again upon the outside world, and returns, telling people that everything in the world outside has been restored. All the customers in the restaurant then leave the bar at the end of the play.

The theme of the play is that our real life is no less an illusion than the events in a theatre. Saroyan equates the nature of the theatre with life, on the ground that both involve the interplay of illusion and reality. Saroyan considers that the theatre presents an illusion of reality, just as life is the reality of an illusion in which one believes that one is the substance of the reality of living. He implies that life is a process of continuation in which one does not find much meaning. Each individual believes that he or she is the

substance of his or her life, but the substance itself changes every moment and eventually disappears as one passes away. Thus life is nothing but an illusion of reality, though we like to give meaning to the illusion. This is similar to the theme of Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. In Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning this outlook is presented by Thomas Piper, a waiter. He argues that life is filled with illusions, from the moment that a person is born and tells the audience that the present theatrical activity is the creation of an illusion:

Anonymous at birth, nobody knows who he's liable to turn out to be. He is the most imaginative of all creations, and yet what happens, as his own years come to him, is usually ordinary, dull, and for the most part boring. We can predict for the man just born anything we like, but the truth is he is not very likely to grow into anything extraordinary. . . . Now, more than ever, you are wondering, What is this about? I don't blame you. Finding little or no meaning in the world, you insist upon unmistakable meaning in created things, in things of illusion, of which this is, good or bad, an example. . . . Outside of this restaurant is the illusion of the world. Here, in this restaurant, is the illusion of our reality--
 (The stage lights rise)
 --which we shall proceed to explore, while there is still time, and no deaths among you. (255-256)

The themes of disillusionment and the meaninglessness of life have grown in Saroyan, perhaps as the result of the difficult world situation emerging at the start of the World War II and the changing attitudes of his time toward the meaning of human existence. In our time, Saroyan writes:

the only real play is a very pathetic play because the leading players are Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and others of their kind . . . at the core of things our time has either selected falsity instead of truth or allowed falsity instead of truth to be imposed on it. ("Two Theatres" 795)

The principal thing that is lacking in our time, he declares, is "noble imagination." Johnny and his father may be disillusioned about their abilities to dwell peacefully in the Highlands without interruption; but they would not argue for the meaninglessness of life. Most of the characters in The Time of Your Life and Sweeney in the Trees also would accept that something's surely wrong somewhere, and experience a consequent disillusionment. However, they too do not assert the meaninglessness of life, but rather are concerned with the difficulty of realizing self-fulfillment. At times in the earlier plays, as in Harry's monologues in The Time of Your Life, Saroyan expresses an existential rage and despair about human existence, but this is a theme that grows in prominence in the later plays.

In Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, this theme is expressed by Harry Mallory. In a monologue Harry proclaims:

The world, we know is amok. The realm of all reality, therefore, is now also amok. The world has always been uninhabitable, but every man alive has been himself a place of refuge from the world--from its murder, its spiritual pestilence, its adultery, its false-witness, its whoring, its mean streets, its rotting cities, its diseased governments: all the things which engage in contest

with the free spirit of a man. The world has always been unworthy of that free spirit, but now also the body of each man in the world has lost its base, its location, its position, its security, its relation to God and grace, its source, its power, its youth and form, its blood and ensemble, its beginning and continuity. . . . This may be the last day of reality. We had better try to be human while there is time. (251-252)

Saroyan shares with the audience much of his increasingly gloomy vision of the world. He believes that a true perception of the nature of our lives would enable us to look into and change ourselves. By so doing, he thought, we can improve the world: "The problem of the world is inevitably the problem of each person in it, and the place to start improving is in each person" ("How to See" 206). Whether or not his perception of our lives as illusion, that is, as self-created is correct, it is obvious that in the theatre he sought to create a histrionic counterpart to the reality that exists outside the theatre. He relied on theatricalism in order for the audience to be aware of the illusion-making nature of the theatre.

The dramatic structure and characterization are not significant in this play. While Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning shares some similarities with The Time of Your Life in terms of the setting and loose dramatic structure, the later play even more deliberately defies the dramatic rules of realist plays. The characters in Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning are individualized only to the extent that they represent particular types of experiences and backgrounds. Their description does not in the least concern a

realistic individual characterization. They are simply customers of the restaurant.

The theatricalism of Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning is its most notable and distinctive feature. While continuing to create theatrical effects through the setting, monologues, music, and dance, Saroyan attempts to explore a new theatrical technique in this play. He seeks to build an intimate relationship between the performers and the audience by demolishing the unseen fourth wall of the realist theatre, through the performers' direct address and contact with the audience.

The play begins as follows:

A portion of Callaghan's Restaurant-bar in New York. THOMAS PIPER, a waiter, is seated at a table, reading a newspaper. He turns a page, notices the audience, goes on reading, remembers the audience, studies the audience, folds the paper, gets up, and moves forward.

PIPER: Ladies and gentlemen, before you is an illusion of a restaurant-bar in New York City: the bar, the bartender, a few tables and chairs, entrances, exits, Men's Room, Ladies' Room, kitchen, a cook and two Filipino boys in the kitchen, a hat-check girl out there near the door, a door-man on the sidewalk, a couple of cabs in the street, New York all around, the world everywhere else. . . . (JOHN CALLAGHAN, the proprietor of the restaurant-bar, emerges from the Men's Room) You feel sorry for people who don't stay alive to see what's going to happen. How things are going to turn out. A lot of things are going on in the world. They're all in the new style, too. Swifter.

CALLAGHAN: What do you think you're doing?

PIPER: My boss. John Callaghan. He owns this place. Excuse me. (To CALLAGHAN) There was nothing to do. I happened to notice the people. I was chatting with them. (217-218)

Saroyan uses Piper like a stage manager who introduces the play directly to the audience, a technique also found in Thornton Wilder's Our Town. In Our Town, the stage manager does not have another role, but Piper plays the role of a waiter as well.

Intermittently Piper continues his monologues spoken directly to the audience. As noted in my previous discussion of The Great American Goof, in one of the monologues Piper confronts the audience with the idea of the performance as an actual event.

Already some of you may be asking yourselves, for instance, what's this stuff mean? Well, all I can say is, I'm glad you came tonight instead of last night because what happened last night wouldn't make anybody ask, What's this stuff mean? A few people came and ate and paid their checks and went. Before you arrived tonight, it was the same here as last night. (231)

By abandoning the unseen fourth wall, Saroyan transforms the theatre into a place of real happenings. The breaking of the fourth wall is not designed to allow audience participation in the manner of some types of environmental theatre. It is designed to create a community of shared illusion among the performers and the audience, thereby awakening both an emotional sensitivity to and an intellectual awareness of our shared participation in creating histrionic reality in the theatre. When Lois enters the restaurant

and notices the audience, she gasps and says to Pinkerton, "Hurry. Let's get out of here" (227). Lois's reaction seems to be designed to awaken the audience to the histrionic nature of performance. In Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, Saroyan is trying to make the audience self-conscious and face up to their part in the creation of a histrionic reality.

Alexander Bakshy, one of the early proponents of the development of the idea of theatricalism as opposed to realism, emphasized the importance of viewing a performance as an event rather than a representation of life. He believed that the performance should be an event presenting something make-believe. In The Theatre Unbound, he argued that:

"Performance," now so unrecognisable in its ponderous representational garb, will appear in its divine nakedness. No longer will it be a picture of events as these are shaped in some real or imaginary world. It will itself be an event, but an event in the life of the theatre, a happening in that real world which is a gathering of actors and spectators come together, the first to practise, and the second to watch, the art of undisguised and glorying make-believe. (17)

This approach is in opposition to the idea of the theatre being a representation of life; that would be the "illusionist" attitude that Gassner attributed to realist playwrights. Bakshy considered theatrical activity itself to be a self-contained artistic activity. A theatrical performance as an independent, self-creative histrionic reality is what Saroyan attempted to achieve in Across the Board on

Tomorrow Morning. Although he may not have intended it to be an purely artistic in the same way that Bakshy had meant performance to be, Saroyan in this work treats the performance as an actual event, as opposed to "a picture of events."

The setting of Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, like that of The Time of Your Life, is a restaurant-bar. However, the metaphor of the bar setting in this play does not imply a haven or a refuge as it did in The Time of Your Life. The setting of Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning encompasses the whole environment of the theatre, including the audience as an integral part. The metaphor of the setting is life, or the world itself. The theatre is the world of illusion, and the outside world represents a harsh reality. However, as the world of illusion can only be temporary, the outside world is not permanent either. Even the outside world is real only if we perceive it as real. In the world of illusion, a new-born baby comes in a minute later as a young man. The Young Man says: "The same things are going to be repeated, and I might say they're going to be repeated more or less endlessly, but outside of that everything is ended" (267). In the cycle of life, everything happens repeatedly. When Harry Mallory comes in, Fritz, a taxi-driver, asks The Young Man who Mallory is. The Young Man answers: "Myself. My father. My son. Yourself. Each of us" (271).

The setting represents a place where reality and illusion coexist. The theatre can be a world which is timeless or where all time exists at once and where the whole process of life can be shown regardless of the passing of time. Accordingly the time of

the performance represents the past, the present, and the future at the same time. The theatre is an impermanent world in which the description of a permanent world is possible. Intimacy between the performer and the audience is created by the notion that both of them simultaneously live and experience the world of the illusion.

The performance modes of the characters are more self-conscious than those in other plays. Saroyan continued to employ monologues in describing the reality of the outside world. Harry's monologue describes the bitter world of reality, which is harsh. Harry's perception of the world represents that of a growing number of people in this century: a loss of faith, the doom represented by world war, and the disintegration caused by rapid social changes. As in his earlier plays, such as My Heart's in The Highlands and The Time of Your Life, Saroyan consistently adopted monologues as a means of describing the harsh outside world, which is opposed to the livable world of the theatre.

In Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, music and lighting are used for the purpose of entertaining, as well as to either create or reinforce the mood. In the opening scene, John Callaghan attempts to entertain the audience by dancing and singing "The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls." The music sometimes controls the tempo of the movement. In the last scene, when everybody except for Harry is ready to leave the bar, "Music begins--Impromptu for Harp, by Gabriel Faure, Op. 86, part 2" (274). Then everyone moves slowly. In this play Saroyan did not

rely on music and lighting as theatrical devices as much as in previous plays.

The theatricalism in Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning is closely related to the theme--the relation of reality and illusion. In addition to the episodic plot and the type characters, the constant juxtaposition of reality and illusion in the play and its juxtaposition of the theatre and the outside world, highlight the histrionic nature of the theatre in general and of the performance of this play in particular. The theatricalism in Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning thus serves both to reinforce its theme and to illuminate the nature of the theatre.

Jim Dandy: A Fat Man in a Famine (1941)

Although not published until 1947, Jim Dandy was first produced by the Theatre Intime of Princeton, New Jersey, in 1941. The responses of the reviewers indicate some puzzlement about the play. In his review Brooks Atkinson remarked that: "Although the setting looks surrealistic, it seems like a normal environment for this masque of states of mind" (10). He called the play "one of the most difficult scripts in the modern drama." Similarly the Time magazine reviewer asked: "whether it is a play is another question. It might as well have been called Fun and Stuff in the San Francisco Public Library" (68).

In Jim Dandy: A Fat Man in a Famine, Saroyan continued to elaborate upon the familiar themes that he had explored in the

plays already discussed, using similar techniques of theatricalism in an attempt to achieve an even greater unity of content and form. Like Sweeney in the Trees, Jim Dandy is also a more symbolic play than his earlier successes, My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life. In Jim Dandy Saroyan further developed his persistent convictions concerning the essential innocence and good nature of human beings, and the value of trying to live a good-hearted life. This play too presents characters in quest of the meaning of life in an indifferent world or universe. As in the earlier plays, he stresses the necessity for the characters to hold on to their dreams, as the only realm in which the good nature of human beings can be fully accomplished and completed.

Even more directly than in the earlier plays, Jim Dandy explores the relationship between human beings and God, and between individuals and society. Above all, the play asks how to restore the disappearing innocence of human nature in order to live in harmony with one another in a disturbed, uncertain world. In various ways Jim Dandy extends a thematic line progressing from My Heart's in the Highlands through Sweeney in the Trees, reflecting Saroyan's increasing belief in the interpenetration of dreams and reality, and the connection between individual fulfillment and the idea of community.

As in the earlier plays, so in Jim Dandy, too, the characters keep their dreams, which eventually overpower the constraints of impinging reality. In expressing his determination to pursue his dream, Johnny says:

Perhaps not, but it's here if it's anywhere at all, and I come here in the hope of witnessing the arrival of someone so pure in heart that it will be revealed to him. . . . Or to the prisoner. It must be revealed to someone again. I come to the public library to see the Holy Grail revealed. (23)

Reality in Jim Dandy exists as a shadow world, in the fragments and desolate ruins of the setting. In Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning Saroyan began to explore the idea of the theatre as a world that could be timeless. The setting of Jim Dandy presents the conditions of human existence regardless of time and space. In the egg-shaped setting, we now see the microcosm of the world. It is crowded with various people and places. The stage simultaneously shows a public library, a jail, and a cave:

JIM DANDY takes place in all or part of a transparent egg shell which is broken and open along one side. Inside the shell are miserable and majestic ruins. . . .

A large copper plate on the librarian's work counter names the ruins The Public Library. . . .

At the center of the egg is the back end of a small jail with a second-floor window of steel bars. . . . Falling brick has made a large Gothic arch directly beneath the jail window, which leads to a dark cave inhabited by a small boy and a small girl, LITTLE JOHNNY and LITTLE MOLLY. (3-4)

As for people, there is a fastidious woman librarian, Flora; two innocent prisoners, Jim Smithers and Jack Adams; Little Johnny and

Little Molly, who live in the cave; a realist, Fishkin; Tommy Singh, a soldier with a rifle; a silent young woman, Molly; an ape man, Gibbon; the priestly-looking Johnny; a seer-magician-Indian chief in a wagon, Jim the Maharajah; a runaway girl; a wild little man in a zoot suit, Jock Arimathea; a young black, Jim Crow; and the enormously fat Jim Dandy. The setting and combination of characters are among the most complicated devised by Saroyan; the long description of the stage and the characters takes six pages before the dialogue begins.

Again in this play, there is no distinctive development of a dramatic action. The dramatic structure is even more episodic than those of the earlier plays. This play too is composed of kaleidoscopic scenes rather than having a traditional dramatic structure.

Act I, scene i, takes place in the library, where everybody is in search of something. Gibbon wants to read books to find out about human beings, while Jock, himself a reader, tells him that there is no need to read books to find out about people, and simply to be himself. Gibbon asks the Maharajah for a secret and receives in return a sealed envelope which has a sheet of paper with the word love written on it three times. In the meantime, Fishkin sits on a thronelike chair reading the Bible. He is very cynical, rational, and skeptical and hence is derided by the people in the library. Still, to get some kind of comforting answers to his own quest for the meaning of his existence, he resorts to reading the Bible. However, unlike the others, Fishkin does not embrace any hopes or dreams in

his life. He is simply in despair from his attempts to face the reality of the uncertain human condition, in which man lives only to suffer. He cannot believe dreams, and hence despises them, his own and others. Thus he is constantly in conflict with the other characters, thwarting their dreams with his rational attitude and the refrain "it wouldn't help." There is also a prisoner in this scene, Jim Smithers, who is alive to the truth that people live only to suffer but who still proclaims love for the other characters.

Into this situation come Jim Dandy and Jim Crow, who serves Jim Dandy as if Jim Dandy were his master. They are welcomed. However, upon their realizing that they cannot save Smithers, the curtain falls on a scene of despair.

In the next scene, a mailman comes to deliver a letter to Smithers, who has been executed. While Jim Crow gets and reads the letter, each character has a chance to give a long speech concerned with his or her quest for truth. The Maharajah says that the secret of his life is love, patience, and "be, beget, begone" (29). Jim Crow reads a letter from Jim Dandy's wife and another one from the Peace on Earth, Goodwill Among Men League, Incorporated. Both letters are about money, as if money could be the ultimate solution for all problems. Only Jim Dandy seems to have a positive attitude towards his life, as if he were the someone with a pure heart for whom Johnny is waiting (23). This act ends when Flora is finally able to say "I love you," and she and Johnny affirm their humanity in the face of the sterile reality represented by Fishkin.

Act II occurs in the same egg-shaped setting. The stage direction tells us: "It could now be another century and another world, but it is still the same century and the same world, although things have changed and moved again" (154). By the time we get to Jim Dandy, Saroyan has realized that all the times of our lives are essentially the same, as are all people in their transformative possibilities. In this act, Jim Crow explains why he accompanies Jim Dandy; Little Johnny expresses the essential hopefulness of human beings, in his talk about tomorrow; and Jock gets new yellow shoes. All the characters are cherishing the very moments of their living. However, Fishkin still opposes the permitting of illusions in his life. Accordingly, when Jim Dandy drinks water as if it were wine, Fishkin insists that it is water, in the belief that he speaks the truth. However, upon being forced to tell his story, Fishkin gradually takes on the character of Jim Dandy, and the scene ends with the characters agreeing to present a play.

In Act III, most of the characters join in the play, called "Man Alive, Or Adam Driven from the Garden . . . Or Jim in Search of the Holy Grail." In this play, Fishkin's cynical attitude toward life gradually changes to a positive one as he is accepted into the community in playing the roles of rain, snow, and a flower. Sparked by the generosity of the old prisoner, Jack Adams, there is a miracle of one loaf of bread satisfying the hunger of all the characters. They in turn break Adams out of jail, and as the interior of the setting is brought to life and light, all the characters leave the egg.

In this final act, the characters' search for the Holy Grail seems to be realized in their sharing the loaf of bread given to Fishkin by Jack Adams. The symbolic meaning of the bread and the water/wine is clear, only here, as the other characters explain to Tommy Singh, they are proclaiming the kingdom of man. Their spiritual communion reaches a climax when Jim Dandy rescues Jack Adams from the prison. In transcending the prison of this material world and their needs in it, the characters experience an absolute freedom and feel their spiritual hunger being satisfied. Thus when Flora asks Johnny in the final act, "What's happened in the public library?," Johnny answers "Freedom and health, fun and love. The Holy Grail is being revealed" (120). Just as the everyday activities of the characters in Act II expresses the "be" of the Maharajah's motto, the spiritual rebirth of the characters symbolizes the "beget" of the motto, especially as expressed by Fishkin's experience in Act III.

In this scene, all the characters' material and intellectual needs for living in the world are replaced by the satisfaction resulting from their sharing and experiencing communal acceptance and love--love for themselves as well as for others. This is the change which allows them "to act their own parts," as opposed to being acted upon. Jack Adams's release from prison also symbolizes the begetting. By the end of the play, all of the characters fulfill the final steps in their lives: be gone. Old and decrepit Jack Adams passes away. His death is comparable to the death of Shakespeare

in Sweeney in the Trees, and like Shakepierce, Jack Adams's death is peaceful and celebratory of his new life after death:

JACK ADAMS: (Standing) I've won my war! This is the happy death I've waited for. (Whispering as he smiles) It was good to have passed this way. (He looks about) Good-bye, my friends! . . . Sing! Sing and dance! Be glad! We're born at last.

He steps into the cave and disappears, as the voice of JIM SMITHERS comes closer, and the revolving door whirls swiftly, by itself, and stops, its bells and glass ringing and tinkling. JIM CROW sings with his old friend JIM SMITHERS, and then the MAHARAJAH and TOMMY SINGH join in. FISHKIN suddenly joins the singing, too. (125-126)

As in the death of Shakepierce, all the characters in this scene in Jim Dandy also sing in celebration of their spiritual rebirth.

As these people are now prepared to have a new life in the outside world, with their enriched spirits, they leave the egg in procession. Their procession has a religious tone:

First in the procession is MOLLY who now holds the girl of cave by the hand. JOCK has his left arm around MOLLY. A foot or two behind JOCK and MOLLY is the second group: LITTLE JOHNNY, FLORA and JOHNNY. Behind this group is the runaway girl and TOMMY SINGH. Next is GIBBON and the MAHARAJAH. And last, alone but no longer in despair, is FISHKIN. The swinging doors are latched back, so that they remain open, and as the people reach the passageway they turn and wave to JIM DANDY and JIM CROW. (125)

As Fishkin has realized, the world is "no orphanage, no asylum for the insane, no hospital for the sick, no penitentiary for the criminal.

This world's home and we are the lucky tenants of the house" (124). As much as the characters had acutely realized the harshness and absurdity in the world and felt disoriented in it, they now feel at home, a theme explored further in Sam Ego's House.

The theme of "be, beget, begone" is symbolically illustrated in the metaphor of the setting, a transparent eggshell. This egg represents "the womb where humanity is struggling to be born" (Calonne 128). The eggshell has a similar function to that of the bar in The Time of Your Life. It offers a place of shelter where dreaming is encouraged as part of the process toward self-realization. In the eggshell, however, there are more remains of reality:

Inside the shell are miserable and majestic ruins. These ruins represent immemorial and immediate reality, as thrown together by time, nature, art, religion, labor, science, invention, play, accident, violence of war, and wear and tear of weather. (3)

This eggshell comprises three major places: the public library, the cave, and the jail. The public library represents civilization and intellectualism, which tend to constrain free thought and alienate people from their born nature. Thus Jock advises Gibbon not to read books because they do not do any good: "I guess I've read half the books in the public library, but what good has it done me? No good at all" (14). Even Flora, the librarian, is so strict and rigid that she can barely talk out loud any more, except to tell people "musn't do something," quenching their lively spirit as well as her own.

In contrast to the library, the cave represents a place where the primitive and yet true nature of human beings can be freely expressed. The cave is inhabited by a small boy and a small girl, Little Johnny and Little Molly, who display the basic emotions of love, hope, alarm, and anxiety. The cave is thus home to natural human possibilities and instincts; it shelters children, not adults. At the end of the play, when the characters leave the egg, transformed and open to their freedom, the cave too is transformed by a change in lighting which reveals its interior.

The prison is located above the cave. It houses in turn two prisoners who insist upon their innocence and protest against the absurd social system. The older prisoner, Jack Adams, even accuses people for not going out into the world to change it. The public library and the prison are thus places of frustration, despair, and grief representing civilization and individual oppression. These places of dark reality overshadow the place of shelter, the cave.

In addition, the setting is cluttered with other visually sumptuous theatrical objects, which are either exaggerated or symbolic. In the library there is an enormous cash register, which makes a great deal of noise whenever it is opened, as if showing off the power of materialism. Another notable symbolic object on the stage is a glass revolving door with a glass globe of the world attached to its top. When this door is turned, it reveals the blue of oceans and the brown and green of islands and continents, and creates all kinds of tinkling sounds from the sleigh bells, colored glass, and wire metal and glass sculptures of a woman and a man

attached to the four corners of the door. The door is a symbol, marking the passage between the outside world and the eggshell world, between conventionally-accepted reality and the self-created reality of illusions.

However, in contrast to Saroyan's earlier plays, where reality outside the theatre is only hinted at offstage, the setting in Jim Dandy comprises both the real world and illusory world in itself. This egg-shaped place represents a world. It is not in contrast to the world outside the theatre, like the settings of My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life. Accordingly it does not present itself as a haven from reality, like Nick's bar. Instead it represents the one world of our experience, where reality and illusion coexist. The fullness of reality is represented by the three different locations and by theatrical embellishments, including symbolic objects and sounds, which represent illusion.

The egg-shaped world represents the womb, as Calonne points out, and is a place of preparation for a better life outside of the egg-shaped world. As the characters' relationships with each other and with their environment change, so does the setting. With the realization that the world is not an outside impediment to their self-realization--that it is in fact their home, of their own making--in short, when the characters experience "begetting" through communal love and leave the place, the setting is transformed into a new world, a world appropriate to their dreamings:

JIM CROW plays a high, clear, solemn yet joyous call on the bugle. As he does so the scene gradually fills with

light, and the rose-tree is seen to be covered with roses. In the window of the jail is JIM CROW'S talisman, enormously enlarged and very bright, surrounded by the violet, daisy, sun-flower, lily and rose entwined among grape leaves and grapes, and sheaves of wheat. Beyond the talisman rain is falling heavily. The interior of the cave is now full of light, in which is seen the disengaged stairway, standing in the falling snow. (126)

Using the very same props and materials, this setting is a complete change from the setting of the beginning of the play, in which the rose-tree was as bare as the people who surrounded it. As the play opens:

A slender but strong tree with one strong branch stands across the stage from the Doric column. Near it a rose-tree standing in a patch of dry grass struggles for life with rocks and cement. The rose-tree has leaves but no flower. There is a disengaged stairway of nine steps near the tree. (4)

This bleak and isolated place, represented by the disengaged stairway, was filled with similarly disconnected people who, like the rose-tree, were struggling for life. It is changed into a home when people begin to love each other and share their love. When the characters leave the place at the end of the play, they are ready and willing to change whatever harsh environment they may find outside into a land fit for their dreams.

In Jim Dandy, the final departures have a slightly different meaning from those in the other plays. In the other plays, the final departures of the characters send them out to face a real world which is separate from their dream world, where they must adapt

themselves to new situations without either transforming the outside world or giving up their dreams. In Jim Dandy, the meaning of the departures is more significant and affirmative. The characters have become more confident in themselves and in the transforming possibilities of human nature, symbolized theatrically by the transformation of the setting. The setting in Jim Dandy is, after all, an egg, and the characters eventually are freed by the realization of the mutual nourishment that they can provide one another, and the creative rather than adversarial relationship possible between humans and their environment. Their departure signals their active cooperation with their environment, in contrast to the active resistance which Johnny and his father must offer in their journeys to the Highlands.

The subtitle of Jim Dandy is A Fat Man in a Famine. The fatness of Jim Dandy, like an egg, signals the power of the unbounded potentiality of human beings. If the key concept describing the relationship between dreams and realities, inner world and outer, in My Heart's in the Highlands is opposition (the characters ultimately learn that they must fight to dwell in the Highlands); and in The Time of Your Life subordination (the characters learn that they must submit what they have learned about themselves in Nick's bar to the test of the external world); in Jim Dandy it is transformation. In "The Word and the Writer," Saroyan tells us: "Everything is specifically itself, but there is nothing that isn't like something else" (10). There is only one world for the characters in Jim Dandy, and thus it is a world where

ultimately the distinctions between reality and fantasy, internal and external, and personal and communal no longer apply. Saroyan is pulling out all his theatrical stops here to argue that all humans are identical at their core, being nothing but the transformative potentiality represented by Jim Dandy. Once the characters realize their shared nature, they are free to create a true community.

This ultimate identity of all individuals is presented by Fishkin's transformation into Jim Dandy. Similarly all times and situations are rearrangements of the same basic elements. The key image in this play is transformations, represented by the revolving, circular door. These characters no longer need a Highlands or a haven, because they have learned that they are always at home.

As in the earlier plays, music and sound effects also take on an important role in expressing the themes of this play. The song "Careless Love" is repeated by Jim Smithers and other characters. There is the singing of Jock and noisy machine sounds from the cash register, the tinkling and clinking sounds from the door, the Maharajah's drum in the old circus wagon, Tommy's strumming, the sound from a metal cricket which Jim Dandy carries, Jim Crow's bugle, and even the occasional weeping of the runaway girl.

The music in Jim Dandy is a key nontraditional theatrical element used for the exposition of character and theme, as well as the establishing of a setting. The music has a variety of functions, in keeping with the setting and its crowd of various symbolic objects and places. Some of the musical sounds contribute to creating an appropriate mood in a particular situation: "Jim Crow ..

blows the bugle: clear, pure, slow, gentle and somber when Dandy asks Fishkin to tell the truth" (85); or Johnny's playing the piano at certain moments. The transformations among the music and sound effects, creating fresh combinations from the same elements, reflects the transformations occurring among the various characters and situations in the play. Feeling their spiritual rebirth, all the characters in the scene start to sing together, as the characters in Sweeney in the Trees did in celebration of their spiritual rebirth. The chorus is repeatedly used to represent a means of spiritual communion in Jim Dandy.

Saroyan uses lighting to a great extent in this play to create an appropriate atmosphere. When people experience friendship and communal love, the stage is filled with a warm, bright color. However, when Fishkin breaks the dreamy mood by emphasizing the importance of bread over illusion, the light dims. When Jim Dandy announces that he will release Jack Adams from prison, the light is the full light of noon. At the end of the play, a lighting change transforms the cave, and so on. Without using great changes in the color of the lighting, Saroyan conveys meaning and accentuates the atmosphere by varying the intensity of bright or dark lighting.

The performance modes of the individual characters serve not only to express an idea or mood, but also are a part of the setting. Actors' movements, dances, and exercises, both individual and ensemble, contribute to creating moods appropriate to the current theme. Sometimes these movements are associated with a

particular situation: upon the entrance of Jim Dandy, Molly is transformed from an old woman in rags into a beautiful ballerina, Johnny and Tommy begin playing musical instruments, Little Johnny and Little Molly come out of the cave where they had been hiding, and the runaway girl welcomes them like a mother. Often these movements are associated with the expression of joy. It is interesting to note that in general the state of illusion is signalled by their movements, while the state of reality is created by their language.

As is often the case in Saroyan's plays, monologues in Jim Dandy serve as an emotional outlet for each of the characters, who examine either themselves or their bitter experiences in the "civilized" world. Most characters are assigned a long monologue in which they contemplate the meaning of their lives or address the particular problem of reality they have to face. As in the earlier plays, monologues are consistently used to describe problems; and consequently, as in the earlier plays, the monologues frequently have an angry or bitter edge. Also these monologues become a means of revealing the initial isolation of the characters from one another. Changes in monologue style reflect transformations in the characters, as for example, when Fishkin begins to assume the character and style of Jim Dandy. As is clearly apparent in Jim Dandy, characterization for Saroyan involves what James Justus describes as:

a profusion of faces and masks, shifting identities, caricatures, stereotypes: all representative of Essential

Man. The fleshing out is done according to the patterns of myth and dream, not those of realistic character portrayal, a strategy which permits extreme individuality to function as emphasis for the common strain beneath it. (218)

Along with exploring his perpetual interests in the underlying unities of human character, in this play Saroyan also addresses more specific social concerns, like prisons and wars and the problems of communal reality we all must face. Although he discusses a variety of social problems and concerns arising from his beliefs about what a true human civilization should be, he does not fully develop his ideas on any particular subject. Instead, the problems of modern 'civilized' society are used to reveal the reality which people have created for themselves. Saroyan seems to believe that reality does not in essence change over the years, and emphasizes in contrast the transformation of human nature. Specifically he emphasizes the importance of recognizing the innocence and unboundedness of human nature and its transformative possibilities, and he finds an invariable value in that nature. His growing awareness of the inseparability of fantasy worlds and external reality makes Jim Dandy a more socially concerned play. Jail, for example, he suggests is a misguided product of human society to reduce or solve social problems.

Saroyan continues to express, however, his same convictions about the world and human beings. Introspection leading to an understanding of human nature and a subsequent spiritual rebirth through communal love should precede the reform of society or the

world itself. As Foster correctly observes, for Saroyan the redemption of society can only be accomplished through the redemption of the individual (287). In contrast to the more overt social concerns and reforms espoused by his contemporaries, such as Clifford Odets, Saroyan's social concerns have a more traditional background. Frederic Carpenter properly points out the link between Saroyan and "the old American faith of Emerson and Whitman, who, skeptical both of social reformers and of prophets of doom, proclaimed that the world could be reformed only by reforming the individual" (96). This attitude is even more apparent in Saroyan's next play, Sam Ego's House. The most notable difference between Jim Dandy and earlier plays is the manner in which Saroyan continues to develop and explore his theatrical style, as particularly in the setting, he presents in Jim Dandy his most complex symbolic work to date.

Sam Ego's House (1947)

Sam Ego's House was first presented by the Circle players in Hollywood, California. Thomas J. Brady in the New York Times called the play a "typical Saroyan mixture of the realistic and the impressionistic" (11). In Sam Ego's House Saroyan placed his concern with the problems of individuals more clearly in the context of the social and political problems of the time. When he did discuss social and political problems, he treated them as universal and allegorical, as in Jim Dandy. Similarly Sam Ego's House is an allegory in which

Saroyan discussed the problems of American society, its people, and the destructive impact of a misguided American dream on the possibilities of achieving individual fulfillment and happiness.

Sam Ego's House is a three-act play concerning the moving of a house belonging to Sam Ego, who has been confined to a lunatic asylum for twenty-five years. It is set in the city of Angels Aghast. Sam Ego was institutionalized because he could not stop laughing silently after a series of tragic accidents had happened to his family. His son was killed in an automobile accident in a welcoming home party upon his return from World War I; his wife committed suicide in depression after her son's death; and his daughter died in childbirth. Following these events Sam Ego began shaking with silent laughter, which so disturbed those around him that he was committed to the asylum.

The play begins with the administrator of the Sam Ego's house selling the house to Mr. Utmost Urge. The administrator arranges with two house movers to move the house to Mr. Urge's property, where he also maintains his place of business, a junkyard. Thus Mr. Urge is someone who lives by finding value in that others discard. During the course of the play the house is moved from Rich Angel Street in Sunup Heights, where it was originally built, to Poor Angel Street in Sundown Slums, where the Urge family lives. On its journey the house passes various places in town, including Infant Angel Street and the First Presbyterian Church. When the house reaches the church, Sam Ego escapes from the asylum, and hides in his house, with the aid of Easy, Mr. Urge's youngest son. Firemen and

boy scouts arrive at the house to look for Sam Ego. The boy scouts mistake a laughing Sexton from the church for Sam Ego and attack him. After the turmoil has subsided, and after Sam Ego has happened to overhear the pastor's sermon, Sam Ego shows up and reveals his identity to Mr. Urge, who invites Sam Ego to live with his family in his house. The play ends with a Sunday family dinner, including Mr. Urge's three sons who have returned from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps respectively upon the end of World War II.

In the preface to Sam Ego's House, Saroyan tells us that the play is an allegory. An allegory may be defined as "a narrative in which the agents and action, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived not only to make sense in themselves and also to signify a second, correlated order of people, things, concepts, or events" (Abrams 4). The purpose of writing allegories, Saroyan explains, is that the plays will be entertaining as they instruct. The allegory and entertainment in Saroyan's plays are created primarily through their theatricalism.

When Saroyan had given Sam Ego's House to readers in manuscript form, some people had regarded it as "subtle propaganda for Communism" (Sam Ego's House Preface). Saroyan is not a political writer, for he explains that "I am as opposed to everything that seems to me to be false, foolish, or fierce in Russian Communism as I am to the same things in American Capitalism" (Sam Ego's House Preface). He also mentions in the preface that Sam Ego stands for the American dream, and his house is the American nation. In Sam Ego's House, although Saroyan specifically addresses the relationship

between the American dream and nation, he is also concerned with contrasting that with a mode of existence based on Christian ethics.

Saroyan often addresses the difficulties individuals face in keeping an integrity, innocence, and nobility of character in a society where these values are no longer highly regarded. Leo Hamalian describes Saroyan as "one of the most fundamentally religious writers in contemporary letters," and even Edmund Wilson early on called The Time of Your Life "an agreeable mixture of San Francisco bonhomie and Armenian Christianity" (26). Many of Saroyan's characters experience some kind of sorrow in the situations in which they have to face changing values. Johnny's comment about the society where he lives, "something's wrong somewhere," echoed by the grandfather in Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All, is a statement of that sorrow and bitterness. In many of the plays that he wrote during the 1940s, Saroyan's characters experience a spiritual rebirth or transformation from that sorrow. This is most overt in Sam Ego's House.

Saroyan is sometimes mistaken for an author who deliberately avoids discussing social and political problems, and who describes only innocent, naive, and good-natured people and their simple lives. Saroyan, however, tried to touch upon the fundamental problems of human existence by raising questions concerning the character of human nature and the good life for human beings. He believed that goodheartedness, innocence, and compassion were integral to the human character. His focus was on how an individual can realize those qualities.

Saroyan's explorations of dreams and illusions in earlier plays were designed to answer that question. In an individual's dreams, which for Saroyan meant our self-creative activities, he or she can realize self-fulfillment. In My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life, that achievement of self-fulfillment was presented in contrast to a harsh external world outside of any individual's control. In later works, such as Jim Dandy, Saroyan is focusing on each individual's role in the creation of social reality and on how we can use our individual dreams to create a community that nurtures self-fulfillment of the positive qualities of human character. In "The Foreigner" Saroyan describes how on an individual level everyone is an outcast. "The real problem," he writes, "is getting one man to understand himself and his relation to everything else" (34). Thus Saroyan was most concerned with the problems of how individuals live and how in combination we live together, and in Sam Ego's House he seems to find the best answers from Christian faith and spiritual rebirth.

Sam Ego's House is Saroyan's first play created as a deliberate allegory of the American experience. Saroyan intended to write a "drama of American life" with My Heart's in the Highlands, in which he portrayed an immigrant family in California. Similarly the characters are arranged in The Time of Your Life to suggest something of the variety of the American experience. In an article pointing out some of the many similarities between Saroyan and Shaw, Daniel Leary notes in particular the scene in which "the Italian-American Nick listens in delight to a Greek-American singing

an Irish-American ballad. The moments of harmony in the bar, carefully choreographed in the stage directions, are living demonstrations of how all men can live together" (74). In Sam Ego's House Saroyan overtly deals with the American nation and its dream, in both its destructive and affirmative aspects.

Saroyan was conscious of creating something more American than European in his work, in both content and form, and found the characteristics of something American in his own values--the importance of innocence, freedom, and nobility. These individual values have correspondences in the social ideals espoused in America, which is still a relatively young country with more possibilities of freedom and idealism than countries in Europe. Particularly coming out of the depression and through World War II into the 1950s, it was easy for Americans to see themselves as protectors of the world, providing a habitable place and model for the rest of the world, in opposition to the dark threatening reality of the Soviet Union. America could see itself almost as a Saroyan protagonist in the world's play, providing other peoples with a safe harbor in which to realize a better life. This spirit can be felt in Saroyan's early plays through the idealism of the characters. But as more of the dark realities of American society and character became unavoidably obvious--the materialism, competitiveness, conformity, self-righteousness, and so on--Saroyan's plays became less lyrical and more symbolic and allegorical. He addressed in a more specific manner the social evils that we, as individuals, have created for

ourselves. In Sam Ego's House, the conflict between the characters and the society has more serious aspects than in earlier plays.

In the beginning of the play, both Sam and his house are in a miserable condition. Sam, once a well-respected lawyer, is now confined to an asylum, and his nice mansion, which once housed a happy family, is now deserted and unwanted. Both Sam and his house had to suffer public misunderstanding and indifference. In fact what has changed is not so much Sam or his house, but the public's attitude and way of thinking about them, after Sam Ego began to act in a way that was unacceptable to the public and made people feel uncomfortable. Sam, however, is not insane. When he reveals himself to Easy and Utmost Urge, he is in a normal and sane condition. His silent laugh was only his own way of facing the irony in his life and overcoming the concomitant sorrow and agony. It is an appropriate laugh for the human comedy, and the proper response that Harry should have received for his monologues in The Time of Your Life. Sam Ego's unusual reaction to the tragic incidents of his life does not signify his insanity--that is the public's misconception. In fact his silent laughter symbolizes his sneer at his own deluded life, which was spent in pursuit of wrong, though conventionally valued, goals.

Saroyan states in the preface to the play that Sam Ego is "the dream of the national ego, the dream of individual achievement, of material wealth, of social importance, of personal security" (103). However, Saroyan does not credit these dreams as valuable goals, for they do not nurture the mind and spirit. Sam loses his fame and

wealth after his family tragedy, and this loss causes his fall from social position and acceptability. However, since these values do not nourish the mind but lead it astray, when he loses them, he is freed to try to recover his innate virtues. He is awakened to the emptiness of his house, and to the emptiness of the pursuit of material success, security, and social status. His only desire upon escaping from the asylum is to reinhabit his house, for he remembers other aspects of the American dream: possibilities of community, mind, and spirit. In talking with the sexton of the church, one of the house-movers mentions: "If the lawyer whose proud house this once was hadn't pushed and crashed after the empty things of life and neglected his mind and the minds of his wife and children, perhaps my brother and I wouldn't be moving the house to Sundown Slums" (131).

Thus Saroyan considers that the American dream can mislead people into having the false values that are associated with materialism and vanity. Saroyan's criteria for judging the goals of Americans and the American dream itself reflect Christian ethics and values, in devaluing material needs and worldly success. Saroyan emphasizes the importance of recognizing the integrity and dignity of human beings along with maintaining innocence, good humanity, and nobility against all odds. The new owner of Sam Ego's house keeps these values.

While Sam and his family are connected with the negative and materialistic aspects of the American dream, Utmost Urge and his family are connected with the spiritual aspects of the American dream, and are equipped with the ideal values of life, such as

maintaining a family relationship based on love and understanding. Poor and unknown he may be, he and his family are decent people and happy together. He runs a junkyard and constantly creates something new out of something old and useless. In Act III, scene i, Utmost talks to Sam:

Among the junk of the yard I run in Sundown Slums, I've had the time it takes to learn that nothing ends. People or things neither die nor finish but change and reach another order of being, and as I find great beauty in change, my work, though full of what appears to be debris, to me is full of beauty and surprise. (185)

Saroyan too found great beauty in change, in the transformations of fundamental values and character in the variety of ordinary incidents in our everyday experience.

Sam Ego also represents an individual who has difficulty in keeping his own freedom and integrity within an American dream that has gone astray. Sam Ego's House confronts the question of the creative relationship possible between an individual and the social context. In The Time of Your Life, Saroyan describes the difficulties of the characters in realizing their dreams. Social constraints and success are a part of the hindrance to their attempt to realize their dreams, as represented by the vice cop, Blick. In Sam Ego's House, Sam Ego's tragic life became more miserable as he was confined to the asylum. Although there was no other evidence besides his silent laughter that he was insane, the public misinterpreted his laughter and considered that he might be dangerous and put him in an

institution. Thus the power of a society over an individual receives more emphasis in this later play.

The conflict between the public and an individual is allegorically described in Act I, scene ii. In this scene three young basketball players humiliate and harass another basketball player simply because the player's sister walks seductively. At first they begin to tease the boy, who thought they were all friends, and the argument gradually develops into a physical fight. In this fight the three boys easily and recklessly victimize the defenseless boy, hurting him both physically and emotionally. The boy leaves the place, deeply hurt and full of animosity. He has realized the lack of depth of most people's ideas of community. He had considered the other boys friends, part of a team (symbolic of a community), and they had easily turned on him, for no good reason.

A similar incident occurs in Act II, scene i, when twenty boy scouts searching for Sam Ego assault the innocent sexton:

A speeding fire-engine is heard, its bell ringing and its siren wailing. The sound draws closer, skidding is heard, and THREE FIREMEN in uniform and helmets, each of them carrying crowbars and axes, come running. The terrified crying of horses is heard, and the stamping of hooves. (137)

This is followed by the arrival of three boy scouts and "the church bell begins to toll crazily, like a public alarm" (138). Soon the scouts witness the sexton shaking with laughter and chase him into the pastor's study, where the sexton runs to hide:

The SCOUTS break the door open and rush into the church, as more SCOUTS arrive and follow them. Churchbells, fire-engine bells, police whistles, police sirens, axe blows, crow-bar creakings blend together into a kind of ridiculous and terrifying celebration of heroic imbecility. The SEXTON rushes out of the church, but is tackled by a HALF DOZEN BOY SCOUTS, who put him down and hold him, as police and firemen come running. . . . The SEXTON struggles to get free and more people, including GIRLS and WOMEN come running to help capture the lunatic. (140)

This scene shows another case of group mentality and how easily a group can destroy an individual. This scene also shows that a group of people can victimize the innocent for no good reason. The frenzy of the group mentality is highlighted theatrically by the loud fire-engine bells, whistles, and sirens.

Whether or not Saroyan had intended to relate these two incidents to the two world wars, the incidents reveal the easy possibilities of human brutality and recklessness and suggest how such actions develop without justifiable cause, somehow growing out of a group mentality that denies individual responsibility for ourselves and each other. Elsewhere Saroyan has written, "I am positive that one man at a time is incapable of the monstrosities performed by mobs. My objection is to mobs only" ("Seventy Thousand Assyrians" 38). After the assault the sexton sarcastically questions the men who came to search the house to find Sam Ego, whether there is anyone who is balanced; that is, anyone fully sane: "Do you know of somebody somewhere in the world who is balanced? Yourself, perhaps?" (151). These incidents too reflect the insanity of a world which restrains the freedom of individuals to live

up to their innate natures. The Time of Your Life contains a key scene of peace and harmony where various people in the bar are enjoying their individual pursuits in a supportive atmosphere. The scene does not last, however, because of the external intrusion of Blick. Sam Ego's House is more direct in its denunciation of a society that demands conformity rather than allowing people to find their own way of living together in harmony.

Just as Sam Ego, representing the American dream, suffers through a degrading experience, Sam Ego's house, representing the American nation, experiences its decline, too. The house is very well-built and grand, and yet nobody has wanted it for the last twenty-five years. At the auction the auctioneer had to force Mr. Urge to buy it. The house does not function fully as a house, as indicated by the fact that it is not inhabited. Thus Saroyan presents the American nation as not functioning properly as a house for its residents. The house is located in Rich Angel Street in Sunup Heights, signifying that it had fame as Sam Ego did, but it does not have any residents living in it, just as Sam Ego was presumed not to have had a sound mind. And yet it is indicated that the house can be restored to its intended function when it is repaired and inhabited, as Sam Ego can stop his silent laughing by being spiritually reborn at the pastor's sermon. And the theme of the sermon, as one of the house-movers puts it, is "what will it profit a man if he gaineth the world and loseth his soul" (130). In Act III, scene i, Sam Ego is described as follows:

There is little uncontrollable shaking in SAM EGO now, and he seems untroubled and at ease. He is wearing a suit of UTMOSTS clothes. . . .

SAM EGO: (Sitting on the box) I am free, isn't that the truth? If you could only know the free sleep I sleep in this new life! What luck it was for me that you bought my house, sir.

The lunchbox has been passed around and they all have sandwiches. (154)

As is symbolized by putting on Utmost's clothes, Sam Ego now shares the values of Utmost Urge. In addition, after Sam Ego's transformation, he shares the lunch with Urge's family, a symbolic communion. Sam Ego has changed, and now his house can be changed, as one of the house-movers comments to the sexton:

The house will lose its fame when it reaches Sundown Slums. Having been built where vanity was all, the people could not help rejoicing in its fall and failure; but when the house settles down where vanity is nothing, they will not hate it--or themselves for rejoicing in the disgrace of that which they envy. . . . It will be the home of a plain family and the emblem of humble honour. (132)

The house can be changed into a home when it is occupied by humble and decent people. Mr. Urge explained to the auctioneer about his name: "Urge is a common name among my people. Utmost was my father's idea" (117). When Sam Ego's house is used to provide common people with a shelter, rather than the famous with an emblem of vanity, it can fulfill its function.

Saroyan addresses in the play the possibility of reforming American society and its people, both of which Saroyan considered needed to reexamine what and who they are. Sam Ego and his house do not meet the standards of simple, ordinary, essential things in the beginning of the play and yet gradually transform their identities to conform with those standards. Here, as in most of his plays, Saroyan suggests that the most ideal society can be achieved when its members enjoy a familylike relationship.

Saroyan regarded the family as an embodiment of the ideal human relationship, based on love and understanding, and wanted that kind of love to be realized in society. Elaine Mary Stern points out that for Saroyan, "the basic source of belongingness and love and other loyalty is the family" (99). Saroyan portrayed the relationship of young lovers as an ideal human relationship, such as the relationship between Tom and Kitty Duval in The Time of Your Life. In Sam Ego's House he focuses on communal love, which is possible not only among the members of a family but also among strangers. Saroyan further explores this model of ideal human relationship among strangers in The Slaughter of the Innocents and The Cave Dwellers. These later works suggest that social achievements can not only act as hindrances to achieving this ideal human relationship but also can provide necessary supplies for the growth of an individual soul.

The dramatic structure of Sam Ego's House, unlike that of many of his previous theatrical plays, tends to observe a more traditional pattern. Saroyan depicts the gradual transformations of Sam Ego and

his house, marked by the gradual movement of the house from Sunup Heights to Sundown Slums.

In Sam Ego's House characterization does not have much realistic significance. The two major characters of the play, Sam Ego and Utmost Urge, have only allegorical meanings. Other minor characters are primarily identified by their social status or their occupations, such as the auctioneer, house-movers, and sexton. Accordingly they do not have proper names. Their speeches reflect their social position in the American dream. The house movers, for example, share the same simple virtues as the Urges, while the auctioneer is more concerned with the material aspects of the dream.

Sam Ego and Utmost Urge are not two totally different characters but rather two contradictory aspects of the human mind, and two different possibilities of the American dream. Sam Ego represents an ego, as the name indicates, while Utmost Urge represents a superego, or conscience. Sam Ego stands for the desire to achieve materialism and fame and is associated with vanity, while Mr. Urge stands for the drives toward spirituality and honor, and is associated with humbleness, the values that Saroyan himself favored and urged upon his audience. Utmost Urge embodies an ideal person in light of Saroyan's philosophy. In addition to the qualities mentioned, he is the head of a happy family, in contrast to Sam Ego, whose house, or nation, is desolate.

The theatricalism in this play it is less spontaneous and creative than in the other plays, since Saroyan uses it in order to explain the symbols and allegorical meaning of the play.

The most striking characteristic of Sam Ego's House arises from Saroyan's experimentation with a new theatrical technique: the assigning of multiple roles to three young men. The multiple roles assigned to the three, and the transformation from one role to another on stage, are both allegorical and theatrical. They are allegorical because the three young men represent various roles in one and the same situation. The characters are also theatrical because their actions and roles contradict. They play angels and guardians of Sam Ego's house in Acts I and II, and yet they do not protect the house from the house-movers in Act I or from the searchers in Act II. The meaning and effectiveness of their roles in both acts depend on their visual impact and their images, rather than on their actual deeds. Thus they function as part of the setting. In Act III, they turn into the Urge's three sons, returning from the Second World War.

First, the three men play the role of angels, as guardians of Sam Ego's house. In the stage directions to Act I, scene i, they are described as follows:

THREE YOUNG MEN stand nearby, watching: a SOLDIER, a SAILOR and a MARINE, in uniform. They might be angels, and they are certainly frequently aghast, as they witness all of the scenes of the play, standing to one side or moving in close to the action. They respond to what happens, approving or disapproving. They are now stiff and straight, and they carry miscellaneous weapons. (109)

They assume the role of angels as protectors of the house. As angels, they are invisible to the other characters, and do not get involved in

any actions. They remain as mere bystanders, commenting on events through their mute presence. In each scene they appear in different costumes, in relation to the incidents surrounding the house. In Act II, scene i, in which the firemen and boy scouts come to the house to search for Sam Ego, the three young men are in battle dress, as the house is invaded by the searchers. Although they do not get involved in any of the action in Acts I and II, their appearance in both acts in military costumes indicates that what happens in both acts is comparable to a battle. The allegorical importance of these three young men in Acts I and II is that, taken away from their family and with their innocent natures clothed by uniforms, they are not effective as either angels or soldiers.

In addition to their roles as angels in uniform, they also represent the Urges' three sons, Inner, Outer, and Ample, sent to the war in the Army, the Navy, and the Marine Corps. In Act III when the house does not need any protection and when it is announced that the war is over, they return to the Urge's home, assuming the role of sons. Their costumes reveal their different roles; as they are now in ill-fitting civilian clothes. Their homecoming is unnoticed. They come home as quietly as if they were coming back from everyday work. When they show up, they are greeted as if they were strangers. No one recognizes them until the second son gently gives his mother a hug and escorts her into the house. Just as the house is restored to its true function as a home, the young men are restored to their true place in the family.

The setting of Sam Ego's House is a mixture of realistic and symbolic qualities. Through the setting Saroyan intends to show visually the gradual transformation of Sam Ego and his dream. Each act is set in different places: Rich Angel Street, by the First Presbyterian Church, and Poor Angel Street. In each set the most important element is Sam Ego's house. Each scene shows either the whole house or a portion of it as part of the setting. The appearance of the house changes as it moves from one place to another. In Act I the house creates a deteriorating image of past grandeur by juxtaposing a magnificent house with its current shabby situation. This image is enhanced by other audiovisual effects such as loud radio jazz of 1945, boogie dancing of a boy and a girl in the street, and miscellaneous posters attached on the front of the house:

The front of the house has been covered with circus and side-show posters, patent medicine advertisements, pictures of candidates for public office, lovers' initials, and hand-painted mottoes of religious or amorous import. "The wages of sin is death, sayeth the Lord." "Is not, Sayeth Harry. Sinned here, feel fine." . . .

Loud radio jazz of the summer of 1945 is heard, followed by applause so sudden, dynamic and unaccountable as to seem insane. (109)

In Act II only a little of the back porch of the house is shown, with "the panes of all of them [windows] broken almost to the frames" (127). This is the act in which Sam Ego listens to the pastor's sermon and reveals himself to others. The setting of the act reflects Sam Ego's inner transformation.

In Act III the appearance of Sam Ego's house is contrasted with that of Act I:

A good many old shingles have been removed from the roof and are lying on the attic porch, and a few bad spots in the roof have already been patched with new shingles. .
..

It is a peaceful, summer morning with a deep blue sky. Only a handful of lazy, indefinite clouds are about, and these few are going nowhere. . . .

The occasional bark of an automobile horn is heard.
(153)

The setting of Act III reflects the peaceful mind of Sam Ego. The disturbing loud jazz music of Act I is replaced by relaxing and dreamy sounds, such as the occasional horn and steam whistles. These sounds create a similar peaceful atmosphere to the one they created in My Heart's in the Highlands. The setting of Sam Ego's House is used to reflect the mood of each scene, but it is made more significant because of its symbolic meaning.

Music in Sam Ego's House is used to reinforce the meaning of symbols and theme. In earlier plays Saroyan used music in accordance with each character's feeling or mood. Johnny's somersaults, McGregor's blowing the bugle, and the newspaper boy's singing in Nick's bar, for example, were associated with the expression of subtle feelings that could not be so easily expressed verbally. In Sam Ego's House music is associated with the allegorical meaning of Sam Ego and his house. As the play opens, the loud radio

jazz is heard, followed by the sudden, insane applause. This loud music reflects the unbalanced mentality of Sam Ego. However, when the house-movers hammer the house in order to move it, even the loud radio programs are subdued. Thus the beginning of rebirth, for the house and the American dream, is signalled, as the constructive new changes represented by the sound of hammering begin to replace the old maniacal symptoms represented by the loud sounds from the radio.

Saroyan relies greatly on sound effects to create the theatrical effect in Sam Ego's House. Different sounds and speeds express different meanings and moods. The sounds in the beginning of the play are disturbing noises with a fast rhythm. As the play progresses, these noises gradually change into sounds carrying the feeling or meaning of a scene. In Act II, the songs of birds, the church organ, and the choir replace the disharmonic, disruptive noises. Act III is filled with a peaceful sound and celebratory music. The celebratory music is heard when the end of the war is announced. It also heightens the celebratory mood for the transformation of Sam Ego. The sounds of Act III are composed of steam whistles, intermittent automobile horns, waltzlike music from a band, and old songs from an old phonograph. As the appearance of Sam Ego's house drastically changes from Act I to Act II, the sound effects vary. In the last scene of the play, a steam calliope is heard and gradually fades away. The frenzied sounds of the opening scene disappear in the quiet reunion of a happy family in the last scene, which uses no background noise.

Saroyan uses dance and acrobatics in conjunction with music to enhance the mood of the scene. In Sam Ego's House he also incorporates dance, although it does not take an important part in the play. In Act III, Dancey Urge, Utmost's daughter, dances to the music of the elegy after the end of the war is announced. Saroyan uses dance most often for celebratory purposes in Sam Ego's House. However, he also uses group choreography very effectively in this play to present the madness and destructiveness of a group mentality. The activities of the boy scouts' who attack the sexton, the searchers who invade Sam Ego's house, and the women who attack the house movers, are all choreographed to express almost a murderous group mentality.

Monologues and lighting are not featured in the play. There are some long speeches by the sexton of the church and the pastor, and yet they are either the reading of a newspaper article about Sam Ego's escape from the asylum or the pastor's sermon. There are no specific directions for lighting in Sam Ego's House. The theatrical function of both monologues and lighting are taken over by the extensive use of music and the symbolic changes of settings.

Saroyan continues to use his established theatrical techniques in this play, while the double roles for the three young men represent a new theatrical experiment.

The 1940s: A Summary

Saroyan's plays of the 1940s reveal a noticeable expansion in his use of allegory to explore the same themes found in his earlier works. The plays of this decade reflect a greater concern with social problems and with the need for people to cooperate in using their individual imaginations to construct a habitable world. Perhaps this more obvious social concern is the unavoidable result of living through the Second World War and its aftermath. In Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning and Jim Dandy he began to explore the allegorical possibilities of viewing the theatre as the world, in which the essential elements of all time and all people can be presented. Sam Ego's House is Saroyan's most developed attempt to confront the American experience, but even in that work, spiritual rebirth and Christian ethics are espoused as solutions to the inhumanity created by all group mentalities, whether Russian or American, old or young, as he indicates in the preface. Thematically in the plays of this decade he seeks to show how individual attempts to maintain innocence and good-heartedness can be combined in cooperative attempts to create a humane world for us all.

Theatrically in these plays, he explores the use of a variety of techniques designed to incorporate the audience in the performance and create a consciously shared histrionic reality. The Great American Goof is his most fully developed attempt to utilize the visual impact of dance to awaken the audience to an awareness of being alive and the transformative possibilities of human nature.

Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning is the first of the plays in which he directly addresses the audience, a technique he develops further in Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All. Through the theatricalism in the plays of the 1940s he attempts to stimulate an intellectual awareness of his thematic concerns with illusion and reality and good-heartedness, while continuing to use the theatrical techniques to create an emotional effect, as in the plays of the 1930s.

Among the most notable features of the plays of the 1940s is the more developed use of symbolic elements. Beginning with Sweeney in the Trees, this usage reaches its height in Jim Dandy, where the setting is crowded with symbolic objects. The plays of the 1940s also witness a growth in Saroyan's anger at the failed possibilities of human society and an increasing pessimism about the prospects for creating a livable world, which contrasts with the simultaneous growth in these plays of a religious consciousness. This is a period when Saroyan personally had to cope with marital problems, which ended with his second divorce from the same woman, Carol Marcus, in 1952. Scenes of communion are included in every play of this period, and salvation for individuals and society is found in the religious and ethical values of compassion and familial love. These two opposing tendencies in Saroyan become even more apparent in the plays of the 1950s, along with an increasing sense of urgency and the feeling that people are running out of time and chances to transform the world into a livable place.

CHAPTER 4

THE 1950s:

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS (1952), THE CAVE DWELLERS (1957), THE DOGS, OR THE PARIS COMEDY (1960),
SAM THE HIGHEST JUMPER OF THEM ALL, OR
THE LONDON COMEDY (1960)

The 1950s was not the best time of Saroyan's life. Personally he had marital problems and was frequently in financial difficulties. Professionally he had fewer plays produced. His only new success during the decade was The Cave Dwellers (1957), which despite mixed reviews, enjoyed a modest success on Broadway. The 1950s was also a dark time for the human spirit. Threats of atomic destruction and the international tensions of the Cold War were combined with McCarthyism in the United States, leading to increasing pressures for social and ideological conformity.

Saroyan's plays of the 1950s present a mixture of the emotional and entertainment uses of theatricalism found in his earliest plays and the allegorical uses he explored in the 1940s. Thematically in the plays of this decade he suggests an alternative way of organizing human relationships, based on the idea of universal human kinship.

The Slaughter of the Innocents (1952)

Saroyan published The Slaughter of the Innocents in Theatre Arts in 1952, after rather a long, dormant period since Sam Ego's House. As the editors of the magazine point out in their introduction to the play, The Slaughter of the Innocents represents a turning point for Saroyan, as he focuses on presenting the darker side of life. The editors observe that "Its theme is a larger, a more momentous one than Mr. Saroyan has ever undertaken before: no less than that of the traditional freedoms of democracy at a time when pressures to jettison those freedoms mount higher everywhere day by day" (33). The Slaughter of the Innocents was written during a period of increasing international tension and the anticommunist fervor of the McCarthy era in the United States, and this environment is reflected in the darkness of the play. W. David Sievers notes that "Slaughter of the Innocents expands the theme of hatred for militarism and the police state into a full-blown nightmare" (252).

Although Saroyan's earlier plays describe the difficulties of innocent people in keeping their integrity and nobility amidst the world's harsh realities, Saroyan expressed the possibility of the triumph of their spirits over that harsh reality. On the contrary, The Slaughter of the Innocents stresses the greater destructive power that our inhumane social and political realities have over individuals. It is a gloomier work, with less faith in the conditions

of human existence and less hope for any improvement in the future.

As the title of the play reveals, The Slaughter of the Innocents portrays the manner in which innocent people are mercilessly victimized by social and political systems. In Saroyan's earlier plays economic, social, and political problems served as threatening forces restraining innocent people from realizing their dreams. Most clearly the forces were embodied in a character like Blick, from The Time of Your Life, or the nursing home caretaker, in My Heart's in the Highlands, or in specific symbols, such as the kicked-around money in Sweeney in the Trees. In The Slaughter of the Innocents, however, external forces indiscriminately destroy the characters' dreams and their innocent natures.

The Slaughter of the Innocents is a two-act play, set in a restaurant bar with an adjoining parking lot. As the play opens, a girl named Rose comes into the bar and finds that it has been transformed into a Court of Justice. A new Republic, which was established nine months previously, has decided to use the bar as a court during the day. Archie Crookshank, another good-natured bar owner like Nick in The Time of Your Life, advises Rose to leave the place before she is unfortunately caught by the court for trial. Government officials soon show up, including a judge, an attorney, and a few others, and set up court in the bar. The accused are brought in for trial.

Those who are brought to trial are accused for various reasons that would not normally be considered violations of law. For

instance, a young man is put on trial for having attempted to commit suicide, a drama critic for having written favorably of the bad performance of a beautiful girl in a play, and an old woman for begging, among other defendants. However, they are all sentenced to death, and all of the accused are shot to death in the parking lot, one after another. Later a three-year old boy is brought to trial for having publicly expressed hatred and contempt for his parents, and Archie accuses the court of recklessness. In the middle of the resulting commotion, a character called Government Man reads a new directive from the Department of Internal Security. He announces that the roles of the people on the Court of Justice are to be exchanged with those of the six people awaiting trial. When the accused assume positions of power, the new judge acquits the old members of the Court of Justice, out of sympathy and a recognition of their shared humanity. However, when the old officials of the Court of Justice resume their original roles, according to the directive, they mercilessly sentence the accused to be executed as usual.

After these trials, the judge insists on continuing to try the boy, and Archie slugs the judge with a blackjack. The play ends when the Government Man announces to the people outside of the bar that the court is adjourned. This is his own decision, and he awaits his doom along with Archie and the other characters who have come to oppose the command of the Chief of the Department of Internal Security by interrupting the boy's trial and returning the boy to his parents.

In The Slaughter of the Innocents, Saroyan expresses his strong discontent with both the external and internal forces that restrain people from actualizing and keeping their good natures. The external forces include social, political, and economic systems and conditions, and whatever oppresses our inborn innocence and desire to live a peaceful life. In the play the Court of Justice represents the external forces of oppression. After the government orders a Court of Justice to be set up in Archie's bar, the peace which Rose used to feel in the bar is totally shattered. Like Nick's bar, Archie's bar used to be a home or haven to his customers, as Rose points out: "This is the only place I ever found that was for me. For me, too, Archie. It wasn't home, but it was something like it" (37). This homelike place turns into a slaughterhouse once the Court of Justice is established there, and Rose finds herself literally standing before the bar.

When the bar served as a place for ordinary people to gather and freely share their lives it functioned properly as a nurturing place of shelter. However, then the bar is taken over by people who do not consider themselves ordinary individuals but think they are more powerful or more privileged than the bar's patrons because of their position in the social and political order. The members of the Court of Justice have given up their individual humanity for their social functions. Archie, Rose, and May, for example, who struggle to retain their humanity, retain individual names; government functionaries, who have given up their

individuality for a secure place in the social power structure, are known by their position and function.

Unlike Saroyan's earlier plays, The Slaughter of the Innocents carries a feeling of deep despair concerning the conditions of human existence. This feeling arises from an awareness not only of the external forces imposed on people but also of the way in which people internalize these forces by accepting them as natural. The external forces, as represented by the court, abuse their power by murdering innocent people instead of protecting them. The innocent are unjustifiably accused and executed, regardless of the nature of their crimes or their age. The Slaughter of the Innocents, like Sam Ego's House, directly confronts the negative consequences of group mentalities, of forsaking one's humanity and individuality for social position and security. However, The Slaughter of the Innocents is a less hopeful play than Sam Ego's House, because the slaughter of the innocents occurs in the minds of people as well, through the destruction of their own individual innocence.

The internal inhumane forces are those elements in the minds of people that destroy their innocence, dignity, and nobility. They include such feelings as fear and shame, which Saroyan believed hinder people from listening to their conscience and from realizing their good natures. Although he is discontented with the unfair judgment of the court, Archie expresses his confusion about what he should do: "Now, I will ask you [Rose] to help me. Help me find out what my duty is, and I swear to God I'll do it" (41). Upon noticing a young man who is still alive after being shot in the

parking lot, Archie is afraid to help him, and Rose must urge Archie to help. Similarly it is only after overcoming his fear that Archie is able to speak out to save the boy from trial. This feeling of fear, Saroyan believes, is an internal enemy to our realizing our fundamentally good nature.

The gloomier tone of the play is increased by its ending. Other plays, such as Jim Dandy, end with an encouraging view of the power of good-hearted individuals to transform the world and make it a more nurturing place. However, in this play he presents the external and internal conditions opposing good-heartedness and innocence as universal and perpetual. He sees the problems facing the good-hearted as prevailing everywhere. He does not specify the name of the place and time of the play. In the introduction, Saroyan asks: "The question will of course arise, where does the play happen? . . . [I]t happens in our thinking, in our sleep, and in one degree or another it happens in fact everywhere in the world, including our own country" (33). In other words, in The Slaughter of the Innocents, Saroyan shows the actualization, in more concrete terms, of how universal and perpetual the problems are that oppose living an innocent and good-hearted life.

The dramatic structure of The Slaughter of the Innocents does not observe a traditional pattern. Instead of portraying any dramatic action, the play presents situations in which absurd trials and executions are repeated and people find themselves desperate and helpless. Act I concerns the trials of three people, on the one hand, and the growing feeling of a family bond among Archie, May

Foley, and Rose, on the other. Although these three characters are not related to each other, when court officials mistakenly take May Foley and Rose for Archie's wife and daughter respectively, the feeling of a family tie begins to grow among them. In Act II trials continue, and Archie speaks out against the court when a boy is brought in for trial. At the end of the play it is suggested that Archie will probably face the death penalty, like the other accused people, for his rebellion against the inhumane forces in the world, represented by the government.

In the middle of the play an abrupt change of roles breaks the illusion of the dramatic situation. When the court is proceeding with the trials, the Government Man suddenly announces that the accused will take the positions of the members of the Court of Justice, and the former members of the Court will take the positions of the accused.

Saroyan had previously experimented with role changes by providing the three young men with multiple roles in Sam Ego's House. In that play the role changes of the some actors were associated with the symbolic meanings of the characters and did not affect the dramatic structure. In The Slaughter of the Innocents, however, the role inversion between some of the characters disrupts the situation and breaks the illusion and tension the dramatic structure has built up. In this later play the change of roles is used to prove the innocence and nobility of the accused people, who are able to forgive the crimes of the judge when they are granted power.

This scene expresses Saroyan's increasing pessimism. The scenes of character transformation in the earlier plays, such as Fishkin into Jim Dandy, are designed in part to reveal the shared elements of humanity, such as compassion, underlying different individuals. The earlier plays might lead us to expect that, upon switching places with the accused, the members of the Court of Justice would recognize their common humanity, be reformed and reborn, and all the characters would celebrate the possibility of a new community. In Slaughter of the Innocents Saroyan is suggesting that there are some people so corrupted by their places in the social and political systems that all their innocence has been slaughtered, and rebirth is no longer possible for them. He is also suggesting that such people must be opposed even at the cost of one's life.

Except for Archie, Rose, and May Foley, the characters in The Slaughter of the Innocents are primarily types. They are not identified as individuals but by either their gender or functions, such as an old woman, a poet, and a judge. Archie, Rose, and May are more individualized than the other characters, yet they primarily function in the play as members of a family. Archie plays the role of father, Rose the daughter, and May Foley the mother. Through their relationship Saroyan suggests the idea that everyone can be identified as a member of a family, and the creation of this relationship among strangers will enable us to develop a habitable society. In Act I Archie promises Rose that he will tell people that Rose is his daughter: "I couldn't tell her [May Foley] tonight, but I'll

tell her tomorrow. (Pause) I'll tell her because it's the truth . . . in a deep and strange way it is the truth" (44). This relationship is presented as an example of true philanthropy, a love between people based solely on their shared humanity. This philanthropic love enables Archie to attempt to save the three-year old boy in Act II, as a father would do. In his action he embodies the practice of love, providing the audience with a compassionate role model. Similarly May Foley protects the boy as if she were his mother, until Archie attacks the judge and she can safely send the boy to his actual father.

Like the locales of many of his other plays, The Slaughter of the Innocents is set in a restaurant bar. However, the metaphor of the setting is neither a haven nor a womb. It is not a place of preparation for a new birth. Rather it is a slaughterhouse, where people are indiscriminately murdered, both physically and spiritually. The restaurants in Saroyan's earlier plays were set off from the world outside and provided a shelter for their customers. Archie's restaurant, however, is no longer isolated from the world outside, for the sentencings occur in the bar itself and the executions occur in the parking lot. Saroyan no longer finds any safe place anywhere. This idea is expressed by the Government Man. When the courtroom guard, the father of the three-year old boy, tries to help his son escape, the Government Man advises him: "There is no place to escape to, my dear fellow. This is the world we live in. A home, restaurant, saloon, Court of Justice" (55). The external forces that support the establishment of a murderous court

of justice have become internalized, so that they also fill our homes and places of communion.

Archie's restaurant is part of the world outside, a world where individuality is destroyed and the good in human nature fails to find realization. When Archie tells May that "one of the thirty-nine they killed today was not unlike yourself, May," she answers, "Impossible. There is no other woman like myself. I've been around a long time and I've never seen another. Where do you find women who wear clothes the way I do?" (42). Here May stresses the importance of recognizing individuality, which the Court of Justice destroys. After the Court of Justice is set up, people are merely identified by their crimes.

Saroyan did not greatly resort to theatricalism in The Slaughter of the Innocents. The major reason for not using his usual theatrical devices, such as dance and music, is related to the theme of the play. In this work Saroyan is more concerned with portraying the harshness and oppressive nature of a grim reality, rather than with expressing the lively spirit of innocent and good-natured people. By showing the difficulties involved in and the need for maintaining our humanity, he still hopes to improve society, the conditions of human existence, and the nature of the audience as well. But in this play he also wants to impart to the audience his own sense of urgency about the need to keep struggling to maintain our humanity, in the light of increasingly powerful opposition. Thus the lack of fun and playfulness in his theme restrains him from relying greatly on theatricalism in this

play. In fact, there is not one moment of fun or amusement in the play. Characters are executed in succession, and they are governed by fear. The only positive moment in the play is Archie's courageous protest against the court, but this action leads him to face the same ending as all the other accused. Although Saroyan in this work still upholds the necessity for each individual to struggle not to lose hold of innocence in a changing world and for fighting against any forces that threaten that innocence, his outlook on the future of human society is not optimistic.

The characters in Saroyan's earlier plays relied on monologues to express their despair and disappointment in the world outside their dreams. In The Slaughter of the Innocents there is no clear distinction between the restaurant and the world outside, and the characters do not offer any dreams or shared visions of community in opposition to the grim reality. Accordingly monologues are not used.

One of the accused characters in the play, a poet named Edward, articulates what may be taken as Saroyan's view, at the time of writing The Slaughter of the Innocents, concerning his plans and goals for writing plays.

My reason for seeking a Fellowship is to enable me to finish a trilogy of heroic poetry which is to concern itself with man's eternal struggle for truth and meaning. The first book of the trilogy has been started and concerns itself with man's eternal struggle for peace and quiet. The second book is in outline and concerns itself with man's eternal struggle for home and hearth. The third and final book is still in a nebulous stage but will

concern itself with man's eternal struggle for food and drink. (49)

According to this statement The Slaughter of the Innocents seems to be the first book of a trilogy, which is followed by a second book, The Cave Dwellers, whose concern is the struggle of human beings for home and hearth.

The Cave Dwellers (1957)

The Cave Dwellers was produced on Broadway in 1957, fourteen years after Saroyan's last Broadway production, Get Away, Old Man in 1943. The reviews of The Cave Dwellers were divided into two different types of responses, as was often the case with Saroyan's plays. Both favorable and unfavorable reviews admitted the great emotional impact of the play on the audience, and this emotional impact was the basis for either the reviewers' like or dislike of the play. Some found it appealing and others sentimental, implying that it was not true to life and intellectually unstimulating. John Chapman acclaimed the play to be "a work of tenderness and beauty," and called Saroyan "a poet with a loving heart who sings of the lowly of the human race. No matter what pitiful, shabby corner he pries into, he finds beauty there" (141). John McClain expressed a similarly favorable opinion of the play:

Along the way there are numberless other thoughts and fancies which the audience can interpret in its own terms. There will be those who see in it a pattern for world

peace; others, perhaps lowering their sights, will read into it a simple exploration of human nobility. Whatever the conclusions, it cannot fail to challenge and stimulate the serious theatre-goer. (147)

Some critics did not appreciate the play nearly as highly. The review in Time magazine reads:

Theatrically, it would not matter if Saroyan wrote first with an eraser--to wipe out reality--if afterwards, with a pen, he created magic. But this play has little magic: only a stab of pathos, now and then, in a wilderness of plight; or a flash of color, humor, poetry amid constant murmuration. (168).

Similarly Harold Clurman criticized the play: "I share Saroyan's sentiments. But The Cave Dwellers is still not only slight but I'm afraid somewhat threadbare" (180-181). Patrick Dennis wrote that The Cave Dwellers leans "crushingly on the theatre-going public's seemingly boundless sentimentality" (175).

The major faults that the critics found in the play seem to be derived from their maintaining different opinions about Saroyan on life and the theatre. The critics who failed to enjoy the play did not pay much attention to the theatricalism and its effects, and instead attempted to judge The Cave Dwellers according to conventional criteria for plays. They demanded a tight plot and realistic characterizations. Saroyan himself stated that he wanted to create a different kind of play with The Cave Dwellers ("A Word on the Theatre in General" 185). Brooks Atkinson in his review suggested a more appropriate way to appreciate Saroyan's play:

Don't expect a plot or a conclusion from Mr. Saroyan. He is not the man to write with a slide-rule. But expect more humor, grace, innocence and improvisation than he has put in one piece since the halcyon days of "The Time of Your Life." (212)

That "humor, grace, innocence and improvisation" are again expressed through theatricalism in The Cave Dwellers. In this play, Saroyan was especially concerned with experimenting with different theatrical devices, such as presenting animals on stage, while he continued to deal with his familiar themes and character types. Thus The Cave Dwellers represents a return to a greater concern with theatricalism, which he had downplayed in The Slaughter of the Innocents.

As almost all the reviews noted, the play created a strong emotional impact on the audience, as in his early successes like My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life. This emotional impact is sought mainly through the theatricalism in the play. The most notable theatrical techniques are involved in presenting the setting, in the performance mode, including pantomime, and in the characterization. The dramatic structure that he chooses for The Cave Dwellers also helps to enhance the theatricalism in the play.

The Cave Dwellers is set in an old, abandoned theatre on the East Side of New York, which is about to be demolished by a slum-clearing project. It is inhabited by the Queen, a former burlesque actress; the King, a former clown in vaudeville; and the Duke, a prize fighter. They are not related to each other, except that they

happen to meet one another in the theatre and decide to live together, creating a community based on their shared humanity and on their similar experiences of being performers. They are soon joined by a homeless girl, who had been fired from a toy gun factory. She had not been a performer, had never been on stage before, and the only thing she can act out is the pledge of allegiance to the flag. However, the other characters welcome her, even though they are short of food and a bed.

A little later a man, a woman, and a trained bear knock on the door, seeking help, and the woman gives birth at the door of the theatre. The Duke goes out to get some milk for the new-born baby, only to find that he must steal some because he does not have enough money to buy it. A mute milk delivery boy chases him down to the theatre, but finds out the situation and simply goes away. Soon the boss of the wrecking crew shows up, but he postpones breaking down the theatre until Monday, thus allowing the inhabitants to stay there for four more days. The play ends with everyone leaving the theatre on Monday morning.

The Cave Dwellers proves that Saroyan's thematic concerns, as well as his use of theatricalism to present those concerns, have not changed greatly since his earliest works. He presents the good-natured humanity of people as a source of strength in confronting the harshness of reality and resorts to theatricalism to enhance the theme and the atmosphere of their desperate situation, as well as to show the joy and creativity in the response of the characters to their situation. All the characters in the play, including a bear, are

tenderhearted, which enables them to share love with one another and to create a sense of family among strangers. Shabby and deserted though the theatre may be, they find the place to be a sweet home. Their warmth and love transform the place into a home.

A similar transformation occurs in the Duke as well. The Girl's love for him makes the Duke courageous, and enables him to overcome his obscure fear of the world outside the theatre. When a family knocks at the door, the King hesitates to open the door and the Duke opens it to the family. He even steals milk for the baby. His compassion makes him brave; he mentions, "If I had stolen it for myself, I could never have run that well" (75).

Some critics thought that the love, warmth, and glowing spirit described in the play were too nonrealistic and improbable, and only proved that Saroyan's perception was so limited that he could portray just the imaginary reality of our lives. Harold Clurman wrote as follows:

You can have no goodness or true love without a full awareness of the objects which are the substance of life. The substance or material of life is always resistant and this resistance--the subject of drama--is what we have so much difficulty in accepting. Saroyan tries nonchalantly to eliminate life's negation: he waves pain away. (180)

While the play lacks the conflict of a dramatic action, it focuses on the characters' reactions to the dramatic situation.

The Cave Dwellers is an allegory, like Sam Ego's House. In movement away from the grimness of The Slaughter of the Innocents, Saroyan was more concerned here with exploring human possibilities to treat everyone as family and transform any circumstances into home and hearth. The Cave Dwellers is an allegory about the kind of life that he wanted to live--a kind of life that may not be possible in the world outside the theatre, but is possible in the histrionic reality created inside. This allegorical sense comes from his belief that theatre is not created to represent life but to present it. The theatre by nature thus is allegorical, as the incidents and people presented on stage are designed to reveal underlying truths about human nature and life. Above all, he hoped that the theatre would be able to show us how to realize our dreams.

The dramatic structure is not significant in The Cave Dwellers. People come to the theatre to get shelter; they meet others with whom they can share their warm humanity and love; and they are finally forced to leave the place, because of its imminent destruction. Again the play presents a series of situations in which characters confront the adverse conditions of life and still keep their good nature. In face of adversity the major characters in The Cave Dwellers seek to maintain their grace and integrity in any situation. Moreover they show that they can transform the adverse conditions of life to tolerable ones with their belief in and realization of love.

The characterization in The Cave Dwellers is closely related to the subject of the play. Saroyan seems to consider that love should be the basis of any kind of relationship and portrays the ideal of all human relationships through the family relationship. He often dealt with the love relationship between a young couple as an idealized human relationship. But in The Cave Dwellers and other plays such as Sam Ego's House, by enlarging the love relationship to a family relationship, he suggests that all humanity is kin. The arbitrary family relationship in The Cave Dwellers represents Saroyan's advocacy of love for all of humanity. Richard Watts wrote in his review that "he [Saroyan] happily has a quality that turns his love affair with mankind into a beautiful romance instead of a vulgar liaison" (145). The relationship among the characters in The Cave Dwellers is an expansion of his experiment with creating an arbitrary family relationship among strangers who meet in chance encounters in The Slaughter of the Innocents, where Archie, May Foley, and Rose form an imaginary family.

The characters in the play represent all human beings, because anyone can be identified as a member of a family. This characteristic makes the characters of The Cave Dwellers less individualized than those in any other play of Saroyan. He is trying to deal here with the universal essentials of human character that underly anyone's life. The characters in The Cave Dwellers are identified by the names of family members. The names such as King, Queen, and Duke have nothing to do with their social status, and are fundamentally the same as father, mother, and son. They

have the names of nobility because of their fundamentally noble nature, a nature Saroyan is suggesting that we all share when we treat one another with love and as family. All of the characters keep an essentially warm nature and noble spirit, which enable them not to succumb to adverse situations but to transform them into valuable life experiences. The characters of The Cave Dwellers share the same good nature with the characters of Saroyan's earlier plays, such as My Heart's in the Highlands and The Time of Your Life. However, they differ from the characters of the earlier plays, because they have spiritually grown. Ben Alexander, Johnny's father, is a good-natured person, but he cannot accommodate himself to the harsh world. He shows a noble spirit in not giving up his good-nature, but he is helpless when he confronts the harsh world. On the contrary, the King is dauntless despite his desperate situation, and shows greater dignity when he leaves the theatre to face the external world.

In other plays the characters are often identified by their social functions. These social functions are no longer of great significance in The Cave Dwellers. They neither determine the characters' roles nor define them as types. Their roles, especially as family members, are not due to relations of birth or social creation, like marriage, but are entirely arbitrary, and are based simply on their feelings toward one another, and on their gender and ages. The family who shows up later at the door of the theatre is identified only as a family with a new-born baby. Saroyan presents this new life as a continuity of human life, as a wonder, and as a miracle. In

The Beautiful People Jonah, a father of three children, makes a similar statement: "Every life in the world is a miracle, and it's a miracle every minute each of us stays alive, and unless we know this, the experience of living is cheated of the greater part of its wonder and beauty" (87-88).

Saroyan seems to suggest that this generous nature and spirit differentiate human beings from animals and must be maintained for us to retain our humanity. In contrast to the humans, Saroyan gives the bear an identifiable name, Gorky. Saroyan considered the Russians as presenting "the threat of total destruction of the human race" ("A Word on the Theatre in General" 187). The Russian name leads the audience to expect that the bear should have the barbaric and animalistic spirit and threaten the noble spirit of human characters. The play after all is called The Cave Dwellers. The King tells us:

Nobody belongs here. . . . The Bear belongs here and all his kind. . . . We think, and remember, and speak, and laugh, and sing, and dance, and make things of all kinds on purpose. We do all these things because we don't belong here. . . . What are we doing in a cave? We're angels.
(106)

In The Cave Dwellers, however, accepted into the family of performers, even the bear is gentle and not harmful to anybody.

The setting of The Cave Dwellers, the theatre itself, has the allegorical meaning of the world. When he leaves the place at the end of the play, the King says, "Farewell, then--womb, cave, hiding

place, home, church, world, theatre" (120). It does not represent a real world but an idealized one: a world where human relationships are based on love, kindness, care, and courage, and characters can realize their dreams, love, and good nature despite any hindrance. The King tells the Girl that the secret of the theatre is love, and continues to explain: "Without love, pain and failure are pain and failure, nothing else. But with love they are beauty and meaning themselves" (42). He is talking about the possibility of transforming a harsh reality into a warm one through love. The theatre presents an example of such transformation. It can present a world of true love where people sacrifice their own love and desire for the sake of others, as the Duke does. Upon recognizing that the Girl loves the Boy instead of him, the Duke goes out to look for the Boy so that the Girl can realize her love.

Saroyan sent his usual message by portraying good-hearted people who maintain caring relationships with others in spite of adversity. However, judging from the critical reaction Saroyan may have been more successful in fulfilling what he considered to be the other major purpose of the theatre: to entertain the audience as well as to instruct them. By creating a theatrically delightful histrionic reality, he hoped to provide the audience with at least a temporary respite from the harsh realities they must confront outside the theatre.

Just as Saroyan portrays the theatre as the world, he presents a play as life. Accordingly the performances are living themselves. In Act I, scene iii each character acts out the role which he or she

had once performed. When the Duke and the Girl act out a scene, the Queen remarks, "Nothing happens! It's the story of our lives" (49), ironically calling to mind that failure to recognize one's own life as drama that he mentions in the preface. Similarly while listening to an argument between the King and the Queen, the Girl asks the Duke whether they are acting. The Duke answers, "Oh, no, they're living" (58). This comment suggests to the audience that what they are seeing is something actually happening. It creates an illusion of performance being transformed into a living process.

Saroyan also suggests that living is acting. One's life is the same as drama in the sense that one's life is already destined by God, as a play is written by a playwright. Thus living out one's given life is the same as performing a given role in a play. One does not create one's own life at will, but only fulfills the tasks of living. Those tasks are fundamental, universal patterns and possibilities that apply to everyone in all times and places. In commenting on the purpose of the theatre in general, Saroyan stated:

Failure to recognize one's own life as drama does probably account for some of the appeal of the theatre. . . . To consider one's self unreal or unworthy of the meaning art gives to real or imaginary people appears to be the unfortunate compulsion of most people, not in our time alone but in all time. ("A Word on the Theatre in General" 184-185)

Saroyan believed that every life is the stuff of drama.

Saroyan presents through the Queen his conception of living as acting. When talking to the Girl about her love for a boy in a play in which she performed, the Queen describes her role as follows:

Oh, it was a good part, and believe me I made the most of it. I lost the Boy. I lost the Man, but the play ran and ran. Ah, you see, the playwright said, how right I was to choose the true. The people know. And all the time it wasn't so at all, it was the art of us, the players, that the people cherished. The play was bad, but do you know, it is still considered a good play? (87)

The double meaning in the last sentence seems to imply that though the playwright may not be so good, as long as the performers play their roles faithfully, we cannot consider it a bad play. The given conditions of our lives may not be favorable or what we wish, but within those conditions living a life full of love and faith makes it a life of value. Saroyan's concern lies with how to live one's life, rather than with what specific kind of life one leads. We may not be able to change the circumstances of our lives, but we can make them happy or unhappy according to how we act within the boundaries of our lives, just as performers can play their roles differently. This idea affects the performance mode of the characters.

The performance of the characters is both self-conscious and distantiating. It is self-conscious in the way that it presents the idea that living is acting. It is distantiating because of the self-conscious acting of the characters. The distantiating effect is achieved primarily through the self-conscious portrayal of their

roles by the King, the Duke, and the Girl in Act I, scene iii. In this scene, instead of building up the illusion of performance, they break it. While the King performs, the Duke and the Girl ask him questions and comment on his performance, thus transforming their own roles into that of spectators. In his review Brooks Atkinson acclaimed the performance of Barry Jones as the King, saying, "He is not the character he is playing; he is an actor playing the character, commenting on it silently out of his own amiable intelligence as an artist" (156). This is similar to the Brechtian acting technique, which is also intended to break the illusion of the realistic theatre. This type of performance in which performers comment on their roles comes not only from the art of the performers but also is called forth by the playscript.

The self-conscious performance also affects the relationship between the performers and the audience. The relationship between them becomes more intimate than that existing in realist theatre, when the Duke places himself in the position of the audience, commenting on the acting of the King. Although there is no direct contact between the performers and the audience in The Cave Dwellers, as in Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, Saroyan builds up an intimate relationship with the audience by having the characters take on the role of the audience.

The suggestion of an equation between living a life and performing a role is presented primarily through the attitudes of the characters in the play, which the performers assume. The result of their playing roles which they have once performed is to

raise the entire theatrical experience to self-consciousness, because the performers and audience both recognize their own awareness of sharing in the creation of the histrionic reality.

The interplay between the real world in the play and the dream world of the characters is highly theatrical. In Act I, scene iv the four characters act out their dreams in their sleep. In other words, in the multileveled histrionic reality of The Cave Dwellers, they exist as actors performing characters who are asleep acting out their dreams. The performance is done in pantomime style, with no dialogue. In this scene, the four act out their experiences in the world outside: the Duke boxing in a ring, the Girl working in the toy gun factory, the King begging on the street, and the Queen performing as an actress. The stage directions describe the pantomime performance mode of the scene:

Later. Storm. Wind. The sounds of human sleeping--breathing, murmuring, a hum.

The GIRL is asleep in the DUKE'S bed. The QUEEN in her bed, and the KING in his.

The DUKE is walking up and down, to keep warm. . . . He is remembering his big fight. He walks the boundary of the fight ring, takes his corner, and waits, looking up now and then. The gong is heard, but differently--like a chime--almost an invitation to sleep. And out of nowhere comes the charging young OPPONENT in trunks and boxing gloves. The DUKE puts up his arms and works fearfully, trying to keep away, but suddenly the OPPONENT tags him. . . . A voice is heard far away whispering one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. . . . The DUKE gets to his feet, but the OPPONENT is on him

again. He tries to clinch, but fails. . . . The DUKE stands, dazed, unbelieving, and then sinks to one knee again.

The GIRL sits up suddenly, notices him. Gets out of the bunk, fully clothed. Goes to him shyly.

She takes him by the arm, as if from the ring of failure and disgrace of long ago, and helps him into the bunk.

The GIRL listens to the DUKE as he breathes heavily and then slowly quiets down and falls asleep. . . .

She sits on a box and begins to work in the gun factory, doing the same thing over and over. A handsome YOUNG MAN comes, dancing a tango, bows to her, they dance, and then the YOUNG MAN goes. (51-52)

These silent movements continue until the Queen performs her role, and all four characters wake up at the same time. The silent movements leave a stronger impression than speech. In other plays the harshness of reality was often expressed in the monologues of the characters; in The Cave Dwellers it is presented in this pantomime dream scene. The scene also increases the image of a silent nightmare that presents the painful experiences that each character has had outside the theatre.

The use of the bear is one of the most theatrical techniques in The Cave Dwellers. This is a new theatrical technique, which Saroyan continues to experiment with in his later play, The Dogs, or the Paris Comedy. Atkinson stated, "a performing bear becomes a valid member of the community without straining the audience's credulity. No one is much astonished when he comes lumbering in. He turns out to be one of the finest creatures in the play" (212).

In addition to the theatrical effect, the bear can have various symbolic as well as allegorical meanings. The bear's animal nature contrasts with the human nature of the characters. The King deplores the presence of violence anywhere, of anything inhuman or cruel, including anything in human nature as well as human society. However, the bear does not show any animalistic violence, but only gentleness. When the Father attempts to wrestle with the bear, it only expresses its affection by rocking him in its arms. Thus it represents the innocence, naivete, and simplicity that Saroyan hoped that people could retain and express. In addition, the presence of the animal adds to the excitement of the theatrical experience.

In The Cave Dwellers Saroyan also relies on some of his usual theatrical techniques, such as setting and performance mode. He does not highlight music and dance or monologue as major theatrical techniques, although John McClain in his review noted "three songs composed by Bernardo Segáll, wonderfully well integrated into the mood of the proceedings and ingratiating in themselves" (212). Instead the play within the play in Act I, scene iii and the pantomime of Act I, scene iv replace these techniques. The technique of the play within the play here is a development of the play episode in Jim Dandy. The pantomime may be considered the development of his use of dance to express theme, character and mood. The pantomime scene reflects the experience of the characters in the outside world, as did Harry's monologues in The Time of Your Life. In addition, the pantomime enhances the

theatrical effect by contrasting the past harsh experiences of the characters with their warm present experience with strangers in the soon-to-be demolished theatre. As Saroyan did in each play throughout his career, in this work he reuses his established theatrical techniques, such as settings, as well as develops at least one new theatrical technique. In The Cave Dwellers this is the use of an animal character. In addition, Saroyan depends upon the family allegory in presenting his theme and characters.

The Dogs, or the Paris Comedy (1960)

The Dogs, or the Paris Comedy is a three-act romantic comedy in which Saroyan combines both realistic and theatrical elements. The play was translated into German and was a hit in a limited engagement at the Akademietheater, in Vienna, in a Volksoper production. The play was well-received, but an extensive run had not been planned (Darwent 33). In The Dogs Saroyan's treatment of characterization is realistic and the dramatic structure is well organized, and yet the use of dogs and birds as characters is theatrical. Saroyan had experimented with the use of an animal as a character in The Cave Dwellers, in which a bear joins the community of performers. In The Cave Dwellers, though expressing gentleness and a good nature in its actions, the bear did not talk, but in The Dogs the dog and bird characters talk among themselves and comment on the actions of the human characters.

The Dogs is set in Paris in 1959. George Washington Hannaberry, a wealthy American from Texas, has won a bet on a horse race by betting on a horse named Lily Dafon. The horse was named after a girl, Lily Dafon, who lives with her mother, Violet, grandmother, Gladiola, greatgrandmother, Rose, greatgrandfather, Max, and a family of dogs, including a father dog, his son, and his grandson, and some birds. The play begins when Lily's greatgrandmother finds a picture in a newspaper in which Lily is seen behind Hannaberry. Lily's greatgrandmother assumes that Hannaberry bet on the horse named Lily Dafon because he knows Lily and may be in love with her. Since the financial situation of her family is not so favorable, she thinks that it will be good for both Lily and her family if Lily marries him. Lily, however, is engaged to another young man. Lily is forced to visit Hannaberry in his hotel room, accompanied by her mother. When they visit him in the hotel, Hannaberry denies that he knows Lily, and Lily and her mother return home. However, Lily starts to date Hannaberry after her visit. Meanwhile Hannaberry's son comes to Paris to reconcile his father and mother, whom Hannaberry has left after an argument. At the end of the play, Hannaberry presents Lily's family with a mansion as a gift, and leaves Paris with his wife, whom his son had brought there.

The play begins with three dogs talking about love. After the First Dog, a father dog, says that "I sometimes wonder if we really understand anything, as we have always believed we do" (90), the human action begins. The dogs neither physically nor verbally

interact with the human characters in the play. They remain as mere spectators on stage, watching things happen, and occasionally commenting on the human behavior. After watching Lily's mother putting the newspaper with Lily and Hannaberry's picture in it on the table so that Lily will easily find it, the three dogs discuss the behavior of human beings. The father dog remarks, "Didn't we learn everything we know from them? But how sad, and how foolish to know so much, to understand so deeply, and yet not be able to--make things right" (97).

The dogs' comments on human affairs are often comic and increase the funny and merry atmosphere of the scene. In talking about the spaceships sent to the moon, the Third Dog, a grandson dog, mentions:

The second to do it were Americans who thought it would be better propaganda to send a woman, to prove to the world that the Americans aren't opposed to them, except at home, in the family. . . . The American effort was a failure, too, because the woman forgot her lipstick. She got no medal, but Helena Rubinstein gave her a job on television, telling other women about Moon Kiss. (171)

To the dog's eyes, the human activities are incomprehensible and irrational. When Lily and her mother leave Hannaberry's hotel room, the First Dog comments, "Well, all I can say is bow-wow" (113). The other two dogs start to bark with him and the birds join the choir by breaking into a kind of crazy song. This animal choir at the end of Act I presents an ironic comment while at the same time increasing the comic and merry mood of the scene.

The Dogs is governed by actions and verbal wit, rather than by emotional tone. The impact of the use of the dogs results from not only their visual effect--the presence of the dogs onstage--but also from the role play of the dogs as characters. In The Cave Dwellers, the bear's expression of affection in his behavior was moving, as in the scene in which he wrestled with the Duke, and it fits well with the overall mood of the scene. In The Dogs, the animal characters are not part of the human activity. They are separated from it, and objectively observe and criticize it. It is Saroyan's intention that each species of character, both the dogs and the people, mirrors the life of the other, and it is the dogs who are used to comment on the foolishness in the life of the human characters. The precise stage directions are not given by Saroyan, and I have been unable to locate any description of the original Vienna production.

Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All,
or The London Comedy (1960)

Saroyan produced and directed Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All at Joan Littlewood's Theatre Royal in London in 1960. The presentation was not well received. One critic considered the play to be "outside the British tradition" (The Times [London] 7 April 1960: 3), and another wrote that the play has "a vague appeal to 'experimental drama' and an even vaguer appeal to Life" (Alvarez 555).

The allegorical treatment of the theme, the unrealistic mode of playwriting, and the intricate use of theatricalism might have made the play appear complicated and confusing to those who were not familiar with Saroyan's dramatic and theatrical aims and techniques, and Saroyan wrote a letter to the London critics explaining and defending the play.

Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All is a two-act play set in Stratford. It concerns a bank clerk called Sam Hark-Harkalark. He is an ordinary bank clerk, good-natured, hard working, and trying to achieve success. In Act I, he is inadvertently involved in a bank robbery. After having read a threatening note written by Ted, his co-worker, who wrote it as a mere joke, Sam gives away half a million dollars to Father Finnegan, who he thought was a robber. In Act II, Sam decides to be the highest jumper in the world, even though he has never jumped before. This abrupt change of mind leads people to believe that he has lost his mind, which they attribute to his being hit over the head by a bobby, who thought that Sam was the bank robber. The play concludes with a Doctor contending that Sam is not insane, and with Mr. Horniman, president of the bank, being arrested for embezzling part of the lost money.

In Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All, Saroyan continues to deal with his familiar themes, arguing for the importance of using the creative imagination to foster novelty in the world and to bring about an integrity of the human spirit in opposition to the materialism and disintegration increasingly prevalent in our

experience. In the preface to the play, Saroyan wrote that "The play is quite simple: it is contemptuous of the phoney, that's all, even when the phoney appears to be the gospel" (14). Saroyan's contempt of the phoney is not targeted toward a specific object. He sees the phoney prevalent in various domains of our lives, including work, social class, technology, war, and even the realistic practices of the theatre. Saroyan here presents the phoney as a threat to those who want to keep their good nature and innocence, the innate nature of human beings. Saroyan also believes that the phoney kills the human spirit just as surely as a gun kills the body. He expresses this idea in the character of a Man-to-be-executed, supposedly a revolutionist, who attempts to improve the world only to fail. The wide-spread phoniness in the world is explicitly addressed in a letter from Sam's grandfather, in which he writes that "something's wrong somewhere" (57).

When Johnny deplored that "something's wrong somewhere" twenty years previously, the threat to his existence was comparatively small and personal in scale. It seemed to be related to an external situation that was not impossible to overcome. In this later play Saroyan addresses problems that represent not only a threat from external conditions but also an inner conflict of all people everywhere. In addition, Saroyan talks about the problems with the tone of both a sense of danger and a warning. Now the threat to well-being is expanded to include global problems represented by weapons, the world economy, and politics, all of which are commented on in the play. In keeping with his emphasis

on the relationship between individual reformation and social progress, Saroyan sees these problems as those of both individuals and the whole world, and he suggests that the basic cause of these problems is phoniness. In Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All it is only the Grandfather who is well aware of phoniness as the cause of the problems, and accordingly, it is he who understands why an individual should make an effort to improve himself or herself. Sam's attempt to jump so high is an expression of his pursuit of self-improvement, and the grandfather, who understands the cause of Sam's action, is the one character who encourages Sam to keep trying.

The dramatic structure of the play is a combination of both surrealist and realistic elements. In Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All, the dramatic structure is built around the main event of the bank robbery. And yet the play is less concerned with unraveling the incident of the robbery than it is with portraying Sam's sudden change of attitude toward his life. The bank robbery functions only as a means through which Sam comes to look back on and decides to change his life. The bank robbery itself is not important but is symbolic of any incident that brings us to full consciousness of our participation in creating our own character and reality. Both acts of the play focus on describing Sam and his actions, rather than on the bank robbery.

As in most of Saroyan's other plays, the dramatic structure of the play does not follow a traditional development of an action. Instead it presents, compares, and contrasts two different Sams: the

one before transformation, in Act I, and the other after the change, in Act II. In Act I, Saroyan uses a realistic manner to describe the kind of person Sam is and the kind of life he lives. In Act II, he uses a surrealist manner to describe how Sam has changed. Act II does not bring Sam's transformation to a conclusion, as it does the bank robbery. It leaves his actions open to the audience, for discussion.

Each act of the play provides different situations that describe different characters, who seem to be more individualized in this play than in most of Saroyan's other works. This is because they are given particular roles in relation to the bank robbery. When looked at separately from this incident, they cannot be considered as well-developed characters, as they are defined by their general features, such as their social positions or jobs. None of these characters are individualized enough to be deeply realistic. Act I provides a more full characterization of Sam, but this is done only enough to show that he is an ordinary good-natured person.

In many respects Sam is an exemplary character who represents the modern common person. He is an ordinary individual who works hard as a member of a big organization such as a bank. Yet he transforms himself by an act of will that involves body and spirit, and he enlivens himself and the world. The activity of jumping that he chooses to transform himself is simple, childlike, and playful. This action is possible only after he has truly understood himself.

Sam has many similarities to protagonists in Saroyan's other plays. They also represent idealists. All these characters share other people's grief and satisfy their needs, often their financial needs. Similarly Sam likes to give things to people. He gives tuppence to Ann, who needs it, and mentions that "I enjoy giving. If I had a million pounds, I believe I'd give it away" (38). Later by jumping he gives himself as a model for others.

Just as the protagonist in Saroyan's plays represents an idealist, many of the minor characters also represent certain types. His characters are from all strata of society. Instead of portraying particular people and their lives, Saroyan always seeks to present the many different types of people in the world. This may make it difficult to portray deeply the life of one person in his plays. Most often the roles of his characters are closely associated with their social function. Thus in Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All the characters are named Ambassador, Gypsy, Blind Man, and so on.

Once again Saroyan tries to keep the audience interested in this play not through a well-made dramatic structure or lifelike characterizations, but through various theatrical techniques. These can provide the audience with fun as well as intellectual stimulation. In Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All the most notable theatrical techniques invoked are the use of symbols, the creation of an intimate relationship between the audience and the performers, singing, and dancing.

Sam's jump has a symbolic meaning. It signifies a fight against the phoney, an attempt to restore the human spirit, and a desire to

transcend mundane concerns such as fame, wealth, and importance, which contaminate the innocence of human beings. In Sam's words it is a jump for the freedom "To be alive decently" (64). It is an attempt to jump over all obstacles. Thus when Sam is jumping, he is not jumping for a world record, as some characters in the play assume, but to revitalize his creative imagination and regain an active role in the constitution of his experience, and to provide a role model by inspiring and encouraging other people. He is jumping not for his own sake or England, but for all people in all the different countries in the world. That is why he travels around the world while he attempts with every jump to achieve a higher record.

As Jonah says in The Beautiful People, "The image of the good must first be real to the mind before it can inhabit substance and occupy space" (84). In his earlier writing Saroyan sought to create an emotional impact on the audience and forge a community based on that shared feeling and thereby encourage the creation of a world that allows the free expression of good-heartedness. In Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All he is more explicitly urging the audience to recognize the human ability to transform our environment as well as our nature through the creative imagination.

Saroyan uses various other theatrical techniques in this play to break the realistic illusion. First, he employs a narrator. Like Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, Sam the Highest Jumper of

Them All begins with the main character's introduction of himself to the audience:

SAM HARK-HARKALARK walks on stage and stands behind his counter. Then, **EDWARD OWLETT** enters and takes his place at his counter. **MR. HORNIMAN** enters with two bags of money, one for **SAM** and one for **TED**, then leans upon a pedestal.

SAM: (to audience) How do you do? I am Sam. This is a play pure and simple, and in the play this is a bank somewhere in Stratford, not far from this theatre.

The distinguished-looking gentleman is the President of the bank, Mr. Telford Horniman, who came over from America forty-five years ago. The seedy-looking young man is Edward Owlett, or Ted, who has been with the bank six years.

All of us are imagined of course, for the purpose of the structure, style, form and meaning of the play, if any.

We all know that nothing here is real as we know reality outside this theatre, in the street, in the remainder of London, and in the world itself, and so we shall not try to be real in that way, since total success would make it necessary for us to leave the theatre immediately, and I don't believe we want to do that. (15)

With this direct contact, Saroyan attempts to break the invisible wall separating the performers and the audience, and create a more intimate relationship between them. In the play many of the characters make direct contact with the audience. The contact between the performers and the audience in the play is not unilateral, as in Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning. It works both ways. Characters in the play speak directly to the audience and the Ambassador, who is supposedly sent by the audience,

comes up onto the stage to ask about the play. He exchanges dialogues with Sam. In "How to See" Saroyan tells us: "The very nature of play and theatre asks for intimacy, definite contact between those playing and those being played to" (204). The Ambassador says to Sam: "I am the Ambassador from the audience. We want cordial relations with the play, and I have been sent to establish and maintain them" (35). Saroyan considers the audience members part of the performance, although they are not expected to actively participate in it, and he wants them to recognize themselves as such. The Ambassador remains on stage watching the show till the end of the play.

Second, Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All includes incidents that appear to have nothing to do with the play. In Act I, in the middle of a realistic situation a blind man enters. He introduces a couple of scenes, one involving a gun and the other an egg-beater. The first scene, where a Man-to-be-executed is executed, is most surrealistic. The man is shot to death and a fish, dog, and teddy bear fall from above. Then the man picks them up, hands one to a woman, and they go off. The blind man explains the scene as follows: "history is an elaborate and inaccurate account of just such stuff, multiplied and enlarged a million times" (34). After this scene, the blind man asks Sam "Who are these people actually in the play so far?" and he answers that "On my word, I don't know, and for that matter I don't know who Sam is. Hark-Harkalark, that is. Myself. The character I'm playing. I don't understand the

bloke" (35). These kinds of interruptions occur repeatedly in different forms, breaking the illusion.

Third, Saroyan also breaks the realistic illusion by having the characters tell the audience about what is going to happen next. Sam tells the Ambassador in advance that the hold-up will take place. This remark destroys any pretense of suspense and forces the audience to acknowledge their participation in the creation of a histrionic reality.

Breaking the realistic illusion is similar to the Brechtian method for creating a distanciation effect. The difference, however, lies in its purpose. While Brecht encouraged the audience to initiate social revolution and thereby change the world, Saroyan suggests that the world can be improved only by individual people improving their natures.

Saroyan nevertheless hopes the audience experiences and lives the presentation as part of their lives. He wants the audience, too, to be conscious that they are creating their own characters, an expansion of a theme he addresses in The Cave Dwellers. Thus, to an Ambassador from the audience, Horniman talks about the relationship between the play and the audience: "In a sense you, the audience, are the play more than we are, for while we are the players who in concert are making the play, it is you, even more than we, who are the true players and the true play" (36).

Similarly at the end of the play, when the Ambassador asks Sam about Act III, Sam answers: "That's outside, where we shall all soon be. Goodbye, then. God bless, good luck, until we meet again. (He

shakes hands with the Ambassador who goes across the orchestra pit.) On with the world, then. Thank you very much" (84).

In Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All, music and dancing are aimed merely at entertaining the audience, rather than creating a mood proper to a situation, as they are used in many of Saroyan's other plays. Saroyan includes songs to be used at the end of the play. The music and dancing are meant to be spontaneous, improvised, comic, lively, and, above all, entertaining. The entertainment created by the music and dancing in the play is designed to make the audience emotionally detached rather than involved, as a Brechtian distancing effect would achieve. After the bank robbery, Sam presses the alarm button, and "Swan Lake" is heard, which is followed on the spot by a spontaneous ballet dance between a man and a woman. This kind of comic interlude also increases the playfulness of the play. Intermittently Wally Wailer, a rock and roll singer, appears with a guitar and sings. His singing is spontaneous. His songs, composed by Saroyan, have a lively and jolly tone. Sometimes in his singing, Wailer comments and raises questions about Sam's action, in a manner patterned on a Greek chorus. In the beginning of Act II, Wally sings what's almost a cheer for Sam: "Who is old and who is new? Who can do what you can't do? Sam--Sam, Hark-Harkalark. Who knows all and more than all? Who's got heart from wall to wall?" (55). Wally functions rather like a cheerleader at a sporting event, trying to get the audience to experience the play as a spectacle.

The overall effect of the ~~the~~ theatricalism, with singing, dancing, and surrealistic scenes, ~~makes~~ ~~the~~ play fun. This playfulness is intentional. Saroyan is ~~attempting~~ ~~to~~ create a sense of community and a congenial spirit ~~between~~ ~~the~~ performers and the audience by maintaining a level of ~~playfulness~~ ~~throughout~~ the performance. The playfulness of the play is ~~highly~~ ~~highlighted~~ at the end when the whole company joins Wally ~~Waller~~ ~~in~~ singing "We Were Only Having Fun." The word "we" should ~~mean~~ ~~not~~ only the performers but also the audience. At the ~~same~~ ~~time~~ : ~~so~~ Saroyan intends to distantiate the audience from the ~~performance~~ ~~by~~ breaking the illusions of realist theatre. The distantiation ~~effect~~ ~~probably~~ is intended to awaken the critical sense of the ~~audience~~ ~~to~~ the incidents on stage. The total effect of the performance is ~~designed~~ ~~to~~ be a communal experience, created through the ~~theatricalism~~ ~~, the~~ playfulness of the play, the distantiation effect, and the ~~resulting~~ feeling of intimacy.

As his plays became ~~less~~ ~~emotional~~, Saroyan did not rely on lighting as much as he did ~~in~~ ~~his~~ earlier plays. There is no reference to lighting in ~~Sam~~ ~~the~~ ~~High~~ ~~est~~ ~~Jumper~~ ~~of~~ ~~Them~~ ~~All~~, and the play will use light just ~~for~~ ~~the~~ purpose of illuminating the performance.

Similarly, monologues ~~are~~ ~~not~~ used much in this play, and even when used, their length is ~~much~~ ~~shorter~~ than those in other plays. Saroyan had used monologues ~~to~~ illustrate the inner realities, the frustrations, and the ~~unfulfilled~~ ~~wishes~~ of the characters. In this play, direct speeches ~~toward~~ ~~the~~ audience replace the monologues. The blind man introduces ~~each~~ ~~surrealistic~~ scene to the audience by

speaking directly to them. Mr. Horniman also speaks directly to the audience, and Sam talks with the Ambassador. They discuss problems together, and Sam answers the questions which the Ambassador has raised, supposedly on behalf of the audience.

Saroyan sums up his play in his letter to the London critics, who did not greatly appreciate the work:

if art is to have any relation to reality--and I know of no other excuse for it--it has got to make drama (form, meaning, beauty, truth) out of intelligence, humour, wit, humility and self-criticism. If there is an enemy, he must be identified as one's self. It is useless to call the other fellow the enemy, while you carry on precisely as he does. (13)

In the letter, as in the play, he tries to bring to full consciousness our realization of our complicity in creating the worlds in which we live, both inside and outside the theatre.

The 1950s: A Summary

In the plays of this decade Saroyan was greatly concerned with deepening his thematic exploration of the family relationship. His plays expressed an overt anger toward the social and political changes in America as well as in Europe. He investigated various ways in which a habitable world could be created by unrelated individuals treating each as though they were all members of the same family, and ways of improving human nature, as a step toward a better world.

In the plays of this period Saroyan also pursued his interest in developing new techniques of theatricalism, including the use of animal characters in counterpoint to, and in cooperation with, human characters in The Cave Dwellers and The Dogs. He also pursued his interest in the equation between life and performance in The Cave Dwellers and Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All. According to this theme, a theatrical performance should be viewed as if it were a real happening, on a level with events outside the theatre, and vice versa. In addition, a person's life should be lived with the self-conscious attitude of a performance, of creating oneself by the manner in which one improves one's nature and lives out the given circumstances of life. At the same time Saroyan continued to develop the allegorical and symbolic techniques he explored in the 1940s.

The later plays of this period also mark a return to a lighter spirit of playfulness, as Saroyan tried to make his allegorical thematic interests more entertaining by enlivening the works with a variety of theatrical techniques, especially with music and pantomime.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Saroyan is distinguished from other playwrights of his time, especially those of the 1930s and the 1940s, less because of his selection of themes than by his unique way of using dramatic and theatrical techniques. Saroyan "never adopted any of the commonly shared political or social theories preached by writers of his time" (Foster 26). Instead he was concerned with the problems of individuals. Specifically Saroyan chose as his main theme the possibility of individuals realizing their dreams.

Nona Balakian, in attempting to explain the relative lack of success of Saroyan's later work, points out that "part of his success in the past depended on an audience that shared common experiences in a depression-ridden world" (Armenian-American Writer 9). The themes that Saroyan pursued in his early plays seemed to provide an emotional outlet for the audience of the 1930s and 1940s, by momentarily freeing them from the harsh realities that they had to face outside the theatre. In his early plays, that reality was primarily the Great Depression and its aftermath.

The second outstanding characteristic of Saroyan's plays is the manner in which he freely adopted dramatic and theatrical techniques, without restraint by the "rules" of conventional

playwriting. By lessening the importance of the dramatic structure and characterization and by stressing the theatrical techniques, he focused on presenting the lively spirits of his characters and increasing the playfulness in his plays. Saroyan dealt with similar themes throughout his career but continued to explore new theatrical techniques that could be appropriate to them. Continual experimentation with theatrical techniques was thus integral to Saroyan's playwriting style.

The thematic use of dreams in Saroyan's plays is not always related to individual desires. This dreaming appears in various forms such as a search for truth and identity. For example, each scene of Subway Circus presents the visualization of the dream of each character or passenger in the subway. In My Heart's in the Highlands, Saroyan presents a dream of the nobility of the human spirit and a loving family. In The Time of Your Life and Sweeney in the Trees, characters talk about their individual dreams, for love, home, security, and so on, and taken together the dreams create a common dream of a humane community, in which each individual can find a place. In Jim Dandy, the dream of the characters, which essentially is to share love with each other in their hardships is realized in the end. The play suggests such a community is possible on the spiritual level. In Sam Ego's House, Saroyan describes the falsity of Sam Ego's dream, as dreams that are contaminated by materialism do not foster nobility, dignity, and a lively spirit. Sam Ego's material achievements do not help him in times of great, personal crisis. His dignity is restored only when he finds spiritual

values that allow him to realize a better dream. In The Cave Dwellers, the characters do not have specific dreams, yet they share a philanthropic love among strangers, which is also the realization of their individual dreams. Finally, in Sam the Highest Jumper of Them All, Sam's dream is to keep his integrity in the changing world, in which many threats, including weapons that threaten world destruction, intimidate individuals' lives and integrity.

The dreams of Saroyan's characters are not easily achieved. They each must cope with some kind of obstacle. The obstacles take various forms, such as poverty, an antagonist-like Blick, materialism, social and political systems, and militarism. For instance, in Sweeney in the Trees materialism is an obstacle the characters must overcome to keep their nobility and realize their dreams. Materialism is represented by the phoney money, and Saroyan expresses his contempt for materialism through Sweeney's behavior of kicking the money around on the floor.

Saroyan suggests self-creation or spiritual rebirth as a helpful aid for those who are too preoccupied with materialism, or with the concerns expressed in his other plays, to be able to achieve mutual understanding and love. The spiritual rebirth of the characters is often implied in the plays in their sharing food and drink, which has the religious connotation of holy communion. Saroyan does not pursue the salvation of the soul through spiritual rebirth, as Christians do, but relates the spiritual rebirth to the restoration of the innocence of human beings.

The major theme of Saroyan's plays is correlated with his tendency to use unconventional dramatic and theatrical techniques, which he believed would be the source of fun and inspiration for the audience. Saroyan seemed to prefer inspiration to conventional dramatic form as a guide for writing plays.

The dramatic structure of all his plays tends to be built around the presentation of a series of dramatic situations and incidents, rather than a unified dramatic action or actions. These dramatic situations are geared to revealing the warm, innocent nature of the characters and their sorrow and happiness, and to creating various moods. In describing The Time of Your Life, George Jean Nathan wrote that

the play consists rather in many variegated chips and stones that gradually settle themselves into the mosaic of a permanent mood. There are a dozen plots, yet on the whole no plot. What we get is a kind of dramatic music, vagrant and often formless but with a melody that lingers when the play is done. And throughout the oddly deft orchestration of loud laughter and gentle pity, a vaudeville of humanity that goes deep under mankind's grease-paint. But, above all, and beyond such critical analysis, what we get is a fundamentally rich and juicy theatrical show. (Encyclopedia of the Theatre 362)

This analysis of The Time of Your Life may not be applied to all of Saroyan's plays, yet most of his theatricalist works have this feature in one way or another, in different degrees. The various moods are created by theatrical techniques, rather than by the dramatic structure. Accordingly most of his theatrical plays defy

the conventional well-made play structure. Instead what we get essentially are episodes and snapshots that show the everyday wonder of creation in its varied possibilities.

Saroyan's characters are not individualized. Many do not even have individual names. In general, they can be categorized into three groups: an idealistic protagonist; good-natured, innocent, simple characters; and the characters who hinder the innocent characters in the realization of their nature and dreams. Neither good nor bad characters are deeply realistic. Since a dramatic action is not the main component of the dramatic structure in Saroyan's plays, characterization, which in conventionally well-made realist theatre assists in explaining the cause of the dramatic actions, is not significant. What matters more is the reactions of the characters, and the emotions aroused, in dealing with their situations and problems.

Saroyan's characters are called forth from various strata of society. Most of them are identified either by their social functions, such as a cop, judge, dancers, and so on; or by their names in a family relationship, such as father, mother, son, and daughter. Most successfully in The Time of Your Life, but in his other plays as well, Saroyan includes all kinds of characters: men and women, old and young, as well as a variety of colorful social backgrounds. Saroyan's concern with presenting various kinds of characters is evidenced by an episode in the production of The Time of Your Life. According to Lawrence Langner, a night before the opening night, Saroyan appeared with a young girl and asked him if the girl could appear

on stage as a character. Saroyan explained: "I have every kind of person in this play, an old man and old woman, a middle-aged man and a middle-aged woman, a young man and a young woman, and I have a little boy, but I have no little girl" (324). Similarly the characters in his other plays include various kinds of people. His characters are primarily variations of type characters that taken together can suggest the variety of the "one player, man."

The settings for Saroyan's plays not only provide an environment for the action of the plays, but also generally represent a metaphor or a symbol, such as a highlands, a haven, or a womb. The setting is often estranged from and contrasts with the world outside, and serves as a shelter. Especially in the later plays, it is also assumed to be an environment where the characters actually live, and are not just acting, on the ground that our life outside the theatre in a sense equals a play designed by God.

Other theatrical techniques include monologue, dance, songs, music, and lighting. They reinforce the theme by creating an appropriate mood, and increase the histrionic nature of the performance by breaking the realistic illusion and enhancing the playfulness and fun of it. While adopting some techniques from Expressionism, Symbolism, and Surrealism, Saroyan cherished the theatrical techniques used in vaudeville and the circus, which he had been familiar with since childhood. Instead of the European dramatic tradition, Saroyan valued and enjoyed vaudeville and the circus, and found in them something more American. The aspiration that he asserted in the preface to My Heart's in the

Highlands, "to introduce American reality to American dramatic art" (xii), did not change throughout his life, and was reflected in his continuous reliance on theatrical techniques developed from popular American theatrical forms.

Another characteristic of Saroyan's plays is the manner in which he attempts to develop an intimate relationship between the performers and the audience. This attempt is related to the idea of the importance of playfulness in his plays and the presentation of the histrionic nature of the theatre. He seems to hope that an intimate relationship between the audience and the performers could be created, primarily by demolishing the invisible fourth wall that isolates the audience from the performers in realist theatre and by consciously extending the illusion of histrionic reality. This attempt often puzzled the critics. This kind of intimate relationship is now explored by various theatre movements, but the audience of the 1940s and even early 1960s, who were more accustomed to the realistic theatre, seemed to be perplexed by Saroyan's attempts to create an intimate relationship. In his liner notes to a recording of Waiting for Godot, Saroyan writes: "The work is a play. Its best excuse is to entertain." That was also his primary hope for his own works. But along with the play, the "livingness" as he called it, he also sought to awaken a feeling of community in the theatre, in the hope that it could be extended to the harsh world outside.

Not all of Saroyan's theatrical techniques are used in each play that he wrote. Monologue, dance, and music are found in most of his plays, yet they had more importance in the plays written in the

1930s. In his later plays, Saroyan explored one new theatrical technique in each play, and varied his thematic concerns to match. For instance, he experimented with dance in The Great American Goof, the use of symbols in Sweeney in the Trees and Jim Dandy, allegory in Sam Ego's House, animals in The Cave Dwellers and The Dogs. His concern with theatricalism did not grow out of a whim, but was a long-lasting concern. It is the basis of the uniqueness and originality of Saroyan's plays.

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