The Time of Your Life Study Guide

The Time of Your Life by William Saroyan

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Introduction

William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* opened on Broadway on October 25, 1939, to mixed reviews. Many in the general public enjoyed the play, but the critics were less enthusiastic. In contrast to many of the playwrights working during the later years of the Great Depression, Saroyan was not interested in social protest; his play depicts a group of alienated loners in a shabby waterfront bar, looking for love and meaning in their lives. The play won the 1940 New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the 1940 Pulitzer Prize for drama.

Despite these awards, many critics felt that the play was unsophisticated, unrealistic, and too romantic, failing to reflect the dark and troubled times in which it was set; some found it confusing. Saroyan was rarely a darling of the critics and maintained a strained relationship with the East Coast theatrical world throughout most of his career. Much of his attitude came from that fact that he distrusted those who were highly educated and felt that the intelligentsia could not appreciate his plays and their simple messages.

The play takes place in 1939, just before the start of World War II. The play is presented in five acts over the course of a day in October 1939. The five acts are set primarily in a seedy San Francisco waterfront bar, through which numerous colorful but distressed characters move in their search for something more out of life than what they have. The action centers on Joe, a rich young man who does not have to work any longer and can spend most of his time drinking, doing small favors for people, and sending his simpleminded friend, Tom, on crazy errands. People enter the bar and interact with Joe; Nick, the bar's Italian immigrant owner; and one another. The tension in the play appears toward its end when Blick, a spiteful vice cop, returns to the bar to make trouble for Nick and a sad prostitute named Kitty Duval.

Author Biography

William Saroyan (also known as Sirak Goryan) was born in Fresno, California, on August 31, 1908. He was the fourth child of Armenak and Takoohi Saroyan, who fled their native Armenia to escape ethnic persecution. Armenak, a Presbyterian minister, died only a few years after Saroyan's birth, leaving Takoohi, with her limited English and job skills, to support the family. She sent her children to an Oakland orphanage for four years, until she could provide for them.

While in school, Saroyan worked as a newspaper boy, and after he dropped out of high school, he worked various jobs, including a job as a telegram messenger. In 1926, Saroyan moved to San Francisco to pursue a career in writing. In 1934, he published his short-story collection *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* to rave reviews; by the late thirties, he had a national reputation as a fiction writer. Saroyan was a prolific writer and claimed to have written more than five hundred stories between 1935 and 1940.

Having been interested in drama from the time he was a child attending puppet shows, local theater, and movies, Saroyan decided, after his success in writing short stories, to try his hand at writing plays. In 1939, he directed *The Time of Your Life* on Broadway to mediocre reviews and limited audiences. The play won the 1940 New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the 1940 Pulitzer Prize for drama, but Saroyan declined the Pulitzer because he believed that the arts should not be judged and supported by business interests. The play lost $25,000 during its initial Broadway run, and only after the Pulitzer announcement did it begin to recoup those losses. While *The Time of Your Life* has often been criticized for its overly sentimental tone and bathos, it is Saroyan's most well-known work.

In 1942, Saroyan was drafted to serve in World War II and was stationed in New York before being sent to Europe in 1944. While in New York, he married a socialite named Carol Marcus; they divorced in 1949, remarried in 1951, and divorced again in 1952. Their marriage produced two children.

During the 1940s, the literary world lauded Saroyan, often comparing him to Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. By the 1950s, however, his reputation had declined; critics claimed that Saroyan's light, optimistic fiction may have been appropriate for depression-era audiences in need of romantic stories but was not relevant to more sophisticated post-World War II readers. During the 1960s, Saroyan focused on autobiographical writing; these works reflect his aversion to authority and his belief in individual freedom, and they influenced writers such as Jack Kerouac and J. D. Salinger.

On May 18, 1981, Saroyan died of cancer in Fresno, California. He was cremated, with half his ashes interred in Fresno and the other half in Armenia.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The play opens in Nick's Pacific Street saloon, a restaurant and bar near the San Francisco waterfront. It is the late afternoon and a group of regular patrons are sitting around the room. Nick, the owner, is behind the bar. Joe and the Arab look at the newspaper headlines and react with typical disgust.

Willie, a young man who enjoys playing the marble game in the bar, enters and gets a beer from Nick. He wants to resist playing the game just this once but finally gives in. Joe begins angrily calling out for Tom, who is not in the bar.

Tom enters the bar in a rush, and he and Joe begin an exchange indicating that, at one time in the past, Joe saved Tom's life by getting him to eat when he was very ill. Because of this, Tom is forever indebted to Joe and runs errands for him—however strange or nonsensical. Joe gives Tom money and asks him to buy a couple of dollars' worth of toys.

Kitty Duval walks in and gets a beer. Tom is enchanted by her, but Joe sends him on his errand. Kitty claims to have been a famous actress in a burlesque show in the past, but Nick does not believe her, knowing that she now works as a prostitute. Joe is easier on her.

Dudley R. Bostwick enters the bar and frantically dials the phone, looking for Elsie Mandelspiegel, his girlfriend. Moments later, Harry comes into the bar looking for a job as a comedian, and Wesley, a young black man, enters the bar looking for any kind of work. Joe shares his champagne with Kitty and begins asking her about her dreams. She responds by revealing that her real name is Katerina Koranovsky, that she is originally from Poland, and that all she really wants is a nice home.

Wesley begins playing the piano. Harry starts to dance, but Nick suggests that he find a job in sales. People in the bar realize that Wesley is a wonderful piano player. Kitty begs Joe to dance with her, but he refuses, saying that he cannot dance. Kitty dances by herself.

Tom returns with the toys, sees Kitty dancing, and begs Joe for some spending money. Tom is obviously in love with Kitty, and Joe encourages him. Tom expresses his love to Kitty, and she asks him if he has two dollars. Tom does not understand that she is a prostitute, but they leave the bar together.

The atmosphere at the bar is comfortable until Blick, a vice cop, walks in. He warns Nick that he knows that "street-walkers are working out of this bar" and threatens to close the place. Nick despises Blick and lets him know it; Blick leaves. Nick hires Wesley to play the piano and Harry to dance. Mary L. walks in.

Act 2

An hour later, everyone is still at Nick's bar. Joe and Mary L., somewhat drunk, are discussing such things as their names and Joe's background—he once fell in love with a woman named Mary in Mexico City, and he enjoys drinking. Joe claims that he drinks because "Out of the twenty-four hours at *least* twenty-three and a half are . . . dull, dead, boring, empty, and murderous." Mary seems captivated by him and what he is saying. They flirt with each other, and when Mary leaves the bar, Joe becomes depressed.

McCarthy and Krupp enter the bar. They are friends. They enter, having a conversation about the fact that Krupp, a policeman, might be forced to hit McCarthy, a longshoreman, over the head with a club during a protest on the waterfront.

The phone rings, and it is Elsie calling for Dudley. She agrees to meet him at the bar. McCarthy has been watching Harry dance and is impressed, stating that his dance is a "satisfying demonstration of the present state of the American body and soul." He calls Harry a genius. Harry performs a comedy sketch for McCarthy about current politics, which further impreses McCarthy. McCarthy and Krupp leave the bar.

Tom rushes into the bar, concerned because Kitty is crying in her hotel room and won't stop. Joe tells Tom to go out and buy him a large map of Europe, a revolver, and cartridges. He also gives Tom the toys he bought earlier and tells him to give one to Kitty to make her stop crying. Tom leaves.

A man who looks like "he might have been Kit Carson at one time" walks into the bar. He claims his name is Murphy, and he begins drinking beers and telling outlandish stories about his travels and adventures.

Tom returns with the revolver and the map and reports that giving Kitty the toys simply made her cry harder. Tom and Joe leave the bar to see Kitty, with Tom helping Joe walk.

Act 3

Kitty is crying in her room at the New York Hotel. Tom and Joe knock and enter, Joe carrying a large toy carousel. Tom tells Kitty that Joe "got up from his chair at Nick's just to get you a toy and come here." Tom and Kitty look at each other, and it is apparent that they truly love each other. Voices in the hallway outside Kitty's room indicate that a young sailor is looking for her, but another woman tries to attract him to her bedroom. He insists on Kitty and enters her room, where he finds Joe and Tom. He is apologetic, but Tom threatens him and he leaves. Joe says he will return with a car to take them to Half Moon Bay, where the three of them will have a nice meal.

Act 4

A little later at Nick's, the phone rings. Nick announces that the phone call was a warning that Blick will probably show up again tonight.

Elsie enters the bar and finds Dudley, who is almost in a trance at seeing her. They discuss their relationship. She does not believe that love can exist in such a harsh world as this one, but Dudley argues that their love is possible. Eventually, she agrees; they leave the bar together. Krupp walks in and talks with Nick about how crazy the world is.

Act 5

It is late in the evening. Willie is still playing his marble game, while Kit Carson watches him, Nick is behind the bar, Joe is studying his map of Europe, and Tom is dreaming of Kitty. When Tom asks Joe where he gets his money, Joe delivers a monologue about how corrupting and hurtful earning money can be. He indicates that he has earned money in the past but does not work because "There isn't anything I can do that won't make me feel embarrassed."

Joe gives Tom another errand: he wants Tom to give the revolver to anyone on the street. He also asks Tom to get him chewing gum, jellybeans, magazines, and the longest panatela cigar he can find. As well, he asks Tom to give a dollar to any old man he sees and to the Salvation Army band outside the bar so they will sing a requested hymn.

Joe shows his revolver to Kit Carson, who teaches Joe how to load and unload the gun. Meanwhile, Willie finally wins at the marble game; the game rewards him with a patriotic song and waving flags. He leaves.

Tom returns with all the things Joe requested. He asks Joe why he paid for Kitty to move into a nice room at the St. Francis Hotel. Joe answers that Kitty is actually a good woman and that she and Tom deserve to be together. Tom is still concerned about earning enough money to marry Kitty, so Joe suggests that he become a truck driver. Joe calls up a trucking company and gets a job for Tom. Tom leaves to start his job.

Harry and Wesley return and report that there has been fighting at the waterfront between the police and strikers. Nick is worried about what is going on and asks Harry to tend bar while he walks over to the pier. Kitty arrives wearing new clothes, looking very beautiful. She talks with Joe about Tom and says that she has told Tom she will marry him. Joe gets up on his own and leaves to find a book for Kitty, remembering that she once expressed an interest in poetry.

Blick walks in looking for Nick and tells Wesley and Harry to stop playing the piano and dancing. When he sees Kitty, he assumes that he has caught a prostitute and begins treating her like a criminal. Kit Carson tries to stand up to Blick, to protect Kitty, but Blick takes him outside and beats him.

Blick forces Kitty up on the stage and demands that she remove her clothes, as if she were a stripper. Joe walks in with the books and, amazed at the scene, grabs Kitty from the stage. Wesley stands up to Blick, but Blick begins beating him up. Tom walks in and is angry at what he sees. Joe does not want Tom to fight Blick, so he shoves some money into Tom's hands and tells him to take Kitty out to his truck; they leave for San Diego to get married.

Joe pulls out the revolver, points it at Blick, and pulls the trigger, but it does not fire. Nick sees this just as he re-enters his bar and grabs the gun from Joe. Nick shoves Blick out the door, telling Blick that he will murder him with his own hands if he ever comes into his bar again.

Nick runs out but comes back almost immediately with the news that Blick has been shot dead by an unknown assailant. He picks up the gun that Joe tried to use and says, "Joe, you wanted to kill that guy! I'm going to buy you a bottle of champagne." Joe gets up and begins to leave the bar. Kit Carson enters, and he and Joe look at each other "knowingly." Kit Carson starts one of his stories that begins with how he shot a man named "Blick or Glick or something like that." Everyone at the bar except Joe gathers around Kit Carson. Joe hands his gun to Kit and looks at him "with great admiration." Joe leaves, and everyone waves while the marble game plays patriotic songs and waves its flags.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

The scene is Nick's Pacific Street Saloon, Restaurant and Entertainment Palace at the foot of Embarcadero in San Francisco. We enter the swing double doors to the street down right with steps leading down to the barroom. The bar itself is at right. A center door leads to kitchen. A piano on a platform rests up left center and steps lead up to a stage in the upper left corner of the bar.

A marble game sits down right of the bar near some tables and chairs. At center and left center we see a wall telephone. There's a phonograph at the left, and a chair sits right of the center door. In the back room above the left end of the bar, there are a table and chairs. Sitting at a table, we find Joe in his expensive, casual and youthfully worn clothes that lend a boyish demeanor to his appearance. With his calm and quiet rubberneck superiority, he's always eager, yet always seems bored. He's sitting alone in a Debussy reverie.

Behind the bar, there's Nick, the owner of the place, a big redheaded Italian who has a large red tattoo of a naked woman on the inside of his right arm. He's engrossed in the racing form that's in his hand. An Arab sits in his usual spot at the end of the bar. He's not a very large man, but he wears an extremely intense, black, old country moustache twisted up on the ends. On his left hand between his thumb and forefinger, there's a Mohammedan tattoo, proof that he has been to Mecca. He sips his glass of beer.

Suddenly in a strong and explosive outburst, a young man named Willie enters through the swinging doors of the bar. Comically, he holds up the forefinger of his right hand, requesting a beer. He's a marble game fanatic who's barely more than twenty years old, wearing a pair of corduroys that are probably not as old as they are dirty to the observer. He's sporting heavy shoes, a light green turtle neck jersey with a large letter "F" printed on the front of it, a tweed coat obviously too large and a green hat with the brim flipped up. The young man quickly gulps down the glass of beer Nick has set out for him. He straightens up and salutes Nick using one finger. Now invigorated, he appears to be leaving the bar. As he walks past the marble machine, the lure of his desire to play the game won't let him go. He stands there hovering over the machine, looking at it, tuning into the machine as if it were speaking to him. He makes another attempt to walk out but...the lure is too strong. He reaches into his pants pocket, searches through the change, picks out one nickel and seemingly gestures to the machine or whoever may be watching, "Only one game." He puts the nickel into the slot.

The noise that comes from the machine seems to be its way of confirming that it's ready for him. The marbles fall and the game begins, Willie versus the iron robot. Man versus machine. The last American man standing has nothing in his way except this glass and alloy sculpted machine. The reward is no more than a few blinking lights and six nickels

for the one he put into the slot. He is the last of the Mohicans, with nothing else in the world to do with his time except to try and outwit the marble machine. "The Missouri Waltz," which has been coming from the phonograph, comes to its end.

A newsboy enters the bar. He very cheerfully says good morning to everyone, but no one speaks back to him. He goes on to ask Nick if he would like a newspaper. Nick says no. He moves onto Joe, who also says no, but just as the newsboy is about leave, Joe takes note of him and asks how many papers he has left. Joe gives him a bill and takes all five papers the boy has, and the boy leaves.

The Arab picks up one of the newspapers. After looking it over he gives his stock reply, "No foundation, all the way down the line." A drunk enters and walks over to the telephone. Nick escorts the drunken man out to the street. The drunk returns as if a spokesperson for the bill of rights. This is a free country isn't it?

Willie, the marble game fanatic, tries to make his getaway from the marble monster, but it seems as if there is an invisible magnet attached to him. The pull from the machine is too strong. Nick yells out, "You can't beat the machine!!!" to the befuddled Willie, who takes this as a dare.

Joe begins to call out for someone named Tom. He gets no answer. He looks over by the phonograph machine, the public telephone, the stage, the marble game and the bar. He whistles for attention and then waits a moment. He whistles again very loudly. Nick, who has become very irritated with Joe, asks him what he wants. He wants Tom to get him a watermelon, and he goes on to suggest to Nick that if there is anything he wants for himself, he won't find it inside that racing form. Nick says he's keeping up with the news.

Suddenly, a very large man enters. He's about thirty years old but seems to be much younger because of his childish face. He is handsome, with a rudimentary, stoic air of confusion and intimidation. He is obviously not a boy, nor does he appear to be a man yet. His name is Tom, and he is wearing a cheap outdated Woolworth suit with a chain across the vest. On the little finger of his right hand there's a dice ring with the number six on it. On the middle finger of his left hand, there's a skull and crossbones ring. Joe, who now sees Tom, begins to look him over in an unconcerned superior manner, which causes Tom to become slack and tense as his pace becomes slower. Tom stands in front of Joe, cowering and waiting to be chastised.

Joe is actually gentle and firm in his approach when he asks Tom about who saved his life. Tom, with heartfelt intentions, responds that Joe did, and he thanks him. Joe requests that he go into detail, and Tom reveals that Joe made him eat chicken soup when he was sick and hungry three years ago and that Joe paid all his bills while he got better. Joe finally asks Tom where he has been all this time. Tom goes on to tell him about the trouble that went on down the street and that he was listening to the boys talk about it. Joe tells Tom of the errands he wants him to run and begins to give precise instructions as to what he needs Tom to do, where to go and how to get there. Tom is to take the money and buy Joe a couple of dollars worth of toys. Tom points out to Joe that

he's always doing his dirty work, while Joe sits around the bar. As Tom is walking away, Joe stops him and hands him a nickel to put in the phonograph to play number seven, the waltz, again. Tom begins to protest about always having to listen to number seven. Joe implores him to put the money in the slot, to sit down until it's over and then to go get his toys.

Tom puts the money in the slot clumsily but exactly and in a hurry. Joe seems to listen without interest and appears only to be interested in the effect this music is having on Tom. Entering the scene now is Kitty Duval. She's a tenant at the New York Hotel around the corner. She enters through the swinging doors almost unheard. She's in no hurry; she moves with a stoic rhythm that seems to match the strange, sad waltz that is her very own, just as it is Tom's. She appears small, yet strong, with a kind of feminine raw-edged beauty that no form of sorrow or distress could destroy. There is a sure pride accompanying her anger. There is elegance and vanity in her walk.

Kitty heads for the bar, requesting a beer that is set before her by Nick. She finishes half the beer in one swallow and returns her attention to the music. Tom becomes oblivious to everything around him as he is enthralled and beguiled by her. Joe, using a mild tone, tries to intercept Tom from his trance-like movement towards Kitty at the bar. He calls out once again, loudly this time, and gets Tom to come over to his table. Tom lets Joe know that he needs money to bet on a horse, "Precious Time," who's sure to win by ten lengths. Joe very deliberately points past the swing doors to the outside. Tom leaves.

Nick speaks up and asks Joe about the watermelon he wanted before. Joe forgot about it, and he turns his attention to the dazed and daydreaming Kitty. He asks, "What's the thought?" Joe tells Nick to bring them a bottle of champagne. Kitty, who's surprised, wants to know what the big deal is for Joe to buy champagne to drink with her. Joe tells Kitty how much he likes champagne, and he thinks that she might like it too. Kitty is quick to let him know that she's no pushover. Joe tells her that it's not in him, or his nature, to be unkind to others even in his dimwitted state. Kitty warns Joe to shelter his thoughts concerning her. Joe assures her that he only has sublime ideas concerning her person. Now Nick, who is confused, wants to know what Joe means. Kitty tells Nick to hush! Joe reminds her that this is Nick's place. She does not care and lets them both know that he won't insult her.

Nick tells her of his knowledge of and dealings with cheap whores, but Kitty simply informs him of her days in burlesque, how she played the burlesque circuit on the coast and was admired by European royalty. Young men of wealth and social position courted her. There are even life-size photos of her in costume in front of theaters all over the country. She dares Nick to call her names. Nick tells her that he's Charlie Chaplin. Joe assures Kitty of his belief in her and then offers her some champagne. She sits at his table.

Miss Duval was her stage name, and Joe insists on using it. Nick demands to know if she's drinking champagne or not. Joe tells him to pour the lady some wine. Nick turns on Joe, wanting to know why he spends all his time and money down here at his low class establishment, instead of one of the classy joints. Why doesn't he drink his

champagne at the St. Francis with a real lady? Kitty admonishes Nick once again for calling her names. She calls him a "dentist." Joe repeats it. Nick's amazement and confusion shows in his face, as he looks at Joe and Kitty. Nick lets Kitty know that she is not the only one he drinks with.

Joe puts his energy into Kitty only, lifting his glass to her. As she does the same, he makes a toast to Kitty Duval's spirit. Kitty, looking at Joe with gratitude, now understands and thanks him. Joe calls to Nick and asks him to play the phonograph, "number seven," of course. Nick doesn't seem to mind at all, though he's not a lover of music. Tchaikovsky was a dope and a sucker because he let a woman drive him crazy. Nick continues on about how he cried like a baby in front of his patrons at the bar. Joe asks Nick what made him cry, a question that Nick cannot answer. He puts the nickel into the machine and listens to the music while studying the racing form.

Kitty, who has slipped into a deep reverie of her own, begins to hazily speak of her love for champagne and all that goes with it: houses, big porches, large rooms and windows, big lawns, trees and shepherd dogs sleeping in the shade. Nick prepares to go next door to Frankie's to place a bet. Joe intercepts him to ask if he will put ten dollars on the nose on a horse, Precious Time. Nick takes the money and leaves.

Dudley R. Bostwick comes through the swinging doors of the bar and throws himself onto the open telephone. He's a young man of twenty-four or so, plain, but different, not very big, nicely dressed in budget-priced clothing, worn from working long hours, aggravated and bored with the tediousness of life. He appears to be no one special but a good person just the same. He's educated without any real understanding, an eager, naive soul fighting with a bromidic mind that has only been more agitated by what it has learned. His simple and basic need alone makes him great in personality, that need being a woman. His face is silly. His body language is stiff and erratic. The pitch of his voice is too high and stoic. His expressions are out of context. Dudley reaches the phone and begins to dial feverishly. He hangs up loudly and then begins an errant style of flipping through the phone book trying relentlessly to find the right number.

Harry enters as if intimidated by his own uncertainty. He seems out of place, self-conscious and disconcerted because of his appearance. He also seems lowly at heart, yet determined to fit in somehow. His arrival calls for a dance. All of his clothes are loose fitting and out of place. He is an inarticulate guy who has ideas. His philosophy is simple, that the world is a sorrowful place, a place that is devoid of laughter, and Harry himself is here to bring laughter to the world. He didn't finish high school but received bits and pieces of information from the boys at the pool hall. Now he's looking for Nick in hopes of securing a position as a comedian at the barroom. He asks the Arab if he is Nick. The Arab tells him no. When Nick returns, Harry, in a moment of pretense, asks him if he needs a comedian. Nick asks him whom he has in mind. Harry, now agitated, discloses his intentions. Nick wants to know what's so funny about him.

At this point, Dudley is at the phone again, dialing, and the noise coming from this is very loud. He gets through, says hello and then asks to speak with Miss Elsie Mandelspiegel. There's a pause. Harry, being very lively, starts dancing and talking

about the other attributes of his trade. Nick wants to know if he's working with or without a costume. Then like a "gun shot" at a starting gate, he tells Harry to "get funny." Harry begins to give his rendition of being funny, talking about standing on corners, not knowing who he is, and old men bumping into fat ladies. He then asks no one in particular whether or not this constitutes war. He shouts out a call to arms, salutes, about faces, aims and fires a make believe gun BOOOMMM!! Nick gets tired of this and tells the young man to take a break.

Next to enter the scene is Wesley. Nick offers him a beer and then asks what he wants. Wesley, who seems a bit befuddled, tells Nick that he needs to speak to him. Nick asks him if he's hungry, at which time the young black man swears that he's not and tells Nick that he wants to work. He's not asking for charity. Nick wants to know if he is good at anything. Wesley then gives a verbal resume of his abilities.

At this point Dudley is on the phone again, frantically requesting and pursuing Elsie and threatening to kill himself if she won't marry him and he loses another day of sleep. He declares his undying love for her and then stops cold...what? He's dialed the wrong number and has been pursuing the wrong woman. After causing a small racket, he picks up the name Lorene from the woman on the phone. They make each other's acquaintance and exchange pleasantries. Dudley starts telling the strange woman that he's at Nick's barroom and goes on about having the day off work from the S.P.I. He asks Nick what the address is at the bar and then tells the woman on the phone that he'd like to meet her too. Nick scoffs at Dudley and calls him a cad. Dudley scoffs back at Nick and then tells of the misery he's suffered over Elsie and how it must be causing indifference in him. He speaks back into the phone questioningly, calling Lorene Elenore. He tells her that the address is 3 Pacific, that he'll wait for her and that she will know him by his recognition of her.

Harry, who's still in his script, is carrying on with his audition, jumping around erratically, making way with his caricature of a soldier. It is obvious that "he's nuts," while sounding off loudly with another BOOOOOMMM!! Nick shouts for him to lay off. Very sadly, Harry tells Willie of the tragic fact that no one has a sense of humor any more.

Nick wants to know from Wesley if he is part of a union, but Wesley doesn't understand and tells Nick again that he doesn't want charity, he wants to work. Nick then responds, "for the love of Mike," and wants to know where Wesley has been. Nick tells him that he has to be part of a union to get a job. Wesley tells him again that he doesn't want favors, that he just needs a job. Finally Nick tells Wesley to go to the kitchen and have Sam make him some lunch. Wesley swears that he's not hungry.

Dudley, out of nowhere, very loudly declares what he's gone through for Elsie. Nick, now exasperated, brings Dudley a beer. Harry spouts off the fact that he has lots of ideas to make the world happy, while Wesley nearly faints from hunger. Nick catches him in time and then he and the Arab lead Wesley to the kitchen.

Harry starts up again, wanting to know if Willie thinks his monologue is funny. Then he begins dancing. Willie, after watching a moment, goes back to his game and tells Harry

that it's stupid. Harry carries on woefully, with much enthusiasm. Dudley argues with Elsie, telling her that he has no need to see anyone except her and that he doesn't know anyone named Lorene. Joe and Kitty are still quietly drinking, and nothing else can be heard except the soft shoe shuffling of Harry the comedian. The Arab returns to his chair.

Joe still wants to know what Kitty Duval's dream is. Kitty very hazily starts talking about how she dreams of home again, and the fact that she doesn't have one, and of her life with her family in Ohio. She continues to go on and on about her mother, father, sister, brother, Louie and their move to Chicago. Louie was killed in Chicago. Her brother Stephen ran away at seventeen, and then her mother died. She pauses momentarily and then continues.

Nick returns with Wesley from the kitchen. Wesley sits at the piano. Nick tells Wesley that the food he ate should hold him and then asks him why he lied about being hungry. Wesley thanks Nick, stating that he didn't know he was so hungry. Nick walks over to Harry and wants to know what the hell it is that he's doing. Harry points out to him that he is a natural born dancer, while Wesley begins playing the piano very slowly. Nick, speaking to Harry again, tells him that he's no good at this craft and that he should try being a salesman. Harry looks to the upper bar and announces that the world hasn't got sense enough to take what he is offering it.

Dudley is still thinking of Elsie and carrying on over having a date with a dame (Lorene Smith), who he has never met. Then, he asks for a beer. Harry starts up again as Nick brings Dudley a beer. He tells Nick that he's going to miss out on the greatest act known to America. He tells Nick that he'll work without pay at first. Just give him a chance, and he'll bring the house down tonight. If he doesn't, Nick can kick him out. Nick again tells him that he's not funny. He's poor, and he's a bum. Why does he want to be funny anyway? He'll just break everybody's heart. Harry states to Nick that he may be poor, but that doesn't count for everything. His talent, ideas and his style, even though it all has to be rounded out, counts for more than money.

By now Wesley is playing something on the piano that is out of this world, and a half a minute later Harry is dancing. Nick stands there and watches. Then, he declares that he runs the worst dump in Frisco that attract champagne buyers, whores claiming to be ladies and talent that doesn't show itself. Even society people show up sometimes. He can't figure it out. Could it be the location? The liquor? Himself? The mixed up personality of the barroom? He pauses...maybe they just feel at home here.

Wesley is working the keyboard, and Harry's grooving. Dudley is more depressed now. Kitty asks Joe to dance with her. He declines because he doesn't know how, and she tries to convince him otherwise. Joe likes Kitty and apologizes for not being able to dance with her. Kitty begins dancing alone. Tom enters with a package and becomes stupefied when he sees her. He comes out of his trance and puts the package on the table where Joe is sitting. Nick clears their bottles and glasses and goes back to the bar. Joe takes the package and asks Tom, 'what'd he get?' Tom replies that he's gotten two dollars worth of toys like Joe told him. Tom turns to look at Kitty. He then tells Joe that

there is nothing in the world he wouldn't do for him but that Joe has to give him money sometimes. Joe then wants to know what he needs money for. Tom turns to stare at Kitty again, who is still dancing. Joe, whose attention is on the two of them, hands Tom five dollars and then asks if he can dance. Tom, now replying with pride, tells how he won second prize at the Palomar in Sacramento five years ago.

Joe tells Tom to go on and dance with her and then shouts to him to dance with Kitty, the burlesque queen of the world. She wants to dance. Tom (in a powerless tone) wants to tell Joe of his love for Kitty, but Joe stops him, letting him know that he's aware of Tom's love for her. Joe tells him to take better care of himself. Nick, who is now watching Wesley in disbelief, states how this guy actually came to him for a job as a dishwasher, fainted from hunger and now plays better than Heifetz. Joe points out to Nick that Heifetz plays the violin. "Well, he's still good ain't he?"

Tom begins to speak to Kitty, and Joe (while playing with his new toys) tells him to dance, not talk. Tom and Kitty dance while Nick carries on as usual at the bar. Dudley cries over his beer, and in walks a strange looking, pushy, thirty-sevenish Lorene Smith. Nick asks the woman what she's having, but Lorene, who's looking around and frightening all the young men in the joint, wants to know where Dudley R. Bostwick, the guy she talked to on the phone earlier, is.

Suddenly, Dudley breaks into a running frenzy towards her and then becomes horror stricken. He launches into lying overdrive and tells the young woman that she has just missed Dudley. He's just left on crutches. Lorene looks at him and then asks if he is sure he isn't Dudley R. Bostwick. He tells her that his name is Tenefrancia (Roger), a French Canadian. Lorene goes on spooking Dudley with the fact that he sounds just like the guy she spoke to on the phone, and she tells him that she only wants to help him so that he won't commit suicide. As she turns to leave, Dudley tells her that it is a coincidence if he sounds like him, because that cripple left ten minutes ago.

After she leaves, Dudley wipes the sweat from his brow, acknowledging his narrow escape. He runs over to the phone, swearing his undying devotion to Elsie and that he'll never leave her again. Then, everything goes back to normal. Dudley can't remember the phone number again and goes on talking about how one obstacle after the other seems to get in the way of him talking to Elsie. He can't sleep because of it. Then, without doubt in his voice, he tells himself that she'll come to the phone one day. He calls out 'Sunset-7349' as he tries to dial the right number again.

Joe is oblivious to all that has occurred around him as he is being pulled into a study of all the toys, becoming better acquainted with each of them. He blows a whistle that causes Tom and Kitty to stop dancing and Tom to stare at her. Then, Dudley is again on the phone, sympathetically and harshly trying to get through to Elsie and changing his name, his whole life, in hopes of getting her on the phone. He speaks into the phone and then tells whoever is on the line that he'll wait.

Tom declares his love to Kitty again, and she asks him if he'd like to come up to her room. Again Tom's confusion leads him down the prim road, and Kitty takes the

opportunity to find out if he has two dollars. In a pathetic and pitiful voice, he tells her no... but that he does have five dollars. He again tells Kitty that he loves her and then hugs her. They leave the bar together as Joe watches.

Joe moves on to his next conquest. He asks Nick about a longshoreman named McCarthy. He wants to know what he will have to say today. Nick says, "Plenty." Then as Nick leaves to check on the third race, Joe informs Nick that Precious Time won, but Nick doesn't think so. Joe (speaking to himself) talks about a horse named McCarthy who is running in the sixth race today. Dudley's on the phone again, frantically weakening, tiring and then praising God when Elsie finally comes to the phone. Speaking in a desperate tone, he tells her where he is and that she has to come and talk to him. After calling out her name and getting no response, he believes she's hung up on him, so he hangs up and goes back to the bar. In the meantime, Wesley and Harry are still performing, and Joe is still consumed by his toys.

Nick returns and walks over to Joe. Joe asks how much money he's won, and Nick can't believe that he already knows. Joe, alluding to the fact that Tom informed them that the horse Precious Time would win by ten lengths, points out that Tom's in love, so of course, he'll pick a winner. Nick, who is now very puzzled, hands Joe the eighty dollars he's won. Joe yells to him that "faith" is the reason he's won. Nick quotes the statistics and wonders why his luck is so bad. When Joe finds out that all Nick lost was fifty cents, he tells him that he should never gamble because he isn't willing too take the risk. Nick reminds him that he never bets more than fifty cents and has no more faith than a fly.

Harry begins shouting for Nick to catch his new act, and Nick quickly tells him to hang around. Then, Nick asks Wesley if he can play that song again tonight. Wesley tells Mr. Nick the he's sure he can play something. Nick tells him to hang around too and goes behind the bar.

Everyone now appears to be at ease in each other's company, which gives the place a kind of naivety that seems to flow throughout. Wesley is playing better, and Harry is dancing better. Nick is behind the bar cleaning, and Joe's playing with his toys and seems happy. Dudley, with all of his problems and in his current state of dejection, seems at ease. Willie is happily playing the marble game, and the Arab is deep in thought, where he seems happy to be.

Then...Blick comes in and invades their peaceful existence. Blick is obviously a person no one likes, with his tough guy demeanor. It is easily understood why people usually dislike him on sight. He enters the bar as if he were a regularly welcomed customer. Harry immediately begins to lose steam. Blick speaks to Nick with his false friendliness. Nick wants to know why he's there, being such a big man of means. Blick, now feeling special, acknowledges Nick's condescension.

Nick speaks as if in he is in awe at the fact that someone so important as Blick would bother to come to a place like this, when there are so many other more classy joints. He sets Blick up with a drink, but Blick declines. Nick swallows the drink himself, as Blick begins talking about being on duty, at which Nick scoffs. Blick then insists that there are

hookers working out of Nick's place, and it's going to stop. At this point, time itself seems to stand still, and heads begin to raise one by one. Then, the music stops. Even the fanatical Willie stops playing the marble game. A moment of silent tension builds as if Blick were expecting applause from everyone there.

Nick then lashes out. He tells Blick not to expect his help and that he should know the difference between a whore and a lady, since he's a married man. Blick says that he's asking the questions, but Nick points out to him that he should act like a man his age who knows better than to accuse people, without being sure. In a loud voice Nick warns Blick. He tells him that he can find out for himself who the hookers are by going out on the street, or even sleeping with one, which he feels sure this man would not hesitate to do. Blick threatens to close down the place. Nick tells him that changing the world is hard for the "pot" who's calling the kettle "black." Blick says he'll be back tonight. Nick, who is angry but cool, tells him to send a more likeable person next time. Blick returns the insult and before leaving, takes one more intimidating moment to look the joint over.

There's a moment of silence again, and then everybody goes back to what they were previously doing, none as enthusiastic as they were before Blick entered. Nick and Joe come to the conclusion that Blick has only brutal intentions towards them all, and they say that in all the anger and misunderstanding, Blick is a bully, who'll be in big trouble messing around this barroom.

Joe, in his witless way, starts talking foolishly and seems to set everyone on edge. He sends Nick into a foul mood that brings everyone and everything they were doing to a violent climax, as Wesley plays the piano, Joe shakes the toys, Willie juggles the marbles and Harry dances. Nick forgets what he was so angry about. He just enjoys everyone and begins making amiable gestures to them all. He knows that he has a nice place that allows people to just be. He then yells to Harry to keep up the dancing tonight and for Wesley to go on and liven up the joint. Harry thanks Nick for the chance he has given him and goes over to the telephone. He calls his mother to tell her that he's gotten the job.

Nick is suddenly full of life and shows interest in Joe's childish yet interesting collection of toys. A woman by the name Mary L. comes in and takes a seat at the center table. Willie begins playing to the tune of the toy music box, while Harry dances to it. Nick wants Joe to let Kitty know that he means no harm towards her and would never touch her teeth. All seems well in the barroom.

Act 1 Analysis

Act 1 is the introduction to this crazy world of characters. From the opening scene of Act 1, we meet the most colorful swirl of people of all classes, backgrounds and beliefs. Each is dealing with his or her circumstances from a perspective of life that is not the most common, and yet they all share a wonderful commonality. We see individuals who probably represent the unsuccessful brothers who didn't go to high school, the unlucky in love or career aunts and sisters, the homeless minorities and the uncles who never

left their mothers. We also see the successful businessman and the property owner who tries to take care of all of these seemingly forgotten souls who wander in from the cold world outside. The play also presents rudimentary adults, who even though not fully developed mentally, are surely eager to love, serve and be loved. They are capable of that which seems to be the hardest thing for their more normal counterparts to achieve, to bring even a superior man to an honest and truthful realization of himself. If just curious enough, this "superior" man may take a look at his "inferior" counterpart and stand up to those who would bully the ones who are weak.

Saroyan uses his different characters to symbolize the many elements that make up American society. Willie on the pinball machine is trying to serve his country and is representative of the military. Wesley is representative of racism. The Arab is the foreigner coming to the USA seeking the better life. Blick, the closest Saroyan comes to conflict in this story, represents oppression of all kinds. Tom is the uneducated. Kitty is the dreamer, as is Harry. Dudley is the young American businessman trying to make something of himself. McCarthy represents the economy of America as he complains about the strike, and the young newspaper boy is representative of the world. The fact that Joe continually buys the papers from him and throws them to the ground is symbolic of this bar, not influence from the outside, being the world to these people. Joe is the master puppeteer who has no real troubles. He is unhappy to the point of trying to drink himself to death as he observes this American congregation of characters, and yet he inspires so much happiness in others.

Nick is the fair hand of compassion and opportunity in a scandalous world. Even with a barroom full of people who appear to be dawdlers, he sets a scene of fair game for each of them and allows them to "just be," ending with a culmination of laughter, self expression and perseverance. The bar is a place where harsh realities have no ground, and the sweetness and beauty of a whore can even be found and salvaged.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

This is Nick's bar two hours later. Everyone is still there, either sitting at tables or lulling around the barroom. Joe is sitting at his table playing with a deck of cards by himself. His attention is on the woman sitting at the center table. He's looking at her bag, trying to figure out what the initials M.L. stand for. The woman has acknowledged his presence and goes on nursing her beer, as does Joe, who is as controlled and sharp as always.

Joe begins to speak to the woman, asking her what the initials on her bag stand for. He throws out a few names to her, until she finally asks him, what name? He points out that he's speaking about her name, and then seeming a bit alarmed, he tells her what his own initials are. They finally exchange names and find out that they're both Irish. The woman's name is Mary. Joe shares the fact with her that Mary is a favorite name of his and that he was once in love with a girl named Mary.

They go on making small talk until Mary wants to know how often Joe drinks. Joe reveals that he drinks only when he's awake. Mary humors him about his drinking habits, and they continue to indulge one another. Dudley puts a nickel into the phonograph machine, while Joe continues trying to figure out why it is that he drinks. Mary tells Joe that it really doesn't matter, but he pushes on, telling her how twenty-three hours out of each day are so unbearably boring because we spend all that time "waiting."

Mary and Joe are still going on about Joe's drinking, and she tries telling him once again that he doesn't need to go on about it. Joe appears to be a man on his own planet. It also appears that he's trying to make amends. He no longer wants to cause hurt to people who are less fortunate than him. He asks Mary to dance with him until she accepts, and then he remembers that he can't dance.

Mary and Joe still talk on and find out some other things they have in common, such as the fact that they have both been to Paris. They wonder if there is any amour between them, and they both wonder how far the other one is willing to take it. Mary finally gets up to leave, and they both sadly say good bye.

The music comes to its end, and the newsboy enters. He asks Joe if he would like a paper. Joe wants to know how many papers the boy has left, and he tells Joe eleven. Joe takes all of them, looks at them and then throws them aside. The Arab comes over, picks up a paper and then goes back to his seat. The newsboy, now addressing Nick, wants to know if he can use a "great" lyric tenor. Nick immediately wants to know who. The newsboy goes on to explain that he himself is a lyric tenor. Nick tells him to sing, and the newsboy begins singing the song "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling." Everyone is astounded at how beautifully he sings the song. Nick is so elated that he asks the boy if

he's Irish. The newsboy tells him that he's Greek. Nick asks him to come back in a year, around the seventh of November. The boy is excited with this news and bops around the bar thanking Nick, who tells him not to wait a whole year to bring the newspapers.

Joe and Nick are now laughing and talking about how wonderful people are, while a Longshoreman named McCarthy and Krupp, a policeman, enter the scene. McCarthy is a large and gentle man. He's lean with broad shoulders, a sensible, fair looking, attractive man, who has obviously just come from work. Krupp is not as large as McCarthy and not as comfortable in his role as a policeman. However, his presence is as pleasant, and his spirit as gentle as McCarthy's. He's an easy-going man who is very perceptive, casual and warm. Krupp is also naive, more uptight and not quite as perceptive as McCarthy. They both speak to Joe as they make their way to the bar. Krupp orders two beers and continues the conversation he was having with McCarthy when they entered.

Krupp is complaining about the fact the he's always being ordered to keep the peace down at the waterfront. McCarthy comments that Krupp doesn't read enough. Krupp goes on to say that he reads everyday. McCarthy wants to know whom he needs to keep the peace for, but Krupp doesn't seem to know for sure. This seems to cause a bit of distress to Joe. A light seems to have gone off in Krupp's mind, and he says that he's there to keep the peace for the citizens. At this point, McCarthy begins to tease him about knocking him upside the head with his club. Krupp reminds McCarthy of their friendship that goes back as far as high school, and he says that he would never hit McCarthy. All of the men take off into a multitude of topics and seem to be enjoying each other's company.

The conversation becomes more intense, and soon the Arab pulls up a little closer to them, listening intently. One of the men asks the Arab what he thinks. He gives his stock reply, "No foundation, all the way down the line." One of the men, seeming a bit confused, wants to know what the Arab means. The Arab takes his "cue," deciding to take a walk, and leaves. Krupp finally asks Joe what the Arab meant and is confused even more by Joe's comments. McCarthy nods his head as if he understood what Joe just said. Krupp goes on to say that if McCarthy understands that kind of gibberish he can't be a longshoreman. He explains to Krupp that he comes from a long line of McCarthys who could stand up to the most quarrelsome of people. Krupp looks at his friend and tells him that he is a great conversationalist.

The phone rings. Harry gets up and starts to dance. Krupp asks McCarthy if it's all right for him to do that. Harry yells to Nick that the phone is ringing and then tells Krupp that he's rehearsing a new dance routine but that he hasn't gotten it worked out just yet. Nick calls out for Dudley to answer the telephone. Dudley is so frantic that he's on his feet and running. He answers and finds out that it is Elsie. He's ecstatic and tells everyone that she's coming to the bar. He hangs up the phone and starts walking around the bar as if this were his first time being there.

In the meantime, McCarthy is complimenting Harry on his dance routine, and Krupp questions McCarthy as to whether or not it really is a good routine. McCarthy says to

Krupp that he thinks the routine is awful. He goes on to say that it's at least clean and honest, a very satisfying demonstration. Harry is excited at hearing this and goes on to let them know that he's also a comedian. Naturally, Harry jumps all over the chance to show them how funny he can be. Even though no one laughs at his monologue, he still seems to be satisfied with the promise of a roaring response from McCarthy. Harry proceeds with much enthusiasm. He goes through the script he's prepared but doesn't get the response he'd hoped from the two men. Krupp makes a sudden and abrupt move in Harry's direction as if making an arrest. Harry runs for the swing doors and McCarthy stops Krupp.

McCarthy, for some reason, can't find his funny bone, and Harry is a bit let down. He complains to McCarthy that this always happens, and maybe he's just no good at it. McCarthy tries to convince Harry that he did find it funny and laughed in his own way, which was a quieter kind of laughter. McCarthy and Krupp then turn and leave.

Joe says goodbye to both men and proceeds to tell Nick to bet his money on a horse named McCarthy. Nick nearly blows a gasket at the request, but Joe, speaking as if he has ESP, tells Nick to bet all that he has on the horse. They continue to argue back and fourth about the bet, until Joe tells Nick that it's because the horse's name is the same as McCarthy's, and that if he listens to him, everything will be all right. Nick wants to know if Joe really believes that Kitty was in the burlesque. Nick admits that she must be somebody, because she called him a dentist.

Tom returns and appears to be upset about something. He heads straight for Joe, who wants to know what's happened. Tom thinks he's in trouble. He hands Joe back the five dollars he got from him and then covers his face. He tells Joe that the problem is Kitty. Joe tells Tom that he needs to run an errand for him and inquires about Kitty. It appears that Kitty is up in her room at the New York Hotel around the corner crying. Kitty has probably had too much champagne and is now traveling down memory lane at the speed of sound. She's talking about her family, their dog, her home and her dead brother. This is causing much confusion for Tom, who loves her very much and hates for her to cry. Joe's sincerity in this matter seems to shine through at this point, and he gives Tom a very large amount of money to bet on the nose of the horse named McCarthy. Tom continues to carry on over the rueful Kitty. He thinks that the woman could be a saint, never a hooker, like the other streetwalkers. Tom takes the money from Joe and takes off to make the bet. He is back in time to gulp down the beer that Nick has set out for him.

Tom is completely overwhelmed with all of the care and consideration Joe is showing for him and Kitty. To the Arab, though, life still has no foundation, not any place in the world, not even "down the line." Nick, who is now a bit disgruntled with Joe for throwing away money on a whim, can't conceive of Kitty wanting to marry Tom. Nick realizes that Tom is a special young man, but why would a burlesque queen, who has been pursued by men in quality positions in their lives, want to marry the rudimentary young man named Tom? Maybe she doesn't really want to marry him. Joe points out to Nick how much Tom wants to marry her. Tom comes running back from next door, very outdone because Frankie won't take the bet. He seems to be trying to incite Joe into action. He

goes on to tell Joe about how McCarthy won by two lengths, and he paid fifteen to one. When Nick hears this news he is disgusted and has only himself to blame.

Tom gives the money back to Joe, reminding him that they could have been one thousand dollars richer. Joe, who is now stoic in his demeanor, wants Tom to go and purchase him a map of the nation of Europe and a nice revolver with bullets from one of the pawnshops. Tom tells Joe about Kitty crying again in hopes of him calling off the errand. Instead, Joe snaps at Tom to do as he has asked him. Nick wants to know from Joe if the plan is to "read the map" and then shoot someone. Joe then tells Nick that he wants to read the names of some European landmarks and study the revolver. Joe gives Tom twenty dollars and tells him again what he wants and for him to not be fooled by the pawnshop owner. In a sudden turn of events, Tom admonishes Joe about fooling with revolvers. He wants to know why Joe is always doing foolish things.

Kitty is still crying. Joe tells Tom that a few tears will do her good. Tom says that Joe needs to talk to Kitty about the person that Tom is. Joe, being in a big hurry, rushes Tom off and reminds him not to load the gun. Tom is very firm in letting Joe know that he'd never see him fooling with a loaded gun. Before Tom leaves, Joe tells him to get rid of the toys. Tom has an idea. If the toys stopped Tom from crying like he said they did, then maybe they'll stop Kitty from crying too.

Tom, in a childish kind of questioning manner, asks Joe if he can give the toys to Kitty. Joe tells Tom that the toys made him forget why he was sad and maybe they'll do the same for Kitty. Tom's response to Joe is that the girl who asked about the toys in the store didn't seem to even know what the toys could do. With a look of misery on his face, he says Kitty is like a child, takes the toys and leaves.

Wesley, the piano player, returns and wants to know if he can play the piano. Nick tells him to go ahead. Wesley wants to know if Nick will pay him for it, and Nick tells him yes. Wesley is excited over the idea of being paid for doing what he likes and does well. Nick is interested in Joe's crying and wants to know why he cries. Joe tells him that his mother died when he was a small boy, and the toys they gave him stopped him from crying. Suddenly Nick's mother, who is in her sixties, comes in speaking loudly in Italian. Nick is happy to see her. Nick and his mother begin holding a conversation in their native language, which only the two of then understand. She then leaves as happily as she came. Joe asks Nick who she was. Nick, seemingly full of love and a bit of sorrow, watches her as she leaves, telling Joe she is his mother. Joe wants to know what she came for. Nick wants to know what the gun is for. Joe comes up with his usual answer, and while they're talking, in comes an old man.

The old man comes in. Obviously already under the influence of alcohol, he cases the joint, inches over to the bar, acknowledges Nick and sits in a chair at the center table. He introduces himself as Murphy, an old trapper. Joe welcomes him first by offering to buy his drink of choice. He thanks Joe and orders a beer, which he finishes in one gulp, wiping away the frost with his hand. The old man, whose real name is Kit Carson, then moves in for the kill. He tells about falling in love with a midget weighing thirty-nine

pounds, simultaneously setting himself up for free beers the rest of the night. Joe will do the honors.

Kit Carson begins to weave out a number of stories. He has met a man who wanted his six white horses broken, bashed an unsuspecting Henry Walpal upside his head with a spittoon and gone off to Mexico leaving the man alive. He has come to blows again, using the victim's own accordion to bring him down. He has nearly lost an eye, having a run in with a six footer with an iron claw that turned out to be six girls and the iron claw. He has dodged seven bullets, leaving a saloon dressed in feathers, silk and a woman's hat cocked over his eye, and he has herded cattle on a bicycle. Finally, Kit tells of leaving Houston with sixty cents (a gift from a girl named Lucinda), getting past a barbed wired fence through a yard full of big dogs and having a shotgun shoved into his face by an old black man. He drank mint juleps with the man and was saved by a hurricane in 1918.

Kit has Joe's full attention the whole time, and Joe is mindful, attentive and bursting with curiosity. Kit wants to know if Joe really believes the things he's told him. Joe does, which leaves Kit with a pensive grin on his face. No one has ever believed him before. Tom returns with the things Joe sent him for. Joe wants to know if Tom has given the toys to Kitty and if she stopped crying.

Tom lets him know that the toys didn't seem to help at all and that she is worse than before. Joe finds this amusing and can't understand why. Tom continues to feel responsible that they didn't make good on the bet in time to win the fifteen hundred dollars on the race. He's curious to know how much, if any, money Joe would have given him. He is astounded to hear Joe tell him that he would have given it all to him, if Kitty had married him. Tom is taken aback even more when Joe goes on to tell him that the most important thing on earth right now is to make sure that Tom is happy. Tom wants to know from Joe if he thinks they'll ever have an opportunity like the one they had earlier to win all that money. Joe tells Tom that it won't likely come again, but that it's ok, because it was not his fault.

Tom now realizes that without money he can't marry Kitty and wonders if he'll ever have the chance to get the money. Joe tells him that there's a chance that he won't, and Tom's desire to marry Kitty is even more urgent. Tom pitifully shakes his head and then begins to tell Joe how he has to save Kitty because she deserves so much better than what she has. She's very good to him. Joe explains to Tom that he needs to get a job and then asks him what kind of work could he do. Tom tells him that he has a high school diploma, but he doesn't know what he can do. Joe, again seeming to be careful in dealing with the childlike man, tells him to think about what he'd like to do. Tom points out to Joe that he'd like to have someone do everything he tells them to, just like Joe. Then he could have drinks, sit around and never run out of money.

Joe tells Tom that he has a majestic idea indeed. Nick also wants to know Joe's secret, but Joe shrugs it off as being the work of the Lord. Nick can't figure out most of what Joe ever says, but it doesn't stop Tom. He wants to know if he should get back to Kitty and try to stop her from crying. When Joe tells him that he's coming with him, Tom is

stunned. He has never known Joe to do anything for another person. Again, Joe speaks to Tom as if talking to a child, explaining to him that this is the way it should be when a friend needs help. Tom continues to be puzzled as he points out the fact that he's never seen Joe leave his seat in such a short period of time. Joe tells him again that it's no big deal and that there must be a way to stop Kitty from crying. Tom is in awe of Joe. He's sorry that he never told him that he was not an ordinary guy. Joe tells him "nonsense," as Tom helps the intoxicated Joe to his feet and they leave. The telephone rings, and Dudley clears a path getting to it.

Act 2 Analysis

William Saroyan has done a wonderful job in Act 2, just as he did in the opening act. He's taken a most unlikely group of people and mixed them together, to bounce off of one another, piss one another off, inspire one another and learn from one another. In Act 2, we find the characters beginning to influence one another, and Joe emerges as the leading character who is beginning to be influenced by those around him.

From the very beginning, it seems as if Joe will never tire of humiliating Tom, the rudimentary, stoic and poor-witted dumdum. Who would have ever thought that Tom would be the one who teaches Joe humility? As Saroyan points out in the introduction to the play, the most superior man in the world finds a valid variation of himself in the most inferior man in the world and will ultimately be hurt by that which hurts this man. We finally see this happen right before our eyes, and it is seemingly the theme of the play.

Though Joe is the central character in the story, let us not forget the side-splittingly foolish Dudley, who is going to have his woman whether she knows it or not, or the Arab, with his insight that is plain, simple and to the point. Then there is Blick, the unsuspecting bully determined to make his mark on the waterfront, and the sweet and beguiling Kitty, with all her memories of sunshine and woe, who still has the power to attract innocents. The black piano player, Wesley, finds a hot meal and a chance to earn his keep, through which he finds his self respect, and Harry keeps up his ridiculous optimism that keeps him struggling to make the world a better place. The lack of any real conflict in this act is overshadowed by the characters and their simplicity. The play is truly a 'slice of life' representative of any city in America.

Note the use of music throughout the play and the characters' desires to express themselves artistically or creatively. The newsboy wants to sing. Kit Carson is a storyteller. Wesley is thrilled at the chance to be paid for playing the piano. The aspiration to create is a basic and human one in this play, and the bar provides a place for creative outlets.

Nick's Pacific Barroom is always open for business, for those who seek redemption from the cruel and cold world outside. It is place for the rubbernecks, the nostalgic and even the pathetic, to share their lives. In this act we learn more of their hopes and dreams and even feel a tinge of real world reality in Blick, who comes along to squash this positivism that the bar stands for.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

The scene is the New York Hotel around the corner from Nick's place, room 21, Kitty's room. Kitty is seated on the bed wearing a dress that she's had since her younger days in Ohio. While Kitty is tying a ribbon in her hair, she appears to be in a mournful state of mind. She looks at herself in the mirror and seems upset at the reflection that looks back at her. She gazes at the empty walls around her and then at herself again in the mirror. She becomes even sadder as she takes the ribbon from her hair and looks at an old photo of herself. She becomes dismal and melancholy. She begins to cry. Falling on the bed, she tries to hide herself, but it doesn't work. There's singing coming from one of the other rooms and then a knock at the door. Tom calls out to Kitty, letting her know that it's him and Joe. Kitty brightens a bit at the thought of Tom. They both enter her room.

Joe, who appears surprised, quickly takes note of the room and then sets the toy carousel on the floor beside the bed. Tom is very tenderhearted at the site of Kitty's tears and tries to convince her to stop crying. Weeping, she states that she doesn't like her life. Joe winds the carousel, and the music starts to play. Joe becomes interested in the toy and watches it closely, while Tom tells Kitty about how they rode all over the place to find it just for her. From that moment on, things move as if in slow motion. Kitty is looking at the photo of herself again. Tom wants to know who the little girl is, and Kitty says that it's her at seven years old. Tom realizes that Kitty is still as pretty now as she was then. Joe reaches for the picture and notices the way Tom and Kitty look at each other. There is no doubt in his mind that they are in love. Kitty wants to know what Tom wanted to be when he was a boy. Tom, a little confused but anxious to do what he can to make her feel better, thinks for a moment and then looks at Joe as if for permission to speak. He tells her that he wanted to be a policeman or an engineer.

Kitty states that she wanted to be an actress, and then with a wishful expression, she asks Tom if he ever wanted to be a doctor. Tom is bewildered and looks to Joe, who encourages him to continue talking to Kitty. Finally in a humoring manner, he tells her yes. With a downtrodden smile, Kitty lets Tom know that she always hoped that she'd be an actress and that some young doctor would fall in love with her. Joe makes signs with his hands encouraging Tom to continue talking, and Tom lets her know that he would do just that. Kitty continues to go on and on, talking until she loses Tom. Then with a pathetic expression, he realizes that Kitty is in a melancholy state of nostalgia. Joe again "tenderly" encourages him to continue the conversation and pretend to be the young doctor Kitty falls in love with. Tom pitifully informs Joe that he doesn't have the words.

Suddenly, there is an outburst of overly zealous singing from a young sailor in the hallway. The sailor begins calling Kitty's name and brings her out of her deep state. Tom angrily rises to his feet, listening to a woman's voice in the hall asking the sailor who he

is looking for. He informs her that he's looking for the loveliest lay that he's ever had, and the woman warns him to stop where he is. The sailor quickly informs the woman that he means Kitty, not the smelly woman. A verbal fight ensues, with the woman calling the sailor a thief and then referring to all of them as being common thieves. She slams the door to her apartment. The sailor lets out a pitiful burst of laughter and then begins calling for Kitty again.

Tom, in a murderous state, tells Joe what he wants to do to the sailor. Kitty is herself again, and she is afraid. She gazes long at both Joe and Tom, who is now impatient and mad as hell. Joe is calm and sad. Joe very tenderly urges Tom to just take him away. The drunken sailor is at the door knocking very hard. He speaks loudly and nearly frightens Kitty to tears. When Tom finally opens the door, they are both very surprised to find a young drunken sailor, no more than twenty years old. He spots Kitty and gives a pitiful apology because she has company. Unaware of the eminent danger he's in, he says he'll return later. Tom angrily grabs him and promises to kill him if he returns. He shoves the scared sailor into the hall and shuts the door.

Joe intervenes, telling Tom to stay with Kitty while he goes out. He wants to gets an automobile so that the two of them can spend a lovely evening together. Tom, who is taken aback, has not the words to express his heartfelt appreciation to Joe. The idea of Joe doing anything for him, or being the one who goes and takes care of things instead of sending Tom, gives Tom a warm feeling. Joe again tells Tom that these are things we do for our friends. Joe then lets Kitty know that she no longer has to be afraid or alone because Tom will be there for her, because he loves her dearly.

Act 3 Analysis

Saroyan has done an excellent job of blending the thoughts and emotions of Joe and Tom and then conveying them to the audience and readers in a sincere and heartfelt manner. He has brought together Kitty and Tom: the beguiling and the napve. Everything they, as well as Joe, feel for each other, comes bursting forward. Joe is finally reaching that place which all humankind hopes to reach before leaving this often wretched, but definitely mysterious and hopeful planet. He's paying his debts in full, and the kind-hearted and nostalgic couple is the first to be rewarded by him.

Kitty and Tom are Joe's symbols of penance to exorcise his guilt over how he has lived. Outside of the sailor, there is little direct conflict in this scene again, but rather a subtler deepening of the symbolism represented by each of the characters. This is the scene where Joe is most directly influenced and truly begins his transformation to a better man.

Act 4

Act 4 Summary

The scene is Nick's Pacific Barroom again. We are back at the point where Tom is helping Joe get up, and they're on the way to Kitty's. Everyone is in the same places. Wesley is on the piano, and Harry's dancing. Nick's at the bar. Dudley and the Arab are in their places, and Kit Carson is asleep on his folded arms.

A drunk comes in and goes over to the telephone in hopes of retrieving any returned nickels that may be in the chute. Nick approaches the drunk, who shows him money. They both go over to the bar, and Nick gives him a bottle and a shot glass. The drunk attempts to make a toast. There is some mention of God, blessing children, small dogs that don't bite and the president. The drunk then leaves.

The phone rings, and Kit Carson jumps up, still under the influence of alcohol. He threatens and boxes with an imaginary opponent as Dudley heads for the phone. Nick is a little concerned and calls out to Kit Carson. Dudley informs Nick that the call is for him and sounds important. Nick admonishes both Harry and Wesley to quiet down while he takes this important call. Kit Carson is still carrying on over the three wars he's been in, his four marriages, being the father of so many children that he doesn't know their names and having no money. He says that if he can help anyone, he's willing to do it.

Nick seems to be speaking to his father. He asks Kit Carson to go back to sleep. Kit says, "I'll do it," and then returns to his earlier position at the table. When he hears Nick talking again, he jumps to his feet and begins to mimic everything Nick says. Nick is still on the phone (seeming very annoyed), saying something about hell and being a Catholic himself. Just as Nick is about to hang up, his daughter comes in, timidly watching her father and looking as if she wants to disappear. She stands by the piano.

Suddenly in a loud and annoyed tone, Nick mentions Blick keeping the girls out, and Blick making trouble. Nick speaks about the fact that he doesn't break any laws and leaves people alone. He mentions the swanky joints uptown. Covering the mouthpiece of the phone, he tells Harry and Wesley to go into their act. He says a few more things to the person on the phone and then hangs up.

Kit Carson has heard Nick on the phone and wants Nick to know that he can count on Kit. He wants to know what kind of trouble Nick is in, and Nick tells him about Blick, who he calls a gorilla. Kit wants to know what kind. Nick's daughter Anna points him out to Kit and beams with love and pride. Kit is elated at the site of such a beautiful girl and speaks about a time that his daughter pointed him out in a crowd. Nick is shocked when he sees Anna and tells her to go home with her grandma. Keeping her eyes on him all the way to the door, as if she's seeing him for the last time, she waves goodbye.

Nick becomes very emotional and takes a drink as he spouts off to his dead wife's spirit that the girl is the image of her. He sheds a few unsolicited tears. Kit Carson is right in his face, watching. Nick then loudly and just as suddenly says to Kit, "You're broke, aren't you!!?" Kit agrees wholeheartedly. Nick sends Kit into the kitchen to give Sam a hand. He tells him that he'll give him a couple of beers when he's finished. Kit holds Nick in the highest esteem.

Elsie Mandelspiegel enters the scene. She's a lovely, dark, wise and pitiful-looking girl, and she's about to cry. She almost seems to be gliding across the floor in a trance-like state, as if everything around her were imaginary. When Dudley finally catches sight of her, he's so elated and beguiled that he does nothing. She has this effect on him. As he finally lets go of the spot he's in, he walks dreamily to her smiling. They speak to one another, and then they sit.

Elsie begins telling Dudley stories of woe at her job, and she says she loves him but.... Before she can finish, Dudley's telling her how happy he is that she came. He then very urgently tells her how he was prepared to die if she didn't come. She tells him she knows, and he goes on about his love for her. At that moment, the Killer and her Sidekick come in. Elsie then tells Dudley that she loves him too, but it's no use in this troubled world.

Elsie goes on about the horrors and pain she has to face every day, and she says that people, unlike animals and birds, can't seem to be able to protect themselves from the pain of loving another person. Dudley is so blinded by the love he thinks he's feeling that it doesn't occur to him that she wants the same thing from him that he wants from her. They agree that the solution lies in a cheap hotel room, where they can fan the fires of passion. They leave together. The Killer wants to know what kind of place Nick is running. He tells her it's a place where people come and go, bring what they have and say what they must to get what they need.

The Other Street Walker complains that broads like her make it hard for their racket. Nick tells her that Finnegan called. She refers to him as the mouse inside the elephant. The Other Streetwalker wants to know what's up, and Nick tells them that they need to stay away from the barroom for a while because the cops will be waiting for them and making trouble for people like him in the meantime. Krupp comes in, and the Killer and the Other Streetwalker get up to leave, shouting that they were going anyway. They go.

Krupp comes in complaining about his job as a cop, and how it's ultimately interfering with his friendship with the longshoreman McCarthy. He suggests that McCarthy should have become a professor. McCarthy is involved in a strike against the 'finks' who are going to try and unload the Mary Luckenbach tonight. Nick tells Krupp that they all seem to go hand in hand. Krupp sums it all up in a neat package. People simply want to live their lives, protect their families, make an honest buck and get a little enjoyment out of life from time to time. The problem is that everybody is nuts, and this realization hit him like a ton of bricks today on pier 27. They live in a wonderful world and are never satisfied with anything, even though they have everything. Nick agrees, but they are still people who have to exist together.

Krupp and Nick continue to try and figure out why the world seems to be such a hopeless place, when it's such a wonderful place. It holds something in it for everyone. How nice it is to smell the roses, to watch the children, to sing a song or to whistle a tune. Why do some people have to make trouble? The children sell themselves, and everybody gambles. People don't take it easy. Krupp goes on until it seems to not make sense anymore. He announces to Nick that he's quitting the force. Nick asks Krupp about the family, and he beams about that. Then he talks about not knowing what he'd do for a living if did quit. The Arab, Willie and Wesley listen to Krupp go on and on until it seems as if he's talking in circles, and they decide to go back to their previous activities.

Krupp finally gets himself so worked up that he takes off the badge and slams it on the bar. The Arab speaks up to say, "no foundation, all the way down the line," which Krupp does not understand. Krupp asks Nick if the Arab ever says anything else, and Nick tells him that it's all he's saying this week. Krupp is curious about what the Arab does to make a living, so Nick asks him and finds out that the man has worked all his life, nearly all over the world. He still doesn't really have anything to show for it.

Krupp and Nick find out, after talking to the Arab, that he plays the harmonica. Harry and Wesley hear him playing, and they are so astounded that they immediately begin playing and dancing to his old country music. Krupp and Nick quietly listen to them play and drink a beer. Krupp finally gets up to leave. He picks up his badge and tells Nick to forget what he'd said about quitting the police. Then he tries to explain himself, but Nick lets him off the hook and tells him that there is no harm in talking about it. Krupp reminds him to keep the streetwalkers out and then leaves.

Act 4 Analysis

Act 4 is the subtle texturing of the characters of the play. With Joe out of the picture at Kitty's, we are able to focus on the beauty of a few of the regulars at the bar including Nick himself. We see that Nick has a family and a wife who passed away. We see a softer side to this man who helps the drunken fools and continues to provide sympathy to men looking to find their self-respect. Nick is a good guy, trying to make an honest living and do some good while at the job.

Dudley finally finds what he has been searching for in Elsie, and the question is posed of how they are to survive together. Krupp has a real issue in his life of what to do with his job, and the bar is a place he can come to talk about it. Sometimes that's enough for a man. We see our wonderful friend the Arab, who has little to say, and always the same thing, playing the harmonica with Wesley while Harry dances. Music is a uniting factor, across differences, across cultures. Suddenly the room has a bit more charm.

Act 4 enhances our view of this little America through the exposure of Nick's family and Dudley's possible family to be. We see struggle in Krupp, and we see joy in the Arab, Harry and Wesley, where others might think no joy could be found. Again there is little conflict, and yet there is so much going on as they all influence one another. At this

point, Saroyan's audience has been captured by the characters in the play, and the scene is set for what is about to take place in Act 5.

Act 5

Act 5 Summary

The scene is Nick's barroom, later that evening. Foghorns are heard through this scene. A Gentleman and his Lady, dressed in top hat and evening clothes, enter the bar. Willie is his usual maniacal self at the marble game. Nick's at the bar, and Joe's at his table with the revolver, the cartridges on the table. He's comfortable and at peace with himself. Tom is thinking of Kitty and how much he loves her. The Arab, Harry and Wesley are gone, and Kit Carson is watching Willie play the marble game.

The Man and his Lady sit at the left center table, and Nick brings them a menu. Outside, the Salvation Army people are playing and singing a song, "The Blood Of The Lamb." The music comes through comically to the patrons. The drunk testifies that he will sin no more because he's saved by the Salvation Army. Joe is also drunk by this time and is trying to call out the names on the map. He points out a city and then loses it when he try's to pronounce it. His voice is slurred, and the Lady wants to know what his problem is. The Man points out for her that Joe's intoxicated, and Tom thinks that Joe is calling him. Tom is a bit insistent about knowing who Joe is talking about. The Lady is involved, and the Man repeats again that Joe's drunk. Tom conveys his heartfelt appreciation to Joe for hiring the automobile and taking them driving along the oceanfront by the bay. Joe, in his drunken haze, is able to let Tom know how delighted he was to do it for them.

Joe's in a different kind of mood, and he has Tom's full attention. Tom has never seen Joe like this. Joe talks about how life has revealed things to him that he never knew or cared about. As long as he can replace something ugly with a thing of beauty, and surpass death in the process, then he knows that life can be filled with good things, and this is the truth he will always seek.

The Man and his Lady are trying to determine whether Joe is drunk or just plain crazy. Tom wants to ask Joe something, but he doesn't want to make Joe angry. He wants to know where all of Joe's money comes from. Tom realizes that Joe has spent very large amounts of cash today, and he did it for both Tom and Kitty. Tom has sense enough to know that moving Kitty from the New York Hotel to the upper class St. Francis Hotel on Powell Street was very expensive, and Joe has paid her rent and put cash in her hand. He even bought her new clothes. Tom has been waiting for the chance to ask Joe, but before now he would never have dreamed of it. Joe becomes a little testy and waves Tom's curiosity to the side.

Joe lifts the box containing the gun and the bullets and then looks at Tom sadly, a bit angry. Joe is not as angry with Tom, though, as with himself, the cold world and his own zealous superiority towards people like Tom. He begins very slowly and speaks to Tom of his indiscretions against poor and unsuspecting people. He carries on like a sinner confessing his sins, letting Tom know that the money he spent was to try and give back

some of those dreams he destroyed while earning it. He talks about how those who have money are not usually conscious of those who don't.

Joe then goes on to tell Tom that as long as this world stays the way it is, he will always be able to get some of it. He's worked since he was a boy. He's worked so hard that he didn't learn to enjoy life, and now he's too tired to try. He gets back at the world by never working again. He hasn't the patience and can't even do simple good things. Money is the guiltiest thing in the world, and it stinks. Joe says that he won't ever talk about this again; so don't ask him to.

Tom is sorry he has upset Joe. Joe hands the gun to Tom and tells him to give it to a worthy hold-up man. The Lady is again unable to understand what Joe means. Her husband reminds her that she wanted to come a honky tonk, so here they are. Tom is confused and wants to know how he can tell if someone is a hold-up man. He wants to take the gun back to the pawnshop and get the money back. Joe admonishes Tom for being ambitious and then tells him to find someone who needs a good gun. Joe tries to persuade Tom to give the gun away, and Tom is bewildered and doesn't want to give the gun to a criminal. Joe gets up to find someone himself. He then hands Tom some money and tells him to go by some magazines and chewing gum.

Tom begins repeating everything Joe has told him to buy and then spouts off the different kinds of chewing gum on the market. Joe also tells him to buy some cigars and jellybeans, to give the newsboy a dollar and to give some to the old man. He also tells him to give the Salvation Army people a few dollars and to ask them to sing the song again. He tries to rattle off a few bars of it and ends it with his own broken-spirited words. Tom tells Joe that he has made a mental note of everything he wants and goes down the list again. As Tom leaves, the Lady is positive that Joe is a lunatic. The man points out to her again that she got what she asked for, and if there are crazy people here, then so be it. He asks her if she's tired of these people, and she says no. He tells her to stop complaining then.

When Joe starts to sing again, he attracts Kit Carson, who comes over to his table, joking with Joe about being a Presbyterian. Joe offers him a drink, and Kit accepts. Kit Carson and Joe begin to tie one on. They sing loudly and awfully. They toast each other. Joe makes another request to the Salvation Army to sing that song again. Kit begins to weave some new tales for Joe about being a seaman in 1899 in New Orleans. He was regarded as being an important man. Joe wants to know if he has any gun knowledge. Kit goes on with another tale about fighting the Ojibways for nothing, along about 1881 or 1882.

Joe shows Kit the gun and asks him what kind it is. Kit is frightened to death at the site of it but goes on humoring Joe as if he were a well of knowledge. Then, he lies about shooting a man right through the middle of his hand. Joe offers the gun to Kit, who then starts laughing ridiculously, taking the gun as if he really were an expert. He starts fooling with the gun and calling it a new kind of six-shooter, all the while trying to figure out where the bullets go. Joe wants Kit to show him how to use it, but Kit's frightened of it. Still, Kit carries on like it's his best friend. Kit aims the gun in the direction of the Lady

(it's loaded but not cocked), and then he tells Joe it's all set to shoot. This time the Lady and Man are terrified, and the Lady stands up. Kit tells Joe to be careful not to squeeze the trigger because it throws your aim off. Joe thanks him for the quick lesson and then unloads the gun.

Joe now beams over the fact that he has a good gun, and Kit seconds his observation. Joe continues aiming the empty gun at things, and then suddenly Willie yells out to Nick that he finally beat that old marble machine like he said he would. The machine begins its prize-winning song, with lights flashing on and off in all colors. A bell rings six times. The American flag jumps out, and Willie comes to attention. Everything quiets down as the machine plays its version of My Country 'Tis of Thee.

The flag returns to its previous station, and Willie is so proud because he has won the war against the marble monster and saved America. He struts about, looking as if he'd defeated not only the machine, but also everyone there in the bar. Nick gives Willie his six nickels, and Willie is elated as he points his finger in an untamed manner at Joe and Kit. Then, he swears that a man could really make a living playing this game, as if he's hit the million-dollar jackpot. He tells everyone how he has it all figured out and that when he decides to do anything, he doesn't stop until it's finished. That's the kind of man he is. He points to the large F on the front of his shirt and tells them what it stands for, Willie Faroughli, and that it is proof of his philosophy, because he's a winner. He then points out to the Lady that she has a successful man because he has foresight and faces life head on, just like Willie. He hits the table they're sitting at very hard and fast and tells them how nice it is to see some people with class in the joint. Then, Willie bids them a good night and salutes Joe and the whole bar before leaving.

Kit Carson heads back to Joe's table, amazed at Willie's abilities in the end. Tom comes back with the gum and magazines, telling Joe he has everything. He had some trouble finding the jellybeans. Tom and Joe look over the stuff, and then Joe offers Kit some. Kit begins weaving a new tale. Joe pours out the gum and jellybeans and then offers Tom some while Kit is trying to get some attention from someone else. Joe bets Tom he can chew more gum than Tom can, and Tom takes him on. Kit offers to be the referee. Tom is like a child at Christmas time. After Joe fills his mouth up with gum, he wants to know if Tom carried out the rest of his orders. Tom assures him that he did, and Joe is satisfied. Kit continues to keep up the count on who has the most gum in their mouth, and Tom is ecstatic at the idea of doing this with Joe.

Tom still wants to know why Joe put Kitty in that fancy hotel. He is a little concerned that she may not be comfortable there. Joe tells him that she'll adapt in a few days, and Joe can feel nothing but admiration towards Tom for his kind and considerate concern over whether or not Kitty is lonely. He then, with deep emotion for Tom, tells him she will never be lonely again as long as he's around. Tom is surprised and happy with Joe's heartfelt warmth towards him and Kitty.

Tom and Kit listen very intensely while Joe tells Tom how much more Kitty deserves because she is a good person and so is Tom. She needs to be in a nice place so that she can become the person she really is inside. Tom deserves the best of her, and there

is no one who can take care of Kitty and love her the way Tom does. She doesn't need anyone else to talk to her or keep her from being sad and lonely as long as she has Tom. The other hotel was just a whorehouse and a place that would only make her act like the other streetwalkers. If she gets lonely that's ok, as long as she's lonely for only Tom.

Kit Carson has a deep expression of great admiration on his face while listening to Joe. Tom appears to be in a dream state, listening to Joe. They talk about the gum and licorice and the different kinds of gum they have left. Then, Joe asks Tom if he really wants to marry Kitty. Tom tells him in a reassuring and pitiful manner that he really does, but he has no money. Joe tries to incite Tom into a boxing career, but a man like Tom doesn't have the heart to hit another person unless he gave him a reason to. Joe tries to find out if Tom has had any thoughts about what he would like to do. Joe asks Tom if he would be too ashamed to drive a truck. Tom would like to drive a truck. Then he could travel to so many other places with Kitty. Joe thinks it's a poetic idea and so does Tom, who wants to know if he can take Kitty along. Joe's not sure, so he tells Tom to bring him the phone book. Joe questions Tom about driving a truck, and Tom reminds him that he can drive anything with motor.

Joe finds who he's looking for, gives Tom a nickel and tells him to dial the number. He gets the person he wants on the phone, and Joe asks Tom to help him up. Joe speaks to the man on the line and asks him if he needs a good driver. He asks Tom if he has a license. He says no, but Joe tells him not to worry, he can get one quickly. He talks a bit about the union to the man on the phone and tells the man that it won't be an obstacle. He doesn't see why Tom can't start driving tonight. Joe tells Tom to help him back to his seat and that the man wants to see him tonight. Tom wants to know if he's presentable, and Joe tells him to stand up straight and be dignified. Tom does this, and Joe tells him he looks good.

Kit Carson is still counting the sticks of gum, and Joe gets rid of the wad in his mouth. He tells Tom that he won the chewing contest and then bites the tip off of a cigar and gives it to Tom. He hands him a few more and then tells him to give the Lady and Man one. At first they appear not to want them, but then the Man lights his and the Lady follows suit. The Man is a bit reluctant to let the Lady smoke the cigar. She tells him that she would really like to join him, and she does. Joe admonishes the Man for always bullying the Lady and tells him to back off. Joe then gives Tom ten dollars and tells him that he may have to drive to San Diego tonight. Tom wants to make sure Kitty knows. He makes Joe promise to take care of her. Joe then gives him directions and tells him to take a cab to the address. He tells him that Keith will be expecting him. Tom thanks Joe, who tells him it's not necessary.

As Tom is leaving, Wesley and Harry are coming in. Nick wants to know where they have been, and they remind him that he told them to come back at ten o'clock for the second show. Harry tells Nick that they were down at pier 27, and one of the longshoremen and a cop had a fight. The cop hit the other guy over the head with his nightstick. Nick asks them if anything else broke out, but they say no. Only a man in a

car talking about a meeting and ending the strike. Nick is glad that the strike will be over so that the cops can calm down before they hurt somebody.

Nick tells Harry to tend the bar and asks the Lady and Man if they've made up their minds yet. They tell him to bring some champagne and to make sure its cold. Nick lets them know that they are well stocked with it because Joe orders it all the time. Nick tells them the cost of the bottle, and Harry brings two glasses and the champagne. Nick tells Wesley to start playing the piano, and he excitedly obliges. Nick is on his way out, and the Arab is back. Nick speaks to him playfully. The Arab makes his usual statement, "no foundation," and Nick finishes it "all the way down the line."

Kitty Duval, looking oddly lovely, comes in wearing new clothes. She glides past everyone, as if hoping no one will see her. The Lady and Man admire her. Harry is surprised, but Joe isn't. Joe and Kitty exchange pleasantries with each other, but Kitty seems a bit dejected and tells Joe that she was never in the burlesque. She came from a poor family and has done too many things that she is ashamed of. Joe, appearing to be completely unaffected by what Kitty is saying, calls her Katerina Koranovsky, toasting her and Tom. Kitty in a pitiful voice asks about Tom's whereabouts and then goes on to let Joe know that she has accepted Tom's proposal of marriage. Joe tells her about the new job Tom has and how he wanted to see her before he left. Kitty, in a dismal tone, lets him know that she thinks Tom is too good for her. Joe tells her that he finds her to be one of the most honest people he's ever met and then lets her know that Tom will return in a few days and that she should go back to her room and wait for him.

Kitty goes on talking about how hard it is for her to adapt to the changes in her life. She tells Joe that she's never been happy before and is afraid she doesn't know how. Joe tells her that his intention was to make her feel better. She says that he and Tom have shown her a side of life that she never thought she would have and that she loves the both of them deeply for that. Kitty is also worried about being able to give Tom babies. Joe says Tom's not much more than a baby himself, and they will be very happy together. He begins telling her about all the wonderful things they can do together and that she should maybe get some books to keep herself busy until Tom returns. He tells her to wait as he leaves to try and find her some books to read. She asks Joe if she should go back to her room and wait for Tom. They smile at each other as Joe goes on his way, still a little under the influence.

The foghorn blows, and the music is going. The newsboy comes in again to sell his papers. Neither the Arab nor the Man wants a paper, but before the newsboy leaves, the Arab tells him that there is, "no foundation, all the way down the line," leaving the boy a bit of a confused as he exits.

Blick and two policemen enter the bar. Blick shoves the newsboy to the side when he tries to sell him a paper. Blick wants to know where Nick is. He interrogates Harry and tells the Arab to shut up. He wants to know who Kitty is. Both the Arab and Wesley stop playing their music, and the Arab exits. Kitty wants to know why her name matters to Blick. Blick becomes angry and tells her to watch her tone. Blick questions her as if she

were a suspect in a crime. Kitty stands up strong, telling Blick that it's not his business where she works or what she does.

Blick appears to be aware that Kitty was once a streetwalker, and Kitty is aware that he knows this. Kit Carson comes over to point out to Blick that he shouldn't talk to a lady that way in front of him. When Blick turns his attention to Kit, the two policemen, who were at the bar, begin shuffling a bit, as if responding to Blick's tone. Blick turns to them and lets them know that he'll handle Kit. He tells Kit to repeat himself, which Kit does. He takes Kit outside, and the sounds of rumbling and punches float back into the bar. Blick returns all worked up and then tells the two officers to take care of Kit. He returns to his interrogation of Kitty. She realizes that Blick knows all about what she does. Finally, the Man has something to say about Blick's treatment of the sweet and naive Kitty. Blick warns him, and the Lady is appalled. Blick walks over to the Man and offers him the opportunity to defend her honor. The Man decides that it's time for him and his Lady to flee, and they do.

Blick quickly starts in on Kitty again, who has decided to give him all the information he wants concerning herself. When he finds out that she's living at the St Francis Hotel, he goes after her with a vengeance. Kitty lies and tells Blick that she's an actress and has worked in the burlesque. Blick calls her a liar and wants to know why she's at the bar. Kitty lies again, telling him that she's looking for a job as a dancer and singer. He tells her that she can't sing or dance and wants to know why she's lying. Kitty continues to hold onto her story about being in the burlesque, so Blick tells her to show him what she can do. He tells Wesley that she needs some music and to put a nickel in the phonograph. Kitty goes up on the stage and in her own enthusiastic way gives a performance that is both strange and unbelievable. Blick begins to incite Kitty to do a strip tease, and she begins removing her clothes.

Joe walks in and sees Kitty. He runs to her, takes her off the stage and holds her in his arms as she cries. He shows his contempt for Blick and wants to know what she was doing. Wesley quickly points out to him that it was Blick's idea. Blick then turns on Wesley, pushing him off the stage and beating him up. Tom enters and wants to know why Kitty is crying again and why Blick is beating the poor colored boy. Joe stops to find out if Tom has the truck. Tom says he does. Joe hands him some money and tells him to leave. Joe tells Kitty to go also and take the books to the truck, as Blick finishes beating Wesley. Wesley tells Blick that he didn't hurt him and that he'll get his. Tom is very concerned about Wesley and wants to hurt Blick, but Joe sends both him and Kitty on their way to get married.

Joe then takes the revolver from his pocket and imagines killing Blick. He cocks the gun and aims at Blick. Standing very still, he pulls the trigger, but nothing happens. He tries again and still nothing happens. Nick and McCarthy come in to see Joe trying to shoot Blick. Nick takes the gun from Joe. Joe is very calm and matter of fact about what's happening and then curses Tom for buying a six shooter that doesn't work. Nick gets rid of the gun, and then Blick comes out in a frenzy. Nick reminds Blick that he doesn't want him there and promises to take him into the back where he was beating Wesley and

slowly kill him. He pushes Blick to the outside of the bar and then tells Harry to see about Wesley.

Harry runs out, and Willie comes in. He begins to put a nickel into the machine frantically, and causes the flag to pop out too soon, never even realizing what has gone on while he was away. He stands at attention and salutes. He then states that his concern is only for his country. "Screw Europe!" He tries again to play the game, but up pops the flag again, causing him to continue standing at attention. He tells Nick that the machine is broken. Nick nonchalantly tells him to hit it. Willie, who is still saluting, does as he's told, but it happens again. Now, frustrated, he tells Nick again that there's a problem. He puts another nickel in. This time it works, and he begins playing the game. Suddenly, there are three gunshots.

Nick goes outside, and so does McCarthy. The newsboy enters again, still trying to sell papers to Joe, who takes them all like before and then tosses them to the side without any thought. The Arab comes back in and picks up the paper. He changes him mind and throws it away. The drunk enters and approaches the bar, while the newsboy tries to cheer Joe up, playing number seven on the phonograph for him. Nick comes back inside and tells Joe that someone has just shot and killed Blick. The police don't seem to care. Joe seems to come out of a daze as he realizes what Nick is saying. Nick repeats it again, and Joe doesn't care. He says that the gun wouldn't fire for him. Nick examines the revolver.

Nick realizes that Joe wanted to kill Blick. Harry returns and wants to buy some champagne. Joe gets up and grabs his coat and hat, and the newsboy tries to help him. Nick's concern that Joe is about to leave now shows. He tells Joe that it's not eleven yet and wants to know where he's going and if he'll be back tomorrow. Joe isn't too sure at first and then says that he probably won't be back. Kit Carson enters and tells Joe that someone got shot. He wants to know if Joe is all right. Joe tells him that he's never felt better. Nick begins to tell a story about how he shot and killed a man named Blick because he didn't like the way he spoke to ladies. He says that in October of 1939, he went up to his room and got his pearl-handled revolver, spotted Blick on Pacific Street and let him have it twice before throwing the gun into the Bay. Harry, Nick, the Arab and the drunk close in around Kit, while Joe walks slowly to the stairs that lead to the street. He turns, waives and then leaves.

Act 5 Analysis

In Act 5, the audience truly witnesses people at their absolute best and worst, through the eyes of the author. We've witnessed life and death, as well as the change of the least likely of characters. We've witnessed Joe's compassion, as well as his acceptance of those seemingly less fortunate than him. Through the Man and the Lady, we see Joe as we first saw him, and come to then appreciate and respect what Joe has brought to the bar. When the strength of Nick and Joe are away, we see how easy it is for the weaker players to be taken advantage of and pushed around by Blick, a weak man abusing authority. Kit Carson, the seemingly crazy old man, ends up being the hero who

seeks vengeance on the evil Blick, though Joe wanted to be the one who did him in. Ultimately, we have watched the revolution of the weak and the weary, as they join together and become a promising and strong force, ready to face the whole world together.

The climax of the play occurs here in Act 5, as Blick barges in and starts smacking people around and is then shot outside. His arrival affects everyone, and he is literally the only antagonist in the play. After having spent so much time with everyone else, it is easy for the audience to feel no sympathy for Blick and to hate him, as do the characters in the play. His death comes as vindication and symbolizes justice in this small corner of the world.

"The Time of Your Life" is rich in theme, left to many interpretations as life is. Some possible themes to be taken away might be: "Love thy neighbor as a reflection of thyself," "at the end of the day, we are all the same," "the time of your life is right under your nose," and "one can't live simply by watching others, we must participate in the game of life."

Characters

Arab

Throughout the play, the Arab sits at the bar in Nick's saloon responding to the newspaper headlines with the comment, "No foundation. All the way down the line." At one point, he says a few more words about how he has left "the old country" and come to America to work hard and not beg. After listening to one of the Arab's brief monologues, Joe pronounces him, "in his own way, a prophet."

Blick

Blick is a thoroughly unpleasant man, a "strong man without strength—strong only among the weak." He works as a policeman with the city's vice squad and struts into Nick's bar as if he owns the place, threatening to shut it down if he catches any prostitutes there. When Blick comes back to Nick's bar in the evening and sees Kitty, he taunts her, provoking many of the bar's regulars to stand up to him. Blick responds by beating up Wesley, thus starting a chain of events that ends in his being shot and killed.

Dudley R. Bostwick

Dudley R. Bostwick is a small man, about twenty-four years old, neatly dressed in cheap clothes when he enters the bar. He is well educated but "without the least real understanding" and is frustrated with life because he has not been successful in his one quest: to find a woman. Elsie Mandelspiegel is the great love of his life, and he spends a lot of time and energy on the bar's phone trying to find her and speak with her. Eventually, he does find her and convinces her that their love is possible.

Kit Carson

Kit Carson claims his name is Murphy, but everyone calls him by the name of the famous nineteenth-century frontiersman because that is who he looks like. He spends most of the play drinking in Nick's saloon and telling stories of his life that sound too fantastic to be true. Only Joe says that he believes his stories.

Kit helps Joe load and unload his revolver. Though Joe's gun is apparently not involved in Blick's death, there is a special bond between Joe and Kit after Blick is shot in the street outside Nick's bar. Kit is outside when Blick is killed; when he re-enters the bar, Joe asks him, "Somebody just shot a man. How are you feeling?" Kit responds by beginning to tell one of his stories; however, this story tells how he "shot a man once. In San Francisco. . . . Fellow named Blick or Glick or something like that. . . . Went up to my room and got my old pearl-handled revolver." The assumption is that he did kill Blick and that, therefore, maybe all of his remarkable stories are true.

Kitty Duval

Kitty Duval is one of the prostitutes who hangs out at Nick's bar. She originally came from Poland to the United States with her family, and her name was Katerina Koranovsky. Her hard and troubled childhood ultimately led her to become a prostitute after her hopes of becoming an actress were gone.

When she first enters the bar, she is loud and brassy, but Joe is able to get at her core, finding out her real name and that she was never really a famous actress to whom "European royalty" sent flowers. Tom's love also seems to soften her and, even though she believes that she has been through too much to be with someone as sweet and innocent as Tom, she accepts his overtures and marriage proposal.

Harry

Harry arrives at the bar looking to be hired for his comedy or dancing routine. Nick gives him a tryout but is not terribly impressed with his abilities as a comedian. Harry's routines are primarily about the impending war in Europe and are not terribly funny. He is convinced that the world desperately needs to laugh and that he is the best man for the job. "Nobody's got a sense of humor anymore," he complains, but he believes that he has "all kinds of funny ideas in my head to make the world happy again." Nick eventually relents and hires Harry to dance while Wesley plays the piano.

Joe

Joe is the character around which much of the action takes place. He has a "boyish appearance" and dresses well, and he is "always thinking, always eager, always bored." Joe has a somewhat mysterious past, although it is clear that he is wealthy and does not ever have to work again. Joe does not feel good about having earned this money, though. When Tom asks him where he got his money, Joe answers, "If anybody's got any money—to hoard or to throw away—you can be sure he stole it from other people. . . . I'm no exception." He spends most of his time in the play sitting at a table in Nick's bar, drinking champagne that Nick stocks just for him. Through his conversation with Mary L., more is learned about his character, including that his last name begins with the letter T., that he fell in love once with a woman named Mary in Mexico City, and that his family background is Irish.

Joe and Tom have a relationship that is built on the fact that Joe once saved Tom's life. For that, Tom must be at Joe's beck and call, running in and out of the bar on errands for odd items such as toys, jellybeans, a map, and a revolver. In fact, throughout much of the play, there is a real question as to whether Joe can walk by himself. Tom seems to be Joe's way of getting around except on a few occasions. Joe is someone who mainly observes life, as opposed to living it.

Krupp

Krupp is a policeman who comes into Nick's bar occasionally, primarily to share a beer with his friend from high school, McCarthy. He is married with two sons and pained by the fact that, as a policeman, he may be asked to break up a union strike and physically hurt McCarthy. He admits to Nick late in the play that he does not really like being a policeman and thought about quitting almost as soon as he started the job, years ago. Krupp has a soft heart but is worried about the future of man.

Mary L.

Mary L. is a beautiful married woman with two children who comes into the bar about halfway through the play. She gets drunk and talks with Joe, and the two seem to be quite charmed by each other. Mary leaves the bar on a bittersweet note, with Joe obviously smitten by her.

Elsie Mandelspiegel

Elsie Mandelspiegel is Dudley's girlfriend. She works at a hospital as a nurse and has a serious outlook on the world. Elsie feels that she and Dudley cannot be married because the world is too harsh for love to survive, so she has been avoiding his desperate phone calls, during which he proclaims his love for her. Toward the end of the play, Elsie succumbs to Dudley's pleadings, and the two of them walk out of Nick's bar, in love and promising each other that they will make an attempt at being together.

McCarthy

McCarthy is a longshoreman working at the docks near Nick's bar. Occasionally, he stops in for a beer with his friend from high school, Krupp. McCarthy is something of an intellectual, and Krupp cannot understand why he became a laborer instead of a white-collar worker. Joe and McCarthy talk with each other about the world, but Krupp is amazed and confused while listening to them.

Murphy

See Kit Carson

Newsboy

The Newsboy comes into Nick's Pacific Street saloon a number of times during the play's action to sell newspapers. Typically, Joe buys all of the papers the Newsboy has, looks at the headlines, and tosses the papers aside. The Newsboy brings the news of the outside world into the bar, but everyone in the bar rejects that information.

Nick

Nick is the "big red-headed" owner of a saloon on Pacific Street in which most of the play's action takes place. He is first-generation Italian American and a man of very deep but hidden feelings. He admits to crying over a sad story he heard on the radio and privately expresses great love for his daughter after gruffly chastising her for showing up at the bar. Twice in the play, he understands that someone is hungry or broke, even when they have not told him, and sends them into the kitchen to have a free meal. He feels a fierce pride about his bar and defends it from Blick.

Tom

Tom is Joe's friend and assistant. Their relationship is based on a time when Joe saved Tom's life. He is a large but childish man, about thirty years old, and wears a cheap suit.

Tom is one of the more innocent of the play's characters; for example, he is confused by Kitty's question about whether he has two dollars, thinking that she simply wants to know how much money he is carrying and not that she is giving him a price for sex. He and Kitty fall deeply in love despite the differences in their backgrounds, but Tom needs Joe's encouragement to ask her to marry him.

Wesley

Wesley is a young black man who shows up at Nick's in need of a job. He says he will do anything, "run errands, clean up, wash dishes," but surprises everyone when he happens to play the piano and the result is remarkably good music. Nick decides to hire him to play the piano in the evenings at his bar. Wesley is full of pride but not the false kind. When Nick tells him he has to be a union member to get a job, Wesley is confused and answers that he just needs a job and does not expect any favors or handouts.

Willie

Willie is a young man, less than twenty years old, who keeps feeding nickels into the marble game for most of the play. He takes it as a personal challenge when Nick tells him that no one can beat the game, facing the machine as if it is his nemesis. When Willie does finally win and the game explodes with patriotic songs and waving flags, he automatically salutes and cries out, "Oh, boy, what a beautiful country."

Themes

Success

Saroyan's descriptions and the actions of the characters are very telling and indicate that the author is interested in what makes someone a good or happy person beyond what is generally considered financial and social success in America. Joe, for example, has made such a large amount of money that he can afford to sit at Nick's without a job, drinking champagne. Yet, Joe indicates that he still searches for things that will make him happy. He cannot work because he cannot find anything that will not "embarrass" him, so his success is in what he is able to give to those around him. He helps Tom and Kitty begin a new life together and listens to and believes the wild stories Kit Carson tells, but he is deeply unhappy with himself and his life.

Other characters are searching for something to fulfill them, as well. However crass or difficult their lives may look on the outside, Saroyan insists on giving them inner beauty and knowledge about what is right and good. Krupp understands that, as humans and Americans, "We've got everything, but we always feel lousy and dissatisfied just the same." He bemoans that there is "nobody going quietly for a little walk to the ocean," because everyone is "trying to get a lot of money in a hurry." Krupp is human, however: he certainly feels the yearning for material and social success, but he is also aware enough to know that it is false and leads nowhere. Kitty Duval, as a cheap prostitute, is a failure by most standards. Saroyan, nonetheless, describes her as "somebody," a person who, despite hardships, has "that kind of delicate and rugged beauty which no circumstances of evil or ugly reality can destroy." Joe even toasts her with champagne, saying, "To the spirit, Kitty Duval."

The Body-Mind Dichotomy

Saroyan offers a number of characters who exemplify the dichotomy that often exists between the human mind and the human body—and the tension between those who act and those who think about acting. Joe is someone who uses his body very little and is nearly all intellect and talk. He rarely moves from his chair in Nick's bar, getting Tom to run all of his errands. When Kitty begs him to dance, he refuses, saying that he cannot dance. He then exhorts Tom to dance with Kitty and tells him, "Don't talk. Just dance," underlining the dichotomy between mind and body. When the beautiful Mary L. asks Joe to dance, he is even more explicit about his inabilities, telling her that he can "hardly walk" and that this is a constant condition, not one simply caused by too much champagne. He cannot work, either, having failed to find work that "won't make me feel embarrassed. Because I can't do simple, good things. . . . I'm too smart." Saroyan writes Joe's character almost as if his mind has gotten in the way of his having a normally functioning body.

McCarthy is another character in whom the dichotomy between the mind and the body is seen. However, McCarthy has been able to surmount the barrier between action and thought that stymies Joe. McCarthy is a longshoreman, but he is a laborer who sounds like a professor. "I'm a longshoreman. And an idealist. I'm a man with too much brawn to be an intellectual, exclusively," he says.

Love Conquers All

Saroyan's work, including this play, was often criticized for being too sentimental and romantic. The play features two somewhat idealized relationships that reflect the concept that love can conquer all: Tom and Kitty's, and Dudley and Elsie's.

Tom and Kitty's relationship is challenged by a number of factors. Tom appears to be dull-witted and inexperienced in the ways of the world. He does not have a job and has no idea how to get one until Joe helps him. Joe, in fact, saved Tom's life when he made Tom "eat all that chicken soup three years ago" when he was sick and hungry. Tom seems barely able to function on his own in the world, yet he meets and falls deeply in love with Kitty, a world-weary prostitute with the proverbial heart of gold. They come into this relationship with very different backgrounds and life experiences, yet they somehow get together. Joe acts as facilitator for their love by helping Tom get a job driving a truck and moving Kitty from the hotel where she works as a prostitute to the luxurious St. Francis Hotel. When Blick sullies the atmosphere in Nick's, Joe shoves cash into Tom's hand and pushes the two lovers out the door, telling them to "Get married in San Diego." Their story has a happy, almost fairy-tale ending.

Elsie and Dudley literally cannot connect with each other during the play's first half. Dudley calls her repeatedly, but each time either she refuses to speak to him or he is mistakenly connected with another woman who is not Elsie. Finally, Elsie relents and agrees to meet Dudley at Nick's. There the couple talk about their love. Elsie believes that the world is too horrible and harsh to support two people who want to be together and in love. "I know you love me, and I love you, but don't you see that love is impossible in this world?" she asks Dudley. He is insistent, and when she asks whether they can find a place to be in love, Saroyan gives the stage direction that his affirmative answer is given "with blind faith." Elsie, as worried as she is about the looming war, accepts his answer, and the two lovers leave Nick's holding hands.

Style

Stage Direction

Saroyan is very explicit with the stage direction in this play. This may be because he was disappointed in the production and direction of his first play, *My Heart's in the Highlands*. Nearly every character has an extensive description of his or her clothes, weaknesses and strengths of character, movements, and place in society. For example, when describing Willie, the marble game player, Saroyan goes so far as to say that the young man is "the last of the American pioneers, with nothing more to fight but the machine, with no other rewards than lights going on and off." In this case, he raises Willie above being a mere young man in front of a game; Willie evokes the history of a nation and a people.

Saroyan even begins the play with a paragraph stating the play's underlying philosophy, just in case the reader is unclear about his intentions:

> In the time of your life, live—so that in that good time
> there shall be no ugliness or death for yourself or for
> any life your life touches. Seek goodness everywhere,
> and when it is found, bring it out of its hiding-place
> and let it be free and unashamed.

Plot

The play's limited plot has been noted by numerous critics and reviewers. In a sense, the play offers a slice of what a day might be like at Nick's bar rather than a story with a beginning and an end. The primary tension centers around Blick, his behavior toward Kitty and others in the bar, and his resulting murder. Without Blick's nasty presence, the play is simply a series of conversations in which the bar's patrons talk about their lives and dreams.

There are minor plot lines, though, such as the growing love between Kitty and Tom, whether Dudley will get Elsie to marry him, and Willie's success at playing the marble game. More than twenty characters come and go; in reality, Saroyan has created a play that stresses characters over plot. Blick's death is less an event in and of itself and more a catalyst that binds the bar's patrons together in a literal circle around Kit Carson at the play's end.

Historical Context

The Great Depression

On October 29, 1929, the New York Stock Exchange crashed when investors sold sixteen million shares in just one trading day. Just a year before that, Herbert Hoover had been elected U.S. president, and the nation was basking in the glow of an unprecedented economic boom. The stock market collapse, however, firmly placed the nation on the road to the Great Depression, and by 1933, the nation's unemployment rate was at about twenty-five percent. Historians and economists disagree over the cause of the depression: some have maintained that the crisis was a global event, exacerbated by Germany's inability to pay the reparations that England and France demanded for its role in World War I; others have blamed a decline in consumption by Americans; while others have pointed to overvalued stocks as the culprit.

The stock collapse did not affect the nation's economy all at once. Gradually, businesses closed, banks failed, and savings and investments disappeared. Fewer families could afford a new car, and spending on new construction in 1933 fell to one-sixth of its pre-depression level. Many credit the start of war in Europe in 1939 with stimulating the world and national economies and ending the Great Depression, whereas others claim that the depression's end came only because President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs helped to strengthen the American people's confidence in the nation's economy.

Labor Unrest in the 1930s

The Great Depression forced companies to lay off millions of American workers, changing their lives forever. High unemployment and the deterioration of working conditions led to labor unrest, and many workers gained a renewed interest in unionization. Strikes became one of the most powerful weapons that unions had to get their point across to corporations, and in 1934, 1.5 million workers across the United States went on strike. Unions won major victories by using the sit-down strike in many industries; from 1936 to 1939, American workers engaged in 577 actions during which they simply stopped working while at their jobs.

In May 1934, San Francisco longshoremen, like McCarthy in the play, went on strike, refusing to unload cargo after their employers failed to recognize their union, the International Longshoremen's Association. Two months later, thousands of tons of food, steel, and other goods clogged docks and warehouses. The day after the traditional Fourth of July celebrations, a day long battle between police and workers erupted on the streets of San Francisco; two strikers were killed, and hundreds on both sides were injured. This event, "Bloody Thursday," caught the attention of many working people in the city, and on July 16, a general strike began. Unionists and workers blockaded

streets and closed stores for four days until their leaders called off the strike for the good of the city.

The Start of World War II

In 1938, Adolf Hitler, Germany's chancellor, began his hegemony by annexing Austria, a country with close ties to Germany. Later that year, Hitler and the other leading European nations signed the Munich Pact, which essentially handed over part of Czechoslovakia to Germany. Many Europeans believed that this would be Hitler's final territorial claim and so viewed the pact with hope.

This was not the case, as less than a year later Germany took possession of the rest of Czechoslovakia. Great Britain and France had to admit that their policy of appeasement had failed, and they began to prepare for war. In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union—historical adversaries—announced that they had signed a non-aggression pact. This agreement eliminated the possibility of Germany having to fight a war on two fronts. In September 1939, one month before Saroyan's play takes place, Germany invaded Poland, and Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

The predominant mood in the United States during the late 1930s and early 1940s was isolationist, as many citizens still remembered the violence and suffering of World War I. The United States would not enter the war until December of 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Critical Overview

Those seeing Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* when it first opened on Broadway in 1939 had varying responses. John Mason Brown's review, originally published in the *New York Post,* acknowledges the play's lack of a strong plot but lauds its "enormous vigor" as well as its beauty and compassion. Brooks Atkinson's *New York Times* review also notes the play's structural weaknesses, but he considers the play "original, breezy, and deeply felt." The play's lack of structure is both a strength and a weakness, according to Grenville Vernon, writing in *Commonweal.* The play's loose plot prevents it from being as powerful as it could have been, he argues, but this form also allows Saroyan "liberties which are fascinating and often delightful."

Some critics were not so kind, though. Charles Anghoff, for example, writing for the *North American Review,* condemns the play and states that "it presents even more serious doubts than [Saroyan's] first, *My Heart's in the Highlands*." The story is "thin," the writing is "undistinguished," the characters "spring out of ancient vaudeville programs," and the script "oozes cheapness," according to Anghoff. Brendan Gill, writing in the *New Yorker* in 1969, seconded the opinion of an earlier critic who had condemned the play upon its opening. "That opinion was sound," declares Gill. The play, he asserts, is "a ramshackle affair, mildly amusing when it is content to be a vaudeville. . . . It has no center and its surface is fatally smeared over with a sticky sweetness." Clive Barnes, on the other hand, condemned the play when he first saw it in 1969 but wrote in a 1972 article in the *New York Times* that his judgment was "far too hasty and flip." He grants that the play has its limits but lauds it as "a lovely play . . . touching when seen in retrospect . . . [and] a play easily got wrong." Some analysis of the play has been done by literary critics. Kenneth Rhoads, for example, asserts in the book *Essays in Literature* that Joe's character in the play "may be seen as a valid Christfigure . . . who takes on stature as heroic protagonist." This contributes to the play's "intense romanticism and unashamed sentimentality," he writes. Winifred L. Dusenbury, writing in her book *The Theme of Loneliness in Modern American Drama,* notes that each of the play's numerous characters "expresses one facet of the character of mankind" and "is trying in his own way to discover how to live in a way that life may seem filled with delight." He believes that these characters, isolated as they are at the play's beginning and joined together by the play's end, are the method Saroyan used to show his audience a way to live "so that life may hold no ugliness." John A. Mills notes in the *Midwest Quarterly* that the play has an existential bent and that it can be seen as "an embodiment of the absurd sense of life, expressing in its structure and all its parts man's confrontation with nothingness."

Thelma Shinn agrees with Mills that Saroyan has presented not simply a romantic view of life but one that is existentialist. She argues in *Modern Drama* that because Saroyan wrote contrasting elements within each character and within each scene, critics have had a difficult time grasping his intent.

Most have misinterpreted the play as "mere Romanticism," she contends. However, each character in the play is "trying to find for himself some meaning in this absurd

universe," and that meaning, if there is any, "appears to be within himself." This feature makes the play resolutely existential in theme, according to Shinn. "The ingredients are romantic . . . but Saroyan's treatment of the material reveals more perception than is usually attributed to him," she notes.

Frederic I. Carpenter in the *Pacific Spectator* responds to Saroyan's work with two impressions: that the preface he wrote for *The Time of Your Life* is one of his best pieces of writing and that, "judged by literary and artistic standards, the formal critics are often right in condemning him." The fact, though, that the public loved Saroyan and the critics often reviled him prompts Carpenter to suggest that the playwright does have something important to say: "he has progressively realized a consistent American philosophy," Carpenter writes.

Mary McCarthy, writing in the *Partisan Review* soon after the play's New York opening, places Saroyan above two of his contemporaries, playwright Clifford Odets and novelist John Steinbeck. She praises Saroyan's ability to "look at the world with the eyes of a sensitive newsboy, and to see it eternally brand-new and touched with wonder." While he may be "puerile and arrogant and sentimental . . . he is never cheap," she states.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sanderson examines Joe's use of Kit Carson and Tom in Saroyan's play.

One of the most striking facts in William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* is that Joe is nearly immobile. Joe is the play's central character—nearly every other character exchanges at least a line or two with him, and he comments on all that he sees from his chair in Nick's bar. In fact, Joe's chair seems almost like a throne, an exalted perch from which he commands Tom to bring him odd items, dispenses small bits of wisdom, and grants favors for his preferred subjects.

If Joe is a king, though, he is an impotent one, in all senses of the word. John A. Mills explains it succinctly in the *Midwest Quarterly,* where he notes that Joe's immobility can be seen as "the external counterpart of an inner, psychic immobilization. Joe is stalled, incapable of movement . . . [and] unable to believe in the efficacy of human action, *any* human action." Joe is a student of life, not a liver of life, someone who exists almost completely in his head. "I'm a student. I study all things," he says to Tom. In fact, he violates Saroyan's imperative in the play's prologue: "In the time of your life, live." Joe is an eternal observer, and the actions he takes are limited. To compensate for this, Joe uses Tom and Kit Carson to make connections to a world in which he is unable to participate.

Many critics, including Mills, point to the obvious use of Tom as Joe's surrogate legs. Tom serves as Joe's legs in his ridiculous errands for chewing gum, toys, and a gun, and he once even lets Joe lean against him as they leave the bar. Beyond that, though, Joe also has Tom serve as his sexual surrogate in his relationship with the prostitute Kitty Duval. Joe obviously cares for Kitty, defending her against Nick's sly comments in the play's first act, saluting her inner beauty and stamina when he buys her champagne, and toasting "To the spirit, Kitty Duval." Saroyan's stage direction notes that when Joe first sees Kitty, he "recognizes her as a good person immediately," and when she sits down, he asks her, "with great compassion," about her dreams and desires. Joe understands that he cannot act when it comes to Kitty, so he pushes the love struck Tom to capture her heart in his stead. Joe directs Tom in his courting of Kitty, mimicking scenes from Edmond Rostand's play *Cyrano de Bergerac* by playing Cyrano to Tom's Christian. This happens in Saroyan's play numerous times but most remarkably when Kitty is telling a dumbstruck Tom about her fantasy of being an actress and having a handsome doctor fall in love with her. "Tom, didn't you ever want to be a doctor?" Kitty asks. Tom is momentarily stumped but finds his voice when he looks at Joe who, according to Saroyan's stage directions, "holds Tom's eyes again, encouraging Tom by his serious expression to go on talking." Joe does have his own memories and experiences of love, but they were mere beginnings that were interrupted before their promise could be fulfilled. Once, while in Mexico City, Joe fell in love with a woman named Mary, but he then discovered that she was only a few days away from marriage

to another man. He falls in love with a different Mary during the play but finds out that she is married and has two children.

While Joe's dependence on Tom is critical and allows him to connect with people and the world, it is his relationship with Kit Carson that truly energizes him. It is immediately apparent that Kit is different from the rest of the patrons in Nick's bar when he walks in and selects Joe's table as his drinking spot. The two men quickly bond with each other, especially when Kit opens his conversation by asking Joe, "I don't suppose you ever fell in love with a midget weighing thirty-nine pounds?" While this might appear to be a flippant question for anyone else, it is actually a question that goes straight to the heart of a man like Joe.

First, the question's remarkable subject matter immediately places Joe, for once, in the subordinate position in the conversation. Joe has controlled every other discussion he had been in, from asking Kitty about her dreams to demanding errands from Tom. Even when speaking with Nick, Joe holds the dominant position; in one scene, he condescendingly informs the bar owner, "Nick, I think you're going to be alright in a couple of centuries." Kit's question also must remind Joe of his limited experiences in the world and his failed efforts at love. When Kit will not complete the story of the thirty-nine-pound love interest, Joe keeps asking for more information. Each time, Kit gently ignores Joe and wanders off into an unrelated but equally crazy story. Kit is in complete control of the discussion, and Joe is as entranced with him as Tom is with Kitty.

Through Kit, Joe is able to see a remarkable world far outside the confines of the bar and his normal life. Despite his preeminent physical position in the bar and his financial advantage among the bar's patrons, Joe is a man with little actual experience—except the experience of earning money and being miserable about it. According to Saroyan's description at the play's start, Joe is "always bored, always superior. His expensive clothes are casually and youthfully worn and give him an almost boyish appearance." In contrast, Kit is a man who literally wears his life on his face. Saroyan describes Kit as "an old man," and Joe tells him, "You look more than sixty now." Kit points out, though, that he is a few years younger than sixty and that Joe must think he is older because "That's trouble showing in my face. Trouble and complications." In one of his tales, Kit also remembers "growing older every second" as he faced down a pack of angry dogs.

Kit has seen and done things that boggle the mind and are often beyond belief. Joe, however, accepts Kit and his remarkable stories. When Kit asks Joe if he is one of those who do not believe Kit's tales, Joe responds sincerely, "Of course I believe you. Living is an art. It's not bookkeeping. It takes a lot of rehearsing for a man to get to be himself." In Kit, Joe sees the set of legs he has really needed, so he must believe Kit.

Kit can do so much more for Joe than can the childish Tom. With Tom, Joe can entertain himself by asking for a few toys and chewing gum. He can come close to love by encouraging Tom's feelings for Kitty. He can even ask for a revolver, and Tom will bring one to him. But he does not truly know or understand what to do with the revolver until he meets Kit and has him explain how to load and shoot the gun.

Joe's immobility—and, indeed, his impotence—is never more clear than when he attempts to kill Blick with his new revolver. Everything seems pointed toward Joe's success: he has received a lesson on how to handle the gun, and he feels the fury necessary to kill another man, saying, "I've always wanted to kill somebody, but I never knew who it should be." However, nothing happens when he pulls the trigger. This is where Kit steps in to act for Joe. Moments later, after Joe's gun fails to fire, Kit re-enters the bar, and the two men "look at one another knowingly." Blick is now dead, and Kit is telling a story of how he "shot a man once. In San Francisco. . . . Fellow named Blick or Glick or something like that." Even though Joe does not pull the trigger and the gun that kills Blick is not his own, it is as if he has participated in the act, thanks to Kit.

Joe, despite his kindness to Kitty and to others, violates many of the lessons for living the good life that Saroyan outlines in the play's prologue. Because Joe cannot act, he cannot live—which goes against one of Saroyan's most urgent messages. Saroyan also writes in the prologue, "if the time comes to kill, kill and have no regret"—another rule that Joe is not able to uphold. Instead, Joe leaves the bar to Kit, and admiring patrons surround Kit, who is ready to take the preeminent position Joe once had. The patrons have chosen action over mere observation, the right choice in Saroyan's universe.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on *The Time of Your Life,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Mills explores the influence of modern existential literature on The Time of Your Life *and its absurd sense.*

In the conclusion of his 1976 article entitled, "Joe as Christ Type in Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*," Kenneth W. Rhoads suggested that "other interpretations of Joe may be validly advanced (although so far they seem not to have been)." Seven years of critical silence having followed the issuance of Rhoads's invitation, the time would seem to be ripe for an alternate reading of the character and the play, the more so since Saroyan's recent death is likely to have stirred up fresh interest in his work.

I should like to propose that Joe be viewed as an "*homme absurde,*" as defined by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* and that the play over which he presides be seen as an embodiment of the absurd sense of life, expressing in its structure and all its parts man's confrontation with nothingness, with "the unreasonable silence of the world."

To speak of a work by Saroyan in these terms is, in large measure, to fly in the face of received opinion. Saroyan's depiction of the human condition is usually thought of as sunny and positive, bordering on the sentimental. The two obituaries of record, in the New York *Times* and the London *Times,* both voiced the orthodox view. The former spoke of "his message of the disinherited rising above adversity with humor and courage" and the latter referred to "Saroyan's indestructible brand of rhapsodic optimism."

There is something in that, of course. Saroyan typically shows his characters coping with earthly existence with a light-heartedness which approaches the meretricious. There is an element of sweetness in his work which has no counterpart in the drama and fiction of Camus or Sartre, to say nothing of Dostoevsky or Beckett. But there is no fundamental incompatibility between an absurd view of the human enterprise and the adoption of an optimistic stance in the face of ultimate absurdity, pessimistic as most absurdist literature undoubtedly is. Brian Masters quotes Camus as having once said to an audience of Dominican Friars: "If Christianity is pessimistic as to man, it is optimistic as to human destiny. Well, I can say that, pessimistic as to human destiny, I am optimistic as to man." One thinks in this connection of Grand, in *The Plague,* a "little" man who carries on in the face of meaninglessness with a sanguine indomitability which differs from the posture of Saroyan's characters less in kind than in degree. But these are analogies which must be validated by close examination of Saroyan's text.

Before undertaking such an examination, however, it will be useful to establish Saroyan's spiritual kinship with the evangelists of the absurd, by reference to materials other than *The Time of Your Life*. Such a kinship is revealed again and again in Saroyan's first three volumes of personal reminiscence, *The Bicycle Rider in Beverly Hills*, *Here Comes There Goes You Know Who*, and *Not Dying*. Since all three were written ten to twenty years after *The Time of Your Life* (1939), the observations on life which they contain must be used with some care. But even if one looks only at those

statements in which Saroyan records his earliest responses to existence, the absurd sense of life stands clearly revealed. A representative sampling will suffice to make the point.

From *The Bicycle Rider*:

"From a very early time in my life I sensed quite
accurately the end of life.That is, that it *must* end, that
it *could* end any time, that the end did not come to pass
by reasonable or meaningful plan, purpose or pattern. . . .
After swimming I remember sitting with my
friends on the hot earth of the pasture bordering the
ditch, in the wonderful light and heat of the August
sun, and being miserable about my own impermanence,
insignificance, meaninglessness, and feebleness.

From *Here Comes There Goes*:

I took to writing at an early age to escape from
meaninglessness, uselessness, unimportance, insignificance,
poverty, enslavement, ill health, despair,
madness, and all manner of other unattractive, natural,
and inevitable things.
The cat would be gone for a good three or four days,
and then it would come back looking like a wreck and
sprawl out and start to heal, the writer of Ecclesiastes
himself. All vanity. All sorrow and ignorance. For
God's sake, where's the meaning of it, and the
dish of milk?

From *Not Dying*:

I'm not sure, but then the thing that I am *about,* the
thing I have for the greater part of my life *been* about,
is to consider and reconsider, and then to consider and
reconsider again, in the expectation of either finding
out or of *knowing* it is impossible for me to find out. I
don't know. I mean, of course, that I don't know
anything, with absolute certainty, with finality, with
(if you like) *final* finality.
I have always had a sneaking suspicion that work is a
kind of excuse for failure, general failure—to know,
to understand, to cherish, to love, to believe, and so
on. It is a kind of evasion, a kind of escape from the
knowledge that one is entirely without grace, that one
is altogether ill and mad.

Such asseverations reveal a mind fully conversant with absurdity, and hence, a mind fully capable of creating a dramatic character imbued with a similar sensibility. That Joe is such a character can be seen in nearly everything he says and does in the course of the action.

One of the most conspicuous features of Joe's character is his immobility. Except for the move to Kitty's hotel room (about which more later) he scarcely stirs. Others come and go—indeed, the play is more than commonly replete with exits and entrances—but not Joe. He remains a still center amid the flux of quotidian activity, relying on the faithful Tom to do such fetching and carrying as he requires. At one point he hints that he is physically incapable of locomotion. "I don't dance," he tells Mary, and then goes on to say, "I can hardly walk." When she asks, "You mean you're tight?," he says "No. I mean *all* the time." Saroyan comments revealingly on this exchange in *Here Comes There Goes*:

> Dance? I could hardly walk. Joe, in this same play I'm talking about, said it for me, precisely in those words. This didn't mean something was the matter with his feet and legs, though. It meant something else.

From the context in which this observation occurs it is clear what, for Saroyan, that "something else" is. He has been declaring his admiration for Bojangles and others he has seen who *can* dance and in the process the term is elevated to the metaphoric plane where it takes on the meaning of "to live, to know how to live, to be engaged, to have found a role, a purpose for living." Joe's physical immobilization may thus be seen as the external counterpart of an inner, psychic immobilization. Joe is stalled, incapable of movement, because, having glimpsed the absurd, he is unable to believe in the efficacy of human action, *any* human action.

This state of mind is manifested in many other ways, both explicitly and implicitly. As he can hardly walk, he can also hardly talk, can hardly summon up the will to verbally engage external reality. His typical utterances are terse, laconic, flat and monosyllabic. It is significant that he delivers himself of more than a single, simple declarative sentence almost exclusively on those occasions when he is goaded into explaining his inertia; paradoxically, he talks only to account for his failure to talk (or walk, or act). One such speech occurs when Tom finally musters the courage to ask where Joe gets his money. Joe looks at Tom "*sorrowfully, a little irritated*" and *"speaks clearly, slowly and solemnly":*

> Now don't be a fool, Tom. Listen carefully. If anybody's got any money—to hoard or to throw away—you can be sure he stole it from other people. Not from rich people who can spare it, but from poor people who can't. From their lives and from their dreams. I'm no exception. I *earned* the money I throw away. I stole it like everybody else does. I hurt people to get it.

Loafing around this way, I *still* earn money. The
money itself earns more. I still hurt people. . . .

This much of the speech, if read in isolation from what follows immediately and in isolation from other materials in the play, might seem to make Joe a social rebel, a man who has withdrawn in protest from the capitalist system, who refuses to be party any longer to the social Darwinism which makes every man a predator of his fellow creatures. Indeed, there is no reason to deny Joe a social conscience. Undoubtedly it was a causative factor in his withdrawal from the world. But it was only a factor, and a relatively minor one. Joe's quarrel is with existence, with the human condition, *sub specie aeternitatis,* and not merely with the institutions of twentieth-century industrial society. This is revealed, in a negative way, in Joe's reluctance to condemn Blick, the play's chief representative of militant fascism, a bully who is "out to change the world from something bad to something worse." "It's not him," Joe tells Nick. "It's everything." And a few lines later: "He may not be so bad, deep down underneath."

Joe has little or no faith in social revolution as a cure for human malaise. When McCarthy, speaking for suffering humanity, tries to get Joe to side with him against Krupp, another fascist-type ("All I do is carry out orders, carry out orders"), Joe remains steadfastly neutral: "Everything's right. . . . I'm with everybody. One at a time."

Even when confronted with ocular proof of Blick's bullying ways, Joe is unable to take decisive action against him. He goes through the motions, points the gun and pulls the trigger, but nothing happens. He blames "dumb Tom" for having bought "a six-shooter that won't even shoot once," but, in fact, he had himself removed the cartridges not ten minutes earlier. Whether the attempted assassination of Blick is pure charade or Joe has actually forgotten about the cartridges (his mind dulled by drink?) is impossible to say. But if Saroyan manages the incident rather clumsily, his reason for including it seems nevertheless clear: he stays the hand of his protagonist because he recognizes that decisive action would run counter to the radically uncommitted nature of the character he has been at pains to depict in all that has gone before. Joe does not act because he lacks the necessary conviction, however much he may hide that fact from his own consciousness by conveniently "forgetting" that the weapon is unloaded, or however much he may hide it from others by blaming Tom.

That Joe cannot act, in the social sphere or any other sphere, he explains in the conclusion to his lengthy answer to Tom about the source of his income.

. . . I don't do anything. I don't *want* to do anything
any more. There isn't anything I can do that won't
make me feel embarrassed. Because I can't do simple,
good things. I haven't the patience. And I'm too
smart. Money is the guiltiest thing in the world. It
stinks. Now, don't ever bother me about it again.

Surely such remarks can be interpreted in a way that establishes a family resemblance between Joe and the alienated, disaffected, anti-heroes who people the world of

modernist fiction and drama. In Camus's terms, Joe has come to regard all tasks as Sisyphean, as so much meaningless activity, activity which is "embarrassing" because it does not have, cannot have, intrinsic value or ultimate efficacy. Like Dostoevsky's Underground Man, Joe is cursed with "lucidity," that "full-fledged disease" which obviates action; he is "too smart." Like the Underground Man he envies those "spontaneous people and the men of action" who lack lucidity but he knows he can never again be one of them. He cannot "do simple things," cannot, like a Russian peasant, be a contented hewer of wood and drawer of water. Consciousness will not allow it. "Before encountering the absurd," Camus writes, "the everyday man lives with aims, a concern for the future or for justification. . . . He weighs his chances, he counts on 'someday,' his retirement or the labor of his sons." Joe has been an "everyday man" but can never be again. When Mary asks why he drinks, he replies:

Because I don't like to be gypped. Because I don't like
to be dead most of the time and just a little alive every
once in a long while. *(Pause)* If I don't drink, I
become fascinated by unimportant things—like everybody
else. I get busy. Do things. All kinds of little
stupid things, for all kinds of little stupid reasons.
Proud, selfish, *ordinary* things. I've done them. Now I
don't do anything. *I live all the time.* Then I go
to sleep.

Not yet grasping his point, Mary asks: "What are your plans?" and he answers: "Plans? I haven't got any. I just get up." And then the light dawns. "*Beginning to understand everything,*" she replies: "Oh, yes. Yes, of course." Following this, Joe returns to the question of why he drinks, struggling, as usual, with inarticulateness, but eventually "*working it out.*"

Twenty-four hours. Out of the twenty-four hours at
least twenty-three and a half are—my God, I don't
know why—dull, dead, boring, empty and murderous.
Minutes on the clock, *not time of living.* It doesn't
make any difference who you are or what you do,
twenty-three and a half hours of the twenty-four are
spent *waiting.*
That goes on for days and days, and weeks and
months and years, and years, and the first thing you
know *all* the years are dead. All the minutes are dead.
There's nothing to wait for any more. Nothing except
minutes on the clock. No time of life. Nothing but
minutes, and idiocy. (*Pause*) Does that answer your
question?

This is a view of the human condition which bears a striking resemblance to one put forward by another "immobilized" protagonist, Hamm of *Endgame:* "Moment by

moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of (*he hesitates*) . . . that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life."

Joe's sporadic outbursts of self-analysis provide perhaps the most explicit evidence of his immersion in absurdity, but his state of mind manifests itself in other ways as well. In the play's opening sequence, after Joe has purchased a stack of newspapers, glanced at them and thrown them away in disgust, the Arab picks one up, reads the headline, and "*as if rejecting everything else a man might say about the world,*" intones for the first time a line which is to run through the play like a lyric refrain: "No foundation. All the way down the line." The incident establishes a spiritual nexus between the two characters; the Arab says what Joe thinks; they share a belief in the emptiness of all human endeavor; it has no foundation, no intrinsic value. Repeated and embellished throughout the play, the Arab's judgment upon the world carries the same thematic force as the cryptic pronouncement with which Estragon opens *Waiting for Godot:* "Nothing to be done." The second time we hear from the Arab he develops his theme, his *sole* theme, at greater length:

No foundation. All the way down the line. What.
What-not. Nothing. I go walk and look at sky.

Krupp immediately turns to Joe for an explanation: "What? What-not? What's that mean?" It is significant that Krupp fails to comprehend because Krupp is a man who cannot live without absolutes, without direction. He has surrendered his freedom, put on a uniform, and follows orders, bashing heads at the command of his masters, secure in the conviction that they know what is to be done, even if he does not. It is also significant that Joe *does* understand and is ready with an explication, further revealing that he and the Arab are like-minded men, differing only in the beverages they choose as aids to lucidity:

What? What-not? That means this side, that side.
Inhale, exhale. What: birth. What-not: death. The
inevitable, the astounding, the magnificent seed of
growth and decay in all things. Beginning, and end.
That man, in his own way, is a prophet. He is one who,
with the help of *beer,* is able to reach that state of deep
understanding in which what and what-not, the reasonable
and the unreasonable, are one.

Once again, Saroyan shows himself to be Beckettian *avant la lettre;* "inhale, exhale" reminds us of the later playwright's thirty-second dramatization of the human condition called *Breath,* and the evocation of "Beginning, and end" expresses the same sense of life as Hamm's "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on."

The Arab thus functions as a kind of choral character, articulating in a quasilyric mode that sense of estrangement, of being rudderless in "a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights", which colors everything that Joe says and does. The Arab's presence in the play expands its reference, amplifies its resonance, by suggesting that

Joe is not to be written off as a special case, an aberration, but is to be viewed as broadly representative. At the end of Act Four, when the Arab plays a solo on the harmonica, Wesley reminds us that the music expresses the age-old pain of earthly existence: "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." Much the same might be said of the Arab's verbal laments. Coming just after his declaration that he no longer works ("For what? Nothing"), the Arab's harmonica threnody reinforces his similarity to Joe. Both have been stopped dead by their perception of the absurd. They have fetched up in "those waterless deserts where thought reaches its confines." For such men, Camus continues, "The real effort is to stay there . . . and to examine closely the odd vegetation of those distant regions." With the aid of champagne and beer, respectively, Joe and the Arab keep the absurd vividly present to consciousness, so as not to be seduced into "bad faith," into the delusion that "little stupid things" are important, into performing tasks which are "for nothing," as though they were "for something."

But stasis is not the only possible posture before the absurd. Camus points out that "on the one hand the absurd teaches that all experiences are unimportant, and on the other it urges toward the greatest quantity of experiences." This "quantitative ethic," this joyous acceptance and energetic use of freedom is exhibited in the play by Kit Carson ("real" name Murphy), a man who seems to know what Joe and the Arab know but who has gone on from there. Carson seems to know that in the absence of absolutes "everything is permitted," and so he has led a rootless, improvised, richly varied existence, reveling in a multiplicity of sensations in the brief time allotted before all sensation ceases. Of the four human types whom Camus describes as embodying most fully and clearly the quantitative ethic which absurdity leads to—Don Juan, the creative artist, the actor, and the conqueror—Carson most closely resembles the actor. He has herded cattle on a bicycle, passed himself off as a mining engineer, masqueraded as a woman and changed his name as casually as other men change their shirts. He calls himself Murphy now but Saroyan says *"he looks as if he might have been Kit Carson at one time"* (106), and that is the name the author assigns him throughout. The actor, Camus explains, "abundantly illustrates every month or every day that so suggestive truth that there is no frontier between what a man wants to be and what he is. Always concerned with better representing, he demonstrates to what a degree appearing creates being." And so it is with Carson as Joe, characteristically, perceives. "Now, son, don't tell me you don't believe me, either?" Carson asks, after recounting some of his adventures. "Of course I believe you," Joe answers. "Living is an art. It's not bookkeeping. It takes a lot of rehearsing for a man to get to be himself."

Joe does not live as Carson lives but he immediately recognizes and approves of the ethic of experience which the latter has embraced. They are brothers in absurdity, fellow outsiders. "You're the first man I've ever met who believes me," says Carson.

That they are both alike and not alike is seen in their responses to the cruelty of Blick. Both deplore it but only Carson is able to turn his moral repugnance into effective action, striking down the oppressor moments after Joe's abortive attempt to do so. Though Carson has, by his own account, repeatedly run away from violence on occasions when only his personal safety was at stake, he feels constrained to stand and

fight against the threat to the general good, to universal human nature, which Blick, the totalitarian ideologue, so chillingly embodies. In this, Carson resembles Cherea of Camus's *Caligula.* Though he agrees with Caligula, "to a point," that "all [actions] are on an equal footing," Cherea executes the tyrant, because, as he tells him, "you're pernicious, and you've got to go."

Joe, the Arab, and Kit Carson are perhaps the play's most vividly rendered exemplars of the absurd sensibility but others among the dramtis personae also bear witness in a variety of modes and degrees. Prominent among these secondary characters is Harry the Hoofer. Saroyan introduces him as a man who is *"out of place everywhere, embarrassed and encumbered by the contemporary costume, sick at heart, but determined to fit in somewhere".* In short, he is another character whose life has "no foundation"; he lacks a ground of being but manfully shoulders the task of improvising one, the existential task of "making himself". His primary medium is the dance and he thus embodies a variation on the dance metaphor which we have found Joe using. Harry's restless, ceaseless soft-shoe patterns and variations are the obverse of Joe's immobility; Harry constructs designs to fill the void left by nature, replacing one configuration with another in full awareness of the ultimate emptiness of all of them. "I felt that man must make," Saroyan has written, "that he must make ceaselessly, again and again. . . ."

Harry also "makes" in another medium; he is a stand-up comic and his monologues speak always of flux and incoherence, of life's refusal to make sense:

> Now, I'm standing on the corner of Third and Market. I'm looking around. I'm figuring it out. There it is. Right in front of me. The whole city. The whole world. People going by. They're going somewhere. I don't know where, but they're going. I ain't going *anywhere.* Where the hell can you go? I'm figuring it out. All right, I'm a citizen. A fat guy bumps his stomach into the face of an old lady. They were in a hurry. Fat and old. *They bumped.* Boom. I don't know. It may mean war. War. Germany. England. Russia. I don't know for sure. (*Loudly, dramatically, he salutes, about faces, presents arms, aims, and fires*) WAAAAAR.

This, like Harry's other routines, is an absurd work of art in miniature. "The absurd work of art," Camus explains, "illustrates thought's renouncing of its prestige and its resignation to being no more than the intelligence that works up appearances and covers with images what has no reason. If the world were clear, art would not exist". Small wonder that most of the regulars at Nick's waterfront honky-tonk fail to comprehend Harry's bizarre accounts of day-to-day existence. They represent a "new kind of comedy," a comedy at which it is difficult if not impossible to laugh—black comedy, in short. "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness," says Nell in *Endgame*. "Yes,

it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh anymore."

Strong intimations of absurdity appear also in the little episode involving Elsie and Dudley. After a peremptory exchange of greetings with her suitor, Elsie, a nurse, launches a bitter critique of the terms upon which human beings hold their tenure of life: "So many people are sick. Last night a little boy died. I love you, but—." Dudley protests, but she is adamant:

> Love is for birds. They have wings to fly away on
> when it's time for flying. For tigers in the jungle
> because they don't know their end. We know *our* end.
> Every night I watch over poor, dying men. I hear them
> breathing, crying, talking in their sleep. Crying for air
> and water and love, for mother and field and sunlight.
> We can never know love or greatness. We *should*
> know both.

The scene is analogous to that crucial confrontation in *The Plague* between Dr. Rieux and Father Paneloux, following the death in agony of the son of M. Othon. "That child, anyhow, was innocent, and you know it as well as I do," says Rieux. "And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture." Like Ivan Karamazov before him, Rieux refuses to countenance a fabric of human destiny which requires the torture of the innocent. In that "immoral" scheme of things lies one of the great headwaters of the absurd. Elsie's revolt against this irrational evil no doubt strikes us as rather facile, unearned, compared to the hard-won and meticulously articulated perceptions of Rieux and Ivan, but it springs from an identical source.

Another familiar topos of absurdist literature occurs, if only in a radically truncated form, in the behavior of The Lady, a socialite who has come to Nick's with her husband on a "slumming" expedition. When Joe passes cigars around, the Lady blithely takes one, bites the tip off, and accepts a light from Carson, to the distress of her straight-laced spouse: "The mother of five grown men, and she's still looking for *romance.* No. I forbid it." In thus flouting the arbitrary social code which proscribes cigar-smoking for a wife-and-mother, she opens herself up to experience, making a brave, if pathetic, little bid for that freedom which is a consequence of the acceptance of absurdity. Characteristically, Joe defends her against her serious-minded, law-giving husband: "What's the matter with you? Why don't you leave her alone? What are you always pushing your women around for?"

That we are to see the Lady's inchoate rebellion in existential terms is suggested not only by Joe's energetic support of it but also by the context in which it occurs. Joe distributes the cigars immediately after removing from his mouth the enormous wad of gum he has put there in his chewing contest with Tom and Carson. In the mock earnestness with which Joe engages in this competition, he parodies those struggles for achievement which characterize the serious world, the world of "aims," which he has repudiated. The incident has something of the flavor and point, though not the force, of

the celebrated passage in Beckett's *Molloy,* where the eponymous hero is made to wrestle for five pages with the logistics involved in transferring sixteen pebbles, one by one, from his pockets to his mouth and back again. The gum-chewing match creates a climate of challenge to orthodox opinion about "allowable" adult behavior into which the "unseemly" conduct of the Lady fits very naturally. The point is underscored by the fact that Joe wraps his gum in a *Liberty* magazine, one of three publications (the others are *Time* and *Life*) which Joe had Tom purchase along with the gum and cigars. *Time* and *Life* echo, of course, the key terms of the play's title (as does Precious Time, one of the horses Joe bets on) and frequent use of such terms serves to remind us of the play's primary thematic thrust: the time of life is short and ends in death and time is therefore precious and must be savoured in the lucid acknowledgment of total liberty.

Yet another image of absurdity appears in Willie's running battle with the saloon's "marble-game," or pin-ball machine. Saroyan points up the symbolic significance of Willie's heroic struggle in a lengthy stage direction:

> [Willie] stands straight and pious before the contest. Himself vs. the machine. Willie vs. Destiny. His skill and daring vs. the cunning and trickery of the novelty industry of America, and the whole challenging world. He is the last of the American Pioneers, with nothing more to fight but the machine, with no other reward than lights going on and off, and six nickels for one. Before him is the last champion, the machine. He is the last challenger, the young man with nothing to do in the world . . .

Willie eventually "defeats" the machine, mastering Destiny, he believes, through skill and force of will: "I just don't like the idea of anything getting the best of me. A machine or anything else. Myself, I'm the kind of a guy who makes up his mind to do something, and then goes to work and does it. There's no other way a man can be a success at anything". But his triumph is hollow and short-lived. The next time he attacks his adversary, the machine records a victory by sheer chance, and goes on doing so, unpredictably, arbitrarily. Like the cosmos which it represents, the "machine is out of order." "Something's wrong," Willie ruefully reports.

The absurd sense of life is expressed not only in the statements and activities of the characters but in the very structure of the work. The play is conspicuously non-linear, palpably static, mirroring in its randomness and clutter that chaos which, in the absurdist view, characterizes life itself. The play lacks plot because life lacks plot. In life, as Camus says, "there is no scenario, but a successive and incoherent illustration." It is true, of course, that all of Saroyan's work, fiction as well as drama, is slack and disjointed, but the fact remains that on this occasion (whatever may be the case elsewhere) the looseness is thematically functional, operating in close congruence with the elements of thought and character which carry the essential import of the work. The harmony of feeling and form is much of the reason why *The Time of Your Life* is one of Saroyan's most aesthetically satisfying accomplishments. He once confessed that he

wished to write "the way snow falls". The metaphor is strikingly apt. In *The Three Sisters,* another work comprised of the "aimless" accumulation of incident, Tusenback, told that life as he has described it does not "make sense," replies: "It's snowing out there. Does that make sense?"

But the play is not absolutely free of consequential action. In the relationship between Tom and Kitty Duval there is a boy-meets-girl plot, of sorts, presided over by Joe and by him propelled forward to a dramatically predictable denouement. Joe's involvement in this romance between a lovable stumblebum and a whore with a heart of gold represents his chief departure from non-alignment and, correspondingly, Saroyan's chief concession to conventional storytelling. As such, the whole episode seems out of key with the desultoriness which is otherwise pervasive; it represents an aesthetic lapse which is "given away," as it were, by the theatrically awkward shift of locale to Kitty's apartment in Act Three; the abrupt and short-lived excursion to a different physical world transports us to a different dramatic world, temporarily dissipating the emotional and spiritual ambience emanating from the honky-tonk. It is as though Hamm and Clov have ventured out of the shelter.

Though the Tom-Kitty plot borders on sentimental cliché, Joe functions in it in a way that is not fundamentally alien to his nature as *homme absurde.* Though he succeeds in his match-making partly by providing material assistance to the lovers—a job for Tom, a new wardrobe and domicile for Kitty—his more important contribution is spiritual. Rhoads focuses on this point in developing his case for Joe as Christ-type. Tom becomes Lazarus, brought back from death by Joe prior to the action, and Kitty becomes the woman taken in adultery, treated with compassion by Joe and told to go and sin no more. These parallels are admittedly quite arresting, more so than some of the other scriptural analogues which Rhoads presents. Joe is indeed a kind of saviour. But if we are to think of him in such terms we would do well to associate him with the Christ of Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" vignette, rather than with the Messiah described by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. For, like Dostoevsky's Christ, Joe has no gospel to preach, no glad tidings to bring, except the gospel of existential freedom. He repeatedly refuses to be dogmatic. When Tom declares, with something like worshipful awe: "You're a different kind of a guy," Joe rebukes him: "Don't be silly. I don't understand things. I'm trying to understand them." Earlier, he has told Nick: "I study things," and when Tom asks him to explain why he has called his three hours in the automobile with him and Kitty "the most delightful, the most somber, and the most beautiful" he has ever known, Joe repeats the self-description with quiet emphasis:

I'm a student. I study all things. All. All. And when
my study reveals something of beauty in a place or in a
person where by all rights only ugliness or death
should be revealed, then I know how full of goodness
this life is. And that's a very good thing to know.
That's a truth I shall always seek to verify.

Hence, the only "word" he has to offer the lovers is that their lives are in their hands, that they are free to make, or remake themselves as they choose. There is no "way"

except the way of choice. "You've got to figure out something to do that you won't mind doing very much," he tells Tom. When Tom fails to come up with anything, Joe offers a gentle nudge, couching his suggestion in the same language he has used earlier in speaking of his own work experience: "Tom, would you be embarrassed driving a truck?" Tom eagerly accepts the position offered and in so doing adopts a philosophic stance not unlike Joe's own, the stance of the outsider, keenly aware of life's absurdity:

> Joe, that's just the kind of work I *should* do. Just sit there and travel, and look, and smile, and bust out laughing . . . .

Joe's ministry to the "fallen" Kitty also stresses the paramount importance of freely-accepted, self-created values:

> 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 anywhere for her to talk to, except you. They all make her talk like a whore. After a while, she'll *believe* them . . . .

Understandably, Kitty reacts with fear and trembling to the freedom Joe offers her. Her first, very human, impulse is to assign irresistible power to the social and psychological forces which have cast her in the role of prostitute: "Too many things have happened to me . . . . I can't stand being alone. I'm no good. I tried very hard . . . . Everything *smells* different. I don't know how to feel, or what to think . . . . It's what I've wanted all my life, but it's too late. . . ." Joe remains nondirective; the choice must be hers: "I don't know what to tell you, Kitty. . . . I can't *tell* you what to do . . . ".

But Blick precipitates a climax in Kitty's struggle for self-possession and self-determination. By forcing her to perform a strip-tease, he seeks to demonstrate, to her and to the world, that she *is* a slut, essentially and irrevocably. Only then does Joe take a hand. He stops the shameful proceedings and by sending her off across the country with Tom puts her feet, if only tenuously, on the first rung of the ladder of self-realization.

A few moments later, having failed to kill Blick and having learned that someone else has succeeded at that task, Joe says goodbye to the saloon, probably for good:

> Nick: Will I see you tomorrow?
> Joe: I don't know. I don't think so.

Where is he going? "I don't know," he says. "Nowhere." Rhoads finds "the aura of vagueness and mystery" which hangs over this departure appropriate to a Christ-figure, whose "ending, whether it be in death or mere disappearance" should be as obscure as his origins. His "ministry" here is finished, Rhoads concludes; "other Toms and Kittys in other places need him, and a new mission calls."

But Joe's mission has been a mission of self-discovery as much as anything else and it seems as reasonable to conclude that he now changes his base of operations in order to continue his "study"—of himself and the world and his place in it. He has, after all, some new material to work on; he has for the first time tried to act on an old desire: "I always wanted to kill somebody, but I never knew who it should be," he had announced as he took up the unloaded pistol. His action has brought with it both self-exposure and self-confrontation and we can imagine him wanting to withdraw in order to think further on these things. That something of the sort is on his mind is strongly suggested by the event which triggers his leave-taking. "Joe, you wanted to kill that guy'," Nick says with surprise and admiration, and offers to buy him a bottle of champagne. Joe immediately goes for his hat and coat. "What's the matter?" Nick asks. "Nothing. Nothing."

Joe might be compared here to Scipio in *Caligula.* Invited by Cherea to join in the assassination of Caligula, Scipio cannot make that choice, though he understands and partly approves of Cherea's motives. Instead, he leaves, determined to "try to discover the meaning of it all."

At virtually every turn then, the dramatic materials which make up *The Time of Your Life* evoke comparisons with that spiritual topography familiar to us in the masterworks of modern existential literature. Saroyan's ability to translate his vision of the absurd into a wholly apposite and powerfully expressive symbolic form no doubt falls below that of his more illustrious forerunners and contemporaries. It is all too easy to read the play as an amiable, if somewhat eccentric slice-of-life, a mere chronicle of the quaint goings-on at a typically American waterfront saloon. On the surface, of course, the play *is* that, and it is as such that it has won an honored place among the classics of American realism. But its surface charm ought not to blind us to the weightier metaphysical import which lies just beneath.

Source: John A. Mills, "'What. What-not.': Absurdity in Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life,*" in *Midwest Quarterly,*

Vol. XXVI, No. 2, Winter 1985, pp. 139-59.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Gassner provides an analysis of the production of The Time of Your Life *asserting that "its uniqueness resides in its form rather than its content or meaning."* No play demonstrates the potential vitality of our stage at the end of the 1930's more convincingly than William Saroyan's fugue, *The Time of Your Life*. In most countries his first effort, *My Heart's in the Highlands*, would have been hooted off the stage as the work of a charlatan. Here it was recognized by most critics as a thing of beauty, even if its charm was found to defy analysis. It was not the masterpiece some commentators thought it was; its thinking was decidedly muddled and its assault on the penumbral regions of the mind grew somewhat wearying. Nevertheless, few of us failed to respond to the advent of a fine talent, and within a few months his new play, *The Time of Your Life*, had been jointly acquired by Eddie Dowling, for whom the central character had been written, and by the veteran Theatre Guild. Disaster seemed imminent at its Boston showing, and so discouraging seemed its prospects that it might have normally been discarded as hopeless. Instead, however, the author, Mr. Dowling, Miss Theresa Helburn, and Mr. Lawrence Langner refused to accept defeat, and their New York production is at present one of the outstanding plays of the season.

Theoretically, the play should have been a disastrous failure, and purists must exclaim that it is not a play at all. So must writers, young and old, who have gone to the trouble of learning the rudiments of dramatic technique only to find that their efforts are unrewarded or are less rewarded than the seemingly scrambled lucubrations of a short-story writer who does not hesitate to proclaim himself a genius. What they fail to see is that there may be direction in indirection, and that the theatre which lives by nuances of acting has always been grateful for nuances in the drama except in the most embattled episodes of its history. Moreover, there is a lasting power in obliquity, in leaving implications to the audience, in asking it to participate in an experience instead of driving the spectator to an acceptance of a philosophy of action that he will very probably forget the moment he leaves the theatre unless he is pre-convinced. It is generally safer to steep him in the substance of the life of his times and to let him try to make sense and purpose out of it. For the record, it is necessary only to go back to Shakespeare, whose disapproval of both feudalism and Renaissance Machiavellism was so implicit that it could be more explicit than any preachment—and far more persuasive. Even Euripides practiced this art, as did Ibsen at his best, not to speak of Chekhov and other moderns. Odets, in our own day, has employed the same means in *Golden Boy, Rocket to the Moon,* and in portions of both *Awake and Sing* and *Paradise Lost;* so has Paul Green in *Johnny Johnson,* and even in *The House of Connelly* and *Hymn to the Rising Sun.*

Most of these examples have been chosen with malice prepense, since they have been recognized as "social plays," and since there is much to be said for those who maintain that all significant plays of our day must have social implications. (Actually, there never was a time when most meritorious serious plays and many comedies were not socially oriented. The proponents of social drama are therefore frequently thinking merely of degrees of social meaning rather than of the mere presence of this attribute.) The truth

about *The Time of Your Life* is that its uniqueness resides in its form rather than in its content or meaning, and even the form departs from convention only by a greater degree of obliquity and by a more persistent employment of nuances than we have found customary. If the play is to be measured by the yardstick of social criticism, it is not likely to be as exasperatingly negligible as some young critics are inclined to believe. If it is to be measured by the yardstick of conventional dramaturgy, it is also not to be dismissed as a hopeless object of curves and angles. Only those who believe that social drama must be hortatory, or that a good play must adhere to the rules of Freytag, will not know how to measure it. It may also be argued with some validity that we need not measure a work of art at all; it is necessary only to feel its magic. That too is criticism or a form of judgment, and the trouble with this absolutely valid approach is only that one cannot argue about it.

The Time of Your Life is a genre picture with a wealth of chiaroscuro, the latter being intellectual or critical as well as sensory. Packed into a "honky-tonk," a saloon that supplies entertainment as well as hard liquor, are a number of people. They are, superficially considered, hopelessly miscellaneous. But they have one thing in common —their burden of aspiration or of frustration or of both. The young marble-game addict, the melancholy comedian, the Negro who collapses of hunger and plays divinely when he is revived, the overzealous comedian, the ludicrously love-sick swain who telephones a nurse in vain until she finally appears and gives him more than he dared to expect, the prostitute who veils her past in dreams, the sensation-seeking wealthy woman married to a comically strait-laced husband, the policeman who detests his job —who are these and others but waifs of the world, impressing upon us the fact that we are all waifs of one kind or another!

Nor is this all. Those who want more cohesion in the drama will find it, if they have unimpaired eyes, in the presence of Joe, a shiftless young man with money at his disposal. Everything, every event or presence in the play, impinges upon him, so that he becomes the sensitive film and focus of the episodes, and many of the events are directly or indirectly inspired by him. He is many things in one, this man who acquired money and sickened of it, who is alone and inscrutably so, as so often happens if not to the same extent. Out of his loneliness and sensitivity he has developed a pity for all mankind and a feeling of brotherhood; and having money and time at his disposal, he has made himself a paraclete or comforter of his fellow creatures, giving understanding where it is needed and material help where it is imperative. He is not a wise legislator or a sound philanthropist, and a course of socially integrated action is foreign to him, for he is mysteriously wrapped up in himself and in his loneliness. One cannot attribute supernatural or social leadership to this figure. But as a very human person, he is the catalytic agent of a large portion of the play. He has a mystic prototype in the Paraclete of Evreinov's *The Chief Thing,* and a realistic one in the interfering Luka of Gorky's *Night's Lodging.* There is, in short, a subtle integration in the play.

Those who want more social pertinence than has been indicated thus far will also find it. To the implicit reference of frustration in our life must be added the hardly irrelevant idea of human brotherhood; all mankind is to be pitied, a doctrine that needs some reaffirmation at this time. "All," is, however, too large a prescription, and for practical

purposes a dangerous one. All mankind is pitiful, indeed; even the sadistic vigilante who bullies the prostitute and maltreats the Negro who comes to her defense is a pitiful specimen. Still, Saroyan realizes, at least fugaciously, that there is a degree of evil that can be overcome only by the application of force. Joe wants to give his gun to "a good man who can use it," and the fantastic relic of the frontier, Kit Carson, who claims the honor of having killed the vigilante is received with approval by Joe; it is to him that he bequeaths the pistol. As a course of social action, this assassination is of course deplorable, when approached literally; apprehended symbolically or suggestively, it is only too pertinent today when men of good will are called upon to cope with international bullies. And if we must labor the point, it is also possible to call attention to the fact that the casually introduced characters suggest the actual social scene. Surely the hungry work-hunting Negro represents something more than an isolated case; does he not remind us of a certain pressing problem that all the New Dealers have been unable to solve in eight long years, as well as of the richness of talent or spirit that goes begging in the streets! The seedy comedian who fails to amuse because he has nothing to laugh about represents a shrewd appraisal of reality by the playwright; and there is much satiric comment inherent in the moronically hopeful lad at the slot machine whose Jobian patience is finally rewarded with a collection of nickels and a display of three American flags. Beyond the confines of the saloon, moreover, there are no brass bands but picket lines, and the proletarian dock workers are ready to lock horns with the proletarian police.

Compassion and perception, and laughter and pity, are fused in Saroyan's play into one of the richest experiences provided by the American theatre in many years. Nothing is basically vague, although everything is fugitive, in this play. If it does not come to a single point (and there is no reason why any play must, provided it is richly alive), all its separate points are vividly realized. Only a certain sentimentality attenuates them, particularly in a bedroom scene. The prime condition of dramatic structure is not actually the principle that everything in a play must be tied up in a knot (*vide King Lear, Henry IV, Peer Gynt,* etc.) but that there should be no inconsistencies in the development of character and plot. A writer who keeps us in one groove and then suddenly jolts us out of it is far more culpable than a Saroyan.

An analysis of the production is impossible within the limits of this article, which has stressed the playwriting problem because it is uppermost in the discussions of the play. There has been some debate on the question of style, and it has been maintained with some show of reason that the original direction by Robert Lewis, who treated the play as fantasy, was more appropriate to the spirit of Saroyan's work. The fact is, however, that the author did not think so, and that the production supplied by Messrs. Saroyan, Dowling, Langner, and Miss Helburn is both affecting and amusing. This does not of course settle the larger problem of form, and I trust I shall have the opportunity to return to it. One may, however, ponder the question whether this play is a fantasy; I do not think it is—one does not consider Brueghel's crowded canvases or Igor Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* fantastic. The assumption that anything not completely integrated constitutes fantasy is an illusion of reason-inebriated members of the intelligentsia; to them we recommend the platitude that a good deal of private and social life is unintegrated and illogical.

Source: John Gassner, "Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life,*" in *Dramatic Soundings: Evaluations and Retractions Culled from 30 Years of Dramatic Criticism,* edited by Glenn Loney, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1968, pp. 407-10.

Adaptations

In 1948, United Artists made a film based on *The Time of Your Life* starring Jimmy Cagney (available on VHS format tape). A television adaptation of the play was produced for the show *Playhouse 90* in October 1958. In addition, a DVD version of the play is available. The disc is a recording of a 1976 performance of the play that was presented on a New York stage without an audience; it was part of the Broadway Archive Series and was directed by Kirk Browning and featured Patti LuPone.

Topics for Further Study

Many of the issues and themes that arise in Saroyan's play still have relevance in the early twenty-first century, such as searching for personal fulfillment, understanding what constitutes success, and defending against evil. Imagine that you are going to stage the play and set it in America today. Which features of the play will you change, and which ones will you keep the same? Explain your reasoning.

The 1930s saw labor unions gathering political strength and popularity. McCarthy and Krupp are friends in the play, but they are on opposite sides of a labor dispute: McCarthy may join a strike to keep a ship from being unloaded, and Krupp may have to protect workers who cross the picket lines to unload the ship. Choose an actual labor dispute of the 1930s, and create a chart outlining the arguments each side used to promote its agenda.

Blick, the vice cop, threatens Nick when he thinks there are prostitutes working at Nick's bar. Investigate the history of prostitution in America. Has prostitution always been illegal? Are there places in the United States where prostitution is legal or is treated as a less serious crime than it is in other jurisdictions? Some people say that prostitution is a victimless crime. Write a brief essay explaining your position on this issue, using the information you have found about prostitution in America.

A number of characters leave the play and do not return. For example, Joe leaves at the end of the play, but it is unclear where he is going; Tom and Kitty leave for a life together, as do Elsie and Dudley. Choose one of these characters or couples and write a one-act play or short story about where they go after they leave Nick's bar and what happens to them.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: The U.S. government responds to the unemployment of forty thousand theater workers by creating the Federal Theater Project. The project brings live theater to small towns all across America. Many in Congress believe that those who are benefiting from the project are politically radical or communist, and it is finally shut down in 1939.

Today: The United States government funds thousands of artists' and writers' projects through the National Endowment for the Arts. National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System also receive federal money for portions of their operating budgets. Many in Congress regularly challenge the appropriateness of government-funded art and federal support of noncommercial broadcasting services.

1930s: During the 1930s, children's toys are built primarily from wood and metal. The toys in the play are typical for the 1930s: Joe brings Kitty a toy carousel that plays a song, and the toys Tom finds for Joe include a music box, whistles, and a large figure that dances and moves when the interior mechanism is wound with a key.

Today: Toys for children, often made from plastic, are much more sophisticated and complex, often incorporating technology such as computer chips. Educational toys are also popular, helping children use computers, improve their reading and math skills, and learn about astronomy, for example.

1930s: Though the United States has expressed a desire to remain neutral in the face of impending war in Europe, President Roosevelt requests about $1.3 billion for national defense in 1939 and issues an executive order for the purchase of more than five hundred military aircraft. This begins a boom in the American defense industry that bolsters the entire U.S. economy throughout World War II.

Today: The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, spur a huge increase in government spending on national security and homeland defense. In early 2002, President Bush asks for a 12 percent increase in military spending, the largest increase in two decades, and an almost 100 percent increase in spending to protect U.S. residents at home.

What Do I Read Next?

Peter Balakian's book *Black Dog of Fate* (1997) is his story of growing up in a comfortable New Jersey suburb in the midst of a family that had survived the 1915 Turkish genocide against the Armenians—a family with experiences similar to those of Saroyan's family. Balakian relates how he was able to get past his family's reluctance to discuss their experiences while living in Armenia and learn about his background and family history.

Clifford Odets and Saroyan both wrote plays during the late 1930s and early 1940s, but Odets was a much more overtly political writer than Saroyan. A collection of Odets's plays, *Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays* (1993), offers an overview of the work by the radical leftist playwright. The title play, about a New York City cabdrivers' strike, was first produced in 1935.

Last Rites: The Death of William Saroyan (1982) is the journal Aram Saroyan kept during the last five weeks of his father's life. Father and son had become estranged and the book chronicles their reconciliation.

Saroyan's collection of short stories *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* (1934) was the publication that launched his career and placed him in the national literary spotlight. In these stories, Saroyan writes of characters who are Armenians, Jews, Chinese, Poles, Africans, and Irish.

The William Saroyan Reader (1958) covers the first half of the author's career and includes selections from the early 1930s through the early 1940s. The original edition contains an introduction by Saroyan entitled "Why I Write."

Further Study

Bedrosian, Margaret, *Magical Pine Ring: Culture and the Imagination in Armenian-American Literature,* Wayne State University Press, 1991.

Bedrosian examines the continuing influence of Armenian history on Armenian-American writing. In addition to Saroyan, Bedrosian includes nine other Armenian-American writers, including Emmanuel Varandyan, Diana der Hovanessian, and Richard Hagopian.

Keyishian, Harry, ed., *Critical Essays on William Saroyan,* Macmillan Library References, 1995.

This volume includes reviews of Saroyan's major plays, stories, novels, and autobiographical writings as well as numerous critical analyses of his work.

Lee, Lawrence, and Barry Gifford, *Saroyan: A Biography,* Harper Collins, 1984.

Lee and Gifford tell the story of Saroyan's life using firsthand accounts from the wife he twice divorced, his son and daughter, and friends such as Artie Shaw, Celeste Holm, and Lillian Gish.

Terkel, Studs, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression,* New Press, 2000.

Originally published in 1970, Studs Terkel chronicles the effects that the Great Depression had on dozens of ordinary people (and a few famous ones), using their own words.

Whitmore, Jon, *William Saroyan,* Greenwood Publishing, 1995.

This book profiles Saroyan, focusing on his life in the theater. Included are critical overviews of Saroyan's work, plot summaries, and production information for his plays, a bibliography, and other writings about his work in the theater.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535