

# SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC PATTERN OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN SAROYAN'S *THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE*

MUFEEED AL-ABDULLAH  
Jerash Private University  
[mufeedh2014@gmail.com](mailto:mufeedh2014@gmail.com)

Received 31 October 2018

Accepted 14 May 2019

## KEY WORDS

Shakespeare; Saroyan; *The Tempest*; *The Time of Your Life*; social change; reformation; dramatic pattern; depression; reformer.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Shakespeare; Saroyan; *La Tempestad*; *El Tiempo de Tu Vida*; cambio social; reforma; patrón arquetípico; depresión; reformado.

## ABSTRACT

Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* (1939) employs a similar dramatic pattern of social change used in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). In Shakespeare, the pattern includes the isolation of a group of characters by washing them up onto the reformer's island by a magical tempest arranged by the reformer Prospero. He thus severs the characters from their community, and separates them on the island to undergo different healing experiences before going back to their society. Saroyan adopts a comparable, though highly modified, pattern in his play. He mainly focuses on the efforts of a reformer, who tries to help a group of depressed characters who gather in a bar, which is similar to Prospero's island, in order to escape the difficulties of the outside world. The bar is a haven of peace surrounded by the atrocities of the urban world. In both cases there is a devoted reformer, who dedicates himself to helping his subjects. The paper aims to study the similarities of the dramatic pattern, and shows that underlying these similarities, there are major differences that reflect the cultural divergence of the twentieth century culture from that of the Renaissance. The study means to illustrate that the alterations Saroyan rendered on Shakespeare's model helps the reader understand the meaning and the age of the modern play and, simultaneously, sheds further light on the Shakespearean play and the Renaissance in general.

## RESUMEN

*El Tiempo de Tu Vida* de Saroyan (1939) emplea un patrón dramático similar de cambio social al usado en *La Tempestad* de Shakespeare (1611). En Shakespeare, el patrón incluye el aislamiento de un grupo de personajes al hacerlos naufragar en la isla del reformador mediante una tempestad mágica organizada por el reformador Próspero. De este modo, aísla a los personajes de su comunidad y los separa en la isla para experimentar diferentes experiencias de curación antes de regresar a su sociedad. Saroyan adopta un patrón comparable, aunque altamente modificado, en su obra. Se centra principalmente en los esfuerzos de un reformador que trata de ayudar a un grupo de personajes deprimidos que se reúnen en un bar, que es similar a la isla de Próspero, para escapar de las dificultades del mundo exterior. El bar es un remanso de paz rodeado de las atrocidades del mundo urbano. En ambos casos hay un devoto reformador que se dedica a ayudar a sus súbditos. El documento tiene como objetivo estudiar las similitudes del patrón dramático y muestra que, subyacentes a estas similitudes, existen diferencias importantes que reflejan la divergencia entre la cultura del siglo XX y la del Renacimiento. El estudio pretende ilustrar que las alteraciones que Saroyan presentó en el modelo de Shakespeare ayudan al lector a comprender el significado y la época de la obra moderna y, al mismo tiempo, arroja más luz sobre la obra de Shakespeare y el Renacimiento en general.

## INTRODUCTION

Some of William Saroyan's plays are woven around the efforts of protagonists who set out to challenge the difficult circumstances of life around them. Mauricio Linde argues that Michael Sweeny in *Sweeny in the Trees* (1940) devotes his time to prove that money cannot dominate the world (68). Sweeny's vision, however, proves to be a mere illusion that does not stand the test of reality. Similarly, the optimistic protagonist of *Jim Dandy: A Fat Man in a Famine* (1940) advocates the human values of peace, love, and wisdom, contending that man was not born for pain, suffering, hunger, and disease (Linde 68). However, Dandy's convictions, like Sweeny's, prove to be unrealistic dreams. Similarly, the title character in *The Politzky Surprise*, an unpublished play by Saroyan (1950) believes

that he can overcome powerful institutions by sticking to his candy shop and declining the offers made by purchasers, because he claims that he has constructed it for dreams not for money (Linde 68). Though they are usually presented as inept weaklings, Saroyan's protagonists are generally adamant in their endeavors and are motivated by laudable intentions and love for others.

The reason behind this philanthropist mood of Saroyan clearly lies in his family and ethnic traditions and the circumstances of America in the thirties. Saroyan developed this humanitarian interest in the poor outcasts and laborers at a time when American society was "emerging from the Great Depression" and had a "mission of bringing them love and hope" (Brodersen and Werner 19). He was also clearly encouraged by his awareness of ethnic prejudice against Armenian immigrants in the USA. Brodersen and Werner contend that his Armenian heritage, "taught him the importance of family as a locus of solace, warmth, and a sense of connectedness to other human beings" (19).

Noticeably, among the plays of Saroyan, *The Time of Your Life* (1939), a Pulitzer Prize winner, is fully devoted to the issue of helping the outcasts and the deprived in society. However, it also stands unique in its theatrical dramatization of Saroyan's vision of the possibility, at least partially, of rendering social change through the efforts of a devoted reformer. This is a play that draws on the critical historical era marked by the eruption of World War II, and by the national economic and political pressures succeeding the Great Depression in America. According to Brodersen and Werner, the play was written at a time when Europe and the Far East were engaged in the conflicts of World War II, and the national scene in America was chaotic. It was an era of workers' strikes, unemployment, and massive poverty. In fact, Saroyan dramatizes the debilitating effects of the Great Depression on the life of the individual. Bogard argues that the "economic depression [...] created a depression of mind and spirit no less severe" (228). Within this context, Saroyan wrote his play in an attempt to provide a pattern of how to reduce the negative consequences on people's lives.

Nonetheless, some critics are skeptical about Saroyan's reformers and about the possibility of rendering social change in the twentieth century. They find in Saroyan's Joe, like all his other

protagonists, reformers, or agents of change, “an extravagant dreamer,” who sets out to change the world by arranging the marriage of a naïve street walker and a simpleton (Linde 68). However, others, like James Justus, recognize the pattern of social change provided by Saroyan in *The Time of Your Life*. Justus maintains a positive attitude towards the laudable efforts of the Saroyan healer.

### **SHAKESPEARE’S VS. SAROYAN’S PATTERN OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

There are no studies that address the impact of Shakespeare on Saroyan or compare and contrast any aspects of their work to the best of the writer’s knowledge. In Lee’s and Gifford’s lengthy biography of Saroyan, there is no mention of Shakespeare or any of his plays or characters. The only reference to Shakespeare in connection to Saroyan is a recollection of the director of Saroyan’s play *My Heart’s in the Highlands* (1939) recorded by Nano Balakian, an enthusiastic critic of Saroyan, in her book, *The World of William Saroyan* (1998), that Saroyan once exclaimed that “I just realized my initials are the same as Shakespeare’s!” (quoted in Johnson). She further states that Saroyan was conceited as he evaluated himself to be “the best writer in the world.” She explains that he aspired “simply to acknowledge a deep reality of his own” (quoted in Johnson). However, despite the absence of any study of the two playwrights, this study suggests that Saroyan’s reformer can be better understood if compared and contrasted to Shakespeare’s healer in *The Tempest* (1611). There are avid similarities between the two plays, but underlying these similarities there are significant differences between the two healers and the cultural background they stem from.

Shakespeare’s play presents a dramatic model of reformation for a group of corrupt and crooked characters who find themselves severed and alienated from their society (Al-Abdullah 329). The whole play is woven around the efforts of a prominent magician who rules over the characters and controls the action on his island. He draws

the group to his arena with a magically provoked storm of his planning and has voyagers undergo a mystical therapy so they can be corrected and then sent back to society after reformation. Al-Abdullah further argues that the

mission of Prospero is to reunite the characters into an integral whole, and to accompany them to the Old world, where penitent and enlightened through the healing experience they have undergone, they can establish enlightened relationships and enlightened government. (328)

Nevertheless, the reformation of perverse or morally wrecked persons through "re-creation" in a charmed or rural world is not new in *The Tempest*. Such a pattern is present in earlier Shakespearean plays, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter's Tale* (Al-Abdullah 328-29). What really distinguishes *The Tempest* from these earlier works is the role of the reformer, Prospero, who arranges the events and determines the action of the play.

The character of Prospero attracted a variety of critical perceptions which propose different interpretations of the character. Dover Wilson, for instance, identifies him with Shakespeare himself, and compares his abjuration of magic at the end of the play to Shakespeare's farewell to the theater after *The Tempest* (143). Similarly, Rabkin sees in him an autobiographical Shakespearean creation (222-23). E. M. W. Tillyard considers Prospero as the agent of his own and his antagonists' regeneration (53). In his erudite introduction to the Arden edition, Kermode perceives Prospero as "a mage, who exercises the supernatural powers of the holy adept," that uses his art to translate merit into power, which enables him to achieve virtuous ends (xlvi). Holland, however, considers Prospero "a play-version of God or destiny" (321). Nonetheless, Al-Abdullah argues that whether Prospero is a demigod, destiny, a sagacious magician, a man of theater, or an echo of Shakespeare, he is undoubtedly the master of his world and the manipulator of other characters (330).

On his island, the Shakespearean protagonist plans the tempest and the shipwreck on the shores of his island, which the

obedient spirit Ariel executes “to every article” (1.2.195)<sup>1</sup> and describes to his master how he implements it in detail (1.2.196-200). Also, Prospero assures Miranda, who pities the supposedly drowned passengers of the ship, that “there is no harm done” (1.2. 14). Ariel, too, informs Prospero that

[...] Not a hair perish'd;  
 On their sustain garments not a blemish,  
 But fresher than before, as thou bad'st me.  
 (1.2.218-220)

Prospero also allocates the passengers in different places onto his island. The “three men of sin” (3.3. 53), who exiled Prospero and his daughter to this barren island, and the noble Gonzalo are isolated, though separately, in the line-grove (5.1.10); the “goodly” Ferdinand is isolated by himself in another place; the mariners are put to sleep; and the rest of the fleet are sent back to Naples to tell the story of the shipwreck and the supposed drowning of the king.

Separating the captives is necessary for the therapeutic project of Prospero as he has them undergo different psychological experiences appropriate to their cases and degree of moral or spiritual deterioration or health (Al-Abdullah 334). According to the plan, the treatment of Ferdinand is different from that of the Machiavellian political leaders. Prospero guides Ferdinand by soft music performed by Ariel to meet Miranda, and the two are prepared for marriage and future leadership of Naples and Milan. In contrast, the three villains receive a seemingly rough treatment meant to purge them of their evil nature before they can be guided back home after being purged of their “pride, ambition, and selfishness” (Al-Abdullah 338).

Shakespeare’s healer succeeds in fully curing Alonzo of his evil nature and securing his repentance for previous sins. He also succeeds in awakening the conscience of Antonio and Sebastian, but

---

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Edited by Frank Kermode, Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1958. All citations from the text are taken from this edition and will be provided in brackets immediately after quotations.

fails to have them repent their previous evil. Ariel describes the effect of Prospero's treatment of the three perverted characters: "The King/ His brother and yours abide all three distracted" (5.1.12). Ariel himself pities them, saying:

Your charm so strongly works on 'em,  
That if you now behold them, your affections  
Would become tender

(5.1.17-19)

As they become penitent, Prospero decides to end his mission. Says Prospero,

[...] They being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further.

(5.1. 27-30)

As the healer's therapy succeeds, he regains his dukedom from his brother, unites Milan and Naples by the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda, and leads the group back home where they can live in a healthy society. However, he arranges for a new political scene in which future evil will be curbed and suppressed (Al-Abdullah 339). Different from other characters, Caliban, who is seemingly incapable of amelioration through the magic of Prospero, is left on the island, which is his original home (Al-Abdullah 331).

At this point, Prospero abjures magical practices and chooses to

[...] Break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.

(5.1. 54-57)

Shakespeare presents Prospero as a benevolent agent of change as he refrains from using his magic to revenge upon his enemies. He is not a Hieronimo, nor is *The Tempest*, a revenge play, Champion (174) and Al-Abdullah (335) conclude.

Saroyan's play, like the Renaissance masterpiece, mainly focuses on the efforts of the healer, Joe, who tries to bring happiness to a group of depressed and lonesome characters, who gather together in a bar, which, like Prospero's island, is a haven of peace engulfed by the tempestuous sea of the urban world. Justus righteously contends that "the world's misfits and outcasts," who, herd into Nick's Pacific Street Saloon "in huddled need for rebirth," find themselves in the presence of "Saroyan's priest, touched by grace, God's own elect who points the true way," (216). In both plays there is a mystical healer, who selflessly dedicates himself to the welfare of his fellow men. Joe, like Prospero, is devoted to his therapeutic mission, extending his generous assistance to everybody who needs it.

However, there is a remarkable difference between abilities and nature of the two reformers. The adequacy of Shakespeare's confident and efficient hero reflects an age that celebrated the high potential and abilities of the individual man. Joseph Satin points out that "Renaissance man bestrode his new world like a colossus and glowed with pride of himself and his achievements" (197). That sort of "pride," holds Satin, inspired the quality of "self-assertion" which is the major feature of Renaissance individualism. That faith in the abilities of the individual man is reflected in the titles of tragedies, histories, and even some comedies, such as *Dr. Faustus*, *Tamburlaine the Great*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Cymbeline* to mention just a few. That also goes along with tradition of writing tragedies in the Renaissance along the lines Aristotle's *Poetics*, which defines tragic characters as magnanimous individuals who are superior to us. However, most comedies do not have such titles of individual names because comedies, according Aristotle, deal with characters inferior to us. Comedies have titles that do not reflect the magnanimity of the individual protagonist, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, among others. The tradition of entitling the tragedies clearly indicates the Renaissance trust in the capability and extraordinary potential of the individual man.

Furthermore, Satin points out that the Renaissance adopted the ancient idea of *arete* (i.e. virtue) of highest value and efficiency,



(217). He maintains that the literature of that era sought to combine all aspects of virtue to a certain type of individuals, generating what was called the *uomo universale* (the universal man). Satin (217) gives the example of Shakespeare's Hamlet who combines elements of wisdom, philosophy, thinking, reasoning, chivalry, and finally action. This mixture of values dubs Hamlet as the *uomo universale* (Satin 217). The same applies to Dr. Faustus, who has acquired all knowledge known at his time, but aspires to attain metaphysical knowledge; and Tamburlaine, who conquers the world, and yet overreaches to conquer the firmament of heaven. It is natural, therefore, for Shakespeare to provide his play with a powerful god-like savior endowed with more than natural powers to achieve his mission of redeeming physically and morally wrecked characters.

In contrast, Saroyan denies his healer a miraculous power similar to that of Shakespeare's. Indeed, Saroyan's Joe is presented as physically disabled. Ironically, at the hands of Saroyan, the Elizabethan magician becomes no more than a good-hearted addict to alcohol in *The Time of Your Life*. Joe, paradoxically, sustains his sobriety through the help of liquor. Thus slighting the efficacy of his redeemer, Saroyan casts doubts about the existence of effective agents of change in the modern times. After all, the twentieth century was the age of anti-heroism. Indeed, the concept of anti-hero is, in fact, a symptom of twentieth century decadence. It avidly reflects "a progressive outgrowth" of writers' reaction to the realities of life in modern times after the recession of classical heroes (Hill 71). Eliot's Sir Alfred Prufrock is justified when he sums up the spirit of the age as he confesses out loud: "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" (111).

Consequently, Saroyan expresses his skepticism concerning the possibility of bringing about extensive social reformation in modern times. Indeed, Joe finds himself in a world of depression and isolation, in which the poor individual is rendered helpless. His time, like Hamlet's, is "out of joint," and, like Hamlet, he has a duty to "set it right" (1. 5. 88-89). Justus justifiably explains that "the disinterested generosity of Joe extends to all those bruised by the world, but the hurt is more persistent than the healing" (215).

This situation makes a major departure from the dramatic pattern of *The Tempest*. In Shakespeare's play, Prospero's mission is

to correct the leaders of society, i.e. the King of Naples, and the evil dukes of Milan and Naples. Interestingly, the direction of targeted change in Shakespeare is from the top downward. He shows that the reformation of the governing political leaders and elites is expected to reform the rest of society. Naturally, this can happen when the reformer can dominate powerful people in society and render the change opted for. To do that Prospero is provided with effective magic, the supernatural assistance of Ariel, and the right moment to set out his project. He starts his therapeutic mission when his “auspicious star” (1.2.149) reaches its zenith indicating the right time for carrying out his plan.

In contrast, Saroyan advocates that change can only be directed to the low classes and social outcasts on a limited basis. Therefore, his healer is not expected to control and change society at large. Besides, Joe’s patients are not corrupt. They are rather victims of circumstances. Saroyan here dramatizes the Existential view of Sartre that modern man is not only estranged by his own “anguish, but also responsible to the unreachable society around him,” so that individual personal despair develops into a “sense of universal helplessness” (quoted in Satin 414). The twentieth century was the age of anxiety with all its aspects of remorse, estrangement, anguish and desertion. Satin isolates three major traits that feature the age, namely “despair, violence, and depersonalization” (411), traits that were prophesied by the pessimistic philosophy of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and later expressed by the Existentialists (414).

One after the other the bruised characters flock into Nick’s Saloon, escaping from their cruel reality. And Joe, clinging to the hope of improving man’s condition, is resolved, despite his limited power, not to allow the corruption of the world go unchallenged, as Justus remarks. There is nothing special about Nick’s bar except that it is, like Prospero’s island, the playfield for Joe’s healing mission. It is a peaceable utopia in which nobody suffers or is hurt.

Joe’s community consists of a group of fairly innocent and simple people: Tom, an errand boy and Joe’s disciple; Kitty Duval, a pure hearted, young prostitute; Nick, the proprietor of the bar; Arab, an immigrant from the Old World; Kit Carson, an old Indian fighter; McCarthy, an intelligent longshore man; Krupp, an honest

policeman; Harry, a hooper; Wesley, a negro piano player; Elsie, a nurse; Dudley, a young man in love with Elsie; Willie, a pinball addict; and Lorene and Mary L are unhappy street walkers. Attracting all these characters with their different ethnic origins and backgrounds –Italian, Irish, Greek, Arabic, African– gives Nick's Saloon cosmic significance and turns it into a cosmopolitan refuge for the lost and the battered in society.

In *The Tempest*, Gonzalo, the only nobleman who remains loyal to Prospero among the marooned passengers, is incited with the mystical atmosphere on Prospero's island to dream of a utopia in which:

All things in common nature should produce  
Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,  
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,  
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,  
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,  
To feed my innocent people. (2.1. 55-60)

The atmosphere in the bar is similar to the world dreamt of by Gonzalo. Saroyan describes it as a peaceful place, an arcadia, where man is his own king, he does whatever he feels like doing, where the dwellers live and let live. They do not compete in anything here. They are wonderful, innocent, and happy. Saroyan portrays the place as thus:

The atmosphere is now one of warm, natural American ease; every man is innocent and good; each doing what he believes he should do, or what he must do. There is deep American naiveté and faith in the behavior of each person. No one is competing with anyone else. Every man is living and letting live. Each man is following his destiny as he feels it should be followed. [...] There is an unmistakable smiling and humor in the scene.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> William Saroyan, *The Time of Your Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1939) 60. All quotations from the play will hereafter be taken from this edition, and page numbers will be given in brackets immediately after direct quotations.

Like Prospero's captives, the characters here show improvement and progress. However, the warm atmosphere of the bar is disturbed by the entrance of Blick, a San Francisco Vice Squad officer, who poses a menace to Joe's community. His presence inverts the happy spirit in the place into tension and silence. When he enters, "The music stops. The mechanical toy runs down. There is absolute silence, and a strange fearfulness and disharmony in the atmosphere now" (62). Like Antonio and Sebastian, who attempt to disturb order and concord on Prospero's island, Blick does disturb the peaceful atmosphere of Nick's Saloon. Joe's inadequate reaction to Blick's violence marks his major departure from the reformer in Shakespeare. Whereas Prospero succeeds in preventing the villainous plans of Antonio and Sebastian to murder Alonzo, Joe fails to stop Blick's aggression on Nick's community. His reaction to this intruding villain ranges from watching what happens to a failing attempt to rid the community of him.

Saroyan's healer uses the bar as a healing center in which he conducts his treatment of the bruised, innocent individuals, thereby, creating a peaceful and therapeutic environment that posits juxtaposition to the rigid world outside the bar. However, unlike Prospero's island, Joe's healing center is not totally isolated from the larger, but real world, outside it. The inmates of the bar go out to look for a living, run errands, and bet on horses. Outsiders also come into the bar either to drink or to relax from tiring work. The outsiders are not only local citizens from San Francisco, but also helpless people from other countries, such as Arab, who migrated to America for work. He spends his time in the bar singing his sorrows and the sorrows of the Old World and playing the harmonica. Wesley describes Arab's sad music as thus: "That's deep, deep crying. That's crying a long time ago. That's crying a thousand years ago. Some place five thousand miles away" (142).

The news of the outside world comes into the bar through the newspapers brought by the Greek newsboy. They carry headlines that speak of local and distant disasters of a world that no longer has foundations, and in which everything is going down the line, as Arab puts it; it is a grim world of sorrow and sadness that does not accept laughs and laughter makers any more, in which artists go

bankrupt from lack of work. They are not even given the chance to prove their talents (50).

The active mobility into and out of Nick's bar marks a serious departure from the dramatic pattern of *The Tempest*. Prospero's complete isolation of the villainous captives is necessary for their redemption and rebirth into a virtuous state. The isolation of these characters enables Prospero to deprive them of their past identities, initiating them into different yet better ones. By contrast, Saroyan apparently does not see the act of isolation necessary or even possible because his characters are neither degenerate nor do they need urgent redemption as Shakespeare's. Instead, they need help, training, and encouragement that will enable them to survive in their cruel world. Saroyan's reformer, unlike Shakespeare's, does not have patience with evil characters, nor does he approve of their co-survival with the innocent and righteous members of society. Saroyan, unlike Shakespeare, deems it necessary to get rid of evil in order to save the purity and goodness of the community of man.

Saroyan's healer directs his energies to the nursing of the innocent victims and the training of simpletons, enabling them to survive in a harsh world. Indeed, Saroyan dedicates a major part of the play to Joe's guidance of Tom. Joe guides him from utter dependence and poverty to a state of independence and active participation in life.

With a compassion similar to that of Shakespeare's Miranda, Joe stresses the contention that "Everyone [...] is wonderful' (83), and ought to co-survive with others peacefully. Motivated by his conscience and a strong feeling of responsibility towards others, Joe, similar to Prospero, extends his generous healing to everybody. This decent little man, as (Justus 213) calls him, tries to live a harmless life. He asserts: "it's not in my nature to be unkind to another human being" (33). In his little world, Joe sings a hymn: "Some poor, dying, struggling seaman, you may rescue, you may save" (154).

These words are at the heart of Joe's perception of his role in society. Unlike Prospero's, his healing project is not directed to a certain group of characters; it is rather aimed at securing happiness to every bruised person around him. Unfortunately, Saroyan's savior cannot fulfill his benevolent plans because, unlike Prospero, he lacks the effective means of change. He is merely "a student of Life" (148),

who is still struggling to attain wisdom and enlightenment. Besides, his physical disability impairs the efficacy of his mission and frustrates his ability to confront the potent powers of evil in his world. Consequently he fails to secure happiness for all the debilitated people he encounters.

Saroyan's reformer sees "the madness of the world with 20/20 vision," to borrow a phrase from Charles Berst (229). Unfortunately, Joe is overpowered and slighted by stronger circumstances. He spends his time at Nick's bar drinking champagne. Drinking, he claims, is important to him as breathing and as life itself (72). He resorts to liquor as the only mechanism to keep his mind intact and away from dreaming and thinking of the boredom of life. In view of the prevailing difficulties of the world around him, and his ineptitude to encounter and triumph over the power of evil represented by Blick, Joe's efforts as a healer look absurd and grotesque, a fact that justifies Linde's view of him as a mere deluded dreamer. Unlike his Shakespearean counterpart, Joe sits in his limited realm playing with toys and running chewing gum competitions. At the hands of Saroyan, Prospero's efficacy is reduced to Joe's annoying limitation. Indeed, he is frustrated and can hardly see any hope in life. In one of his desperate moments, he says:

Life goes according to the clock. No time of living. Time is boring, dull, empty and murderous. People spend most of the time waiting... the more the one waits, the less there is anything to wait for. [...] Years are dead, minutes are dead. People are dead. There is nothing to wait for. Nothing except the minutes of the clock. Nothing but idiocy. No time of life. (75)

This gloomy vision echoes O'Neill's pessimistic view of life, and Beckett's bewildering portrayal of it, and rubs shoulders with Macbeth's gloomy portrayal of life in the famous "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech after the death of his wife (5.5.19-28).

Nevertheless, Joe is more like Prospero than Macbeth and Hickey. Despite his awareness of the bitter realities and insubstantiality of life, Saroyan's hero, like Shakespeare's, does not panic, nor does he sit handcuffed to watch the degeneration of his

world. Instead, he, though with less capacity than Prospero, works devotedly to bring happiness to his bruised fellow men. He persistently, though, at times childishly, challenges the increasingly audible apocalyptic tune that is suggested by the worsening realities around him.

Both Joe and Prospero manage to get the trust of their subjects, using different approaches. Prospero has his marooned dukes experience complete humiliation and helplessness in order to prepare them for full submission to their healer. In contrast, Joe succeeds in winning their trust from the initial encounter. He qualifies himself as a trustworthy and reliable healer through his charity and kindness to everybody around him. He does not need to stimulate a tempest or humiliate the characters. In fact, the characters in *The Time of Your Life* have already been isolated and tortured by the tempest of the world outside Nick's bar. Figuratively speaking, they are marooned on the safe shores of Joe's "island." In Nick's Saloon, Joe makes the characters happy and generates a glimpse of hope in their lives. Kit Carson, for instance, is amazed and delighted as Joe shows faith in his seemingly incredible stories. "You are the first man I have ever met who believes me," says Carson (113). Kitty too feels consoled by Joe's decent treatment of her. Says she: "You haven't hurt me. You're the only person who's ever been good to me. I have never known anybody like you" (179). Mary also feels "so pleased" (79) with Joe's compliments and love of her. The lady of society too feels wonderful as she smokes the cigar Joe gives her. Even outside the bar, newsboys, old men, and Salvation Army people appreciate the money Joe sends them.

### **THE HEALER'S MISSION**

Though he unsparingly extends a hand to everybody, Saroyan's protagonist, unlike Shakespeare's, is selective in his therapeutic mission. Joe's main objective is to educate and guide the bewildered and mindless Tom. In answer to Mary's question if he has responsibilities, Joe responds that he has "One, and thousands. As a matter of fact, I feel responsible to everybody" (77). Later, Joe points out that Tom is the "one" character he specifically feels responsible

for. He explains that “Tom is the only subject, and it’s my duty that my subject is happy” (114).

But why Tom in particular? That is clearly because he is the least capable character to survive in the practical world. Besides, Joe has paternal feelings towards Tom. He guides him and has him undergo a manipulated experience which enlightens and teaches him how to depend on himself; he leads him from dependence and childhood to independence and maturity, guiding him through three different stages: first, complete financial and psychological dependence; second, rehearsing and humiliation; and, third, illumination and independence.

The first phase started before the beginning of the play. Joe, we learn, saved Tom’s life when Tom was sick. He sent him to a doctor, gave him money for food and clothes, and paid his rent, among other things. At that point, the child-like Tom depended completely on Joe. In the second phase, Joe, like Prospero, resorts to humiliation, music, and psychotherapy to heal Tom. His seemingly tough treatment of Tom, like Prospero’s apparently harsh management of his captives, is only a façade behind which lie sympathy and kindness. Furthermore, this treatment, like Prospero’s, is based on full knowledge of Tom’s nature. Joe is fully aware of Tom’s laziness, childishness, and wishful nature. Tom’s only dream is: “Just [to] sit around like you, Joe, and have somebody run errands for me and drink champagne and take things easy and never be broke and never worry about money” (115-16).

Like Prospero, Joe uses music to minister to his patient. He has Tom play the sorrowful American music of the Missouri Waltz which “plays dreamily and softly, with perfect orchestral form, and with a theme of weeping in the horns repeated a number of times” (28). Tom’s reaction to the sad music is that of pain and grief. In other words, the music has an expected cathartic effect on him and, in fact, on the other characters in Joe’s utopia.

Although he is not a psychiatrist, the modern healer demonstrates enough understanding of psychotherapy and shows competence in using it to guide and train Tom in order to grow and depend on himself. The healer is aware of Tom’s need of emotional



health. Thus, he uses toys and gum contests to enable Tom develop self-confidence, a sense of security, and emotional growth.

Similar to Prospero in the case of Ferdinand and Miranda, Joe unites his “foster son” to an equally innocent and kind-hearted partner, Kitty Duval, guiding them to a happy marriage. Through this arrangement, Joe succeeds in restoring Kitty to the purity and innocence of childhood. Moreover, Like Prospero, Joe alienates his patients to purge them of the corruptive influence of society. For instance, he isolates Kitty in St. Francis hotel so that she will not deal with anybody except Tom. He explains to Tom:

By the grace of God, you're the other half of that girl. Not the angry woman that swaggers into this waterfront dive and shouts because the world has kicked her around. Anybody can have her. You belong to the little kid in Ohio who once dreamed of living. Not with her carcass, for money, so she can have food and clothes, and pay rent. I put her in that hotel, so she can have a chance to gather herself together again. She can't do that in the New York hotel. You saw what happens there. There's nobody for her to talk to, except you. They all make her talk like a whore. After a while, she'll believe them. Then she won't be able to remember. She'll get lonely. Sure. People can get lonely for misery, even. I want her to go on being lonely for you, so she can come together again the way she was meant to be from the beginning. Loneliness is good for people. (166)

Similar to the efforts of Prospero in uniting Ferdinand and Miranda, albeit the different circumstances, Joe's endeavors succeed in creating understanding and interdependence between the two lovers, which will guarantee Tom and Kitty a happy future married life. The next stage of Tom's healing process starts as Joe finds a job for Tom as a truck driver in San Diego through his connections. From now on, Tom has to depend on himself and work for his and Kitty's supply.

### **CONFRONTATION WITH MALEVOLENT FORCES**

Along with his efforts to help Tom, and to heal the other characters, Saroyan's reformer strives to rid Nick's bar of Blick, who symbolizes evil and threatens the peace and quietude of the community. Joe

feels an instinctive antagonism and hostility to Blick. He sees that Blick's role is entirely opposite to his own. If Joe is a healer or God's elect chosen to assist the people of his world, then Blick is an intruding devil that corrupts and disturbs that world. Blick inflicts pain and agony on the characters, whereas Joe tries to heal their wounds and give them happiness. It is natural therefore that Joe tries to shoot Blick. But he fails. This failure is congruous with his ineptitude. But Blick is killed at the end outside the bar at the hands of Kit Carson, one of Joe's agents. Saroyan is consistent in his effort to prevent evil from intruding into his haven. However, he maintains his skepticism about the possibility of having a capable reformer, like Prospero, to curb the evil of the world.

Killing or even attempting to kill Blick posits a departure from the Shakespearean dramatic pattern. First, Joe is different from Prospero in the sense that he does not include Blick in his redemptive effort, the way Prospero includes the corrupt leaders despite their evil. It shows that Joe is not forgiving like the Shakespearean reformer. The reason probably lies in the fact that Prospero overpowers the villainous antagonists he summons to his island and, therefore, he can forgive them. In contrast, Joe is weaker than Blick, and, therefore, he cannot possibly cure him neither does he try to. Second and, more importantly, is that Saroyan, unlike Shakespeare, does not tolerate the coexistence of evil and good in his world. He is apprehensive of leaving the power of evil loose in his community of wonderful and peaceful men and women. Thus, he manages to rid the community of that evil. Ironically, however, Saroyan's redeemer proves inept in the face of Blick's evil as he fails to shoot him. Rather, it is Kit Carson, who represents past American heroism and modern individualism that succeeds in ridding the community of Blick and his evil (Floan106). Carson's last tale of killing a man in San Francisco once with the name of Glick or Blick gives credibility to his tall tale, as Floan explains, and incredibility to what he has done (106).

## **CONCLUSION**

This last affirmative touch of killing Blick as well as Willy's victory over the pinball machine registers Saroyan's skepticism about the ability of the individual to assert himself and survive in a harsh world. Simultaneously, the events in the play demonstrate the playwright's lack of faith in the possibility of having social reformers or mystical redeemers who can redirect the currents of society on a large scale, like Shakespeare's charmer. Thus, defeated, frustrated, and capable of only minimum achievements, Joe puts his bottle aside to drink no more and never to return to the bar. Similarly, Prospero quits magical practices and leaves the island forever after achieving his mission.

Despite its affirmative tone, the *Time of Your Life*, unlike *The Tempest*, ends without advancing any solution for the overwhelming and devastating economic and political problems of the world. Naturally, Saroyan, who wrote his play after the beginning of World War II, is less optimistic about the possibility of having successful social reformers than Shakespeare, who wrote his play at an age marked by trust and belief in the abilities of the individual, at a time when England was expanding and founding an empire. Saroyan's reformer is crippled and is overpowered by corrupt forces. He tries hard, but, at best, he can save one person at a time.

Finally, the employment of a dramatic pattern in *The Time of Your Life* similar to that provided by *The Tempest* probably stems from Saroyan's view of the possibility, or rather partial possibility, of rendering change in the fragmented modern society. Saroyan, who bragged that he had the same initials as Shakespeare and that he was "the greatest writer in the world" (quoted in Johnson) might have shaped his view indirectly by his familiarity with Shakespeare. Or if he is not directly indebted to Shakespeare, he must have reached the same conclusion about change and the possibility of reformation. Saroyan's personal life struggles clearly developed awareness in him that he needs "to connect with humanity at large" (quoted in Johnson). Thus, his play emphasizes the role of a pious individual who takes upon himself the responsibility to save others out of possible disasters and disorder.

## **WORKS CITED**

- Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, vol. 23, 2019. Seville, Spain, ISSN 1133-309-X, pp. 23-44.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12795/REN.2019.i23.02>

- AL-ABDULLAH, Mufeed. "The Prosperal Solution: A Study of Shakespeare's Vision of Social Change in *The Tempest*." *The Arab Journal for the Humanities*, vol. 9, no. 33, 1989, pp. 327-45.
- BALAKIAN, Nona. *The World of William Saroyan*. Bucknell U P, 1998.
- BERST, Charles A. *Bernard Shaw and The Art of Drama*. The U of Illinois P, 1973.
- BOGARD, Travis, et al. *The Revels History of Drama: American Drama*. Methuen, vol. 8, 1977.
- BRODERSEN, Elizabeth and Jessica Werner, editors. "William Saroyan (1908-81): The Time of His Life." *Words on Plays*. Presented by American Conservatory Theater in association with Seattle Repertory Theatre, 2004.
- BRODERSEN, Elizabeth, and Jessica Werner, editors. "A Time of Your Life Timeline." *Words on Plays*. Presented by American Conservatory Theater in Association with Seattle Repertory Theatre, 2004.
- CHAMPION, Larry S. *The Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Perspective*. Harvard UP, 1970.
- CHAPMAN, J. "Saroyan: Bless Him." *Theatre Arts*, vol. 42, 1958, pp. 25-6.
- ELIOT, T. S. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Harriet Monroe, 1915.
- FLOAN, H. R. *William Saroyan*. Twayne, 1966.
- FLOREANI, T. *Fifties Ethnicities*. Suny P, 2013, ebrary.com. Accessed 21 Jun. 2018.
- HILL, James Lee. *Anti-heroic Perspectives: The Life and Works of Frank Yerby*. U of Iowa P, 1976.
- HOLLAND, Norman. *The First Modern Comedies*. Indiana UP, 1959.
- . *The Shakespearean Imagination*. Indiana UP, 1964.
- JOHNSON, Greg. "Same Initials as Shakespeare." *The New York Times*, May 3, 1998.

- JUSTUS, James H. "William Saroyan and the Theater of Transformation." *The Thirties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, edited by Warren French, Everett Edwards, 1967.
- KENNY, Anthony Trans. *Aristotle: Poetics*. Oxford World's Classics, 2013.
- KINGSLEY-SMITH, Jane. *Palgrave Shakespeare Studies: Shakespeare's Drama of Exile*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, ebrary.com. Accessed 12 Jul. 2018.
- LEE, Lawrence and Barry Gifford. *Saroyan: A Biography*. Paragon House, 1984.
- LEGGETT, John. *A Daring Young Man: A Biography of William Saroyan*. Knopf, 2002.
- LINDE, Mauricio Aguilera. "Saviors of Mankind or Fools of Illusion? How to Understand Saroyan's 'Absurd' Heroes." *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, vol.11, no.7, 2000, pp. 67–74.
- MANN, Arthur. "The Time of Your Life." *Collier*, vol. 10, no.14, 1942, p. 74.
- MILIORA, Maria T. *Narcissism, the Family, and Madness: A Self-Psychological Study of Eugene O'Neill and His Plays*. Peter Lang, 2000.
- MORRISON, John. *Shipwrecked: Disaster and Transformation in Homer, Shakespeare, Defoe, and the Modern World*. U of Michigan P, 2014, ebrary.com. Accessed 29 Jun. 2018.
- RABKIN, Norman. *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding*. The Free Press, 1967.
- REMENY, J. "William Saroyan: A Portrait." *College English*, vol. 6, 1944, pp. 92-100.
- RHOADS, K. W. "Joe as Christ-type in Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*." *Critical Essays on William Saroyan*, edited by Harry Keyishian, Hall, 1995, pp. 105-123.
- SAROYAN, William. *The Time of Your Life*. Harcourt Brace, 1939.
- SATIN, Joseph. *The Humanities Handbook*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Tempest*, edited by Frank Kermode, Methuen, 1958.

SHAKESPEARE, William. *Macbeth*, edited by A. N. Jeffares, York, 1995.

SIMMONS, D. *The Anti-hero in the American Novel: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut*. Macmillan, 2008.

TILLYARD, E. M. W. *Shakespeare's Last Plays*. Chatto and Windus, 1958.

VOGLINO, Barbara. "Perverse mind" *Eugene O'Neill's Struggle with Closure*. Associated American Presses, 1999.

WILSON, Dover. *The Essential Shakespeare: A Biographical Adventure*. Cambridge UP, 1932.