

WILLY TORRESIN DE OLIVEIRA

**WILLIAM SAROYAN'S HERO IN
THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE
FLYING TRAPEZE**

Tese apresentada para obtenção do grau de Mestre. Área de Concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, do Curso de Pós-Graduação em Letras, do Setor de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes da Universidade Federal do Paraná.

Orientadora: Prof.ª Dr.ª Sigrid Renaux.

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on William Saroyan's early short fiction in order to demonstrate that it possesses a far richer and deeper content than observed by critics. An analysis of a selection of six short stories from *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* reveals the presence of an existential dimension in Saroyan's early work, expressed through the presence of a protagonist who bears the characteristics of the Absurd Hero. This existential content is effectively foregrounded in the use of the lyric short story form, thus revealing the unrecognized innovative nature of Saroyan's first literary phase.

The Introduction starts with a review of the initial unfavorable criticism generated by Saroyan's first book, followed by a discussion of his extensive literary career, ethnical heritage, influences, and the purpose of this study along with the methodology adopted.

Chapter 2 deals specifically with theoretical considerations on the theme of the Absurd Hero, providing a conceptual framework based on the writings of Albert Camus, which enables us to detect the existential and absurdist aspects in Saroyan's early short fiction.

The first part of Chapter 3 focuses on some theoretical aspects of the Lyric Short Story, since Saroyan employed this short story mode for the expressionist rendering of his existential themes, followed by an individual analysis of each selected story. This section is concluded with a description of Saroyan's literary style in this collection, arguing that he developed his own peculiar literary "voice".

Chapter 4 combines elements from the analysis of the stories with the theoretical concepts of the Absurd and builds the profile of the Saroyan Hero present in the selection, revealing that this protagonist bears the characteristics of the Absurd Hero.

The Conclusion demonstrates that these combined aspects reveal that Saroyan's first literary phase did not receive proper critical evaluation since these important aspects were overlooked and his work unjustly dismissed as minor literature by his early critics, who failed to observe the fact that in his early short fiction Saroyan innovated both in form and in content, through stories possessing lasting literary and artistic worth.

RESUMO

Este estudo focaliza a primeira fase literária de William Saroyan, demonstrando que a mesma possui maior profundidade e riqueza em termos de forma e conteúdo do que observada pelos críticos. A análise de uma seleção de seis contos de *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* revela a presença, nesta fase literária, de uma dimensão existencial através da presença de um protagonista que possui as características do Herói Absurdo, e o fato de que este conteúdo existencial é eficientemente estabelecido pelo uso do conto lírico, revelando o aspecto inovador, porém não reconhecido, do trabalho de William Saroyan.

A Introdução inicia-se pela revisão da crítica desfavorável inicialmente recebida pelo primeiro livro de Saroyan, seguida por uma discussão de sua extensa carreira literária, herança étnica e influências, terminando com o objetivo deste trabalho e a metodologia adotada.

O Capítulo 2 trata especificamente de considerações teóricas sobre o tema do Herói Absurdo, fornecendo uma estrutura conceitual baseada nos escritos de Albert Camus, nos permitindo detectar os aspectos existenciais e absurdos da primeira fase de ficção curta de Saroyan.

A primeira parte do Capítulo 3 focaliza alguns aspectos teóricos do Conto Lírico, já que Saroyan fez uso desta modalidade do conto para a produção expressionista de seus temas existenciais, seguidos pela análise individual de cada conto escolhido. Esta parte é concluída com uma descrição do estilo literário de Saroyan nesta coleção, argumentando que Saroyan desenvolveu sua própria "voz" literária.

O capítulo 4 realiza uma combinação dos elementos fornecidos pela análise dos contos individuais juntamente com os conceitos teóricos do Absurdo, construindo o perfil do Herói Saroyano presente nos mesmos, revelando o fato de que este protagonista possui as características do Herói Absurdo.

A Conclusão demonstra que a combinação destes aspectos revela que a primeira fase literária de Saroyan não recebeu uma avaliação crítica apropriada, já que tais importantes aspectos foram ignorados e seu trabalho imerecidamente relegado como literatura de qualidade inferior por seus críticos, que deixaram de observar que nesta fase Saroyan inovou tanto em termos de forma como de conteúdo, através de contos que possuem valor literário e artístico permanente.

"... I have said that I am deeply religious. I am. I believe that I live, and you've got to be religious to believe so miraculous a thing. And I am grateful and I am humble. I do live, so let the years repeat themselves eternally, for I am sitting in my room, stating in words the truth of my being, squeezing the fact from meaninglessness and imprecision. And the living of this moment can never be effaced. It is beyond time."

From William Saroyan's "Myself Upon the Earth."

PARECER

Defesa de dissertação do Mestrando **WILLY TORRESIN DE OLIVEIRA** para obtenção do título de **Mestre em Letras**.

Os abaixo assinados Brunilda T. Reichmann, Corina M. Busnardo e Sigrid Renaux argüiram, nesta data, o candidato, o qual apresentou a dissertação:

" WILLIAM SAROYAN'S HERO IN 'THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE' ".

Procedida a argüição segundo o protocolo aprovado pelo Colegiado do Curso, a Banca é de parecer que o candidato está apto ao título de **Mestre em Letras**, tendo merecido os conceitos abaixo:

Banca	Assinatura	Conceito
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1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 - A Review of the Criticism on Saroyan:

Late in 1933, William Saroyan sent one of his short stories, "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze", to the editors of *Story*, a national literary magazine, who printed it in their following issue. The story was very well received by the reading public, marking the beginning of a steady flow of stories which culminated, by October of 1934, in the publication of his first collection of short stories: *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories*¹. The book became a best-seller, and that was William Saroyan's arrival, "with a bang", into the literary scene. Saroyan's initial success was so great that one enthusiastic critic, W.J.V. HOFFMANN, affirmed that

within the next year, the popular monthlies will have him in their clutches and the boom will be on. Already, the shrewd boys who called "firsts" have their bony clutches on his first and recent published collection, "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze." Soon, every issue of every magazine in America, and possibly the English-speaking countries will be a Saroyan "first". (HOFFMAN, p.25)

Nevertheless, despite this enthusiasm, Saroyan's arrival in the literary scene caused a great deal of perplexity and uncertainty on some critics as well as harsh criticism by others. Even favorable critics were cautious and demonstrated discomfort with some aspects of Saroyan's fiction, most notably his unorthodox attitude about writing and the intensity of his literary production. HOFFMAN also depicts the critical scene following Saroyan's publication, saying that

some [critics] were honest and told the world what they thought of this puerile capering. Others aristocratically ducked the issue and tried to discuss whether or not Mr. Saroyan was writing in the short story form. Others were still honest and admitting the brashness of the preface², felt that a new talent had come into American writing. (HOFFMANN, p.27)

Thus, from the beginning of his career Saroyan proved to be a polemic writer, which had much to do with his style and the specific time when he was writing, as HOFFMANN comments:

Naturally, there were those who resented this sudden leap to fame and fortune of an unschooled writer from the slums, who broke or disregarded the rules to an unprecedented degree, and one who already had a reputation as a self-proclaimed genius. He was attacked in *Esquire* by Ernest Hemingway, in petulant mood, while James Thurber was inclined to dismiss him as just another proletarian writer who couldn't write anyway and tried to make a virtue of the fact. It was a controversial beginning, but Saroyan was unimpressed either way. (DARWENT, p.xii)

The fact remained that Saroyan couldn't simply be dismissed as a minor writer, yet he didn't fit into the

accepted "standards" of what a major writer in his day should be like. Thus, although he was a disturbing presence in the literary world of his day, most wise critics preferred to allow him some time before an adequate evaluation could be drawn on his work.³

This polemic "boom" in William Saroyan's literary career during the thirties, shadowed by the suspicion of a literary "hoax", lasted until the first years after World War II, when his fame and success began to decline in the mid-fifties. Budd SCHULBERG, a writer who had been Saroyan's long-time personal friend, adds that this loss of prestige experienced by Saroyan "had more to do with the fact that the postwar years were stripped of illusion, were tough and frightening, while Bill's characters and themes still bathed and wallowed and were suffused in illusion [...] [and that] there was a need for harder, bolder, more violent or more profound voices..." (SCHULBERG, p.96)

Edward FOSTER traces this increase in opposition towards Saroyan directly to the rise in popularity of New Criticism:

As the New Criticism solidified its influence in the universities, his stories began to disappear from even the few classroom anthologies to which he had, however surreptitiously, been admitted. Toward the end of the 1950s, according to Lawrence Lipton, his "early stories [were being] sought out in yellow paperbacks" by beat writers, but that kind of attention would never impress the universities, where the beats themselves were an anathema. (FOSTER, p.xii)

FOSTER further adds that critical schools were, like the Leftist critics, "equally incapable of understanding what Saroyan was doing", so much so that he was accused by them of not paying enough attention to "technique" and "form": "New Critics in particular, insisting that fiction must be well crafted, failed to realize that craft is, after all, convention, and had Saroyan followed their standards his prose would have lost the spontaneity and improvisation characteristic of his best-known works." (FOSTER, p.xii)

CALONNE adds that this critical devaluation is attributed

to the fact that the generation of academic critics had now come to power who were overseeing the development of the kind of dense, cerebral literature which justified their profession. Absent from Saroyan's work were the rich symbolic and ironic textures so highly prized by the New Critics. (CALONNE, p.3)

Other explanations for Saroyan's loss of prestige over the years have been made, but the main aspect that caused critics to be displeased with him at the time when he was achieving great literary success, had to do with his attitude about reality and people in his fiction. Saroyan was accused of being excessively optimistic about both, thus failing to depict the troubles and tragedies of real life. Besides, his insistence in dwelling mainly on autobiographical and ethnical aspects, notably in the subsequent phases of his literary career, gave him the reputation of a mellow, self-centered and superficial author, lacking enough quality and depth in his work for serious appreciation and academic study. His later novels such as *The*

Human Comedy, appeared to the critics as shallow and devoid of any deeper meaning, thus apparently confirming such charges. At the same time, paradoxically, Saroyan's great popular success may have caused the critics to consider him with suspicion and prejudice, drawing from the belief that the common public does not appreciate real art.

Another complaint critics often made was his tendency toward "escapeism." Philip RAHV "found Saroyan's role as lover of mankind irritating" and along with this charge, was also that of Saroyan being "wrong" -in the political sense, "since he supported no "ism" and was therefore accused by Leftist critics in special of lacking a social conscience", and this attitude put him out of favor with the proletarian writers of the thirties, who were anxious to enlist him in their cause."(CALONNE, p.3)

There were still several other reasons why Saroyan faced so much antagonism, and all of them are related to the fact that Saroyan's work was really engaged in an *avant garde* kind of writing which had little to do with the standards favored by the critics, present in the work of acclaimed writers such as T.S. Eliot, Henry James, James Joyce, and others, as CALONNE remarks:

He was not an allusive, learned writer in the manner of T.S. Eliot; he was not interested in exploring the intricate psychological labyrinths that Henry James was so fond of; he was not a brilliant, medieval, mystic scholastic with a passion for complexity like James Joyce. Furthermore, Saroyan's often flippant and antiacademic tone was not calculated to endear him to the professors. (CALONNE, p.3)

Despite all these charges, however, Saroyan stubbornly refused to make any changes in his attitude and style of writing, as expressed in his preface to *Daring*, or to take any political stand other than his own brand of anarchism, in which he continued to affirm, despite all evidences against it, "the brotherhood of man; he recognized no authorities, no leaders, no programs to save the world. For Saroyan, no political plan of action could be successful, for the revolution had to take place within the human heart." (CALONNE, p.4) Nevertheless, SAROYAN himself was aware of the paradoxical reactions his work was creating among critics:

As it happened first with my short stories, my plays appeared so suddenly and continued to come so swiftly that no one was quite prepared to fully meet and appreciate them, so that so far neither the short stories nor the plays have found critical understanding worthy of them. If the critics have failed, I have not. I have both written and criticized my plays, and so far the importance I have given them, as they have appeared, has been supported by theatrical history. If the critics have not yet agreed with me on the value of my work, it is still to be proved that I am not the writer I say I am. I shall some day startle those who now regard me as nothing more than a show-off, but I shall not startle myself. (CALONNE, p.10)

As a result of these attitudes, many critics dismissed Saroyan for not being what "they wanted him to be", rather than consider his virtues and faults on the writer's "own terms", and it is precisely this hasty dismissal that led critics to overlook other less "sunny" and less optimistic aspects in his work, elements that upon closer

consideration will reveal a dimension of Saroyan's work that although immersed in the context of his "sunny optimism" nevertheless deals with the darker side of man's loneliness and quest for meaning.

In recent decades more balanced and optimistic evaluations of Saroyan's work have been offered by the already mentioned David Stephen CALONNE, Edward Halsey FOSTER and Brian DARWENT⁴, who share the view that Saroyan was unjustly dismissed by the critics claiming that he has been one of the major American authors whose writing "has not yet received the responsible critical attention it merits." (CALONNE, p.10) These critics acknowledge Saroyan's positive attitude about life in his work, and share the view that Saroyan's optimism, despised by his early critics, is nevertheless very closely related to introspection and doubt, and that this positive outlook serves a function:

[Saroyan's] bridge of faith is carefully and consciously built over a turbulent ocean of doubt and despair. The angst of the twentieth century pervades his work; we can see his brooding depression not only in the later work but in an early play, *The Time of Your Life*. Saroyan's lonely and pathetic characters sense the oncoming fury of World War II, and the knowledge that life is poised precariously at the rim of disaster haunts their dialogue. This darker, despairing, existential side of Saroyan's work has been almost completely ignored by commentators." (CALONNE, p.4)

This existential dimension of Saroyan's work places him in the same sphere with other modernist writers, and according to CALONNE, three commentators who have observed this philosophical aspect in Saroyan's work have been Edward

HOAGLAND, who observed that Saroyan is "brother at once to Thomas Mann and to the author of *Krapp's Last Tape*", Thelma SHINN, who stated that Saroyan's work can be considered as the "record of the search for meaning within the self", and began to explore Saroyan's "existentialism and romanticism as complementary aspects of the quest for true being", and William FISHER, who argued that "Saroyan's novels and plays became strange battlegrounds where belief struggled with skepticism." (CALONNE, p.10).

Thus, Saroyan's main concern as an artist has been the expression of man's spiritual hunger for unity and meaning in the midst of life's perplexing situations. His characters are individuals who fight very hard to live life fully in absolutely bleak and despairing situations. His themes center around the individual's search for home in a chaotic universe, encouraging him to seek his own identity. These are the aspects of Saroyan's work that give it lasting worth.

Besides, the importance of Saroyan's contribution to American literature should not be overlooked, not only in terms of its innovation, but also concerning Saroyan's influence on a new generation of American writers:

[his] innovative, hip, casual, jazzy voice - his paratactic stacking-up of images in Whitmanesque catalogs - was a major influence on modern American prose style. Yet he also pioneered in his absurdist, fantastic plays, which introduced a kind of rambunctious, whimsical, surrealist energy into conventional drama. His "absurdity", however, was in direct relation to his sorrow at observing the waste of the true, vital flame of life in the contemporary world. His artist figures - Joe,

Jonah Webster, Ben Alexander - all feel within themselves the dying of the old order and the painful struggle to birth a new consciousness. (CALONNE, p.147)

Finally, the fact is that Saroyan was really writing a new kind of fiction, which critics were not familiar with at the time and probably not yet prepared to evaluate, and thus the prejudice against him as a writer persisted. And as mentioned, this discrimination caused critics to overlook some very important aspects of his work, most notably in his early short fiction, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this study.

1.2 - Saroyan's Literary Career:

1.2.1 - The Armenian Heritage:

A very important aspect of Saroyan's life, vital for the understanding of his work, is the fact that he was the son of Armenian immigrants. This personal circumstance deeply influenced his fiction, for Saroyan grew up as an American individual inserted into a very strong ethnic tradition. Writing about those critics who found Saroyan an enigmatic and complex writer, James TASHJIAN claims that Saroyan is

enigmatic only to those who cannot or do not bother to understand what his Armenian heritage meant to him - how large a role the practice of that heritage played in his success. For William Saroyan was

a restless man torn between two worlds - the world of Armenia, his overseas heritage into which, through the accidents of fate, he had not been born but which he felt welling within him; and the world of America, into which he had been born, and in whose opportunities he exulted. Saroyan's life was spent synthesizing and mediating this "immigrant" dichotomy, a phenomenon present in those blessed with undying and compulsive pride in their parental heritage; and this he was able to do brilliantly in a manner more poignant and graphic, but with less homily and maudlin eloquence, than any other American author of avowed ethnic persuasion and inspiration. (TASHJIAN, p.21)

This dichotomy is very important for a more adequate understanding and appreciation of Saroyan's oeuvre, for he is one of those writers whose work is intricately woven with his own life.

For this reason and for the sake of the reader who is unfamiliar with him, a brief consideration of his life as a writer will be presented here.

Saroyan was born on August 31, 1908 in Fresno, California. His parents, Armenak and Takoohi Saroyan, were Armenian immigrants who had moved to America to escape from the persecution they faced in Armenia.⁵ When Saroyan's father, a lay Armenian Presbyterian preacher, died in 1911, his mother placed him, his brother and two sisters in the Fred Finch Orphanage in Oakland, while she worked as a domestic in the Bay area of San Francisco.⁶ This period

lasted until 1916, when the family was reunited in Fresno and Saroyan was sent to public schools. From these family events and heritage, as well as the discrimination young Saroyan faced as the son of immigrants in California,⁷ one can trace the feeling of displacement and homelessness that is so characteristic of his work.

The combination of these two important events in Saroyan's childhood, the early loss of his father and the years spent in the orphanage, left him with the feeling of rootlessness which pervades his work: "Well, first of all, just where was my home? Was it in Fresno, where I was born? Was it in San José, where my father died? Was it in Oakland, where I spent four very important years?... Home was in myself, and I wasn't there, that's all. I was far from home."

(CALONNE, p.6)

This biographical aspect in Saroyan's life helps to establish a basis for the understanding of the search for meaning present in his whole work, especially in his early stories.

Young Saroyan was not a very good student and his formal education was over after his second year in high school.⁸ However, when he was twelve, the reading of *The Bell*, a short story written by Guy DE MAUPASSANT, started his ambition to become a writer. It was not de Maupassant's style or form that really impressed him, but rather the fact that his stories conveyed a sense of freshness and immediacy. At about the same time Saroyan became a frequent visitor to

Fresno's public library, where he read whatever he laid his hands on, becoming involved in the world of books and literature. Brian DARWENT comments that as young Saroyan grew up in Fresno, he was at the same time an American boy and also a member of the exiled Armenian tribe, and thus, from this combination of factors, he collected the themes and topics for his later short fiction. (DARWENT, p.ix)

After this period, Saroyan took several odd jobs to help the family income, but never settled down in any of those activities. When he was eighteen he left Fresno for Los Angeles, and there he had his first short story accepted for publication in *The Overland Monthly*, "a western magazine which in its day had published the work of such famous writers as Jack London and Ambrose Bierce, but it couldn't pay anything." (DARWENT, p.x) A year later Saroyan went to New York where he stayed for six months, unsuccessfully trying to become a famous writer. He returned to California and settled in San Francisco, again working at a number of odd jobs to support himself. With the coming of the Great Depression, he worked even harder at his writing, convinced by then that he really wanted to pursue a career as a writer. This was not pursued only in terms of professional fulfillment, but as a purpose for his own existence, as he himself explains: "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. I have managed to conceal my madness fairly effectively." (CALONNE, p.6)

At this early stage Saroyan already had the strong attitude about his own writing that would accompany him for the rest of his literary career. He already knew how he wanted to write, no matter how "unliterary" his writing style might be considered by critics, and how difficult such a decision to uphold, as DARWENT corroborates:

Although the prospect for an unknown young writer specializing in his own unorthodox brand of short stories was bleak indeed, during this difficult period he refused to compromise his literary integrity. He continued instead to work in defiance of what was commercially acceptable - a hard and lonely path but the only choice for a writer of true originality. (DARWENT, p.xi)

So, to this end he kept on writing during his free time until 1933, when an Armenian journal in Boston, the *Hairenik*, began publishing his work.⁹ This ethnical publication, however, brought Saroyan no literary recognition and it was only later in 1933, with the publication of "Daring Young Man" in *Story* magazine that William Saroyan's career as a writer was launched in earnest, as mentioned above.

Following the publication of *Daring* in 1934, several other collections of short stories were published¹⁰, all having the background of the Depression years. These stories were "written in a variety of styles and moods, though with the Saroyan voice always clearly in evidence, [and] these early stories established his reputation, as a writer with

staying power, and provided the foundation for the rest of his career." (DARWENT, p.xii)

Saroyan's career as a playwright began with *My Heart's in the Highlands*, in 1939, a play that was adapted from one of his early short stories. (DARWENT, p.xiii) The positive reception this play received encouraged Saroyan to follow it with *The Time of Your Life*, his greatest theatrical success, for he received both the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for this play, which was the first to ever win both prizes. Saroyan rejected the Pulitzer Prize on the grounds that he strongly felt that commerce should not patronize the arts. Saroyan's success with *The Time of Your Life* on Broadway was followed by several other theatrical productions, and he even established his own Saroyan Theater in 1941.

Following these theatrical activities, Saroyan became involved in movie making, and late in 1941 he wrote the script for a movie called *The Human Comedy*. When MGM refused to allow him to produce and direct the movie, he transformed the script into a novel, which became his most successful book.

By 1942, during World War II, Saroyan had been drafted into the army and in the following year he married the socialite Carol Marcus. Soon they had a son named Aram and Saroyan was sent to England by the army to write stories supposedly to promote Anglo-American relations. Instead he wrote a pacifist novel, *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson*,

which turned out to be "strongly anti-war when such sentiments were unthinkable." (DARWENT, p.xiv)

The late forties proved to be the beginning of long and difficult years to Saroyan. Despite the birth of his second child, Lucy, his marriage to Carol Marcus ended in 1949, marking the beginning of a steady decline in his literary career and in his financial situation.

At this stage in his life Saroyan also went through changes in his writing themes:

Following the dissolution of his marriage, Saroyan turned increasingly to the exploration of his past through a series of autobiographies, memoirs, and journals. Although he continued to publish plays and fiction, autobiography became his main form of self-expression. This impulse reflects a shift in emphasis from art to life, from "doing" to "being", from the creation of works to the creation of self. He sought in memory the key to his identity, for a meaningful pattern underlying the chaos of experience. "I want to think about the things I may have forgotten. I want to have a go at them because I have an idea they will help make known how I became who I am. (CALONNE, p.142)

Saroyan then moved to Europe in an attempt to put his life together, but for the following decade it was marked by gambling, drinking, unsuccessful novels and plays, although there were a few successful ones; and growing debts. Not being able to get out of his financial troubles in America, in 1958 he returned to Europe, and this time he managed to make a considerable amount of money writing several successful plays. Nevertheless, he wasn't able to pay his debts due to gambling:

Gambling was the worst of it; and yet he needed to gamble. It was central, he claimed, to his approach to writing, and to life. He often justified it by saying that it helped his work, and many of his best stories and plays were apparently written in the aftermath of a bad gambling experience. He despised the whole business of money-making - or *The Money*, as he sometimes put it ("Had *The Money* not revealed itself as a stupid thief, I might have lingered a year or two longer in the *Business World*") - and gambling provided the perfect opportunity to demonstrate his contempt for the stuff. (DARWENT, p.xvi)

But by 1964 Saroyan was finally able to get out of his debts and published a new edition of his first book along with comments about his present life and work in relation to that time when he published *Daring*. At this time Saroyan's stories and plays were making a great success, especially in eastern Europe.

In the late sixties Saroyan sorted through all the writings he had collected throughout the years and began publishing them as a series. In the seventies, already out of debts, Saroyan didn't bother much about having his work being printed, despite his great success in Europe, especially in Czechoslovakia, Romania, Finland, Spain, Germany and Poland, where the play "*The Cave Dwellers*" was a favorite for many years. Saroyan's last published work, in 1979, *Obituaries*, dealing mainly with the topic of death, received quite positive criticism in *The New York Times Book Review*.

By 1980, Saroyan was already diagnosed as having cancer, and he died in May, 1981 in Fresno, California. *Time* magazine (which had been an old enemy), paid a tribute to Saroyan saying that "the ease and charm of many of his

stories will continue to inspire young writers. It is a legacy beyond criticism." (DARWENT, p.xix)

Such ease and charm can still be experienced in his early short stories today and they continue being a source of inspiration to his readers.

1.2.2 - Literary Influences:

The characteristics of Saroyan's work reveal several of the literary influences which helped to shape his writing style, most notably those by Sherwood Anderson.

Both Saroyan and Anderson had similar attitudes towards their art, and the influences of Anderson's style in *Winesburg, Ohio*, can be particularly observed in several stories of *Daring*. Besides, Anderson's prose rhythms and themes gave William Saroyan a precedent for the exploration of the theme of the search for identity, along with the elements of lightness and freedom, already highly valued by Saroyan.

Saroyan, however, developed a more lyrical and intense phrasing, contrasting with Anderson's rather bare language. Besides, he improved on Anderson's work and followed its implications even further in that he made his own work even more subjective and personal than Anderson did:

Essentially, [Saroyan] spoke in his own voice, taking his story in whatever direction the moment seemed to require. The world and its language were no more than materials from which to evoke an image of his internal self, [...] [and he was always] willing to ignore all the conventions of storytelling. (FOSTER, p.14)

Nevertheless, what links these two writers most is their "intense focusing on a single instant of illumination, when a character suddenly perceives the hidden reaches of reality [and] becomes aware of things as they are" (CALONNE, p.20), a characteristic that results in writing similar to spoken language, since Saroyan, like Anderson, subordinated narrative to "tone", the general feeling or attitude the work conveyed, through which words became "the direct expression of the narrator, whose narrative was in turn effectively a pretext for expressing subjective attitudes and responses [...] Thus form derived from the materials of the tale and the teller's reaction to them" (FOSTER, p.12).

Guy de MAUPASSANT also exerted influence on Saroyan, who admired the emotional world in de Maupassant's stories, and the powerful sadness they evoked. That is related to Saroyan's primary concern with stating or expressing emotion. (FOSTER, p.11) Similarly, WHITMAN's poetry and Henry David THOREAU's philosophical writings influenced Saroyan in the aspects of transcendence and "bravura", and in several instances when combinations of philosophical musings and Whitmanesque cataloging appear in his work. Examples are "Myself upon the World", where Saroyan writes, "Every life is a contradiction, a new truth, a new miracle, and even frauds

are interesting. I am not a philosopher and I do not believe in philosophies; the word itself I look upon with suspicion. I believe in the right of man to contradict himself" ("Myself", p.54), contrasted with the following excerpt from *Leaves of Grass*: "Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes)"¹¹.

One concludes from these considerations that Saroyan, in his own kind of fiction, was engaged in a search for personal meaning, identity and purpose and it may be stated that Saroyan's work as an artist is the activity of writing itself, coupled with his more profound task as a human being *to live life fully*. Saroyan used his artistic medium to expose the fragmentation of our experience and at the same time to prove the possibility of "true being" through artistic creation.

For this reason the short stories written by Saroyan were so positively received by the public, for readers clearly saw their troubled lives portrayed vividly in his stories, and although such stories also revealed the anguish and the agony of the time in which they lived, the stories also conveyed a great sense of hope. Thus, at a time of political and economical unrest, Saroyan's blend of humanism and faith in the individual met the need for reassurance so strongly felt by his generation.

Therefore Saroyan's work has much more to offer than what has been revealed by most of his critics so far. Besides the ethnic and humanistic dimension of his fiction, there is

also the existential dimension in his work that also needs to be considered for an adequate evaluation of his work as a whole, for Saroyan's writing is

a blend of the affirmative, mystical, and rambunctious qualities of the American romantic sensibility and the profound sadness which finds its matrix in the tragic history of the Armenian people. On the one hand, he is thoroughly American in his persistent expansiveness, verve, and spontaneity. His writing is autobiographical, the dominant mode employed by such representative American authors as Whitman, Thomas Wolfe, and Henry Miller. Yet he is also the Armenian with his heart in the highlands, grieving for this lost homeland, speaking for those lost in an alien culture. He praises and broods, moves outward toward the world in extrovert fashion and holds closely inward to himself the loneliness of the poet. (CALONNE, p.9)

This is the Saroyan little known to anyone but those readers who have looked deeper into his stories, and who have found a much more significant and important contribution to modern literature.

1.3 - Purpose of this Study:

As mentioned, Saroyan's literary work has been dismissed by many critics as not offering enough depth for academic study. On the other hand, other critics have recently argued that this opinion failed to evaluate Saroyan's work adequately. However, even these more positive

considerations about Saroyan's work have not dealt with some important aspects of Saroyan's short stories in *Daring*, which develop several themes that have not yet been explored, such as the theme of the hero. Studies have been carried out on this theme in Saroyan's plays and novels, but not in his early short fiction, particularly in *Daring*.

Thus, the aim of this study is to delineate the profile of the hero that is present in Saroyan's early fiction, specifically in the stories selected from *Daring*, and to characterize this hero as the man who confronts a chaotic reality in the physical world surrounding him as he is involved in a personal search for significance and existential meaning, and who, in the process, assumes several characteristics of the Absurd Hero. Besides, the exploration of several elements related to this theme as well as the subsequent analysis and interpretation, contributes for a more suitable evaluation of this collection in specific terms, and also Saroyan's work on the whole, for the theme of the hero is part of a more universal, less optimistic and existential dimension of his work; a dimension that has been somewhat overshadowed by his ethnical or "Armenian" dimension. The latter has been criticized as being overly optimistic and ethnical and based on this evaluation, critics have placed all of Saroyan's work in this category, including the existential one.

Saroyan's literary career can be divided into five different phases, as follows: the first, from 1934 to 1939,

is marked by the production of a steady flow of short fiction; the second, from 1939 to 1943, is characterized mainly by the writing of several plays, of which *The Time of Your Life* received a Pulitzer prize; the third phase was dominated by the writing of novels, among them *The Human Comedy*, which became a movie in 1945, and *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson*, as well as other plays and short fiction; his fourth phase, between 1951 and 1964, dealt mostly with topics related to marriage and family themes, and the last one, from 1964 until his death in 1981, is characterized mainly by autobiographical writings consisting mostly of an exploration of his own past. Despite this very large literary production, however, this work focuses on Saroyan's first phase, during which the misunderstanding of his critics was at its highest, due to the fact that the kind of fiction he was producing was diametrically opposed to the climate of opinion that came to dominate the literary life at that time and the prescribed standards of what a short story should be like.

Considering the scope of Saroyan's work - he wrote over 500 short stories between 1933 and 1939 - and the specific nature of this study, a limitation in the number of stories was imposed. Six short stories from *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* have been selected for analysis: "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze", "Seventy Thousand Assyrians", "Myself Upon the Earth", "Aspirin in a Member of the N.R.A.", "A Cold Day", and "Fight Your Own War".¹²

This limitation is justified by the fact that not all the twenty-six stories in the collection lend themselves to the theme being studied since the majority are related to the Armenian dimension of Saroyan's work, dealing mostly with ethnical aspects, whereas the six pieces selected form a category in themselves in that they share significant patterns and similarities both in terms of content and form and especially in that they are representative of the more universal dimension in Saroyan's work, mentioned above.

All the selected pieces deal with a protagonist involved in a personal quest; a young male writer, who lives alone in a small rented room in extremely poor conditions and who is totally involved in his unrecognized and unsuccessful work as a writer. Each of the stories supplies additional and recurring elements that help to delineate the profile of that hero. The formulation of this pattern helps us, in the words of Theodore STROUD, "to appreciate how the parts fit into one whole." (STROUD, p.117)

Therefore, due to the similarity of the protagonists in their action and setting, the stories are treated as being variations on the same theme, as "parts" which can be fitted together in order to produce a clear picture.

Besides, working with several stories instead of just one longer text will better explore the element of fragmentation present in the stories, for Saroyan worked with his stories impressionistically, that is, he wasn't as concerned with clarity of ideas and themes as he was intent

in conveying images and emotions which formed an impression on the reader. Therefore, Saroyan's work should be appreciated from a certain distance, where the fragmentary pieces of the mosaic formed by the juxtaposition of several of his stories will produce the image of the Absurd Hero present in them.

 NOTES

¹ SAROYAN, William. *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories*. The Modern Library. New York:Random House, 1934.

² Saroyan's unorthodox preface to the first edition of *Daring* caused a lot of criticism and perplexity. HOFFMANN, states that "he wrote the snottiest, nastiest preface to his collection that has appeared in this town for a long, long while. It was almost like the good old days when e.e.cummings was inciting to riot and dismay. That preface did the trick." (HOFFMAN,P.27) Although quite long, it seems reasonable to include the entire preface here, for the relationships that can be established between it and his stories, in terms of form and content:

I am writing this preface to the first edition so that in the event that this book is issued in a second edition I will be able to write a preface to the second edition, explaining what I said in the preface to the first edition and adding a few remarks about what I have been doing in the meantime, and so on.

In the event that the book reaches a third edition, it is my plan to write a preface to the third edition, covering all that I said in the prefaces to the first and second editions, and it is my plan to go on writing prefaces for new editions of this book until I die. After that I hope there will be children and grandchildren to keep up the good work.

In this early preface, when I have no idea how many copies of the book are going to be sold, the only thing I can do is talk about how I came to write these stories.

Years ago when I was getting a thorough grammar-school education in my home town I found out that stories were something very odd that some sort of men had been turning out (for some odd reason) for hundreds of years, and that there were rules governing the writing of stories.

I immediately began to study all the classic rules, including Ring Lardner's, and in the end I discovered that the rules were wrong.

The trouble was, they had been leaving me out, and as far as I could tell I was the most important element in the matter, so I made some new rules.

I wrote rule Number One when I was eleven and had just been sent home from the fourth grade for having talked out of turn and meant it.

Do not pay attention to the rules other people make, I wrote. They make them for their own protection, and to hell with them. (I was pretty sore that day.)

Several months later I discovered rule Number Two, which caused a sensation. At any rate, it was a sensation with me. This rule was: Forget Edgar Allan Poe and O.Henry and write the kind of stories you feel like writing. Forget everybody who ever wrote anything.

Since that time I have added four other rules and I have found this number to be enough. Sometimes I do not have to bother

about rules at all, and I just sit down and write. Now and then I stand and write.

My third rule was: Learn to typewrite, so you can turn out stories as fast as Zane Grey.

It is one of my best rules.

But rules without a system are, as every good writer will tell you, utterly inadequate. You can leave out "utterly" and the sentence will mean the same thing, but it is always nicer to throw in an "utterly" whenever possible. All successful writers believe that one word by itself hasn't enough meaning and that it is best to emphasize the meaning of one word with the help of another. Some writers will go so far as to help an innocent word with as many as four and five other words, and at times they will kill an innocent word by charity and it will take years and years for some ignorant writer who doesn't know adjectives at all to resurrect the word that was killed by kindness.

Anyway, these stories are the result of a method of composition.

I call it the Festival or Fascist method of composition, and it works this way:

Someone who isn't a writer begins to want to be a writer and he keeps on wanting to be one for ten years, and by that time he has convinced all his relatives and friends and even himself that he is a writer, but he hasn't written a thing and he is no longer a boy, so he is getting worried. All he needs now is a system. Some authorities claim there are as many as fifteen systems, but actually there are only two: (1) you can decide to write like Anatole France or Alexandre Dumas or somebody else, or (2) you can decide to forget that you are a writer at all and you can decide to sit down at your typewriter and put words on paper, one at a time, in the best fashion you know how - which brings me to the matter of style.

The matter of style is one that always excites controversy, but to me it is as simple as A B C, if not simpler.

A writer can have, ultimately, one of two styles: he can write in a manner that implies that death is inevitable, or he can write in a manner that implies that death is *not* inevitable. Every style ever employed by a writer has been influenced by one or another of these attitudes toward death.

If you write as if you believe that ultimately you and everyone will be dead, there is a chance that you will write in a pretty earnest style. Otherwise you are apt to be either pompous or soft. On the other hand, in order not to be a fool, you must believe that as much as death is inevitable life is inevitable. That is, the earth is inevitable, and people and other living things on it are inevitable, but that no man can remain on the earth very long. You do not have to be melodramatically tragic about this. As a matter of fact, you can be as amusing as you like about it. It is really one of the basically humorous things, and it has all sorts of possibilities for laughter. If you will remember that living people are as good as dead, you will be able to perceive much that is very funny in their conduct that you perhaps might never have thought of perceiving if you did not believe that they were as good as dead.

The most solid advice, though, for a writer is this, I think: Try to learn to breathe deeply, really to taste food when you eat, and when you sleep, really to sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive, with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough. (*Daring*, pages 9-13)

³ HOFFMANN, acknowledged in 1935: "That Mr. Saroyan has talent and cleverness and glibness cannot be doubted. The short story can use him - and he can certainly use the short story. More years will have to pass before his stature as an artist can be properly measured. Till then, we have the intrusion of a personality into current literary life - a good method of attaining mention and, for those of the outside, an entertaining viewpoint which helps to balance the grim drabness of most of the writing boys." (HOFFMAN, p.27)

⁴ CALONNE, David S. *William Saroyan - My Real Work is Being*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983. 185p; DARWENT, Brian. (Ed.) *The New Saroyan Reader: A Connoisseur's Anthology of the Writings of William Saroyan*. San Francisco: D.S. Ellis. 1984; FOSTER, Edward H. *William Saroyan: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne, 1991.

⁵ CALONNE writes that "in 1896, twelve years before Saroyan's birth, 200,000 Armenians were massacred by the Turks. In 1915, the Turks deported the Armenian population of 2,500,000 to Syria and Mesopotamia; more than a million and a half Armenians were killed during this process." (CALONNE, p.4)

⁶ See TASHJIAN, p.21. He comments that this period of William Saroyan's life in the Orphanage was also very influential in his later writing.

⁷ CALONNE writes that "Armenians were not really absorbed into the fabric of American life. They remained alienated, often yearning to return to their native land. They were isolated within their own communities, out of step with mainstream American culture. (CALONNE, p.5)

⁸ Brian DARWENT says that "It is not surprising that young William Saroyan, who was destined to be a writer strongly in the American unschooled tradition, had an undistinguished academic career. He left school early - the school work was too slow and predictable and there was constant friction, caused by boredom and by frequent reminders that he was the son of an immigrant." (DARWENT, p.ix)

⁹ James H. TASHJIAN, in "A Preface (and Other Things)" in SAROYAN, William. *My Name is Saroyan*. Edited and prefaced by James H. Tashjian. TASHJIAN claims that the *Haireniks* of Boston, Armenian Journals, should really receive the credit for launching

William Saroyan into the literary world, since they really were the first to publish his stories.

¹⁰ Among them *Inhale and Exhale; Three Times Three; Little Children; Love, Here is My Hat; The Trouble with Tigers; Peace, It's Wonderful.*

¹¹ CALONNE writes that "for Saroyan, as for Whitman, the contradictions of experience must be embraced; life's paradoxes cannot be overcome by forcing them into air-tight 'systems' or philosophies. The inner self must be allowed to grow free - unfettered by the false twistings and 'proofs' of logical constructs" (CALONNE, p.21).

¹² Hereafter these stories will be referred to as "Daring Young Man", "Assyrians", "Myself", "Aspirin", "A Cold Day", and "War", respectively.

2 - THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 - The Absurd Hero:

This Chapter presents theoretical considerations of the Absurd as well as of the Absurd Hero, in order to provide a background for the analysis of the hero present in William Saroyan's early short fiction. This preliminary description of the Absurd Hero is based upon the writings of several Existentialist philosophers, who developed a series of concepts in the early 1940's opposing rationalism and empiricism, advocating man's position as a self-determining agent responsible for his own choices. Their teachings also established that man is alone in a meaningless world, and completely free to choose his actions, thus determining his own nature. Most of the principles adopted in this study come from Albert Camus, whose concepts of the Absurd best serve to characterize William Saroyan's hero in *Daring*, and are further complemented by opinions from other thinkers and critics.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*¹, CAMUS uses the story of the Greek hero Sisyphus as a starting point for a description of the Absurd and of the individual he calls

the Absurd Hero. He also provides an account of the original legend of Sisyphus, as follows:

Having angered the gods by several acts of defiance and misbehaviour², Sisyphus was condemned by them to endlessly push an enormous rock to the top of a mountain in the underworld, just to see it roll back downhill to where it previously was. His punishment thus consisted of endless and futile labor, a penalty "in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing" (CAMUS, p.89), but despite his punishment, Sisyphus maintains his attitude of defiance toward the gods, his hatred of death and his passion for life. What brings about his state of absurdity is the fact that he is aware of the meaninglessness and futility of his labor. Were he not conscious of his ordeal, he would not be the absurd hero, for consciousness is what places him in his absurd condition. Without consciousness, he would be the common man blinded by illusions and hopes of succeeding: "the workman of today works everyday in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious." (CAMUS, p.90)

Sisyphus's victory lies precisely in the fact that his absurd condition "makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men [...] the rock is his thing." (CAMUS, p.91) Paradoxically, however, this same consciousness which was meant to constitute his greatest torture and suffering, turns out to be the key element in

his victory, for Sisyphus concludes that no matter how meaningless his existence and his toil, he nevertheless finds meaning in the tension of his situation itself, even though he knows that it will have no end and it will be devoid of any purpose. Thus, this tension itself becomes his reason for being, as CAMUS comments:

·this universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that nightfilled mountain, in itself forms a world. *The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.* One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.91)

This story helps to illustrate CAMUS's concepts of the Absurd and the Absurd Hero. Along with a description and comments based upon CAMUS's previous essays in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as well as additional thoughts provided by other theorists³, it helps to render a clear picture of this individual.

For this reason, although the concepts of the Absurd and the Absurd Hero do not constitute a fixed model with which to study a given literary work, Camus claimed that such concepts provide a useful tool for the understanding and appreciation of some literary texts. David GALLOWAY also states that the concepts of the Absurd present in *The Myth of Sisyphus* can function as a key to contemporary novels of absurdity, writing that

the absurd sensitivity, nevertheless, helps to clarify [the vision of certain writers], to isolate the attitudes which ultimately shape their view of the

life-enhancing alternatives which man may adopt when confronted by the dark, fragmented, absurd night of despair which often colors so much of the modern imagination. (GALLOWAY, p.173)

This is the case concerning Saroyan's *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, and the considerations which follow are included here to provide the background for the understanding of the Saroyan hero present in the selected stories.

2.2 - Components of the Hero's Absurd Awakening.

The absurd hero is that individual who, at a certain moment in his existence, begins to reflect on the world surrounding him and becomes conscious of the undeniable fact that the universe is devoid of meaning. This discomfort with his surroundings may be almost imperceptible at first, probably perceived as a minor nuisance. CAMUS says that in this first stage,

at any streetcorner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face. As it is, in its distressing nudity, in its light without effulgence, it is elusive [...] [nevertheless], the climate of absurdity is in the beginning. The end is the absurd universe and that attitude of mind which lights the world with its true colors to bring out the privileged and implacable visage which that attitude has discerned in it. (CAMUS, p.9)

Thus, this is just the beginning of a process which will eventually produce that "odd state of soul in which the void becomes eloquent, in which the chain of daily gestures is broken, in which the heart vainly seeks the link that will connect it again, then it is as it were the first sign of absurdity." (CAMUS, p.10) It is inevitable, though, that eventually the "stage sets collapse", and all the daily routine activities of work, study, survival, observance of social norms and all the rest are perceived as completely void of meaning and significance.

The recognition by the individual of the inadequacy of all the reasons he had had so far to explain the world and his own existence in it, initially triggered the feeling of absurdity, and made the world unfamiliar to him:

a world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.⁴ (CAMUS, p.5)

Traditions can no longer help this man feel "at home", for such traditions themselves, including religion, are also "part of the factions - religion has become an ineffectual pantomime: Such a monkey-holiness is not what the functioning world requires..." (CAMPBELL, p.389)

Thus, once he is awake and loses his illusions and faces the reality surrounding him, the absurd hero sees himself as an exiled individual in a meaningless universe, one whose human experience is perceived as being "fragmented, irritating and apparently unredeemable" (GALLOWAY, p.vii), and one who, feeling continually less able to find order and meaning in his life, and finding himself involved in the "exhausting, monotonous and apparently unending tasks in the viciously seductive rhythm of contemporary life", (GALLOWAY, p.6) in which his whole being is "exerted toward accomplishing nothing", (CAMUS, p.89) becomes increasingly "hungry for unity in the face of a disordered universe" (GALLOWAY, p.5). Not finding real meaning or purpose in his existence, this individual becomes caught in an endless process in which he waits for something or someone that never happens or comes to rescue him from his bleak situation, as BECKETT's "Waiting for Godot" so well illustrates.

This is when the "why?" arises and gives birth to consciousness, anxiety and anguish⁵. This experience is also characterized by the fact that the awareness that accompanies it makes all appearances lose their effectiveness: "this veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in disorder - naked, with a frightening, obscure nakedness" (from SARTRE's *Nausea*, p.183).

This situation reveals the components of the Absurd, necessary for its realization, which arises out of

the confrontation between man's intention and the reality he faces in the world surrounding him.

The Absurd man is situated in a context of a paradoxical, ironical and contradictory environment, which characterizes the landscape of the modern wasteland. The concept of wasteland here refers to the sterility of contemporary society, in which the hero today is different from the hero of the past. Democracy and individuality have transformed human life and have brought the universe of symbols to a collapse, in which "the social unit has become an economic-political organization and is no longer a carrier of religious content [...] [for] within the progressive societies themselves, every last vestige of the ancient human heritage of ritual, morality and art is in full decay" (CAMPBELL, p.388), leaving man in a situation in which he is unsure about the values which have upheld him in the past.

In an analysis of the heroes present in the works of Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin and Updike, Howard HARPER discusses their attitudes and reactions to the wasteland, and the several alternatives which are offered to them: orthodoxy, nihilism or simply existentialism and humanism. These options constitute the boundaries of the modern wasteland,

the trap in which man must run, but from which there is no exit. Rabbit [UPDIKE's hero in *Rabbit Run*], cannot commit himself fully to any of the alternatives; he cannot break out of the trap of existence into the certainty of essence. He is, to echo Sartre still

further, *condemned to life.*(italics mine) (HARPER, p.171)

What further characterizes this wasteland are the developments of scientific, economical and technological areas, encircling contemporary man in "a fragmented world of technology that reduces [him] to the operational and functional [...] Ours is a disintegrating world without a unifying principle, without meaning, without purpose: an absurd universe." (HARRIS, p.17)

Thus, the confrontation-between man's intentions and the reality surrounding him reveals the presence of a *disproportion* between these two elements, and it is precisely out of this disproportion that the notion of the Absurd becomes manifest: "The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation." (CAMUS, p.23) In addition, Paul TILLICH's definition of the Absurd helps to clarify this feeling:

Twentieth-century man has lost a meaningful world and a self which lives in meanings out of a spiritual center. The man-created world of objects has drawn into itself him who created it and who now loses his subjectivity in it. He has sacrificed himself to his own productions. (TILLICH, p.944)

Following this perception, this man realizes that this disproportion between the opposing forces destroys all illusions of order and meaning in the universe. Man's intention is revealed by the fact that

the mind's deepest desire, even in the most elaborate operations, parallels man's unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity. Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal.[...] That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama. (CAMUS, p.13)

This desire for unity and meaning (man's intentions), encountered by the meaninglessness of the universe (wasteland), and the fact that for this man there are now no guiding signs to help him find his way, is what solidifies this disproportion which can never be solved, and which leads this man to his Absurd awakening. Although not able to solve his conflict, at first he still wishes to run away from it or pretend that it does not exist. The courage of being himself and facing the consequences of this decision is his next challenge.

2.3 - Consequences of the Awakening:

CAMUS stated that he was much more interested in the consequences of the absurd than in the absurd discoveries themselves. The course of action taken by the individual who undergoes the absurd awakening is of major importance for it poses the decision by the individual

whether he will maintain the absurd tension or whether he will attempt to evade it. The point in question is whether this man will be able to live in the "deserts" of the Absurd and will resist the temptation to escape through hope or suicide.

From the moment absurdity is recognized, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all. But whether or not one can live with one's passions, whether or not one can accept their law, *which is to burn the heart they simultaneously exalt - that is the whole question.*"(italics mine) (CAMUS, p.17)

GALLOWAY elaborates on this aspect writing that "faced with a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man must decide either to live or do die." The recognition of the meaninglessness of the universe may lead man to physical suicide or to the "intellectual suicide of the leap into faith."(GALLOWAY, p.9)

Also at this point this man is faced with two paths: "the gradual return into the chain [...] or the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery." (CAMUS, p.10) In other words, some, upon the beginning of the absurd reasoning, evade it and go back to the "chain of daily gestures", those routine activities one is engaged into automatically and which he performs practically without being aware of them, or at least attempt to. Others, however, maintain the feeling of absurdity until it becomes

the definitive awakening. It is then that a choice must be made.

Therefore, the first consequence of the Absurd is the choice the individual has to make between suicide and life. To CAMUS one of the central issues of the Absurd is suicide. In fact, in the introduction of his book he says that the purpose of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is to "resolve the problem of suicide, without the aid of eternal values which, temporarily perhaps, are absent or distorted in contemporary Europe." (CAMUS, p.v) -

The issue of suicide is brought up by the Absurd since it is directly related to the question of the meaning of life: "it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face." (CAMUS, p.v) Although CAMUS acknowledges that longing for death which the absurd reasoning arouses in the individual, the process in which the individual who has become conscious of the Absurd evaluates his situation and eventually comes to a decision concerning it, he nevertheless equates suicide with evasion⁶ and rules it out as a possible legitimate consequence to the absurd⁷, since it amounts to confessing that "life is too much for you or that you do not understand it", or that it was not "worth the trouble"⁸. (CAMUS, p.5) Besides, suicide is rejected, be it physical or philosophical, because "man must accept the feeling of Absurdity which then becomes the springboard for action,

giving him a sense of freedom and passion" (*italics mine*) (HINCHLIFFE, p.36), and because

suicide is a repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance [...] the contrary of suicide, in fact, is the man condemned to death. (CAMUS, p.40-41)

For this reason, also, the most painful punishment to this man is premature death: "To the actor as to the absurd man, a premature death is irreparable." (CAMUS, p.61) Therefore, three consequences can be drawn from the absurd: "my revolt, my freedom and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death - and I refuse suicide [...] the point is to live." (CAMUS, p.48)

Therefore, the option left to this man is to live his absurd experience: "The real effort is to stay there, [in "the waterless deserts where thought reaches its confines"] rather, in so far as that is possible, and to examine closely the odd vegetation of those distant regions." (CAMUS, p.8) Unless, of course, this man is condemned to death. Suicide settles the absurd in that it is acceptance at its extreme, and that life should be the real outcome of the absurd, for it presupposes revolt. "That revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of a life, it restores its majesty to that

life [...] Consciousness and revolt, these rejections are the contrary of renunciation." (CAMUS, p.41)

Besides suicide, the other route of escape from the absurd, which is also ruled out, is the kind of hope present in religion through faith. The absurd is "a confrontation and an unceasing struggle" which implies "a total absence of hope, a continual rejection, and a conscious dissatisfaction", (CAMUS, p.23) for the absurd can exist only as long as it is not agreed to. If one resorts to any type of hope upon any form of external consolation whatsoever, this will be as much evasion as suicide, for it will project this individual's ordeal into the future. But "a man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it. A man devoid of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future." (CAMUS, p.24)

Notwithstanding this fact, there are those who insist on finding an escape from this situation. They are the ones who "through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, [...] deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them." (CAMUS, p.24) Thus, be it through suicide, hope or any other means, any form of evasion is an escape from the absurd, not a solution. On the other hand, as stated previously,

the absurd man recognizes the struggle, does not absolutely scorn reason, and admits the irrational. Thus he again embraces in a single glance all the data

of experience and he is little inclined to leap before knowing. *He knows simply that in that alert awareness there is no further place for hope.* (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.28)

Therefore, there is no room for any evasion from the Absurd. The only option is to face it and live with it, sustaining the disproportion, since any form of evasion "implies for the absurd mind deceit and the mind's retreat before what the mind itself has brought to light." (CAMUS, p.37) This question is reinstated:

I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone, [since] the absurd, which is the metaphysical state of the conscious man, does not lead to God[...], it is a matter of living in that state of the absurd. I know on what it is founded, this mind and this world straining against each other without being able to embrace each other. (CAMUS, p.30)

Thus, the Absurd leads to man himself, and it becomes the basis for the anthropocentric position occupied by the Absurd Hero.

In this way, although not driving man to faith or to anguish, CAMUS's thoughts about the absurd develop positively into something that takes man *beyond* the Absurd, and the *Myth of Sisyphus* turns out to be "an intellectual investigation of [...] the hopelessness of life; the need to refuse the world *without renouncing it*; the purity of the heart and happiness." (HINCHLIFFE, p.35) Again, the awareness of the Absurd leads the individual to a position of resistance. However, revolt itself does not produce "anything which negates the Absurd, but man does learn that

he can, without help from God, create his own values and pass beyond the anguish which is the terminus of existential revolt." (italics mine) (HINCHLIFFE, p.44) In this way, the Absurd is a *beginning*, and not an *end*. Having faced the option for *death* and for *hope*, and having exhausted and rejected them as legitimate options, the absurd man now turns towards *life*.

The tension inherent in the Absurd takes the absurd man to the second consequence of his awakening, once he has exhausted all the possible routes of escape from the Absurd, through suicide or hope, and has realized that any of them will imply in evasion from it. It is then that it becomes clear to him that the Absurd implies a rejection of suicide and a choice for life: "Only that individual who takes the Absurd as a truth of existence is able to realize the notion of the Absurd, and, through heightened consciousness, bind himself so closely to absurdity that it becomes something to live for." (GALLOWAY, p.11) Therefore, the problem is now reversed, for at first it was a matter of "finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. *It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully.*" (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.40) This is the discovery made by the absurd man once he exhausts all arguments in favor of suicide. TILLICH further elaborates on this issue, by stating that a state of balance rests in life itself:

But man still is aware of what he has lost or is continuously losing. He is still man enough to experience his dehumanization as despair. He does not know a way out but tries to save his humanity by expressing the situation as without an "exit". He reacts with the courage of despair, the courage to take his despair upon himself and to resist the radical threat of nonbeing by the courage to be as oneself. Every analysis of present-day Existentialist philosophy, art, and literature can show their ambiguous structure: the meaninglessness which drives to despair, a passionate denunciation of this situation, and the successful or unsuccessful attempt to take the anxiety of meaninglessness *into the courage to be as oneself.*" (italics mine) (TILLICH, p.944)

From this moment onwards, the only thing that interests the absurd man is the "pure flame of life", since the meaning of existence for him amounts to "nothing else for the moment but indifference to the future and a desire to use up everything that is given." (CAMUS, p.44-5) That is, to live life without appeal:

If I convince myself that this life has no other aspect than that of the absurd, if I feel that its whole equilibrium depends on that perpetual opposition between my conscious revolt and the darkness in which it struggles, if I admit that my freedom has no meaning except in relation to its limited fate, *than I must say that what counts is not the best living, but the most living.* (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.45)

Thus, the position of integrity found by this hero is "one in which the paradox [of the absurd] is preserved and in which the individual clings to the resulting tensions and conflicts as the only potential source of meaning." (GALLOWAY, p.9) That is, the potential meaningfulness of life is found in the tension of the

absurd existence itself. CAMUS's aim on this aspect "is to shed light upon the step taken by the mind when, *starting from a philosophy of the world's lack of meaning, it ends up by finding a meaning and depth in it.*" (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.31) This tension becomes the object of this hero's resistance, for any truth he finds is worth fighting for, even if this truth means that there is no other truth rather than the one of his existence, his being. This is the individual who has "learned that it is the struggle itself which is his definition, *and not the fulfillment of some revealed or inherited view of himself and his destiny.*" (italics mine) (FIEDLER, p.79) CAMUS adds to this idea stating that "being aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom, and to the maximum, is living, and to the maximum [...] the present and succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man" (CAMUS, p.46).

In his choice for life, the hero resists the "wearying rhythm [which] lulls many back to sleep" (GALLOWAY, p.10) and decides to sustain the disproportion and cling to its truth. In this conflict between man and his absurd environment, humanistic and nihilistic impulses clash against each other, and the absurd hero faces the chance of becoming "capable of producing adequate spiritual antibodies to resist despair." (GALLOWAY, p.viii) In addition, Germaine BRÉE says that "the absurd human being is by definition wedded to life; all evasion of life is a

capitulation [and] *life is our rock*", (italics mine) (BRÉE, p.204). Thus, the absurd hero is the one who has made up his mind to find a source of meaning which will reject both nihilism and traditional absolute values. In this aspect, both Camus and Saroyan want to go beyond the anguish of nihilism and find meaning in existence itself.

Thus, the only thing that makes sense in the universe is man himself, the only being who insists upon meaning and who seeks justification against fate. Thus, *man's existence itself becomes his meaning*, for in this choice for life, the absurd hero discovers that the simple fact of being, his own existence, as opposed to nothingness, is the truth he is seeking for. Life itself, "determined and walled in by absurdities" (GALLOWAY, p.15) is the source of hope for this hero, and not hope projected into something in the future or that relies on the intervention of any kind of external power, but the hope which arises from the simple fact that this individual is, that he simply exists.

A consequence of this fact is that the sense of the immediacy of experience becomes of utmost important to this man. The past and the future become less relevant and the present moment and all that can be perceived in it is what really matters to him⁹. This is the individual who "does nothing for the eternal; [...] assured of his temporally limited freedom, of his revolt devoid of future, and of this mortal consciousness, he lives out his adventure

within the span of his lifetime." (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.49) Thus, through the conflict of the absurd, man affirms his own humanity and establishes the basis for a homocentric humanism¹⁰. (GALLOWAY, p.19)

Paradoxically, by rejecting any hope in any external source of consolation, the Absurd itself becomes a symbol of hope, for it projects meaningfulness in the fact that one is alive and that it is really everything that matters. Thus this man reaffirms his dignity: "the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions - *and to laugh at it.*" (italics mine) (ESSLIN, p.419)

For these reasons, the maintenance of awareness of the absurd is of fundamental importance. The temptation to "go back to sleep", that is, to evade the absurd is always present. Consciousness of the basis of the conflict, the break between the world and the mind must be preserved "through a constant awareness, ever revived, ever alert" (CAMUS, p.39), for this is the only coherent position for the Absurd man, since the negation of any of the terms of the Absurd represents its evasion. Therefore, the individual must keep an attitude of constant revolt, thus keeping the Absurd alive.

2.4 - The Absurd Man and Art.

As a consequence of these discoveries and of the constant awareness of his ordeal, the absurd man is the one who refuses to simply

chronicle the horrors and hazards of a meaningless world [but one who is able to] suggest paths through the modern wasteland, even if he has not always been able to chart those paths with complete precision [...] [for] the obsession with the meaninglessness can result in an art that is puerile, or merely prurient, as contrived and predictable and fashionable as the 'mass', selfless world which it purports to reject. (GALLOWAY, p.ix)

Besides, this is the man who is able to fully express his despair concerning the situation he is in, without being overtaken by it, and to maintain his firm belief in the human spirit while questioning and rejecting traditional solutions.

This capability is carried out by the absurd hero through *artistic creation*, the "agency employed by this hero to complete his actions" (PICKETT, p.ix), due to the fact that the "absurd joy par excellence is creation" (CAMUS, p.69). The importance of artistic creation for the absurd man lies in the fact that

the constant tension that keeps man face to face with the world, the ordered delirium that urges him to be receptive to everything leave him another fever. *In this universe the work of art is then the sole chance of*

keeping his consciousness and of fixing its adventures. Creating is living doubly. (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.70)

Corroborating the idea that artistic creation keeps the absurd man alive, CAMPBELL (p.388) says that meaning can be found in the self-expressive individual, not in the group or in the world, and that the "hero-deed" is now different from that of the past in that it now consists of that quest through which *the hero now attempts to find and establish his own individual identity through artistic creation.*

In this way, artistic creation becomes, along with life, a *passion* to the absurd man. It is the only way he finds to live life fully, for "in the time of the absurd reasoning, creation follows indifference and discovery. It marks the point from which absurd passions spring and where the reasoning stops." (CAMUS, p.71) It is also very important to point out that this artistic creation by the absurd man has a very peculiar characteristic in that it is intimately associated with the creator, since "an art detached from its creator is not only outmoded; it is false [...]for the same reason as the thinker, *the artist commits himself and becomes himself in his work* [since] for an absurd work of art to be possible, thought in its most lucid form must be involved in it." (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.72)

Therefore, the writer, for instance, gives up "telling stories and creates his universe." (CAMUS, p.74)

Writing becomes an excellent medium for this task, since the novel or the story is an ideal form for mirroring and confirming the confrontation of intention and reality¹¹, for, in itself, the novel, or the story, for that matter, represents a

kind of revolt in favor of order [...] by selecting and rearranging elements from reality and composing them into an imaginative pattern, *the artist gives them a meaningfulness and coherence which they would otherwise not have possessed.* As an imaginative recreation of experience, the novel can thus, in and of itself, *become a revolt against a world which appears to have no logical pattern.*" (GALLOWAY, p.7)

And in this task of ordering reality through his art, that artist must attempt not only to accept life as it is present to him, but also to be engaged in the difficult and contradictory task represented by his attempt to

work and to create *without appeal*[...] [for] if the work does not illustrate divorce and revolt, if it sacrifices to illusions and arouses hope, it ceases to be gratuitous[...]it ceases to be that exercise in detachment and passion which crowns the splendor and futility of a man's life. (CAMUS, p.76)

Therefore the writer must resist the temptation to explain and thus "forsake its initial and difficult lesson in favor of a final illusion [for] there is so much stubborn hope in the human heart. The most destitute men often end up by accepting illusion." (CAMUS, p.76) Thus, although the artist finds meaning in his being and

expresses his being through his art, he does not attempt to create illusion or hope in *anything else except in being*.

A second characteristic of the absurd work of art is that it is never an isolated thing in and by itself, for "a profound thought is in a constant state of becoming; it adopts the experience of a life and assumes its shape. That is, his work is not "a series of isolated testimonies, [rather, they] complement one another, correct or overtake one another, contradict one another too, [and what] brings creation to an end is the death of the creator, which closes his experience and the book of his genius." (CAMUS, p.84)

Even when such an artist works by juxtaposition in such a way that his work seems to be contradictory and devoid of correlations, nevertheless, when viewed all together, "they resume their natural grouping." (CAMUS, p.85) Thus, artistic creation becomes the best way for the individual to maintain awareness of the absurd tension and to plunge fully into life, for he takes material from life itself for his work. At the same time artistic creation becomes the external element through which the absurd hero asserts his humanity and his sense of being.

As important as the characteristics of the Absurd work of art mentioned above, is a third aspect which has to do with the rejection on the part of the artist, or the writer, for that matter, of *any imposition of form or even content dictated by any artistic trends or schools*. To

SARTRE words should not be used as an end in themselves: "There is nothing more deplorable than the literary practice which, I believe, is called poetic prose and which consists of using words for the obscure harmonics which resound about them and which are made up of vague meanings which are in contradiction with the clear meanings." (SARTRE, p.210-11) Thus, for this artist, the concern is not to fulfill the requirements and demands of a given style or tendency in art or letters, but to realize his being through his own individual artistic creation.

Assuming this anthropocentric position, opposing suicide or murder, this hero turns inward in his quest for truth and becomes involved in a "religious" search; religious as "anything which works for a people insofar as it fulfills needs they define as spiritual[...]on this journey to the end of night". (GALLOWAY, p.6)

Thus, this inward quest becomes a search for authentic life, as opposed to the superficial existence characteristic of man in the modern wasteland, and it asserts itself in the establishment of the individual identity characterized by a strong sense of being - "Existenz", to then reach the revelatory conclusion that "all promise of value rests in life itself" (GALLOWAY, p.6), and in the preservation of this sense of being. This establishes the modern basis for heroism and this discovered truth is defended fiercely for it is perceived as being of such importance as to justify existence. In his

quest for truth in a universe that says truths are impossible, this hero discovers that his success lies in his capacity to preserve his sense of being in the face of the elemental disproportion of his environment; that existence itself, despite its apparent meaninglessness in its absurd environment, has purpose in itself. Thus, his emphasis shifts from *attainment to performance*, "in which the struggle for truth itself becomes truth" (GALLOWAY, p.12), to the simple fact of *being*, and the Absurd Hero achieves fulfillment simply by defending this truth.

In conclusion, the Absurd Hero is the one who assumes the role of a rebel involved in a revolt or war against meaninglessness and disorder in the battlefield of life's wasteland. He finds in artistic creation the weapon with which to reinstate order and meaning in his own universe and rejects all "conventional value systems as either explanation for this conflict or relief from it", refusing to avoid the components of the absurd. This hero is the one who answers the "call to humanize and to transform the inhumanity of the world" (GALLOWAY, p.19), and the consciousness of the absurd is followed by the refusal to be obsessed and paralysed by it. "The absurd man becomes free the moment he recognizes his own absurdity [for] the most appalling truths can lose their power over us once we have absolutely recognized and accepted them." (GALLOWAY, p.13)

In this way, awareness gives this man the opportunity to realize his own individual identity, and thus defeat the gods, despite the situation he is in. Since his quest is within and not without, his victory is also internal and not external, for he does not have to accomplish anything external to become a victor, but to reach that sense of being which cannot be taken away. This powerful sense of being can only be achieved in the absurd environment. At the same time, this hero is not seeking success or victory in terms of approval of his ideas by those surrounding him, for, in the role of the absurd conqueror, he knows that "there are no victorious causes" and is conscious that his cause is a lost one, but is nevertheless worth fighting for, for a lost cause "requires an uncontaminated soul, equal to its defeat as to its temporary victories." (CAMUS, p.65) This is the man who's not "striving to be better; [he] is attempting to be *consistent*." (italics mine) (CAMUS, p.67)

An important outcome of this discussion is the fact that within the very limits of nihilism it is possible to chart paths to move *beyond* nihilism. (CAMUS, p.v) The unifying principle of the concepts of the Absurd, therefore, may be considered as a "lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert" (CAMUS, p.v), for man can create his own values, all by himself, without any external help. By turning into himself, to the fact of his *being*, and by embracing life

and not rejecting it, he can "arrive at the joy of truth."
(GALLOWAY, p.15)

This is precisely what Saroyan achieves through his hero in *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, where the protagonist finds in *life itself, in being*, expressed by *remembrance through artistic creation*, the reason and fulfillment for his existence, as I intend to demonstrate.

 NOTES

¹ CAMUS, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated from the French by Justin O'Brien. New York: Random House, 1955. 151p. It was originally published in France as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in 1942, eight years after the publication of *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* by William Saroyan.

² "[Sisyphus] is accused of a certain levity in regard to the gods. He stole their secrets. Aegina, the daughter of Aesopus, was carried off by Jupiter. The father was shocked by that disappearance and complained to Sisyphus. He, who knew of the abduction, offered to tell about it on condition that Aesopus would give water to the citadel of Corinth. To the celestial thunderbolts he preferred the benediction of water. He was punished for this in the underworld. Homer tells us also that Sisyphus had put Death in chains. Pluto could not endure the sight of his deserted, silent empire. He dispatched the god of war, who liberated Death from the hands of their conqueror.

It is also said that Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife's love. He ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary. Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld, where his rock was ready for him." (CAMUS, p.89)

³ Especially the writings of TILlich, JASPERS, KIERKEGAARD, HEIDEGGER and SARTRE in *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* by ELLMAN and FEILDELSON, Roy PICKETT in *The Theme of the Hero*, David GALLOWAY in *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, Arnold HINCHLIFFE in *The Absurd*, Joseph CAMPBELL in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, as well as others.

⁴ GALLOWAY adds that what reinforces this feeling of estrangement is the fact that "the world ceases to be familiar when even the worst reasons fail to be of any help in explaining or ordering it." (GALLOWAY, p.5) And KIERKEGAARD also offers his definition of the Absurd: "Now what is it that I have come up against? The *absurd*. And what is the *absurd*? It is, as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just

as well do one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say: you cannot act-and yet here is where I have to act. But that is the case every time I have to act really decisively; because I am then caught up in an infinite passion, and that is just where the incongruity between action and reflection becomes evident. In the routine of everyday I do not notice the secret of reflection, and so imagine that I am acting upon reflection in spite of the fact that nothing is more impossible-because reflection is the equilibrium of possibilities." (KIERKEGAARD, p.857)

⁵ Commenting HEIDEGGER's thoughts on the absurd, CAMUS says that "to the man lost in the world and its diversions this anxiety is a brief, fleeting fear. But if that fear becomes conscious of itself, it becomes anguish, the perpetual climate of the lucid man 'in whom existence is concentrated.[...] the world can no longer offer anything to the man filled with anguish.'" (CAMUS, p.18) And borrowing from SARTRE's work on the absurd, CAMUS employs the term "nausea" to illustrate the feeling. Nevertheless, HEIDEGGER's thoughts on the Absurd differ from CAMUS'in that the first does not define it as anxiety: "It would be truer to say that dread is pervaded by a peculiar kind of peace. And although dread is always 'dread of', it is not dread of this or that. 'Dread of', is always a dreadful feeling 'about'- but not about this or that. The indefiniteness of *what* we dread is not just lack of definition: it represents the essential impossibility of defining the 'what'.[...] All things, and we with them, sink into a sort of indifference. But not in the sense that everything simply disappears; rather, in the very act of drawing away from us everything turns towards us. This withdrawal of what-is-in-totality, which then crowds around us in dread, this is what oppresses us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, is this 'nothing'." (HEIDEGGER, p.838)

⁶ Concerning evasion from the absurd, CAMUS says that "the important thing is to find out how people get away in the first case and why people stay in the second case." (CAMUS, p.22)

⁷ On this aspect, CAMUS asked: "Does absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide - this is what must be clarified, hunted down, and elucidated while brushing aside all the rest. Does the Absurd dictate death?" (CAMUS, p.7)

⁸ Commenting on those who chose suicide, CAMUS claimed that "they then abdicated what was most precious to them, their life. Others, princes of the mind, abdicated likewise, but they initiated the suicide of their thought in its purest revolt." (CAMUS, p.8)

⁹ On this matter CAMUS mentions the work of the phenomenologists in their concern with the description of every aspect of experience, and CAMUS claims that this principle of phenomenology helps to illustrate the absurd reasoning better than anything else: "There is no longer a single idea explaining

everything, but an infinite number of essences giving a meaning to an infinite number of objects." (CAMUS, p.33) This aspect also helps to clarify the feeling of freedom this individual achieves, since he is not bound by the past nor concerned exclusively with what the future will present to him. He wants to live the present moment as if it were the only thing he had.

¹⁰ GALLOWAY characterizes these writers, including CAMUS, as "post-existential humanists." (GALLOWAY, p.viii)

¹¹ Writing about this confrontation experienced by writers in America, GALLOWAY says that "many American novelists are considering the same disquiet, anxieties and apparent lack of meaning and hope analysed by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* - they share with him a common concern for religious and moral themes, especially in terms of the struggle to find value and fulfillment in a world without God." (GALLOWAY, p.8) And GALLOWAY also mentions that several American writers, including T.S. Eliot, Hemingway, Faulkner and Morris, "have noted similar manifestations of the absurd." (GALLOWAY, p.10)

3 - SAROYAN'S SHORT STORIES IN *THE DARING YOUNG MAN* ON *THE FLYING TRAPEZE*.

This chapter presents some of the theoretical concepts of the short story, a discussion and analysis of each selected short story individually and a discussion of William Saroyan's literary style in the selection.

3.1 - The Lyric Short Story:

The contribution of the theoretical concepts on the short story, presented here, is that they take into consideration the parallel development of two different kinds of short story, the better known and more traditional epical story, and the lyric short story, considered here as a mode "which can be perfectly distinguished by its characteristic subjects, structures, tone and language." (BALDESHWILER, p.213) Such distinction is important because most of Saroyan's short stories in *Daring* selected for this

study fall into the category of the lyric story. This aspect was not taken into consideration by Saroyan's critics, many of whom dismissed his stories because they did not have the formal characteristics typical of the epical story, favored by them at the time Saroyan was publishing his stories.

The main general characteristics of the epical short story are the presence of a clear plot which is forwarded by specific external action developed through characters; a decisive ending which usually leads to universal insights; and almost invariably the use of prose realism language for its expression.

On the other hand, the lyric short story - whose development is traced by BALDESHWILER¹ from its inception by Turgenev, through Chekhov and his English followers Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, to the American writers Sherwood Anderson (who influenced Saroyan), Katherine Anne Porter and such contemporaries as Eudora Welty and John Updike - presents the following characteristics:

1) Instead of emphasizing plot development, it focuses mainly on the *internal changes, moods and feelings* of the characters and the protagonist, and utilizes structural patterns in subordination to the shape of the emotion being depicted. Thus, conventional plot is forsaken. The story is free from its limitations and the narrative shifts focus from

external action to internal states of mind. Although plot is not the central aspect of these stories, however, they nevertheless have an internal structure, for although

many present-day stories seem disconnected or chaotic, [...] we need only to penetrate beneath the surface of the mode of presentation to recognize integrating principles. The occasional story which seeks to reflect the chaos of our times by means of utter irrelevancies has chosen a plausible, but probably a self-defeating, nonartistic principle. (STROUD, p.119)

BADER adds to STROUD's definition claiming that the lyrical and the modern short story, despite arguments against it, does have a structure or pattern; a basic design or "skeletal framework", although expressed in different techniques. Unlike the structure of traditional plot stories which are characterized by essentially dramatic lines of progression, including a clear conflict, crisis and resolution, the modern short story "may seem plotless, fragmentary, and amorphous" (BADER, p.108), perhaps from a tendency by writers to attempt to break away from traditional plots, which is certainly the case with Saroyan.

The central point in this aspect is that unlike the nineteenth century story teller, who was a master of plot, the twentieth century writer, "seeing that life was not made up of neatly parcelled collections of incidents, took his rebel stand." (BADER, p.110) It is important to observe that this is not a reaction against plot itself, but against the misuse of plot. This is Saroyan's attitude towards his stories. He wasn't interested in obeying literary rules in

order to produce a pleasing effect or for the sake of the rules themselves, but to employ devices such as indirection, for instance, characteristic of the lyrical modern short story, to convey images of ordinary but extremely relevant instances of human experience. Thus, Saroyan does not state things directly or openly. Instead, they are suggested, hinted at, or simply implied.

2) Besides fragmenting and forsaking plot, the author *focuses attention on certain minute details*; the combination of sounds, smell and color images, as well as dream sequences, idyllic interludes and shifts of tone, which are reported with the fidelity of naturalistic art, conveying powerful impressions;

3) *Symbols* are employed to perform structural functions which help to extend meaning, and especially Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and Katherine Anne Porter made use of *epiphanies* to reflect and resolve emotional complexities;

4) *Language* is explored to express states of feeling and changes in emotion. Lyrical short stories are expressed in the "condensed, evocative and figured language of the poem" (BALDESHWILER, p.210) However, they maintain the essential elements of fiction: characters involved in action in time, expressed through prose;

5) The story is cut free from "the tale, the moral fable; the romantic reverie and the journalistic *jeu*." (BALDESHWILER, p.210) Especially in the case of Sherwood Anderson, there is a combination of the skills of the naturalistic writer with those of the poet. The result is that of *fragmentation of chronological sequence; repetitive, incantatory rhythmic effects; ritualized dialogue;*

6) *Interior monologue* is employed to convey images of conflicting emotions;

7) Lyrical stories usually rely on the *open ending*, as well as other patterns of story organization, "such as the alternation of scenes and moods for a 'surrealistic' effect, the circling around a central dilemma or set of feelings, the record of a moment of intense feeling or perception which contains its own significant form" (BALDESHWILER, p.206).

8) The use of *variety and disparity of materials which are nevertheless fully integrated*. Stories are built in such a way as to "present isolated blocks of description that are joined by a continuity of persistent inquiry in the narrative voice." (BALDESHWILER, p.212) BADER suggests that this "stricter limitation of subject and the method of indirection produce a desire for realism and a focus upon a limited moment of time or a limited area of action in order

that it may be more fully explored and understood." (BADER, p.110)

The result of combinations of these techniques is that of short stories which produce *powerful impressions*, and effects that are "poetical, even lyrical, and, as in lyric, it is not plot development that arouses interest. On the contrary, the reader experiences 'infection' by the poet's mood." (BALDESHWILER, p.204) These *impressionistic* touches alert the senses of the reader, soften his feelings and make him reflective. Thus, this attitude towards writing requires the reader's participation in the process, for it is left to his "imagination to fill in all that is left unsaid" by the writer. (BADER, p.110) Therefore, the reader must supply the missing parts of the traditional plot in many lyrical modern stories.

That is the case with Saroyan as well, along with the fact that the apparent lack of relationship between events and characters is deliberate - the aim of a story of this kind is a *perceived* relationship - the reader must find the pattern. (BADER, p.112) Such stories derive much of their power from their ability to project the reader's imagination beyond their limits.

The point in question is that Saroyan's technique is different from that of the epical story and it is this difference in technique that is frequently mistaken for lack of structure by readers and critics.

3.2 - Plots and Settings in *Daring*.

In order to provide the background for the characterization of the Saroyan Hero in the selection of short stories in *Daring* and to familiarize the reader with the stories selected for this study, this section presents an analysis of each selected short story.

Since the protagonist present in each of these stories is treated as being the same hero, and the different stories as variations on the same theme, the stories are presented here in a chronological order in terms of the development of this hero, and not in the order of their original appearance in the book².

3.2.1 - "Seventy Thousand Assyrians"

Considered by several critics as the best story in *Daring*, "Assyrians" reflects one of the outstanding aspects of Saroyan's personal writing style, characterized by stories

that have "to do less with the intricacies of character and plot than with the moods and feelings of the narrator." (FOSTER, p.7)

Like "Daring Young Man", this story also received considerable positive criticism. Budd SCHULBERG expressed his surprise when he first came across "Assyrians", saying that the story

didn't read like Hemingway or Morley Callaghan or Daniel Cornel De Jong. That, as I knew from my own bit of undergraduate writing, took some doing in those days. *It was absolutely its own voice. It was impudent, it was audacious, it was true. It dared to be not only its own content but its own form.* You will never know how difficult that is to do until you try it. (italics mine) (SCHULBERG, p.72)

Howard FLOAN further describes Saroyan's style in "Assyrians" saying that he "installs himself as narrator in order to gain the immediacy and credibility of his presence and yet he overcomes the usual limiting effects of autobiographical devices by telling of those whose backgrounds differ widely from his own." (FLOAN, p.28)

This story deals with a young writer who goes to the Barber College for a cheap haircut. Once there, while he waits for his turn, he is eager to make friends with everyone around him, and he is very attentive to every detail about the people surrounding him. They consist of poor old men, lost boys, displaced people. As he waits, he wanders from one topic to another, from politics to literature, including his

choice of being a writer. He himself dates the events in the story as taking place during the Depression (December, 1933).

Throughout the story there are metafictional elements in which the writer digresses from the narrative and deals with the topic of writing, his uneasiness about what to write about and what he is trying to do in the story. It is clear that the protagonist is a writer himself and he is obviously addressing the reader. One of these interruptions in the narrative takes place when he is describing the feeling of disgust of the young Japanese barber who is shaving a tramp and can't stand the smell of the old man:

He was shaving an old tramp who had a horrible face, one of those faces that emerge from years and years of evasive living, years of being unsettled, of not belonging anywhere, of owning nothing, and the Japanese boy was holding his nose back (his own nose) so that he would not smell the old tramp. *A trivial point in the story, a bit of data with no place in a work of art, nevertheless, I put it down. A young writer is always afraid some significant fact may escape him. He is always wanting to put in everything he sees.* (italics mine) ("Assyrians", p. 30).

The entire story is punctuated by these interruptions and the narrative is often taken from its course. It is obvious that there isn't really a clear plot or main aspect to be communicated to a reader. There isn't a conflict or situation to be solved. The impression is that of someone attempting to make contact, who is trying a number of different topics, even unrelated ones, to reach out and strike a conversation with someone else. It is someone who is eager to be in touch with another human being, who is trying

hard to fight loneliness and isolation, and who is hungrily absorbing any amount of human experience that life can offer him. Thus, the young man who is attempting to reach out to the people in the barber shop is also the young writer who is reaching out to his reader.

The achievement of this juxtaposition of fragments is the strong impression and lyricism caused by the collection of reactions to fractions of human experience. The point that is clearly established is that any bit of human experience, no matter how ordinary or how small and insignificant, has importance in itself, for it is part of life, of *being*. Each isolated fragment of experience is like a small piece of colored material that is employed alongside other fragments which, from a distance, become a mosaic which communicates a strong impression of human life, filled with sorrows, joy, laughter, tears, birth, life and death.

The young writer is intensely dedicated to sharing with everyone else the importance of being alive and of the brotherhood of man. That is really all that matters to him and for that purpose he will employ his means, that is, writing, in the best possible way to achieve his purpose:

I am out here in the far West, in San Francisco, in a small room on Carl Street, writing a letter to common people, telling them in simple language things they already know. I am merely making a record, so if I wander a little, it is because I am in no hurry and because I do not know the rules. If I have any desire at all, it is to show the brotherhood of man. ("Assyrians", p.32)

Throughout the story he moves back and forth, between the narrative of the story he set out to tell and his own feelings about writing and his beliefs, bits of information about members of his family and friends, the works of other writers such as Hemingway.

At several moments his anxiety and despair over trying to communicate something important and over precision comes to the surface, for he is aware of the difficulty involved in really communicating something to the heart of man as opposed to merely saying meaningless things:

Now I am beginning to feel guilty and incompetent. I have used all this language and I am beginning to feel that I have said nothing. This is what drives a young writer out of his head, this feeling that nothing is being said. Any ordinary journalist would have been able to put the whole business into a three-word caption. Man is man, he would have said. Something clever, with any number of implications. *But I want to use language that will create a single implication. I want the meaning to be precise [...] and I am trying to see it from all angles, so that I will have a whole picture, a picture of wholeness. It is the heart of man that I am trying to imply in my work.* (italics mine) ("Assyrians", p.33)

He finally manages to tell the story of the seventy thousand remaining Assyrians who have survived after centuries of war and persecution, but who are still being destroyed by their enemies. The protagonist grieves over this sad story told him by his Assyrian barber, Theodore Badal. But he equally grieves over the fate of the old tramp being shaved by the Japanese barber, as he grieves over young "Iowa", the sixteen year old boy who was as displaced as anyone else in that barber shop: "I have prayed for Iowa, and

I consider myself a coward. By this time he must be dead, and I am sitting in a small room, talking about him, only talking." ("Assyrians", p.29)

As the conversation between the barber and writer develops over the fate of the Assyrian and Armenian races, it gradually becomes clear that the main issue is not really ethnical or political matters, but the preservation of the individual's identity and integrity. When the young writer mentions the enemies of his nation he is aware that such enemies do not consist of individuals, but of mobs:

I think now that I have affection for all people, even for the enemies of Armenia, whom I have so tactfully not named. Everyone knows who they are. I have nothing against any of them because I think of them as one man living one life at a time, and I know, I am positive, that one man at a time is incapable of monstrosities performed by mobs. *My objection is to mobs only.* (italics mine) ("Assyrians", p.38)

He believes that as long as a person establishes and maintains his own identity and integrity, he will not be led into massacres and other atrocities. However, when individuals give up their identities and allow themselves to be shaped into a mob, they may end up as instruments of the destruction of other human beings. This vision reflects the thoughts of KIERKEGAARD, who reinforces the individuality of man and the danger in crowds: "A crowd [...] is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction." (KIERKEGAARD, p.810)

Thus, stressing his belief in the importance of one's individual identity and dignity, this young man assumes the role of the daring young writer, using language to make a record of the real people he meets everyday for he refuses to create fictional characters to please literary critics, like what he claims other writers are trying to do:

Michael Arlen [a writer] is an Armenian, too. He is pleasing the public. I have great admiration for him, and I think he has perfected a very fine style of writing and all that, *but I don't want to write about the people he likes to write about. Those people were dead to begin with. You take Iowa and the Japanese boy and Theodore Badal, the Assyrian; well, they may go down physically, like Iowa, to death, or spiritually, like Badal, to death, but they are of the stuff that is eternal in man and it is this stuff that interests in me. You don't find them in bright places, making witty remarks about sex and trivial remarks about art. You find them where I found them, and they will be there forever, the race of man, the part of man, of Assyria as much as of England, that cannot be destroyed, the part that massacre does not destroy, the part that earthquake and war and famine and madness and everything else cannot destroy.* (italics mine) ("Assyrians", p.40)

As stated before, all of these fragments juxtapose to form an impressionistic rendering of human character, that eternal component of man which cannot be destroyed by anything, as long as individuals cling to it tenaciously, considering it more precious than physical existence itself.

Concerning form, "Assyrians" presents several of the characteristics of the lyrical story. Although this story still presents a plot, it is unconventional, especially in the sense that it is fragmented and wayward. Instead, the focus of the story is on the moods and feelings of the narrator concerning his relationship with the people

surrounding him. There are several instances of detailed descriptions of some scenes, especially when the young barber is shaving the tramp; and the story itself, besides being open-ended, takes its inspiration from unusual sources; and the language employed relies on interior monologues and digressions. The fragmentation and juxtaposition of the loosely connected parts of the story help to better convey the impression that one is trying to make sense out of a meaningless and senseless reality, which would not be as effectively expressed through a linear and conventional plot.

3.2.2 - "Myself Upon The Earth"

Again, there is hardly any action in this essay-like story. The wayward and fragmented plot, consisting of a poor young writer attempting to write a short story about his typewriter, seems to lead nowhere at certain moments. In addition, before being able to get to his topic, he wanders around, sharing with the reader his ideas about literature, life, and many other issues. Despite the fragmentation of the story, however, there is a central point, typical of all the other stories in this selection, which is the relevance of any small aspect of human experience, the quest for existential significance, for *being*. The writer's concern is

not necessarily to write about his typewriter, as he himself states as his purpose, but to think about and to share with others the importance of writing as a tool to record fragments of life; to consider his purpose and process in writing as he does so and to share his ideas on the entire issue with his reader.

He makes it clear that writing is of utmost importance to him. It is also obvious that he does not write just to make money in order to survive, but writing for him is a way to express his joy for living:

I am a young man in an old city. It is morning and I am in a small room. I am standing over a bundle of yellow writing paper, the only sort of paper I can afford, the kind that sells at the rate of one hundred and seventy sheets for ten cents. All this paper is bare of language, clean and perfect, and I am a young writer about to begin my work. It is Monday...September 25, 1933...how glorious it is to be alive, to be still living [...] the moment is of great importance to me, and therefore of great importance to everyone. I am about to place language, my language, upon a clean sheet of paper, and I am trembling. It is so much of a responsibility to be a user of words [...] now that I have come to a labor even more magnificent than living itself I do not want to utter a single false word. ("Myself", p.52)

This is the central aspect of the story: the writer's own peculiar poetics. And he has his own specific ideas on how to write and what to write about: "I am a story-teller, and I have but a single story - man. I want to tell this simple story in my own way, forgetting the rules of rhetoric, the tricks of composition. I have something to say and I do not wish to speak like Balzac." ("Myself", p.53) He is concerned about life and about man and writing is his tool to

record his feelings and beliefs about these two related topics. He quite clearly sees himself as a fighter in a war and considers writing his weapon: "My only weapon is language, and while I know it is stronger than machine-guns, I despair because I cannot singlehanded annihilate the notion of destruction which propagandists awaken in man." ("Myself", p.54) However, it is also quite clear that this writer struggles with his task. There is an element of anxiety and even despair which he faces due to his fear of not being able to express what he wishes to communicate. Despite these difficulties, however, he is determined not to be changed, but to remain true to himself and to his vision: "I am determined not to lose my character." ("Myself", p.53)

This attitude alienates this writer from society, for he lives "in a world which does not highly prize the search for being, a quest which is finally the motivating power behind all artistic creation. [such writers] *are spiritual anarchists whose nonconformity celebrates the potentials of the individual human spirit.*" (italics mine) (CALONNE, p.24)

The writer in the story continues his wanderings and includes fragments of his relationship with his deceased father, his love of music and then finally comes to the story which he had been about to tell, the fact that he had exchanged the typewriter for fifteen dollars with a money lender in a moment of utter despair due to lack of money. He talks about his misery without his instrument with which to record all the precious fragments of human experiences he

finds along his way and shares with the reader his joy when he was able to recover his typewriter.

Therefore the story in itself functions mostly as a framework for these philosophical and existential principles, which, characterized by nonconformity, are revealed in the story. These feelings and ideas pervade not only this story, but also all the other stories selected in this study, serving as a linking element which unites all of them.

As in "Assyrians", the main lyrical elements in "Myself" are the absence of a clear and conventional plot, replaced by a focus on moods and feelings and the use of interior monologues characterized by fragmentation. Besides, there are several instances when Saroyan relies intensely on lyrical and poetic language:

The earth is vast. And with the earth all things are vast, the skyscraper and the blade of grass. The eye will magnify if the mind and soul will allow. And the mind may destroy time, brother of death, and brother, let us remember, of life as well. Wastest of all is the ego, the germ of humanity, from which is born God and the universe, heaven and hell, the earth, the face of man, my face and your face; our eyes. For myself, I say with piety, rejoice. ("Myself", p.52)

Instances of the fragmentation of plot appear throughout the story. At several points the narrator says that he will start the story he is supposed to tell, but he still gets involved with another topic:

And what satisfaction do I get from writing stories? Well, that is the story. Still, I do not want anyone to suppose that I am complaining. I do not want you to feel

that I am a hero of some sort, or, on the other hand, that I am a sentimentalist... ("Myself", p.56).

At other moments, he reveals that he is aware of such fragmentation: "All this rambling may seem pointless and a waste of time, but it is not. There is absolutely no haste - I can walk the hundred yard dash in a full day - and anyone who prefers may toss this story aside and take up something in the *Cosmopolitan*." ("Myself", p.59) And later, when he again mentions that he will eventually tell the story:

I shall come soon to the matter of the typewriter, but there is no hurry. I am a story-teller, not an aviator. I am not carrying myself across the Atlantic in the cockpit of an airplane which moves at the rate of two hundred and fifty miles per hour. It is Monday of this year, 1933, and *I am trying to gather as much of eternity into this story as possible.* (italics mine) ("Myself", p.62)

Thus, even when mentioning that he will tell his story, he still departs from it to add another detail which nevertheless has all the importance of the world to him.

He finally tells the "story" he is supposed to tell in the last three pages of the story, and even then, still departs from it. At this point the narrator starts the story all over again, and the open-ending employs practically the same words used in the beginning: "This morning I got it back [the typewriter]. It is before me now and I am tapping at it, and this is what I have written." ("Myself", p.66)

The narrator constantly focuses on impressions and feelings, and uses abundant references to his own beliefs and personal experiences, resorting to biographical narration,

especially describing his relationship with his deceased father:

My father was a writer, too. He was an unpublished writer. I have all his great manuscripts, his great poems and stories, written in our native language, which I cannot read. Two or three times each year I bring out all my father's papers and stare for hours at his contribution to the literature of the world. Like myself, I am pleased to say, he was desperately poor... ("Myself", p.60)

Such fragmentation and plotlessness, however, do not keep the story from becoming a cohesive whole. Instead, its characteristics combine to produce an intense and warm impression, characteristic of the lyrical short story and Saroyan's personal writing style in *Daring*.

3.2.3 - "A Cold Day"

"A Cold Day" is one of those pieces of Saroyan's writings that defy literary classification³. As in a letter, it is addressed to someone, "Dear M."; and the narrator himself says that he is writing a letter. Like "Myself", it presents elements of an essay associated with scattered thoughts about writing and literature.

Despite criticizing Saroyan for including this piece in the collection, FLOAN nevertheless recognizes the merit of the story in that it achieves "a tone of spontaneity and ease

and communicates a feeling of intimacy and involvement that is essential to this kind of writing." (FLOAN, p.26)

The characterization of the text as a letter helps to convey a feeling of intimacy. "M" is never identified in the story⁴, for it is really a "letter" addressed to the reader. The protagonist of the story is a young writer, alone in his small rented room, who writes this letter to complain of the cold which is keeping him from writing his short stories. Despite the absence, once again, of a clear plot and structure, characteristic of the lyrical story, like in "Aspirin", this short piece nevertheless contributes with several elements, described below, which reveal important aspects about Saroyan's Absurd Hero.

As stated previously, the text does not take the shape of a story in a strict sense. Instead, it really consists of the narration of several fragments of human experience, which combine to create an impression. The pervading idea in this impression is that anything and everything is a topic for writing, for any bit of human experience, no matter how small or insignificant, is worth being recorded as some form of art.

The nameless young writer complains that although he is trying very hard, he is not being able to write any stories. What is very obvious is his urge to write, for it seems to be as important to him as breathing: "I very much dislike letting a day go by without writing a short story and that is why I am writing this letter..." ("A Cold Day", p.153)

He is also aware that his stories may never be printed, but that does not keep him from writing. As the cold intensifies, he even thinks of burning some old books he owns to warm himself. He considers several books with the potential of becoming burning material, but in the end he can not even burn a book in German, a language he does not understand, for the simple fact that he feels any written language is too precious to be destroyed, even when one does not understand what it means. Every moment he thinks of burning a book he thinks of the language they contain. He is not sorry for the book itself, but for what is implied in a book: the writer behind it, his ideas about it, no matter how silly they might be. He finally gives up the idea of burning books: "Anyway, I didn't burn a single page of a single book, and I went on freezing and writing. Every now and then I burned a match just to remind myself what a flame looked like." ("A Cold Day", p.152)

The image and symbolism of a flame producing light and heat suggests the idea of writing as a light dispelling darkness and chaos, and producing some kind of meaning and coherence in the world. To this young writer, writing is not simply a hobby or a means of making enough money to survive: "It is simply this: that if you have any respect for the mere idea of books, what they stand for in life, if you believe in paper and print, you cannot burn any page of any book." ("A Cold Day", p.158)

This tremendous importance of the written word conveyed by his attitudes about writing is coupled with a sense of discomfort and restlessness, a sense of being lost and of going nowhere. He feels there is so much to write about and yet he cannot seem to get down to it. Later on he states that he has been in his room all day, from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon, trying to write, unable to do so. He has attempted to start many times, but got nowhere.

The circular structure of this story, the fact that it keeps going back to the beginning, coupled with the restricted setting gives the impression of claustrophobia and paralysis, caused by the thought of staying in a small, cold room all day long, unable to do anything. Even his warm-up and stretching exercises seem to be totally misplaced and absurd, if not altogether pathetic, for it reveals his hopelessness and incapacity to change the situation he is in.

The young man keeps switching from one topic to the next and after talking about his incapacity to write and to play music on the phonograph (it is so cold that not even the phonograph will work), he talks about the fact that his typewriter has been functioning marvelously. He is also aware that his theme is quite irrelevant, but he knows that he is forming an impression, and that is what matters to him⁵:

That's what it amounts to. If you can't write a decent short story because of the cold, write something else. Write anything. Write a long letter to somebody. Tell them how cold you are. By the time the letter is received the sun will be out again and you will be warm again, but

the letter will be there mentioning the cold. If it is so cold that you can't make up a little ordinary Tuesday prose, why, what the hell, say anything that comes along, just so it's the truth. Talk about your toes freezing, about the time you actually wanted to burn books to keep warm but couldn't do it, about the phonograph. Speak of the little unimportant thing on a cold day, when your mind is numb and your feet and hands frozen. Mentioned the things you wanted to write but couldn't. This is what I have been telling myself. ("A Cold Day", p.159)

At several moments the writer addresses the reader, revealing aspects about the creative process he is involved with. He laments having forgotten what he initially wanted to say and even attempts to try to say it unsuccessfully. Thus he continues sharing with his reader his ideas about writing. As he does so, he reveals important aspects of his poetics and his own philosophy of life, as can be observed in the excerpt above. He is intent in transparency and in the sense of being, as perhaps the most important thing an individual can ever possess. Thus he uses writing, in a very personal and unsophisticated way, to record fragments of human experience and therefore stress the importance of simply existing. This seems to be the compelling passion of this young writer. In this sense he is totally engaged, not to politics or extraneous ideologies, but to himself, in his daring attempt to be himself. And he moves beyond that, encouraging others to do the same, making use of energetic and poetic language:

Do not deceive. Do not make up lies for the sake of pleasing anyone. No one need be killed in your story. Simply relate what is the great event of all history, of all time, *the humble, artless truth of mere being*. There is no greater theme: no one need be violent to help you

with your art. There *is* violence. Mention it of course when it is time to mention it. Mention the war. Mention all ugliness, all waste. Do even this lovingly. *But emphasize the glorious truth of mere being. It is the major theme.* You do not have to create a triumphant climax. The man you write of need not perform some heroic or monstrous deed in order to make your prose great. Let him do what he has always done, day in and day out, continuing to live. Let him walk and talk and think and sleep and dream and awaken and walk again and talk again and move and be alive. It is enough. *There is nothing else to write about.* You have never seen a short story in life. The events of life have never fallen into the form of the short story or the form of the poem, or into any other form. Your own consciousness is the only form you need. Your own awareness is the only action you need. Speak of this man, recognize his existence. Speak of man. (*italics mine*) ("A Cold Day", p.161)

This excerpt exemplifies the protagonist's existential attitude about life, and the way he sees writing in relation to his beliefs about life. It is clear that to this young writer the written work is a tool for the realization of the individual's being. This is his poetics and his passion.

Despite all this, however, he feels paradoxically unable to do what he has set about to. He himself realizes that all of this is "a poor idea of what the story was to have been like." His only consolation is that he can at least put into words the remembrance of that story. The point seems to be that there really is not a story. What this young writer wants to share, as in all the other stories, is the importance of one's being. His frustration probably stems from the feeling he has that he is possibly the only one who has this vision and he feels unable to effectively share it with others.

In the end of the story he is back to the beginning, seemingly at the same point where he had started, once again complaining of the cold and of his incapacity to communicate:

All day I have been in this room freezing, wanting to say something solid and clean about all of us who are alive. But it was so cold I couldn't do it. All I could do was swing my arms and smoke cigarettes and feel rotten [...] The most I can say now is that it is very cold in San Francisco, and I am freezing. ("A Cold Day", p.163)

Ironically, however, despite his pessimism, he communicates something. His insistence upon the importance of all small fragments of experience and all of his ideas about life and writing are not only his, for these feelings are shared by all of those people who are also seeking for meaning and purpose in life. Perhaps his basic problem is that he is trying to communicate such truths in the wrong way or in the wrong medium, but nevertheless he is trying, and by doing so, he himself is the flame that brings about a flicker of light and a little bit of warmth to a dark and cold world.

The focus on internal moods, the fragmentation of plot and the use of symbols and interior monologues, lyrical elements employed in "A Cold Day", produce a story which is highly impressionistic and adequately illustrate the feelings and emotions of the protagonist.

Perhaps the most interesting one is William Saroyan's choice of unusual material for this story. Besides, as in the previous stories, the lack of a clear and forwarding plot

and the fact that the story doesn't really progress to a climax or any resolution, reinforces the feeling of helplessness that dominates the protagonist. The narrator keeps moving redundantly back and forth between his comments about the cold weather and his difficulty to write:

I am sitting in a very cold room and there is no sun anywhere, and the only thing I can talk about is the cold because it is the only thing going on today. I am freezing and my teeth are chattering. I would like to know what the Democratic party ever did for freezing short story writers. Everybody else gets heat. We've got to depend on the sun and in the winter the sun is undependable. That's the fix I am in: wanting to write and not being able to, because of the cold. ("A Cold Day", 154)

The symbols employed in the story, especially fire and flame, represent life and warmth, as opposed to the cold and darkness surrounding the protagonist.

Detailed descriptions of small, rather irrelevant aspects in the story are used in several instances, such as when he talks about his books and his intention of burning one of them for heat and light:

All of my books are old and cheap. I have about five hundred of them and I paid a nickel for most of them, but when I looked around for titles to burn, I couldn't find any. There was a large heavy book in German on anatomy that would have made a swell fire, but when I opened it and read a line of that beautiful language, *sie bestehen aus zwei Hüftgelenkbeugemuskeln des Oberschenkels, von denen der eine breitere*, and so on, I couldn't do it. It was asking too much. I couldn't understand the language, I couldn't understand a word in the whole book, but it was somehow too eloquent to use for a fire. The book had cost me five cents two or three years ago, and it weighed about six pounds, so you see that even as fire wood it had been a bargain and I should have been able to tear out its pages and make a fire. ("A Cold Day", p.155)

Thus, the lyrical aspects in "A Cold Day" unite several elements of the lyrical story in a highly effective way in characterizing the Absurd Hero present in them.

3.2.4 - "Aspirin is a Member of the N.R.A."⁶

The opening paragraph in "Aspirin" somewhat resembles the opening paragraphs in "Daring Young Man." Besides functioning as an introduction to the story, it is also a separate element in itself. The effect is that of a vague impression or a misty background for the story about to be told:

Remember above all things the blood, remember that man is flesh, that flesh suffers pain, and that the mind being caught in flesh suffers with it. Remember that the spirit is a form of the flesh, and the soul its shadow. Above all things humor and intelligence, and truth as the only beginning: not what is said or done, not obviousness: the truth of silences, the intelligence of nothing said, nothing done. The piety. Faces. Memory, our memory of the earth, this one and the other, the one which is now this and the one that was once another, what we saw, and the sun. It is our life and we have no other. Remember God, the multitudinous God. Remember laughter. ("Aspirin", p.131)

This opening paragraph sets the tone for this story which was highly appraised by one critic⁷, but also regarded

a failure by another⁸. This is also one of the few of Saroyan's short stories that includes some form of social protest. Nevertheless, it does not limit itself to political protest only. It deals with deeper issues, and touches upon social aspects only superficially. FOSTER suggests that "Aspirin" "contains no solutions to the social problems it describes - or rather *it suggests that there are no solutions except those an individual works out for him- or herself.*" (italics mine) (FOSTER, p.10) Thus the protest in this story encourages inward, not outward action, in which the individual takes responsibility for his own choices and for his own individual existence, not expecting solutions from without, nor blaming external forces for his situation.

"Aspirin", one of the stories in the selection that has a somewhat linear and organized plot, although containing several lyrical elements, tells the story of a young man who lives alone in a small rented room in the heart of Manhattan in New York City in the 1930's. This young man "studies the people in the subway", and works in an office downtown. It is hinted in the story that he is also an unsuccessful writer⁹, when he says that he studies the subway and makes notes about the people who ride in it ("Aspirin", p.135). Like the protagonist of "Assyrians", this young man is constantly eager to observe and describe in minute detail the expressions and the lives of the people surrounding him:

One or two faces I saw coming across the Continent: the boy with a bad dose, riding in the bus, going home to his mother, taking a bad dose with him from a South American

resort, talking about the girl, just a young kid and very beautiful, and God, what a pain, every moment and nothing to do about it. He was eighteen or nineteen, and he had gone down to South America to sleep with a girl, and now he had got it, where it hurt most, and he was drinking whisky and swallowing aspirin, to keep him going, to deaden the pain. York, Pennsylvania, a good town, and his people living there. Everything, he said, everything will be all right the minute I get home. And the sick girl, going back to Chicago, talking in her sleep. The language of fear, the articulation of death, no grammar, exclamation, one after another, the midnight grief, children emerging from the grown girl, talking. And the faces of people in the streets, in the large cities and in the small towns, the sameness. (italics mine) ("Aspirin", p.133)

No names are mentioned in this story, and the people described are all tormented, lonely, and displaced individuals like the ones depicted in "Assyrians."

The main issue dealt with in this story is the pain, the moods and feelings caused by remembrance. Throughout the story the word remembrance appears several times, as nouns or as verbs. At first it is not specified what should be remembered nor why, but the insistence on remembering is always present. Another recurring element is the fact that the protagonist waits endlessly for something to happen, usually in the midst of sleepless and lonely nights:

I used to get up in the middle of the night and *remember*. It was no use trying to sleep, because I was in a place that did not know me, and whenever I tried to sleep the room would declare its strangeness and I would sit up in bed and look into the darkness. [...] I used to sit in the dark room, *waiting* for morning and the fellowship of passengers of the subway [...] *waiting* to die. (italics mine) ("Aspirin", p.134)

Thus, awake at night, in his cold attic room, unable to sleep, the protagonist engages in interior monologues,

laughing at his remembrance and his loneliness; and in need to communicate his feelings, he develops a dialogue with the personified room, which doesn't understand why he is laughing in the middle of the cold night:

But whenever I laughed, the room would be puzzled, a bit annoyed. It would wonder what there was for me to laugh about, my hair frozen, and my spirit unable to rest. [...] I used to get up in the middle of the night and laugh about it quietly, disturbing the room. I used to make the room very angry, laughing, and one night it said to me, You are in a hurry but I am not: I shall witness your disintegration, but when you are destroyed I shall be standing here quietly. You will see. ("Aspirin", p.135)

Gradually he mentions some of the nameless people he is concerned about, other lonely people like the Japanese barber, Theodore Badal and Iowa from "Assyrians"; tormented men who cry in their sleep at night.

At a certain moment he explains that he laughs instead of crying because he "was doing what [he] wanted to do" ("Aspirin", p.136), and it is clear that his job in the office had nothing to do with his choice.

This young man expresses a constant feeling of anxiety and restlessness, caused by a strong and constant awareness of meaningless waiting for something unknown, probably death, but characterized by a futile and purposeless existence. Thus his laughter is sad and ironic. Along with the feeling of meaninglessness, there is the powerful sense of isolation and loneliness. He is aware that he is one of six million people in that city, all of them lonely, not meaning or representing anything to one another. He painfully

acknowledges that his presence in that city is totally unnoticed by anyone:

It was the secrecy that amused me, the fact of my being one of the six million people in this city, living there, waiting to die, I could die in this room, I used to say to myself, and no one would ever understand what had happened, no one would ever say, Do you know that boy from California, the fellow who is studying the subway? Well, he died in a little room on Forty-fourth Street the other night, alone. [...] My presence in Manhattan was not known, so if I came to vanish, my vanishing would not be known." ("Aspirin", p.135)

This pervading sense of loneliness contrasts sharply with the strong desire for the brotherhood of man evoked in this and in the other stories in the selection.

The young man's quarrels with the room where he lives become even worse when he moves to another room, hoping to avoid such confrontation, for the next room is even smaller than the previous one and now, added to that, he can hear the weeping of other lonely men in the adjacent rooms. The emphasis on the room and its smallness is symbolic of the sense of impotence and helplessness felt by the young man. As the rooms get smaller, his inability to act also increases. Finally the young man concludes the weeping is caused by remembrance of life:

...my room in the Mills Hotel was even more malicious than the other. It was smaller and therefore its eloquence was considerably louder. Its walls used to fall in upon me, with the whiteness of madness, but I went on laughing. In the middle of the night I used to hear my neighbors, old and young men. I used to hear them speaking out against life from their sleep. I used to hear much weeping. That year many young men were weeping from their sleep. ("Aspirin", p.135)

This strong feeling of isolation and loneliness caused by the room on the protagonist is a relevant aspect in the story, for it is the key element which unites this and the other stories. Those men cry not because of isolated memories of their past. They cry for the terrible loss of their own identities. These moments of anguish and pain are caused by those rare moments of awareness when they remember who they really were, contrasted with what they have become. This is when aspirin comes into the story, or "document" as the narrator himself calls it. He employs aspirin as a metaphor and a symbol of anything that is used by people to forget anything unpleasant and disturbing. Aspirin is used to "deaden pain", and to keep one going about his daily obligations, undisturbed by that nagging feeling of uneasiness caused by a headache, for example: "Aspirin is an evasion. But so is life. The way we live it. You take aspirin in order to keep going. It deadens pain. It helps you to sleep. It keeps you aboard the subway. It is a substitute for the sun, for strong blood. It stifles remembrance, silences weeping." (*italics mine*) ("Aspirin", p.137)

Thus aspirin stands for all those illusions which cover up what is underneath, slow and relentless death, not only of physical bodies, but also of souls, represented by the subway, symbolic of a huge communal coffin, transporting half-dead people from one place to another, all of them involved in meaningless and endless activities that lead them nowhere.

However, such illusions cannot kill pain once and for all. It is still there, only "drugged" for the moment, covered up and hidden from consciousness until those moments when it surfaces unexpectedly but powerfully. That's when the turning point in the story takes place: "All I know is this: that if you keep on taking aspirin long enough, it will cease to deaden pain." ("Aspirin", p.139) The following paragraph sums up the rebellion that comes to surface inside one's being when confronted with this realization. It is a protest voiced out of the anger and frustration caused by meaninglessness:

And that is when the fun begins. That is when you begin to notice that snow isn't beautiful at all. That is when your hair begins to freeze and you begin to get up in the middle of the night, laughing quietly, waiting for the worst, remembering all the pain and not wanting to evade it any longer, not wanting any longer to be half-dead, wanting full death or full life. That is when you begin to be mad about the way things are going in this country, the way things are with life, with man. *This is when, weak as you are, something old and savage and defiant in you comes up bitterly out of your illness and starts to smash things, making a path for you to the sun, destroying cities, wrecking subways, pushing you into the sun, getting you away from evasions, dragging you by your neck to life.* (italics mine) ("Aspirin", p.139)

This existential revolt, represented by his insistence upon finding a place in the sun, in life, contrasts sharply with the atmosphere of darkness and death that pervades the story. When one gets over the effects of "aspirin", one stops being like the rest of the mob, that accepts to be part of a senseless "rat race", without even noticing it. The awareness of reality brings about this deep

and powerful dissatisfaction with the status quo. Thus, although remembrance is painful, it is nevertheless necessary to shake people out of this state of living death. But the battle to maintain such awareness and pain alive will apparently be lost, for the system will do anything imaginable to suffocate it, by providing an abundant and endless supply of "aspirin", as well as any other means to keep people unaware of their true identities.

The essay-like structure of this story contains very little action, if any at all, consisting mostly of the narration of internal moods, feelings and interior monologues and the forsaking of plot. The narrator constantly returns to the central idea of his loneliness in a small room at night, being unable to sleep because of remembrance. There is no resolution or climax and what is communicated throughout is a state of mind; a feeling and an impression is shared.

The focus of the story is in the description as well as in the relationship between the young man and the small room where he lives his tormented life. The impression caused is that of claustrophobia, inertia and impotence. Linked to this element is the symbolic use of the subway and the small room, described as having no outside window ("Aspirin", p. 134), representing a coffin, or some kind of slow, "living death", caused by a meaningless life.

Thus, through the combination of these elements, Saroyan achieves in *Aspirin* a very effective and powerful sensation of isolation and hopelessness and a strong

impression of man's existentialist struggle to establish and maintain his individual identity.

3.2.5 - "Fight Your Own War"

Unlike most of the stories in this selection, "War" presents "a better adjustment of subject and narrative technique", according to Howard FLOAN (p.27), for it has a clear plot that leads toward a somewhat decisive ending, when compared with the open-ended structure of the other stories in the selection, and the language employed is mostly prose realism. Also unlike the other selected stories, the protagonist is named as well as most of the other characters who appear in it. There are however, several similarities with the other stories: there is again only one central character who lives alone in a small rented room and who is an unsuccessful writer of short stories.

This protagonist is Enrico Sturiza¹⁰, who is trying his best to write his stories undisturbed by anything else around him. At the beginning of the narrative he is found in his small rented room, writing a story about people, when he is interrupted by someone knocking on his door. Before bothering to open the door, he wanders off trying to imagine

who it might be; his cousin, who often visits him, or a young man who works for a collection agency and who has been there several times hoping to receive the money he owes to an employment agency.

The narrator shifts about in his subject, sharing his feelings of frustration when feeling unable to "write well and always putting down the wrong thing, and then having to go out and walk to the public library to try to find out again how Flaubert did it." ("War", p.253)

When he finally opens the door, though, it is neither his cousin nor the collector, but a strange man. Sturiza is interested in the man, for he might collect new material for a short story from him. The stranger is an agent from the Army who is there to inform him that he is "eligible for active duty in the front line", and is to be taken to regimental headquarters to be trained as a soldier and to fight in the war that has just been declared that morning.

Sturiza's reaction is far from that expected by the agent, for he considers his occupation as a short story writer far too important to be interrupted by anything, not even a war. His attitude is arrogant and irritating to the old man, and finally Sturiza orders him out of his room. He attempts to resume his writing, but he cannot. But his concern has nothing to do with the consequences his attitude might cause him, but with the effect of the war on his writing:

I return to my typewriter and try to go on with the story I am writing, but it is not easy to do so. A war is a war, and everybody knows how viciously the last war got on the nerves of writers, bringing about all sorts of eccentric styles of writing, all sorts of mannerisms. News of the war upsets me, and I begin to mope, sitting idly in my chair, trying to think of something intelligent to think. ("War", p.255)

Not much later there is once again a knock on the door and this time it is another stranger, a polite young soldier who introduces himself as Gerald Appleby and who basically repeats Mr. Covington's attempts to recruit Enrico Sturiza. The young writer, always curious to meet new people, is pleased to talk to Appleby, and they start a conversation. From this point onwards, it becomes clear that Sturiza is not a coward who is trying to save himself from being killed in a war, and not so alienated from reality that he is not aware of what is going on in the world around him. On the contrary, his awareness of the real situation is so deep that he actually sees far beyond all what these people who are so enthusiastic about the war are able to see. He is aware that men like Covington and Appleby see the war in completely different terms from himself: "Appleby is very interesting. He is interesting because I can see that *nothing short of a war, and nothing short of a threatened civilization, could possibly lift him from the narrowness and emptiness of his life.*" (italics mine) ("War", p.256) He amuses himself with Appleby's naiveté about the war and his preoccupations with the possible destruction of civilization and assumes a flippant attitude about his attempts to convince him to join

the war effort. Sturiza vainly attempts to explain to Appleby that he is not a coward, but that his view of people and ideologies are different. He does not see anyone in particular as being an enemy:

I have no desire to destroy the enemy. I do not recognize an enemy. Who are you supposed to be fighting? Germany? France? Italy? Russia? Who? I am very fond of Germans and of the French and the Italian and the Russian. I wouldn't think of so much as hurting the feelings of a Russian. I am a great admirer of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoi and Turgenev and Chekhov and Adreyev and Gorky. ("War", p.258)

Although Sturiza is aware of the events taking place in the world around him, he does not see himself as part of that system, much less part of a war. On the contrary, as mentioned previously, he feels that his occupation as a writer is far more important than anything else. He insists in believing that he can live his own life unaffected by what goes on in the world around him. And not only that, his attitude suggests that he also believes that writing is one way of fighting *against wars*¹¹. He is aware that his attitude is causing serious consequences to him personally, but he is determined not to change his mind.

The Army officials are not willing to change their minds either. They make a final attempt, and this time a seductive lady officer offers him the opportunity to join the Army as a writer in order to write heroic stories with which to motivate young people to join the war effort. To Sturiza this offer is as meaningless as the others and perhaps even worse. He can't imagine using his writing for that purpose,

and again he refuses to join the Army. A few days later several soldiers come to his room and arrest him for desertion. As he is arrested, Sturiza's attitudes and thoughts in the last paragraph reveal the seriousness and importance of his beliefs to him, for he is determined to be true to himself, no matter the consequences:

I am standing over my typewriter and looking down on a bundle of clean yellow paper, and I am thinking to myself *this is my room and I have created a small civilization in this room, and this place is the universe to me, and I have no desire to be taken away from this place,* and suddenly I know that I have struck Mr. Covington and that he has fallen to the floor of my room, and that I am doing my best to strike the other members of the Committee, and they are holding my arms, the four members of the Committee and the two military police, and the only thing I can think is *why the hell don't you bastards fight your own war, you old fogies who destroyed millions of men in the last war, why don't you fight your God damnn wars,* but I cannot say anything... ("War", p.264)

The ironic force in this story derives precisely from the fact that Enrico Sturiza does not see himself as being tragic or even pathetic in his attempts not to be disturbed in his task (FLOAN, p.26), for he is also fighting in his own private kind of war.

The final impression is that of impotence and rage when one is bound by powerful forces that keep one from achieving that which he set out to achieve. These powerful forces may be external, as represented by the Army men in this story; or, they can also be internal, and well up from within the individual, creating that contradictory and

uncomfortable sensation that one has when one realizes that he himself may be his own worst enemy.

"War" thus fits the pattern of the other stories in the selection in terms of content. The recurrence of the the setting, that of ever smaller rented rooms, where the protagonist lives, conveys the feeling of claustrophobia and anxiety; a sense of imprisonment and incapacity of action.

Like the subway in "Aspirin", this room may also represent a coffin, indicating slow, living death. The impression is that one is more and more incapable of reaching out and reacting to the pressures placed upon him by the outside world. Therefore more elements are added for the characterization of the hero present in all the stories in the selection.

3.2.6 - "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze"

Certainly the best known of William Saroyan's short stories and possibly his masterpiece, "Daring Young Man" was first published, as mentioned, in February, 1934 in *Story* magazine, and later, in October of that same year, in the collection named after this story.

To a certain extent, in this selection, "Daring Young Man" functions almost as a summary and a conclusion of all the other five stories, for it contains most of the elements present in all of the other pieces and yet it is the only one that leads to a final resolution. Curiously enough, this is also the only piece that blends the elements of the epical and the lyrical story in a very effective way.

The only character in this story is a nameless young man who has been trying unsuccessfully to earn his living as a writer. After a long time without a job and not having enough to eat, he is already suffering the effects of starvation. At the beginning of the story the protagonist is making his last attempt to survive, by going into town one last time to try to find a job. Throughout this story and also in some others in the selection, there is the constant reminder that "life is lived in the presence of death." (FLOAN, p.22)¹²

All the action in the story takes place in one single day, and it is expressed in very specific actions in a chronological sequence of events: the young man wakes up, shaves, gets dressed, makes and drinks coffee, goes out of his rented room, finds a coin on the street and keeps it in his pocket, goes into the city, visits some employment agencies and department stores looking unsuccessfully for a job, goes to the YMCA to get some paper in order to write his "Application for Permission to Live," visits the public library where he reads a little, returns to his room,

polishes the coin he had found on the street, lies down on his bed to rest a little, and finally dies.

Throughout these events the protagonist is involved in the conflict between life and death, mentioned before. Little by little he recognizes and accepts the fact that he will not be able to survive physically. He is aware that he could have appealed to charity and possibly other means to obtain food, but he is also very concerned about his integrity, for he knows that by accepting charity would imply giving up something that he considered more precious for him than his own physical life:

He accepted the thought of dying without pity for himself or for man, believing that he would at least sleep another night. His rent for another day was paid; there was yet another tomorrow. And after that he might go where other homeless men went. He might even visit the Salvation Army - sing to God and Jesus (unlover of my soul), be saved, eat and sleep. But he knew that he would not. His life was a private life. He did not wish to destroy this fact. Any other alternative would be better. ("Daring Young Man", p.21)

Thus, although he eventually comes to terms with physical death, he refuses to give up his integrity and to surrender his personal beliefs and ideas in exchange for physical survival. To this young man the survival of his inner being is far more important than the survival of his physical body¹³. Eventually it becomes clear that physical death does not represent the end of existence to this writer, but a progression into another sphere of existence. Therefore he does not consider death as a total loss. By becoming "unalive", the protagonist is freed to become one with all

things at once. Thus the opening and the closing paragraphs, merge to form a continuous flow, revealing that sphere of existence now entered by this hero:

Horizontally wakeful amid universal widths, practising laughter and mirth, satire, the end of all; of Rome and yes of Babylon, clenched teeth, remembrance, much warmth volcanic, the streets of Paris, the plains of Jericho, much gliding as of reptile abstraction, a gallery of watercolors, the sea and the fish with eyes, symphony, a table in the corner of the Eiffel Tower, jazz at the opera house, alarm clock and the tapdancing of doom, conversation with a tree, the river Nile, Cadillac coupe to Kansas, the roar of Dostoyevsky, and the dark sun. [...] For an eternal moment he was all things at once: the bird, the fish, the rodent, the reptile, and man. An ocean of print undulated endlessly and darkly before him. The city burned. The herded crowd rioted. The earth circled away, and knowing that he did so, he turned his face to the empty sky and became dreamless, unalive, perfect. ("Daring Young Man", p.17;25)¹⁴

These two moments of "sleep" are separated by the events outlined above which are grouped under "wakefulness", the protagonist's wanderings during that day. Although there is an element of opposition between being asleep and being awake, such opposition is not absolute, for both are part of existence. They represent a dichotomy in relative terms, since one does not exclude the other. On the other hand, one would not possibly exist without the other.

At the same time, this dichotomy is also represented in the structure of the story, in which there are two levels of existence taking place simultaneously: the physical actions performed by the young writer and his thoughts about his coming death. In this way,

the outward action of the story, slight as it is, establishes a structural unity while remaining subordinated to the inner life of his character. Because the life surrounding the youth is seen only as it impinges upon his consciousness, the story achieves an effect not unlike that of an impressionistic painting of Edouard Manet or of Pierre Renoir. (FLOAN, p.25)

The use of the stream-of-consciousness technique in the beginning and in the end of the story also helps to convey this impression to the reader, in which all things are fused into one simultaneously, forming a whole.

The imagery of a daring young man on a flying trapeze, moving back and forth, "to God or to nothing", corroborates this kind of dichotomy between life and death, as David CALONNE comments:

the trapeze symbolizes the delicate transit from life into death, the essential unity of life and death. The last words, "dreamless, unalive, perfect," carefully avoid including "death", thus suggesting that the demise of the story's hero should not be taken with tragic solemnity. Rather, we are left at the end feeling that a necessary reconciliation has taken place, a completion, a kind of "perfection." (CALONNE, p.17)

This is the objective this hero is after: the freedom to be, to exist, to live life fully being true to himself, unhampered by conditions imposed by an insensitive system. The hero's naive and impulsive heroism implies tragic consequences for him, but he is not defeated in the end, for he has maintained his integrity, despite the price he had to pay for it. Thus death is not considered as an enemy, for through death there is a kind of consummation, "a coming together of the disparate fragments of life into a new unity." (CALONNE, p.17)

As mentioned above, "Daring Young Man" is the only story in this selection that blends epical and lyrical elements. As an epical story, it has a clear plot that employs linear action from a beginning until its resolution, all taking place in one single day. However, simultaneous with this outward action or plot - "wakefulness", there is a level of internal reality or action going on - "sleep". This consists of all the internal changes, moods, feelings and thoughts of the protagonist, and unlike the outward action, which follows an organized sequence of events and leads to a resolution, this interior "plot" is actually timeless, for there is no end or beginning to it. The combination of these two simultaneous levels of existence demonstrate man's paradoxical nature. At the same time that he is mortal in a physical sense, he is nevertheless eternal in his spirit. Therefore, although he dies physically, he lives forever.

The blending of lyrical and epical aspects in the story serves to effectively express such paradox. The lyrical "dimension" of the story deals with the eternal in man, the world of dreams, feelings and freedom of thought that knows no boundaries; whereas the epical focuses upon man's daily routine, expressed in the linear plot of the story.

Other important lyrical characteristics in this story are the several instances when the focus is upon the minute description of some details, especially when the narrator describes the coin he found in the street:

He placed the shining penny on the table, looking upon it with the delight of a miser. How prettily it smiles, he said. Without reading them he looked at the words, *E Pluribus Unum One Cent United States of America*, and turning the penny over, he saw Lincoln and the words, *In God We Trust Liberty 1923*. How beautiful it is, he said. ("Daring Young Man", p.25)

An apparently irrelevant detail in the story, the description of the coin is nevertheless important for it is precisely due to lack of more coins that the protagonist is dying. There is irony in his thoughts about the penny, for he is painfully aware that everything that it represents is not available to him. It is interesting to observe that the Latin expression "E Pluribus Unum", meaning "One out of many", originally intended to refer to a national government consisting of many individual states, may also be interpreted as the importance of the individual in relation to the crowd. This further strengthens the ironic force of the story. The expression "In God we Trust" and the words "United", "Lincoln", "Liberty" and "One" are also symbolic of everything this individual has been seeking, the brotherhood of man and his freedom to be himself, which have been denied him.

Another instance of lyricism is the epiphanic episode of the final moments of the protagonist and his death. The language employed in the opening and closing paragraphs and at several other important moments in the story is highly poetical and symbolic:

Then swiftly, neatly, with the grace of the young man on the trapeze, he was gone from his body. For an eternal moment he was all things at once: the bird, the fish, the

rodent, the reptile, and man. An ocean of print undulated endlessly and darkly before him. The city burned. The herded crowd rioted. The earth circled away, and knowing that he did so, he turned his lost face to the empty sky and became dreamless, unalive, perfect. ("Daring Young Man", p.25)

At this moment the young man leaves the sphere of physical existence, the realm bound by the chronological sequence of actions and events, and enters the eternal level of existence that has no boundaries of time and space, where one becomes perfect.

Finally, Saroyan employs interior monologues and the stream-of-consciousness technique throughout the story as devices that effectively unite the two levels of narration. Therefore, although there is a linear plot, the story itself is free from the tale, and although there is a clear and decisive resolution, the story is nevertheless open-ended, for its end is just like the beginning. The hero moves from one level of existence into another, and, although he dies physically, he continues to exist in another dimension.

Thus, like parts of a mosaic, these six stories contribute with many of their elements to produce the profile of a Saroyan Hero whose specific characteristics in the collection and relationship with the Absurd Hero are discussed in the following chapter.

3.3 - The Saroyan "Voice":

Saroyan's polemic preface¹⁵ to *Daring* reveals much more than his unorthodox attitude about writing. It demonstrates clearly his poetics and his choice concerning the form and content of his early short stories, and the fact that he was aware of the formal processes involved in writing. He states that he discovered very early in his writing career that "there were rules governing the writing of stories [and that he] immediately began to study all the classic rules, [...] and in the end [he] discovered the rules were wrong." (*Daring*, p.10)

Such rules to the writing of short stories had been organized in *The Craft of Fiction*¹⁶ by Percy LUBBOCK, who developed the formalist principles establishing that narrative should represent the narrator's organized experience, similar to what is accomplished by a picture, in which the presence of the author should not be felt by the reader.

As seen in the selected stories, nothing could be farther from Saroyan's approach to writing. In his preface, he rejected all the traditional rules and developed his own, the first one being simply that a writer should reject any rules imposed upon him by anyone else. The second rule, related to the first, rejected all previous writers as models or as standards to be followed. To Saroyan, a writer must

write "the kind of story [he] feels like writing." His third rule was simply to learn how to type, in order to produce as many stories as fast as possible: "[...] you can decide to forget that you are a writer at all and you can decide to sit down at your typewriter and put words on paper, one at a time, in the best fashion you know how." (*Daring*, p.12)

Thus, having taken his fiercely independent attitude towards writing, Saroyan produced stories that are marked by the presence of the narrator, to him the most important aspect in the work of a writer, in a very informal and apparently disorganized narrative, in which development of plot is subordinated to the expression of fragments of human experience. This "presence", which serves as expression of subjective identity, is usually Saroyan himself, a characteristic which pervades his work, as FOSTER comments:

Much of William Saroyan's (short fiction) is first-person narrative, and the speaker is usually Saroyan himself. It doesn't matter whether the story comes out of something he actually did or saw (although in fact much of the fiction is autobiographical); what matters is a characteristic set of attitudes, a certain personality or presence for which the narrative is merely an agent. Even when the "I" is not used, it is commonly Saroyan who is talking about his opinions, his family, or something in his past. The stories, one might say, are *spoken, not written*. (italics mine) (FOSTER, p.xi)

Although the concept of the presence of the writer in his fiction is certainly debatable, since it may be argued that once a text is fiction its characters are also fictional, the fact is that most of what Saroyan wrote is biographical. One option is to treat his writing as

biography. The other, adopted in this study, is to accept the presence of the writer as a characteristic of William Saroyan's fiction.

Still concerning form, another important characteristic of Saroyan's writing style is its spontaneity and freshness, which also existed as a result of Saroyan's lyrical approach: "Sometimes I do not have to bother about rules at all, and I just sit down and write. Now and then I stand and write." (*Daring*, p.10) This attitude, typical of the Saroyan "Voice", is very well explained by one critic who said that Saroyan "began with no firm ideas as to what the stories would be about - no plots or characters in mind - but this didn't matter because his basic working method of choosing a starting point more or less at random and taking it from there - at speed - was already well established." (DARWENT, p.xi) Nevertheless, Saroyan claimed that such procedures became a method of composition (he called it the "Festival or Fascist method of composition") from which his stories are a result.

Saroyan's preface also reveals his existentialist attitude in writing. Commenting on style, for example, he claims that a writer has only two choices on this matter, both relating to his attitude towards the inevitability of death. By adopting the first, he claims, a writer should deal with life, the importance of living the present moment fully, experimenting the truth of being:

A writer can have, ultimately, one of two styles: he can write in a manner that implies that death is inevitable, or he can write in a manner that implies that death is not inevitable. Every style ever employed by a writer has been influenced by one or another of these attitudes toward death. If you write as if you believe that ultimately you and everyone else alive will be dead, there is a chance that you will write in a pretty earnest style. Otherwise you are apt to be either pompous or soft. (*Daring*, p. 12)

Thus, life itself, the present moment expressed in simply being, is all that matters to him individually and is worth as theme for his art. To express this simple truth the writer must also employ simple rules in his writing, as the ones developed by Saroyan. Consequently, in order to fully grasp his purposes,

we must strive to understand him, to confront what he strove to tell us. We must not codify him, but treat his writing for what it was, a dynamic product of the interplay between the opposing forces within him. In this is revealed not only the meaning, but the courage of his confrontation with life. (KEYISHIAN, p.151)

Therefore, the stories selected reveal Saroyan's well developed personal writing style, in which he combined the characteristics of the lyrical short story as a suitable and effective form for the expression of his existentialist themes, more specifically man's search for identity and purpose through artistic expression.

As such, these stories are quite effective as "flashes of the fireflies" (GORDIMER, p.180), for such shining flashes, although not capable of adequately pointing the way to the weary traveler as a bright light in the

darkness, nevertheless send some signals of hope into the midst of the modern wasteland. Saroyan's existentialism thus possesses the same concepts offered by Camus, in which the hero actually finds joy and meaning in his bleak fight against meaninglessness.

NOTES

¹ In MAY, Charles. Ed. *Short Story Theories*. 5th. Ed. Ohio University Press, 1985.

² The character as well as the absurdist elements present in the stories selected are discussed in detail in Chapter 4, despite some necessary and unavoidable overlapping and references to the protagonist in this Chapter as well.

³ A.L. BADER writes that, contrasting with the structure of traditional plot stories, which were essentially dramatic and had a distinct line of progression leading to a conflict, a crisis and a resolution, the modern short story [like Saroyan's] may seem to be plotless, fragmentary and amorphous, but such aspects are not incidental. They are deliberate choices made by the author to produce a "kind of perceived relationship" by the reader, of the different parts of the story. Thus, "the [modern] story derives much of its power from its ability to project the reader's imagination beyond the limits of the story." (in MAY, C., p.112) This seems to be the case with "A Cold Day". Despite its lack of a linear progression, it succeeds in creating a tremendous effect of claustrophobia on the reader.

⁴ "M" here refers to Martha Foley, editor of *Story* magazine, to whom Saroyan wrote a letter which was published in April, 1934. This letter was included with only a change of title in *Daring*. (FLOAN, p.26)

⁵ It reminds one of a painting by Manet, in which the topic itself is quite ordinary, even common, and the treatment of that topic is also unsophisticated, but the impression produced is very powerful and effective.

⁶ N.R.A. stands for National Recovery Act, a governmental plan in the 1930's to fight the effects of the Depression. Its recessive measures, however, proved quite bitter to many Americans.

⁷ FOSTER says that besides being one of the best of Saroyan's stories, it is also one of the bleakest of his early stories; about a "daring man who fell, and his story is an unrelieved invective against American life", one of his most bitter stories. (FOSTER, p.9)

⁸ FLOAN claims this story failed due to Saroyan's inability to keep himself outside the story. Thus, according to FLOAN, "he cannot sustain [a] double vision; and the possibilities of his original conception, essentially dramatic in nature are never realized [...] because the speaker never achieves distinct fictional identity, one must read his words as Saroyan's own musings. Moreover, spoken after the event, they nevertheless lack

the restraint and clarity of retrospect." (FLOAN, p.26) However, it is quite evident that Saroyan had no intention in keeping himself apart from his fictional speaker. He himself is the speaker, for he wants to communicate real life to his reader, not fictional life.

⁹ Saroyan himself spent about six months in New York City when he was 19, trying hard to earn his living as a writer. The story reflects his personal anguish and loneliness during that unsuccessful attempt. After that period, Saroyan went back to California.

¹⁰ Howard FLOAN comments on this story saying that "although we may never think of Enrico Sturiza as anybody other than Saroyan himself, this story loses nothing thereby; for, by adapting his own personality to a slightly fictionalized circumstance, Saroyan imparted warmth and vitality to his protagonist, visualized his setting effectively, and conveyed through a believable conflict the tragic-comic aspect of a rather eccentric artist out of tune with his times." (FLOAN, p.27)

¹¹ This is echoed in a play written later by Saroyan, called *My Heart's in the Highlands*, in which the hero, a poet, is writing furiously, at the outset of World War II, in a feverish attempt to neutralize, with his writing, all the horror and the destruction caused by that war.

¹² David CALONNE corroborates this idea saying that the title of the story, taken from a popular song, "suggests to the story's hero the perilous nature of humanity's search for meaning and the essential tenuousness of life itself [...] the continual oscillation between faith and despair that occurs throughout [Saroyan's] work." (CALONNE, p.15)

¹³ FOSTER claims that "the daring young man never has to agree with someone or do what someone else wants. But his freedom is solipsistic and made possible only by retreating from the world or moving through it like a ghost. He is a specter and a spectator; he speaks to no one, and no one speaks to him." (FOSTER, p.5)

¹⁴ David CALONNE suggests that this stream-of-consciousness beginning to the story reveals "the desire to fly, to achieve a sense of graceful balance...[which] conveys the complex simultaneity of the young writer's vision of the world." (CALONNE, p.15)

¹⁵ See the Preface on page 27.

¹⁶ LUBBOCK, Percy. *The Craft of Fiction*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1921.

4 - THE SAROYAN HERO.

This Chapter delineates the profile of the Saroyan Hero, by the arrangement of characteristics of the protagonist present in each of the selected stories¹. The definition of hero as "a unique, major character, male or female, who faces a significant conflict in a literary work" by Roy PICKETT (p.vii), is the one that best applies to the Hero present in *Daring*, since it does not limit his meaning to characters who achieve extraordinary feats and eliminates the element of predictability present in all stock or stereotyped characters.

Seen in the isolation of each individual story, the characteristics of the protagonist produce a rather blurred image of this individual, but as the fragments of images are juxtaposed and made into a whole, a clearer picture of this man becomes defined. The first part of this chapter deals with the emergence of the hero in the selection and the following parts identify him in more detail and finally relate him to the Absurd Hero.

4.1 - Emergence of the Saroyan Hero.

The protagonist of the selected stories undergoes an unfolding process in which he becomes progressively alienated from the world surrounding him as he becomes increasingly aware of his own individuality. This process can be traced in the stories as follows:

In the first story in the chronological order, "Assyrians", the young writer is very eager to meet new people and still very optimistic about the possibility of the brotherhood of men. He is reaching out to others, and still filled with enthusiasm toward writing about this brotherhood. He is intent in his search for self-realization and is deeply affected by the misery of the people surrounding him, but he can still look at them with optimism.

In the next two pieces, "Myself" and "A Cold Day", we learn more about this young writer's attitudes toward his art. Especially in the former, one can sense his joy of writing and its importance to him. In the latter, that joy is still present, but there is also the pervading feeling of growing disappointment and isolation. There is not as much contact with others, especially in "A Cold Day", where he only observes and listens to people but does not really talk to them, and it can be noticed that he is moving deeper into his own internal world, gradually losing touch with reality.

The next two stories, "Aspirin" and "War", add frustration and anger to the feeling of disappointment and isolation felt by the young man. Whereas in "Aspirin" there is a small remainder of positive feelings, there is only rage and revolt in "War". The young writer is still as determined to be true to himself as in the beginning, and not to give up his beliefs, but by now he is painfully aware of all the obstacles, not only external, but also internal, that are fighting to keep him from achieving his goal. He fights back valiantly, against the Army men who are trying to get him involved in another war apart from his own battle in which writing is his weapon, not aware that he is fighting in vain; that he, like Don Quixote, is really attacking windmills. Nevertheless, he does not give up writing and keeps fighting, no matter the consequences.

Finally, in "Daring Young Man", the young writer has become totally alienated from the world surrounding him. Paradoxically, however, he is totally aware of his situation. There is no more contact with other people and he moves around the city as if it didn't exist. At this point he is approaching his death and has come to realize that the price to be paid to maintain his integrity and to remain true to himself is to give up his own physical life. Nevertheless, he believes that there is more to life than his physical existence, and that his sacrifice will not be in vain. Thus, although involved in a fierce battle against meaninglessness

through the establishment and defence of his *individual sense of being*, this hero finds meaning in the conflict itself.

4.1.1 - The Context of the Hero and his Awakening:

The hero mentioned above inhabits an arid and sterile landscape, and although there are many external physical elements in this wasteland, most of it consists of an interior landscape in which lonely, displaced and tormented individuals who are lost in a meaningless existence try desperately and unsuccessfully to make sense of the grim reality surrounding them.

This harsh reality is illustrated when we find the protagonist surrounded by people in pain, who cry out at night in their restless sleep: "In the middle of the night I used to hear my neighbors, old and young men. I used to hear them speaking out against life from their sleep. I used to hear much weeping. That year many men were weeping from their sleep" ("Aspirin", p.135); and when he talks about another displaced individual, the collector for an employment agency, in whom he recognizes an individual trying to find his place in society, he is aware that, despite the apparent conflict

between them because of the money he owes, there is something in common between them:

At first I used to dislike this young man and I used to wonder why he worked for such a company as a collection agency, but when he explained about his little sick daughter I began to understand that he *had* to earn money somehow and that he wasn't doing it because he liked to do it, but merely because it was absolutely, almost frantically, necessary. [...] Then we used to talk for about a half hour or so, and the young collector used to tell me his troubles, how bad it was with him, and I used to tell him my troubles, how bad it was with me... ("War", p.253)

This world is also inhabited by immigrants and migrants who do not really fit into society, by displaced foreigners searching for home in a hostile environment, who become a crowd of lonely people who are lost and confused and who must face their ordeal by themselves. Although they try very hard to be accepted and to become part of society, they can never achieve this goal and continue to inhabit a marginal sphere of existence.

The protagonist himself, as demonstrated in the analysis of the short stories, is a single young writer who lives alone in a small rented room in absolute poverty. He is unemployed and trying to make a living out of his writing. In all of the stories, except in "War", the writer is unnamed. He has no family or relatives and only a few acquaintances, and except in "Assyrians" and in "War", he is the only character in the story. The impression of isolation and loneliness is reinforced by the fact that although the protagonist is a lonely individual and situated in the

context of other lonely individuals and that there is a constant attempt on his part to reach out and relate to others, there is nevertheless very little direct involvement between him and them:

I lived in many rooms, in many sections of the city, East Side, West Side, downtown, uptown, Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, all over the place. It was the same everywhere, my hair frozen at night, alien walls, around me, and the smile of death in my eyes. ("Daring Young Man", p. 136)

Thus, ironically, at the same time that this writer tries very hard to praise the virtues and importance of the brotherhood of men, he is as isolated and lonely as everyone else, and he talks about something that he wishes could be true, not something that *is* true.

Like the other individuals surrounding him, he has also attempted unsuccessfully to become part of the mainstream world surrounding him, but eventually realized that he wouldn't ever be admitted into it. When he makes his final attempt to belong he is already aware that it will not be possible:

From a hill he saw the city standing majestically in the east, great towers, dense with his kind, and there he was suddenly outside of it all, almost definitely certain that he should never gain admittance, almost positive that somehow he had ventured upon the wrong earth, or perhaps into the wrong age, and now a young man of twenty-two was to be permanently ejected from it. ("Daring Young Man", p.21)

However, as this young man makes his many frustrated attempts to become part of mainstream society, he awakens to

the facts that admittance will cost him something. He realizes that the price of admission is precisely to give up his own individual identity and to accept to be molded by social norms and rules, and to be conformed into the crowd, the mob. By losing his identity, like the others who have accepted to pay this price, he would be easily manipulated. This awareness leads him to retreat into a search within himself in order to establish and defend his own identity and value as a unique individual.

Observing the world around him and the "successful" individuals who have succeeded in it, he realizes that their success is directly related to the fact that they have willingly surrendered their individuality and accepted to be conformed to the social norms and demands.

At this stage he becomes painfully and unmistakably aware of the disproportion between his intention, that is, his desire to belong and to be part of the social world surrounding him, characterized by the brotherhood of men; and the harsh reality of the world surrounding him, characterized by aggressiveness, loneliness, isolation, selfishness and despair. He also becomes aware that it will not be possible to eliminate this disproportion, that the pressure exerted on the individual to conform and to give up his identity will always exist and that he will not be able to run away from it. He may even pretend that this situation does not exist but it will not make it any less real. For a while he is divided and uncertain of what to do, for although he wants to

belong, he does not want to give up his individuality. This interior conflict and the reflection it produces in his mind leads this man to the final stage of his awakening, to the conscious realization that his integrity as an individual is far more important than anything the world around him can offer. He realizes that all worth lies within the individual and not in the mob. Thus he decides to reject the world around him, to maintain his integrity and to resist the pressure to conform. This decision also involves a refusal of evasion, be it through suicide or religious hope, and a choice for life, as he claims in "Myself", "I love and worship life" (p.63).

4.2 - The Warrior:

Aware that the refusal to pay the price for social admission and acceptance is not a simple and easy choice, and that it will imply in definitive rejection by society, this man maintains his decision and accepts the fact that his will be a life marked by loneliness and isolation:

No one would be able to say anything about me if I died, no one knew I was from California and that I was studying the subway, making notes about the people riding in the subway. My presence in Manhattan was not known, so if I came to vanish, my vanishing would not be known. It was a secret, and it amused me. I used to get up in the middle

of the night and laugh about it quietly, disturbing the room. ("Aspirin", p.135)

Nevertheless, once that decision is made, this man builds his own private world, and realizes that from this position he will be better able to carry on a private war against his enemy. We find that this hero is determined to fight to stay in his own universe and to maintain his decision not to conform to the norms of the system for at this point he has definitively rejected this possibility: "I am standing over my typewriter and looking down on a bundle of clean yellow paper, and I am thinking to myself this is my room and I have created a small civilization in this room, and this place is the universe to me, and I have no desire to be taken away from this place." ("War", p.263)

At this point Saroyan's protagonist in *Daring* can be metaphorically compared to a warrior fighting tenaciously in a war, using his weapon to defeat his enemies and achieve victory. He faces this ordeal not as a victim or in sadness but by putting on a scornful and proud attitude, knowing that he has made the conscious choice to be true to himself.

This warrior is engaged in an unconventional war, in which the fighting does not occur at a physical level with material and military manouvers and weapons. Instead, this a war waged within, in which the warrior fights in order not to lose his ground, that is, his established individual identity, knowing that he is not fighting to defend his physical body or material possessions, though he owns little

of both, but his own soul. He resists that force which robs people of their individual identity, their dignity and integrity and molds them into mere statistical numbers in a society driven to a never-ending race for the accumulation of power and wealth. This force takes individuals and shapes them into deformed mobs, devoid of personality and the consciousness of their own individual being. Those who oppose and fight against this constant pressure to conform and attempt to retain their individuality are not only ejected from the system, as mentioned, but constantly pressured to be dissuaded from pursuing their goal, for the person who has discovered his own identity becomes a constant threat to the establishment, confronting and rejecting its values, fighting to preserve his own individuality and encouraging others to do the same. This political attitude makes this fighter ideologically incorrect in every way, for he refuses any pre-established ideological system, regardless of its orientation, and remains true to his firm conviction that *each individual has the inalienable right to live and exist according to his own beliefs*. Therefore he is a dissident and is regarded as such by those who have made the choice to conform.

In this battle, the warrior sometimes regrets that this is an unconventional war, and considers that it would be easier to fight it if it were like a military war:

If there had been a war, it would have been much easier, more reasonable. The pain would have been explicable. We are fighting for high ideals, we are protecting our

homes, we are protecting civilization, and all that. A tangible enemy, a reasonable opposition, and swift pain, so that you couldn't have time enough to think about it much: either it got you all the way, carrying you over into death and calm, or it didn't get you. Also, something tangible to hate, a precise enemy. But without a war it was different. You might try hating God, but in the end you couldn't do it. In the end you laughed softly or you prayed, using pious and blasphemous language. ("Aspirin", p.134)

Nevertheless, despite such moments of despair and anguish, the power that drives this man to keep on fighting in spite of all the difficulties he encounters is the conviction that his cause is worth fighting for, no matter how pathetic and ridiculous such a battle may seem for the onlookers. He knows that he could have made it easier for himself by conforming, for he must go through the loneliness and alienation that came as a consequence of his choice. However, he does not give in, knowing that there is no turning back. He claims that he "could never cry, because [he] was doing what [he] wanted to do" ("Aspirin", p.133), and when he is literally starving to death and considers the possibility of going to the Salvation Army for food, he quickly discards it:

He might even visit the Salvation Army - sing to God and Jesus (unlover of my soul), be saved, eat and sleep. But he knew that he would not. His life was a private life. He did not wish to destroy this fact. Any other alternative would be better. ("Daring Young Man", p.21)

The alternative he chooses is to keep resisting the attacks of his enemy.

4.2.1 - His Enemy:

In this unconventional war, the fighter also battles against a similarly unconventional enemy, suggested above, who does not consist of *individual men* or a group of soldiers in a military war, but consists of the *mob*, that is, the amassing of men into a shapeless crowd, who now attempt to do the same with other men. This mob becomes the collective identity of the establishment, exerting a constant pressure to conform all individuals to its norms.

Although this mob is a real enemy to the lonely warrior, he feels sympathy and sadness for these men and he does not regard each of them individually as an enemy for he is aware that they have lost something precious. He speaks of these men saying: "I have nothing against any of them because I think of them as one man living one life at a time, and I know, I am positive, that one man at a time is incapable of the monstrosities performed by mobs. My objection is to mobs only." ("Assyrians", p.38)

Although this is a very real enemy, it is not a tangible one as in a military war. Nevertheless, it is always present, especially in moments of deep loneliness, weariness and despair, as when it manifests itself in the small oppressive room where the protagonist lives: "I used to make the room very angry, laughing, and one night it said to me,

You are in a hurry but I am not: I shall witness your disintegration, but when you are destroyed I shall be standing here quietly. You will see." ("Aspirin", p.135)

Nevertheless, the war is not any less cruel because of the intangibility of the enemy, for the weapons used by this enemy are as effective as the ones employed in physical wars in its destructive capacity: "You hear a lot of sad talk about all the young men who died in the Great War. Well, what about this war? Is it less real because it destroys with less violence, with a ghastlier shock, with a more sustained pain?" ("Aspirin", p.137) This is due to the fact that this man's enemy uses a strategy aimed at destroying the individual identity of people, exerting a constant effort to make people *forget who they really are*.

4.2.2 - His Weapon:

Aware that conventional weapons would not be of any use in this war, the Saroyan Hero turns to the *written word* as his weapon and his writing becomes his *pièce de résistance* to him. To this young man, being a writer is much more than just a way of surviving. In fact, the opposite may be said, since he is not interested in producing the kind of writing that would bring him any financial compensations. He even knows that he could do it if he wanted to. Paradoxically, his

main goal is not even to be published at all. He writes exactly because he is aware of the power of the written word in order to help him to maintain his individual identity.

Thus, he is determined to use his writing for a very specific purpose, the paradoxical proclamation of the brotherhood of man, despite a context of loneliness, individualism and prejudice surrounding him, and for the unsaid but obvious purpose of *remaining creative* in the context of artistic barrenness and sterility. Those who are part of the mob have lost their creativity because they have surrendered their original and individual thoughts, dreams and ideas. He states what his purpose is: "to show the brotherhood of man [...] If I want to do anything, I want to speak a more universal language. The heart of man, the unwritten part of man, that which is eternal and common to all races." ("Assyrians", p.32)

To this end he is determined to shape his writing in the form and content most suitable for his purpose, developing his own specific poetics, characterized by the constant recording of fragments of human experience. His sole writing topic is man and everything that pertains to it, including himself. He claims that there is no other topic one can write about. He is especially dedicated to the task of writing about the brotherhood of mankind, despite all the evidence against it. In fact, it seems that the stronger the evidences, the more he believes in the feasibility of this brotherhood. It is not simply that he is shortsighted or

naïve, and that he does not see reality, or that he is just a dreamer of a perfect paradise on earth. On the contrary, he knows that as long as there is anyone, even if he is the only individual who has the belief in the brotherhood of man, there will be a chance of it becoming manifested, or at least that possibility will be potentially available. This realization makes him even more stubborn in his determination not to give up.

This writer also has the firm conviction that the artistic rendering of this brotherhood through any medium, but especially through the written word, is a guarantee that the total destruction of mankind by wars will never be possible, as illustrated by a character from one of Saroyan's plays, the poet Ben Alexander in *My Heart's in the Highlands*, who is also an individual willing to sacrifice himself and even his family so that he can go on with his writing. The importance of writing for him is made clear when in a fit of despondency and despair he shouts that systems and governments, despite wars and mass killings, won't destroy anything, for there will always be "poets in the world".

For this reason this man employs all his writing energies into this topic, using a fluid, lyrical and unsophisticated language, suitable for the recording of experience in such a way as to preserve its freshness and immediacy.

Paradoxically, although obsessed with precision, his writing appears as a compilation of fragments, as loosely

connected parts of a mosaic. And as such, despite this fragmentation, he achieves his purpose of rendering an accurate impression of what man is like, before he is robbed of his individual identity.

Thus he writes about man, with the purpose of reminding him of who he is (or, for that matter, even only himself), constantly trying to awaken him from the indifference that brings about loss of identity. As mentioned, this is the only subject or topic worth writing about to this writer. Therefore it may be stated that he is an engaged writer, both in terms of form and content, to his own private belief in the dignity of man:

There is nothing else to write about. You have never seen a short story in life. The events of life have never fallen into the form of the short story or the form of the poem, or into any other form. Your own consciousness is the only form you need. Your own awareness is the only action you need. Speak of this man, recognize his existence. Speak of man. ("A Cold Day", p.161)

And he knows exactly who this man he wants to write about is. He is not thinking of the great names of history or politics, or about the heroes who are capable of achieving fantastic feats which bring about the awe and adoration of the ordinary man, but he is thinking of the common man one can meet everywhere in all walks of life, especially the immigrants, drunkards, gamblers and losers, that is, other men like himself, for, according to this writer,

they are of the stuff that is eternal in man and it is this stuff that interests me. You don't find them in bright places, making witty remarks about sex and trivial remarks about art. You find them where I found them, and they will be there forever, the race of man, the part of man, of Assyria as much as of England, that cannot be destroyed, the part that massacre does not destroy, the part that earthquake and war and famine and madness and everything else cannot destroy. ("Assyrians", p.40)

Once more he identifies himself as a writer who has a very clear and definite subject to write about, reinforcing the importance of his task to him and the language he feels he must employ for this purpose:

I am a story-teller, and I have but a single story - man. I want to tell this simple story in my own way, forgetting the rules of rhetoric, the tricks of composition. I have something to say and I do not wish to speak like Balzac. [...] How has it happened that man, that humble and lovable creature, has been exploited for the purpose of monstrous documents? How has it happened that his solitude has been destroyed, his godliness herded into a hideous riot of murder and destruction? [...] *I am interested only in man.* (italics mine) ("Myself", p.53)

He is intent in making clear his claim about content and form: "Do you know that I do not believe there is really such a thing as a poem-form, a story-form or a novel-form? I believe there is man only. The rest is trickery. I am trying to carry over into this story of mine the man that I am." ("Myself", p.58)

Nevertheless, despite his firm decision to be true to his beliefs, he is sometimes haunted by the consequences of his own "calling": "Why don't I make up plots and write beautiful love stories that can be made into motion pictures?

Why don't I let these unimportant and boring matters go hang?
Why don't I try to please the American reading public?"
("Assyrians", p.40)

Yet he himself answers this question when he states that he does not really want to write like other writers or to make money out of his stories, and that he is aware that he is not employing any of the techniques for producing accepted prose:

I am not using great material for a short story. [...] I am not fabricating a fancy plot. I am not creating memorable characters. I am not using a slick style of writing. I am not building a fine atmosphere. I have no desire to sell this story or any story to *The Saturday Evening Post* or to *Cosmopolitan* or to *Harper's*. I am not trying to compete with the great writers of short stories, men like Sinclair Lewis and Joseph Hergesheimer and Zane Grey, men who really know how to write, how to make up stories that will sell. Rich men, men who understand all the rules about plot and character and style and atmosphere and all that stuff. I have no desire for fame. I am not out to win the Pulitzer Prize or the Nobel Prize or any other prize. I am out here in the far West, in San Francisco, in a small room on Carl street, writing a letter to common people, telling them in simple language things they already know. ("Assyrians", p.31)

Thus, as already mentioned, this writer is aware that the use of words in artistic form is the only suitable weapon he has and that there will be any hope only as long as he keeps brandishing this sword:

My only weapon is language, and while I know it is stronger than machine-guns, I despair because I cannot single-handed annihilate the notion of destruction which propagandists awaken in men. I myself, however, am a propagandist, and in this very story I am trying to restore man to his natural dignity and gentleness. I want

to restore man to himself. I want to send him from the mob to his own body and mind. I want to lift him from the nightmare of history to the calm dream of his own soul, the true chronicle of his kind. I want him to be himself. It is proper only to herd cattle. When the spirit of a single man is taken from him and he is made a member of a mob, the body of God suffers a ghastly pain, and therefore the act is a blasphemy. (italics mine) ("Myself", p.54)

In this way, as the sword and the shield become part of the identification of the warrior, the written text is related to the identity of this writer. So much so that he suffers greatly during a period of time when, pressed for money, he takes his typewriter to a money-lender and trades it for fifteen dollars so that he can buy food:

And for the past six months I have been separated from my writing, and I have been nothing, or I have been walking about unalive, some indistinct shadow in a nightmare of the universe. It is simply that without conscious articulation, without words, without language, I do not exist as myself. I have no meaning, and I might just as well be dead and nameless. (italics mine) ("Myself", p.63)

As illustrated, writing is a compulsion for him. He must write everyday, not really mattering what or how he writes. The important thing is that the "light in the darkness", here represented by the creative use of language in writing, is kept shining, lest there be total and final darkness. The production of written records of human experience is what it means to him to be civilized. He says that he writes "because there is nothing more civilized or decent for [him] to do." ("Myself", p.58) And when it is so cold that he can hardly write anything, he makes the extra

effort to put into paper another fragment of experience: "If it is so cold that you can't make up a little ordinary Tuesday prose, what the hell, say anything that comes along, *just so it's the truth.*"(italics mine) ("A Cold Day", p.159) Along with this very unorthodox attitude about the writing process, the written word has a tremendous significance to him, and he approaches writing with the greatest awe and respect:

I am about to place language, my language, upon a clean sheet of paper, and I am trembling. It is so much of a responsibility to be a user of words. I do not want to say the wrong thing. I do not want to be clever. I am horribly afraid of this. I have never been clever in my life, and now that I have come to labor even more magnificent than living itself I do not want to utter a single false word. ("Myself", p.52)

The simple fact of ink on paper takes on a magnified importance to him. When he is suffering terribly from the cold weather, it occurs to him to burn the pages of some old books in a language he can not even understand. After considering this possibility for a while, he prefers to go on freezing rather than burn anything printed:

Anyway, I didn't burn a single page of a single book, and I went on freezing and writing. Every now and then I burned a match just to remind myself what a flame looked like, just to keep in touch with the idea of heat and warmth. (....) *It is simply this: that if you have any respect for the mere idea of books, what they stand for in life, if you believe in paper and print, you cannot burn any page of any book.* Even if you are freezing. Even if you are trying to do a bit of writing yourself. You can't do it. It is asking too much.(italics mine) ("Aspirin", p.138)

It is very important to establish at this point that the writer in these stories uses the written word as a *tool for remembrance*, and not as an end in itself, for remembrance is the real reason why he writes his fiction in his own peculiar poetics.

In all the stories selected there is at least one instance when the writer talks about the importance of remembering, and there are several moments when he is trying to remind people of who they are, saying that he is making a record of human experience. For this reason, the fact of keeping a written record of individual human experience becomes a task of religious dimensions: "I am sitting in my room, *stating in words the truth of my being*, squeezing the fact from meaninglessness and imprecision. And the living of this moment can never be effaced. It is beyond time." (italics mine) ("Myself", p.64)

And this goal of keeping this fact alive is pursued with missionary zeal, for he is aware that it is undoubtedly the singular most important issue in life. He is determined not to let man forget his true identity.

Remembrance and memory are thus of utmost importance to this writer in this conflict between light and darkness, in which he uses his writing to make a record for remembrance, and in which the written word becomes that little flame which can nevertheless cast some light to its dark surroundings. He addresses his reader saying: "I want you to know that I am deeply interested in what people

remember. A young writer goes out to places and talks to people. He tries to find out what they remember."
("Assyrians", p.31)

Once, feeling frustrated for not being able to write a story, he says that "the least I can do is put into words this remembrance." ("A Cold Day", p.162) Elsewhere, he states: "I'm merely making a record, so if I wander around a little, it is because I am in no hurry and because I do not know the rules" ("Daring Young Man", p.31), and during a very cold day in San Francisco he says that he "is sitting in the cold, smoking cigarettes, and trying to get this coldness onto paper so that when it becomes warm again in San Francisco I won't forget how it was on the cold days." ("A Cold Day", p.158)

And when he wonders why men are crying in their sleep, he realizes it is the memory of what real life is that produces this sadness: "Why are you men weeping? It was because of remembrance, I suppose. Death is always in a man, but sometimes life is in him so strongly that it makes a sad remembrance and comes out in the form of weeping through sleep." ("Aspirin", p.136)

When he is alone, under the pressure to forget who he is, he forces himself to remember:

Remember above all things the blood, remember that man is flesh, that flesh suffers pain, and that the mind being caught in flesh suffers with it. Remember that the spirit is a form of the flesh and the soul its shadow.... remember laughter.... I used to sit in the darkness, remembering. ("Aspirin", p.132)

4.2.3 - "Being" as Victory:

Although painful, remembrance is what keeps this young man from losing touch with real life. He is aware that the constant battle is to avoid being engulfed by a meaningless existence, devoid of a past, for the relationship of the past with the present is what gives one his sense of individual identity, a sense of personal historical reference, and helps him to enjoy the simple fact of *being*. This is the purpose of remembering to him. It allows him to enjoy life at the present moment, and this is accomplished through writing.

At the same time, this realization leads this man to live the moment fully: for him life must be lived moment by moment, for one cannot live in the past or in the future. The present moment is all he has. Therefore living life at the present moment is what gives life a meaning for this writer. Thus he expresses his desire to live forever: "I myself do not wish to die. It is part of my plan as a writer of prose to try to live as long as possible. I hope even to outlive three or four wars. It is my plan to stay alive indefinitely." ("War", p.257) And he encourages others to do the same, suggesting how this can be done:

Go out to some single person and dwell with him, within him, lovingly, seeking to understand the miracle of his being, and utter *the truth of his existence* and reveal the splendor of *the mere fact of his being alive*, and say it in great prose [...] Simply relate what is the great event of all history, of all time, the humble, *artless truth of mere being* (italics mine) ("A Cold Day", p.161).

Contrasting remembrance (as being truly alive) with forgetfulness (as being in a state of living death), he deals with the latter as if it were an analgesic, which, by deadening pain, makes existence easier, but kills memory with it, therefore keeping one from experiencing true life:

[Aspirin] is the hero of this story, all of us six million people in New York, swallowing it, day after day. All of us in pain, needing it. Aspirin is an evasion. But so is life. The way we live it. You take aspirin in order to keep going. It deadens pain. It helps you to sleep. It keeps you aboard the subway. It is a substitute for the sun, for strong blood. It stifles remembrance, silences weeping. [...] [Aspirin] is helping everyone to evade fundamentals, it is helping to keep people going to work. Aspirin is helping to bring back prosperity. It is doing its part. It is sending millions of half-dead people to their jobs.It is deadening pain everywhere. It isn't preventing anything, but it is deadening pain. ("Aspirin", p.138)

However, he knows that for him and maybe for some others, this "analgesic" eventually fails to produce its effects and they remember and start rebelling, and can not stand the darkness and the meaninglessness anymore and wrestle against all those attempts to hamper the spirit of man. In this moment, fully awake from his deadly sleep, he lets forth a wail of despair and agony and knows that unless he has all of life he had better face death:

All I know is this: that if you keep taking aspirin long enough, it will cease to deaden pain. And that is when the fun begins. That is when you begin to notice that snow isn't beautiful at all. That is when your hair begins to freeze and you begin to get up in the middle of the night, laughing quietly, waiting for the worst, remembering all the pain and not wanting to evade it any longer, not wanting any longer to be half-dead, wanting full death or full life. That is when you begin to be mad about the way things are going in this country, the way things are with life, with man. That is when, weak as you are, something old and savage and defiant in you comes up bitterly out of your illness and starts to smash things, making a path for you to the sun, destroying cities, wrecking subways, pushing you into the sun, getting you away from evasions, dragging you by your neck to life. ("Aspirin", p.139)

It is also important to establish that this warrior is not afraid of the death of the physical body, for he knows that it does not really destroy an individual. "I cannot fear death because it is purely physical" ("Myself", p.53), for he thinks of real life as the eternal existence of one individual after another, as in a continuous, endless flow, forming one continuous life which cannot be destroyed. To him, man is eternal in a spiritual way, so that physical life cannot end his existence: "Is any journey so vast and interesting as the journey of the mind through life? Is the end of any journey so beautiful as death?" ("Myself", p.53). This fact is very well stated when the starving protagonist becomes "unalive". The word employed is not "dead", which would denote finality, but unalive, which denotes the fact that the individual still exists in another level of existence. However, what can really destroy a person, according to the beliefs of this hero, is the loss of the

consciousness of the eternality of the individual's existence. When a man believes that all that there is to life is to be born, to grow up, to acquire a profession, to fight for survival, to raise a family, to become old and finally to die, he is truly dead. This hero wants to transcend mere physical existence, and he also finds writing to be a tool for this purpose: "I am trying to gather as much of eternity into this story as possible." ("Myself", p.63)

The entire process can be defined as a lifelong conflict between opposing forces; represented by the following dichotomies:

LIGHT/WARMTH	DARKNESS/COLD
REMEMBRANCE	FORGETFULNESS
PRESERVATION OF ONE'S INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY/ ISOLATION	LOSS OF ONE'S IDENTITY/MOB-CROWD
LIFE	DEATH

4.3 - The Saroyan Absurd Hero:

The framework supplied by the theoretical considerations about the Absurd Hero in chapter 2, and the characteristics of the protagonist in the selection of

stories, discussed in chapters 3 and 4, reveal that Saroyan's young writer in *Daring* bears the characteristics of the Absurd Hero, as follows:

1) The Absurd as well as the Saroyan Hero find themselves in a context of wasteland. The Absurd Hero is a prisoner in the underworld, which is dominated by the gods, where he is condemned to a meaningless existence. The young writer inhabits the modern world where contemporary man has lost any reasonable explanation for his existence and finds himself bound by endless activities which lead him nowhere;

2) Both experience an Awakening when, faced with the confrontation between man's intention and the reality surrounding them, they acknowledge the disproportion between these two elements and the resulting tension caused by this conflict. The writer intends a world characterized by the brotherhood of men, unity and freedom, where every man has the inalienable right to live his life according to his beliefs. His awakening comes when he realizes that the world surrounding him not only reflects the total opposition to his intention, but also attempts to destroy anyone who tries to carry out such intention;

3) Faced with the disproportion generated by the Absurd Awakening, both the Absurd Hero and the Saroyan protagonist reject any form of evasion from it and make a

choice for life, facing the challenge of living in the desert, finding in the tension of the conflict itself a reason for existence. Thus they maintain the notion of the Absurd and take the steps to move beyond it;

4) This is realized when they discover in life itself, immersed in its paradoxical conflict, the central element for the establishment of a passionate homocentric humanism, characterized by an urgent sense of immediacy, of living the present moment fully;

5) Artistic creation becomes, for both, the vehicle through which *being* is accomplished, thus shifting the focus of their lives from attainment to performance, in which the artist expresses his own life, where the artistic process is far more important than the final work of art. The Saroyan writer uses his art as a tool for the remembrance of man's identity, that is, his own sense of being. Thus, writing for him acquires a circular, neverending dynamic, for it functions doubly as the means for achieving self-realization and at the same time as an end in itself, since for him creating is being.

NOTES

¹ This approach implies in some unavoidable redundancies, especially in terms of the contents of Chapter 3, since some of the aspects mentioned in the individual analysis of the stories will be retrieved to permit the characterization of the Saroyan Hero.

5 - CONCLUSION

As stated in the Introduction, this study sought to revert the initially unfavorable critical opinion on William Saroyan's early short fiction, through the analysis of six selected short stories from *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*.

The study required the development of a conceptual framework consisting of theoretical considerations on the Absurd Hero and the Lyric Short Story, providing the background for the characterization of the Saroyan Hero present in the selection, both in terms of its content, as well as the literary form employed for its expression.

The analysis of the content of the stories provided the components for the construction of the Saroyan Hero, and their consideration in terms of form brought to light the employment of the Lyric Short Story form in Saroyan's early short fiction.

From this analysis and subsequent characterization of the hero present in them, several conclusive aspects can be drawn upon Saroyan's work in *Daring*.

The overall conclusion is that William Saroyan's early and later critics have failed to evaluate adequately

his early short fiction. Several reasons account for this failure, and William Saroyan himself is partly to be blamed for some of these reasons. His arrogant attitude about his own writing, coupled with an overwhelming literary production, caused the suspicion that he was a literary hoax to persist, since he insisted on publishing everything he wrote practically without any sort of revision. Besides, quite a considerable proportion of his early short fiction deals with ethnical themes, mostly related to his Armenian cultural inheritance. Thus most of his best early short stories, "Daring Young Man," for instance, were overshadowed by dozens of stories that lack their literary quality. Furthermore, the fact that critics employed formalist standards to evaluate Saroyan's largely expressionist stories also added arguments for his dismissal as a major writer, resulting in the fact that critics did not look deeper into his work with an unbiased attitude, thus overlooking important aspects of his first literary phase.

The first of these aspects is that the characterization of the Saroyan protagonist in *Daring* reveals that Saroyan's early short fiction possesses an existential and universal dimension of outstanding literary qualities which, overshadowed by the Armenian dimension of his work and overlooked by his early critics, constitutes a tremendously important and valuable component of his work.

A second concluding aspect, that helps to explain why critics misunderstood his work, is the fact that Saroyan

developed absurdist themes and aspects in his short fiction almost a decade before Camus and other existentialist philosophers began publishing their theoretical concepts on the Absurd. His critics noticed such absurdist elements only in some of his plays many years later. Therefore Saroyan was ahead of his time in his choice of content and may be considered as one of the forerunners of the Literature of the Absurd in America.

A third important concluding aspect, related to the previous one, is the fact that William Saroyan employed the lyric short story form as the most adequate means to accommodate his existential themes, experimenting with this combination in a very effective way, revealing the richness and depth of his work, which can be compared to other important writers such as Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and John Updike.

All of these aspects reveal that in his early short stories William Saroyan produced a new kind of fiction, innovating both in terms of form and content, working with themes related to the conclusion that "life has a meaning, that art and literature are the best means we have of expressing that meaning, that a dignified survival for any of us, but especially for the artist, matters more than anything else." (BALAKIAN, p.140) Such work reveals a writer intent in dealing with the universal concerns of mankind, seeking a balance between the puzzling paradoxes of life, never willing

to compromise but to find meaning and satisfaction in simply being.

These conclusions lead to the perception that Saroyan's early short fiction has lasting worth, revealing a writer who, from the beginning of his career, remained true to his beliefs and ideals, always involved in his own personal battle to restore and maintain his own identity and dignity, as well as that of the universal man. His purpose was to use his artistic medium as a tool to express such beliefs, as BALAKIAN so well illustrates:

Again and again, the realist and the mystic go hand in hand to create a sense of absurdity in the differences that separate the mundane world from his own way of seeing it. Through his ever-present sense of man's mortality, Saroyan keeps his eyes fixed on the natural world, that rich, true, earthly place on the other side of the artificial Human Comedy, where there are no roles to be enacted and a person's true style is allowed to emerge. (BALAKIAN, p.144)

This desire for authentic expression of life's crucial truths was Saroyan's deep intention throughout his life, yet present in his very first works, through which he sought to achieve meaning and purpose in the midst of chaos and meaninglessness, and to see fragments of human beauty in a context of ugliness and despair.

Saroyan strove to remain creative in the midst of a sterile and aggressive environment, responding to life's simple truths, the fact that existence is all we have got and that we must live life fully. His deep commitment to *being*, to performance, as opposed to achievement, is very well

expressed in his early fiction, where the combination of lyrical and existential aspects express so well.

His writing is thus shaped by the strength of his beliefs. He himself was aware of the contradictions and paradoxes involved in such attitude, when his protagonist in "Myself" says:

I wouldn't advise any young man with a talent for words to try to write the way I do. I would suggest that he study Theodore Dreiser or Sinclair Lewis. I would suggest even that, rather than attempt my method, he follow in the footsteps of O. Henry or the contributors to *The Woman's Home Companion*. Because, briefly, I am not a writer at all. I have been laughing at the rules of writing ever since I started to write, ten, maybe fifteen years ago. I am simply a young man. I write because there is nothing more civilized or decent for me to do. ("Myself", p.58)

This is the Saroyan whose impressions about the human soul and man's search for meaning and personal significance are still available for experience through his timeless short stories.

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7. APPENDIX

Selection of Stories from The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze:

7.1 - "Seventy Thousand Assyrians":

I hadn't had a haircut in forty days and forty nights, and I was beginning to look like several violinists out of work. You know the look: genius gone to pot, and ready to join the Communist Party. We barbarians from Asia Minor are hairy people: when we need a haircut, we need a haircut. It was so bad, I had outgrown my only hat. (I am writing a very serious story, perhaps one of the most serious I shall ever write. That is why I am being flippant. Readers of Sherwood Anderson will begin to understand what I am saying after a while; they will know that my laughter is rather sad.) I was a young man in need of a haircut, so I went down to Third Street (San Francisco), to the Barber College, for a fifteen-cent haircut.

Third Street, below Howard, is a district: think of the Bowery in New York, Main Street in Los Angeles: think of old men and boys, out of work, hanging around, smoking Bull Durham, talking about the government, waiting for something to turn up, simply waiting. It was a Monday morning in August and a lot of the tramps had come to the shop to brighten up a bit. The Japanese boy who was working over the free chair had a waiting list of eleven; all the other chairs were occupied. I sat down and began to wait. Outside, as Hemingway (*The Sun also Rises; Farewell to Arms; Death in the Afternoon; Winter Take Nothing*) would say, haircuts were four bits. I had twenty cents and a half-pack of Bull Durham. I rolled a cigarette, handed the pack to one of my contemporaries who looked in need of nicotine, and inhaled the dry smoke, thinking of America, what was going on politically, economically, spiritually. My contemporary was a boy of sixteen. He looked Iowa; splendid potentially, a solid American, but down, greatly down in the mouth. Little sleep, no change of clothes for several days, a little fear, etc. I wanted very much to know his name. A writer is always wanting to get the reality of faces and figures. Iowa said, "I just got in from Salinas. No work in the lettuce fields. Going north now, to Portland; try to ship out." I wanted to tell him how it was with me: rejected story from *Scribner's*, rejected essay from *The Yale Review*, no money for decent cigarettes, worn shoes, old shirts, but I was afraid to make something of my own troubles. A writer's troubles are always boring, a bit unreal. People are

apt to feel, *Well, who asked you to write in the first place?* A man must pretend not to be a writer. I said, "Good luck, north." Iowa shook his head. "I know better. Give it a try, anyway. Nothing to lose." Fine boy, hope he isn't dead, hope he hasn't frozen, mighty cold these days (December, 1933), hope he hasn't gone down; he deserved to live. Iowa, I hope you got work in Portland; I hope you are earning money; I hope you have rented a clean room with a warm bed in it; I hope you are sleeping nights, eating regularly, walking along like a human being, being happy. Iowa, my good wishes are with you. I have said a number of prayers for you. (All the same, I think he is dead by this time. It was in him the day I saw him, the low malicious face of the beast, and at the same time all the theatres in America were showing, over and over again, an animated film-cartoon in which there was a song called "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?", and that's what it amounts to; people with money laughing at the death that is crawling slyly into boys like young Iowa, pretending that it isn't there, laughing in warm theatres. I have prayed for Iowa, and I consider myself a coward. By this time he must be dead, and I am sitting in a small room, talking about him, only talking.)

I began to watch the Japanese boy who was learning to become a barber. He was shaving an old tramp who had a horrible face, one of those faces that emerge from years and years of evasive living, years of being unsettled, of not belonging anywhere, of owning nothing, and the Japanese boy was holding his nose back (his own nose) so that he would not smell the old tramp. A trivial point in a story, a bit of data with no place in a work of art, nevertheless, I put it down. A young writer is always afraid some significant fact may escape him. He is always wanting to put in everything he sees. I wanted to know the name of the Japanese boy. I am profoundly interested in names. I have found that those that are unknown are the most genuine. Take a big name like Andrew Mellon. I was watching the Japanese boy very closely. I wanted to understand from the way he was keeping his sense of smell away from the mouth and nostrils of the old man what he was thinking, how he was feeling. Years ago, when I was seventeen, I pruned vines in my uncle's vineyard, north of Sanger, in the San Joaquin Valley, and there were several Japanese working with me, Yoshio Enomoto, Hideo Suzuki, Katsumi Sujimoto, and one or two others. These Japanese taught me a few simple phrases, *hello, how are you, fine day, isn't it, good-bye*, and so on. I said in Japanese to the barber student, "How are you?" He said in Japanese, "Very well, thank you." Then, in impeccable English, "Do you speak Japanese? Have you lived in Japan?" I said, "Unfortunately, no. I am able to speak only one or two words. I used to work with Yoshio Enomoto, Hideo Suzuki, Katsumi Sujimoto; do you know them?" He went on with his work, thinking of the names. He seemed to be whispering, "Enomoto, Suzuki, Sujimoto." He said, "Suzuki, small man?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I know him. He lives in San Jose now. He is married now."

I want you to know that I am deeply interested in what people remember. A young writer goes out to places and talks to people. He tries to find out what they remember. I am not using great material for a short story. Nothing is going to happen in this work. I am not fabricating a fancy plot. I am not creating

memorable characters. I am not using a slick style of writing. I am not building up a fine atmosphere. I have no desire to sell this story or any story to *The Saturday Evening Post* or to *Cosmopolitan* or to *Harper's*. I am not trying to compete with the great writers of short stories, men like Sinclair Lewis and Joseph Hergesheimer and Zane Grey, men who really know how to write, how to make up stories that will sell. Rich men, men who understand all the rules about plot and character and style and atmosphere and all that stuff. I have no desire for fame. I am not out to win the Pulitzer Prize or the Nobel Prize or any other prize. I am out here in the far West, in San Francisco, in a small room on Carl Street, writing a letter to common people, telling them in simple language things they already know. I am merely making a record, so if I wander around a little, it is because I am in no hurry and because I do not know the rules. If I have any desire at all, it is to show the brotherhood of man. This is a big statement and it sounds a little precious. Generally a man is ashamed to make such a statement. He is afraid sophisticated people will laugh at him. But I don't mind. I'm asking sophisticated people to laugh. That is what sophistication is for. I do not believe in races. I do not believe in governments. I see life as one life at one time, so many millions simultaneously, all over the earth. Babies who have not yet been taught to speak any language are the only race of the earth, the race of man: all the rest is pretense, what we call civilization, hatred, fear, desire for strength.... But a baby is a baby. And the way they cry, there you have the brotherhood of man, babies crying. We grow up and we learn the words of a language and we see the universe through the language we know, we do not see it through all languages or through no language at all, through silence, for example, and we isolate ourselves in the language we know. Over here we isolate ourselves in English, or American as Mencken calls it. All the eternal things, in our words. If I want to do anything, I want to speak a more universal language. The heart of man, the unwritten part of man, that which is eternal and common to all races.

Now I am beginning to feel guilty and incompetent. I have used all this language and I am beginning to feel that I have said nothing. This is what drives a young writer out of his head, this feeling that nothing is being said. Any ordinary journalist would have been able to put the whole business into a three-word caption. Man is man, he would have said. Something clever, with any number of implications. But I want to use language that will create a single implication. I want the meaning to be precise, and perhaps that is why the language is so imprecise. I am walking around my subject, the impression I want to make, and I am trying to see it from all angles, so that I will have a whole picture, a picture of wholeness. It is the heart of man that I am trying to imply in this work.

Let me try again: I hadn't had a haircut in a long time and I was beginning to look seedy, so I went down to the Barber College on Third Street, and I sat in a chair. I said, "Leave it full in the back. I have a narrow head and if you do not leave it full in the back, I will go out of this place looking like a horse. Take as much as you like off the top. No lotion, no water, comb it dry." Reading makes a full man, writing a precise one, as

you see. This is what happened. It doesn't make much of a story, and the reason is that I have left out the barber, the young man who gave me the haircut.

He was tall, he had a dark serious face, thick lips, on the verge of smiling but melancholy, thick lashes, sad eyes, a large nose. I saw his name on the card that was pasted on the mirror, Theodore Badal. A good name, genuine, a good young man, genuine. Theodore Badal began to work on my head. A good barber never speaks until he has been spoken to, no matter how full his heart may be.

"That name," I said, "Badal. Are you an Armenian?" I am an Armenian. I have mentioned this before. People look at me and begin to wonder, so I come right out and tell them. "I am an Armenian," I say. Or they read something I have written and begin to wonder, so I let them know. "I am an Armenian," I say. It is a meaningless remark, but they expect me to say it, so I do. I have no idea what it is like to be an Armenian or what it is like to be an Englishman or a Japanese or anything else. I have a faint idea what it is like to be alive. This is the only thing that interests me greatly. This and tennis. I hope some day to write a great philosophical work on tennis, something on the order of *Death in the Afternoon*, but I am aware that I am not yet ready to undertake such a work. I feel that the cultivation of tennis on a large scale among peoples of the earth will do much to annihilate racial differences, prejudices, hatred, etc. Just as soon as I have perfected my drive and my lob, I hope to begin my outline of this great work. (It may seem to some sophisticated people that I am trying to make fun of Hemingway. I am not. *Death in the Afternoon* is a pretty sound piece of prose. I could never object to it as prose. I cannot even object to it as philosophy. I think it is finer philosophy than that of Will Durant and Walter Pitkin. Even when Hemingway is a fool, he is at least an accurate fool. He tells you what actually takes place and he doesn't allow the speed of an occurrence to make his exposition of it hasty. This is a lot. It is some sort of advancement for literature. To relate leisurely the nature and meaning of that which is very brief in duration.)

"Are you an Armenian?" I asked.

We are a small people and whenever one of us meets another, it is an event. We are always looking around for someone to talk to in our language. Our most ambitious political party estimates that there are nearly two million of us living on the earth, but most of us don't think so. Most of us sit down and take a pencil and a piece of paper and we take on section of the world at a time and imagine how many Armenians at the most are likely to be living in that section and we put the highest number on the paper, and then we go on to another section, India, Russia, Soviet Armenia, Egypt, Italy, Germany, France, America, South America, Australia, and so on, and after we add up our most hopeful figures the total comes to something a little less than a million. Then we start to think how big our families are, how high our birth-rate and how low our death-rate (except in times of war when massacres increase the death-rate), and we begin to imagine how rapidly we will increase if we are left alone a quarter of a century, and we feel pretty happy. We always leave out earthquakes, wars,

massacres, famines, etc., and it is a mistake. I remember the Near East Relief drives in my home town. My uncle used to be our orator and he used to make a whole auditorium full of Armenians weep. He was an attorney and he was a great orator. Well, at first the trouble was war. Our people were being destroyed by the enemy. Those who hadn't been killed were homeless and they were starving, *our own flesh and blood*, my uncle said, and we all wept. And we gathered money and sent it to our people in the old country. Then, after the war, when I was a bigger boy, we had another Near East Relief drive and my uncle stood on the stage of the Civic Auditorium of my home town and he said, "Thank God this time it is not the enemy, but an earthquake. God has made us suffer. We have worshipped Him through trial and tribulation, through suffering and disease and torture and horror and (my uncle began to weep, began to sob) through the madness of despair, and now he has done this thing, and still we praise Him, still we worship Him. We do not understand the ways of God." And after the drive I went to my uncle and said, "Did you mean what you said about God?" And he said, "That was oratory. We've got to raise money. What God? It is nonsense." "And when you cried?" I asked, and my uncle said, "That was real. I could not help it. I had to cry. Why, for God's sake, why must we go through all this God damn hell? What have we done to deserve all this torture? Man won't let us alone. God won't let us alone. Have we done something? Aren't we supposed to be pious people? What is our sin? I am disgusted with God. I am sick of man. The only reason I am willing to get up and talk is that I don't dare keep my mouth shut. I can't bear the thought of more of our people dying. Jesus Christ, have we done something?"

I asked Theodroe Badal if he was an Armenian.

He said, "I am an Assyrian."

Well, it was something. They, the Assyrians, came from our part of the world, they had noses like our noses, eyes like our eyes, hearts like our hearts. They had a different language. When they spoke we couldn't understand them, but they were a lot like us. It wasn't quite as pleasing as it would have been if Badal had been an Armenian, but it was something.

"I am an Armenian," I said. "I used to know some Assyrian boys in my home town, Joseph Sargis, Nito Elia, Tony Saleah. Do you know any of them?"

"Joseph Sargis, I know him." said Badal. "The others I do not know. We lived in New York until five years ago, then we came out west to Turlock. The we moved up to San Francisco."

"Nito Elia," I said, "is a Captain in the Salvation Army." (I don't want anyone to imagine that I am making anything up, or that I am trying to be funny.) "Tony Saleh," I said, "was killed eight years ago. He was riding a horse and he was thrown and the horse began to run. Tony couldn't get himself free, he was caught by a leg, and the horse ran around and around for a half hour and then stopped, and when they went up to Tony he was dead. He was fourteen at the time. I used to go to school with him. Tony was a very clever boy, very good at arithmetic."

We began to talk about the Assyrian language and the Armenian language, about the old world, conditions over there, and so on. I was getting a fifteen-cent haircut and I was doing my best to learn something at the same time, to acquire some new

truth, some new appreciation of the wonder of life, the dignity of man. (Man has great dignity, do not imagine that he has not.)

Badal said, "I cannot read Assyrian. I was born in the old country, but I want to get over it."

He sounded tired, not physically but spiritually.

"Why?" I said. "Why do you want to get over it?"

"Well," he laughed, "simply because everything is washed up over there." I am repeating his words precisely, putting in nothing of my own. "We were a great people once." he went on. "But that was yesterday, the day before yesterday. Now we are a topic in ancient history. He had a great civilization. They're still admiring it. Now I am in America learning how to cut hair. We're washed up as a race, we're through, it's all over, why should I learn to read the language? We have no writers, we have no news - well, there is a little news: once in a while the English encourage the Arabs to massacre us, that is all. It's an old story, we know all about it. The news comes over to us through the Associated Press, anyway."

These remarks were very painful to me, an Armenian. I had always felt badly about my own people being destroyed. I had never heard an Assyrian speaking in English about such things. I felt great love for this young fellow. Don't get me wrong. There is a tendency these days to think in terms of pansies whenever a man says that he has affection for man. I think now that I have affection for all people, even for the enemies of Armenia, whom I have so tactfully not named. Everyone knows who they are. I have nothing against any of them because I think of them as one man living one life at a time, and I know, I am positive, that one man at a time is incapable of the monstrosities performed by mobs. My objection is to mobs only.

"Well," I said, "it is much the same with us. We, too, are old. We still have our church. We still have a few writers, Aharonian, Isahakian, a few others, but it is much the same."

"Yes," said the barber, "I know. We went in for the wrong things. We went in for the simple things, peace and quiet and families. We didn't go in for machinery and conquest and militarism. We didn't go in for diplomacy and deceit and the invention of machine-guns and poison gases. Well, there is no use in being disappointed. We had our day, I suppose."

"We are hopeful," I said. "There is no Armenian living who does not still dream of an independent Armenia."

"Dream?" said Badal. "Well, that is something. Assyrians cannot even dream any more. Why, do you know how many of us are left on the earth?"

"Two or three million," I suggested.

"SEventy thousand," said Badal. "That is all. Seventy thousand Assyrians in the world, and the Arabs are still killing us. They killed seventy of us in a little uprising last month. There was a small paragraph in the paper. Seventy more of us destroyed. We'll be wiped out before long. My brother is married to an American girl and he has a son. There is no more hope. We are trying to forget Assyria. My father still reads a paper that comes from New York, but he is an old man. He will be dead soon."

Then his voice changed, he ceased speaking as an Assyrian and began to speak as a barber: "Have I taken enough off the top?" he asked.

The rest of the story is pointless. I said so long to the young Assyrian and left the shop. I walked across town, four miles, to my room on Carl Street. I thought about the whole business: Assyria and this Assyrian, Theodore Badal, learning to be a barber, the sadness of his voice, the hopelessness of his attitude. This was months ago, in August, but ever since I have been thinking about Assyria, and I have been wanting to say something about Theodore Badal, a son of an ancient race, himself youthful and alert, yet hopeless. Seventy thousand Assyrians, a mere seventy thousand of that great people, and all the others quiet in death and all the greatness crumbled and ignored, and a young man in America learning to be a barber, and a young man lamenting bitterly the course of history.

Why don't I make up plots and write beautiful love stories that can be made into motion pictures? Why don't I let these unimportant and boring matters go hang? Why don't I try to please the American reading public?

Well, I am an Armenian. Michael Arlen is an Armenian, too. He is pleasing the public. I have great admiration for him, and I think he has perfected a very fine style of writing and all that, but I don't want to write about the people he likes to write about. Those people were dead to begin with. You take Iowa and the Japanese boy and Theodore Badal, the Assyrian; well, they may go down physically, like Iowa, to death, or spiritually, like Badal, to death, but they are of the stuff that is eternal in man and it is this stuff that interests me. You don't find them in bright places, making witty remarks about sex and trivial remarks about art. You find them where I found them, and they will be there forever, the race of man, the part of man, of Assyria as much as of England, that cannot be destroyed, the part that massacre does not destroy, the part that earthquake and war and famine and madness and everything else cannot destroy.

This work is in tribute to Iowa, to Japan, to Assyria, to Armenia, to the race of man everywhere, to the dignity of that race, the brotherhood of things alive. I am not expecting Paramount Pictures to film this work. I am thinking of seventy thousand Assyrians, one at a time, alive, a great race. I am thinking of Theodore Badal, himself seventy thousand Assyrians and seventy million Assyrians, himself Assyria, and man, standing in a barber shop, in San Francisco, in 1933, and being, still, himself, the whole race.

7.2 - "Myself Upon the Earth"

A beginning is always difficult, for it is no simple matter to choose from language the one bright word which shall live forever; and every articulation of the solitary man is but a single word. Every poem, story, novel and essay, just as every

dream is a word from that language we have not yet translated, that vast unspoken wisdom of night, that grammarless, lawless vocabulary of eternity. The earth is vast. And with the earth all things are vast, the skyscraper and the blade of grass. The eye will magnify if the mind and soul will allow. And the mind may destroy time, brother of death, and brother, let us remember, of life as well. Vastest of all is the ego, the germ of humanity, from which is born God and the universe, heaven and hell, the earth, the face of man, my face and your face; our eyes. For myself, I say with piety, rejoice.

I am a young man in an old city. It is morning and I am in a small room. I am standing over a bundle of yellow writing paper, the only sort of paper I can afford, the kind that sells at the rate of one hundred and seventy sheets for ten cents. All this paper is bare of language, clean and perfect, and I am a young writer about to begin my work. It is Monday... September 25, 1933... how glorious it is to be alive, to be still living. (I am an old man; I have walked along many streets, through many cities, through many days and many nights. And now I have come home to myself. Over me, on the wall of this small, disordered room, is the photograph of my dead father, and I have come up from the earth with his face and his eyes and I am writing in English what he would have written in our native tongue. And we are the same man, one dead and one alive.) Furiously I am smoking a cigarette, for the moment is one of great importance to me, and therefore of great importance to everyone. I am about to place language, my language, upon a clean sheet of paper, and I am trembling. It is so much of a responsibility to be a user of words. I do not want to say the wrong thing. I do not want to be clever. I am horribly afraid of this. I have never been clever in life, and now that I have come to a labor even more magnificent than living itself I do not want to utter a single false word. For months I have been telling myself, "You must be humble. Above all things, you must be humble." I am determined not to lose my character.

I am a story-teller, and I have but a single story - man. I want to tell this simple story in my own way, forgetting the rules of rhetoric, the tricks of composition. I have something to say and I do not wish to speak like Balzac. I am not an artist; I do not really believe in civilization. I am not at all enthusiastic about progress. When a great bridge is built I do not cheer, and when airplanes cross the Atlantic I do not think, "What a marvelous age this is!" I am not interested in the destiny of nations, and history bores me. What do they mean by history, those who write it and believe in it? How has it happened that man, that humble and lovable creature, has been exploited for the purpose of monstrous documents? How has it happened that his solitude has been destroyed, his godliness herded into a hideous riot of murder and destruction? And I do not believe in commerce. I regard all machinery as junk, the adding-machine, the automobile, the railway engine, the airplane, yes, and the bicycle. I do not believe in transportation, in going places with the body, and I would like to know where anyone has ever gone. Have you ever left yourself? Is any journey so vast and interesting as the journey of the mind through life? Is the end of any journey so beautiful as death?

I am interested only in man. Life I love, and before death I am humble. I cannot fear death because it is purely physical. Is it not true that today both I and my father are living, and that in my flesh is assembled all the past of man? But I despise violence and I hate bitterly those who perpetrate and practise it. The injury of a living man's small finger I regard as infinitely more disastrous and ghastly than his natural death. And when multitudes of men are hurt to death in wars I am driven to a grief which borders on insanity. I become impotent with rage. My only weapon is language, and while I know it is stronger than machine-guns, I despair because I cannot single-handed annihilate the notion of destruction which propagandists awaken in men. I myself, however, am a propagandist, and in this very story I am trying to restore man to his natural dignity and gentleness. I want to restore man to himself. I want to send him from the mob to his own body and mind. I want to lift him from the nightmare of history to the calm dream of his own soul, the true chronicle of his kind. I want him to be himself. It is proper only to herd cattle. When the spirit of a single man is taken from him and he is made a member of a mob, the body of God suffers a ghastly pain, and therefore the act is a blasphemy.

I am opposed to mediocrity. If a man is an honest idiot, I can love him, but I cannot love a dishonest genius. All my life I have laughed at rules and mocked traditions, styles and mannerisms. How can a rule be applied to such a wonderful invention as man? Every life is a contradiction, a new truth, a new miracle, and even frauds are interesting. I am not a philosopher and I do not believe in philosophies; the word itself I look upon with suspicion. I believe in the right of man to contradict himself. For instance, did I not say that I look upon machinery as junk, and yet I do not worship the typewriter? Is it not the dearest possession I own?

And now I am coming to the little story I set out to tell. It is about myself and my typewriter, and it is perhaps a trivial story. You can turn to any of the national five-cent magazines and find much more artful stories, stories of love and passion and despair and ecstasy, stories about man called Elmer Fowler, Wilfred Diggins, and women called Florence Farwell, Agatha Hume, and so on.

If you turn to these magazines, you will find any number of perfect stories, full of plot, atmosphere, mood, style, character, and all those other things a good story is supposed to have, just as good mayonnaise is supposed to have so much pure olive oil, so much cream, and so much whipping. (Please do not imagine that I have forgotten myself and that I am trying to be clever. I am not laughing at these stories. I am not laughing at the people who read them. These words of prose and the men and women and children who read them constitute one of the most touching documents of our time, just as the motion pictures of Hollywood and those who spend the greatest portion of their secret lives watching them constitute one of the finest sources of material for the honest novelist. Invariably, let me explain, when I visit the theatre, and it is rarely that I have the price of admission, I am profoundly moved by the flood of emotion which surges from the crowd, and newsreels have always brought hot tears

from my eyes. I cannot see floods, tornadoes, fires, wars and the faces of politicians without weeping. Even the tribulations of Mickey Mouse make my heart bleed, for I know that he, artificial as he may be, is actually a symbol of man.) Therefore, do not misunderstand me. I am not a satirist. There is actually nothing to satire, and everything pathetic or fraudulent contains its own mockery. I wish to point out merely that I am a writer, a storyteller. I go on writing as if all the periodicals in the country were clamoring for my work, offering me vast sums of money for anything I might choose to say. I sit in my room smoking one cigarette after another, writing this story of mine, which I know will never be able to meet the stiff competition of my more artful and talented contemporaries. Is it not strange? And why should I, a storyteller, be so attached to my typewriter? What earthly good is it to me? And what satisfaction do I get from writing stories?

Well, that's the story. Still, I do not want anyone to suppose that I am complaining. I do not want you to feel that I am a hero of some sort, or, on the other hand, that I am a sentimentalist. I am actually neither of these things. I have no objection to *The Saturday Evening Post*, and I do not believe the editor of *Scribner's* is a fool because he will not publish my tales. I know precisely what every magazine in the country wants. I know the sort of material *Secret Stories* is seeking, and the sort *The American Mercury* prefers, and the sort preferred by the literary journal like *Hound & Horn*, and all the rest. I read all magazines and I know what sort of stuff will sell. Still, I'm seldom published and poor. Is it that I cannot write the sort of stuff for which money is paid? I assure you that it is not. I can write any sort of story you can think of. If Edgar Rice Burroughs were to die this morning, I could go on writing about Tarzan and the Apes. Or if I felt inclined, I could write like John Dos Passos or William Faulkner or James Joyce. (And so could you, for that matter.)

But I had said that I want to preserve my identity. Well, I mean it. If in doing this it is essential for me to remain unpublished, I am satisfied. I do not believe in fame. It is a form of fraudulence, and any famous man will tell you so. Any honest man, at any rate. How can one living man possibly be greater than another? And what difference does it make if one man writes great novels which are printed and another printed great novels which are not? What has the printing of novels to do with their greatness? What has money or the lack of it to do with the character of a man?

But I will confess that you've got to be proud and religious to be the sort of writer that I am. You've got to have an astounding amount of strength. And it takes years and years to become the sort of writer that I am. Sometimes centuries. I wouldn't advise any young man with a talent for words to try to write the way that I do. I would suggest that he study Theodore Dreiser or Sinclair Lewis. I would suggest even that, rather than attempt my method, he follow in the footsteps of O. Henry or the contributors to *The Woman's Home Companion*. Because, briefly, I am not a writer at all. I have been laughing at the rules of writing ever since I started to write, ten, maybe fifteen years ago. I am

simply a young man. I write because there's nothing more civilized or decent for me to do.

Do you know that I do not believe there is really such a thing as a poem-form, a story-form or a novel-form? I believe there is man only. The rest is trickery. I am trying to carry over into this story of mine the man that I am. And as much of my earth as I am able. I want more than anything else to be honest and fearless in my own way. Do you think I could not, if I chose, omit the remark I made about Dos Passos and Faulkner and Joyce, a remark which is both ridiculous and dangerous? Why, if someone were to say to me, "All right, you say you can write like Faulkner, well, then, let's see you do it." If someone were to say this to me, I would be positively stumped and I would have to admit timidly that I couldn't do the trick. Nevertheless, I make the statement and let it stand. And what is more, no one can prove that I am cracked; I could make the finest alienist in Vienna seem a raving maniac to his own disciples, or if I did not prefer this course, I could act as dull and stupid and sane as a Judge of the Supreme Court. Didn't I say that in my flesh is gathered all the past of man? And surely there have been dolts in that past.

I do not know, but there may be a law of some sort against this kind of writing. It may be a misdemeanor. I hope so. It is impossible for me to smash a fly which has tickled my nose, or to step on an ant, or to hurt the feelings of any man, idiot of genius, but I cannot resist the temptation to mock any law which is designed to hamper the spirit of man. It is essential for me to stick pins in pompous balloons. I love to make small explosions with the inflated bags of moralists, cowards, and wise men. Listen and you will hear such a small explosion in this paragraph.

All this rambling may seem pointless and a waste of time, but it is not. There is absolutely no haste - I can walk the hundred yard dash in a full day - and anyone who prefers may toss this story aside and take up something in the *Cosmopolitan*. I am not asking anyone to stand by. I am not promising golden apples to all who are patient. I am sitting in my room, living my life, tapping my typewriter. I am sitting in the presence of my father, who has been gone from the earth so many years. Every two or three minutes I look up into his melancholy face to see how he is taking it all. It is like looking into a mirror, for I see myself. I am almost as old as he was when the photograph was taken and I am wearing the very same moustache he wore at the time. I worship this man. All my life I have worshipped him. When both of us lived on the earth I was much too young to exchange so much as a single word with him, consciously, but ever since I have come to consciousness and articulation we have had many long silent conversations. I say to him, "Ah, you melancholy Armenian, you; how marvelous your life has been!" And he replies gently, "Be humble, my son. Seek God."

My father was a writer, too. He was an unpublished writer. I have all his great manuscripts, his great poems and stories, written in our native language, which I cannot read. Two or three times each year I bring out all my father's papers and stare for hours at his contribution to the literature of the world. Like myself, I am pleased to say, he was desperately poor; poverty trailed him like a hound, as the expression is. Most of

his poems and stories were written on wrapping paper which he folded into small books. Only his journal is in English (which he spoke and wrote perfectly), and it is full of lamentations. In New York, according to this journal, my father had only two moods: *sad* and *very sad*. About thirty years ago he was alone in that city, and he was trying to earn enough money to pay for the passage of his wife and three children to the new world. He was a janitor. Why should I withhold this fact? There is nothing shameful about a great man's being a janitor in America. In the old country he was a man of honor, a professor, and he was called Agha, which means approximately lord. Unfortunately, he was also a revolutionist, as all good Armenians are. He wanted the handful of people of his race to be free. He wanted them to enjoy liberty, and so he was placed in jail every now and then. Finally it got so bad that if he did not leave the old country, he would kill and be killed. He knew English, he had read Shakespeare and Swift in English, and so he came to this country. And they make a janitor of him. After a number of years of hard work his family joined him in New York. In California, according to my father's journal, matters for a while were slightly better for him; he mentioned sunshine and magnificent bunches of grapes. So he tried farming. At first he worked for other farmers, then he made a down payment on a small farm of his own. But he was a rotten farmer. He was a man of books, a professor; he loved good clothes. He loved leisure and comfort, and like myself he hated machinery.

My father's vineyard was about eleven miles east of the nearest town, and all the farmers near by were in the habit of going to town once or twice a week on bicyucles, which were the vogue at that time and a trifle faster than a horse and buggy. One hot afternoon in August a tall individual in very fine clothes was seen moving forward in long leisurely strides over a hot and dusty country road. It was my father. My people told me this story about the man, so that I might understand what a fool he was and not be like him. Someone saw my father. It was a neighbor farmer who was returning from the city on a bicycle. This man was amazed.

"Agha," he said, "where are you going?"

"To town," my father said.

"But, Agha," said the farmer, "you cannot do this thing. It is eleven miles to town and you look... People will laugh at you in such clothes."

"Let them laugh," my fahter said. "These are my clothes. They fit me."

"Yes, yes, of course they fit you," said the farmer, "but such clothes do not seem right out here, in this dust and heat. Everyone wears overalls out here, Agha."

"Nonsense," said my father. He went on Walking. The farmer followed my father, whom he now regarded as insane.

"At least, at least," he said, "if you insist on wearing those clothes, at least you will not humiliate yourself by walking to town. You will at least accept the use of my bicycle."

This farmer was a close friend of my father's family, and he had great respect for my father. He meant well, but my father was dumbfounded. He stared at the man with horror and disgust.

"What?" he shouted. "You ask me to mount one of those crazy contraptions? You ask me to tangle myself in that ungodly

piece of junk?" (The Armenian equivalent of junk is a good deal more violent and horrible.) "Man was not made for such absurd inventions," my father said. "Man was not placed on the earth to tangle himself in junk. He was placed here to stand erect and to walk with his feet."

And away he went.

Ah, you can be sure that I worship this man. And now, alone in my room, thinking of these things, tapping out this story, I want to show you that I and my father are the same man.

I shall come soon to the matter of the typewriter, but there is no hurry. I am a story teller, not an aviator. I am not carrying myself across the Atlantic in the cockpit of an airplane which moves at the rate of two hundred and fifty miles per hour.

It is Monday of this year, 1933, and I am trying to gather as much of eternity into this story as possible. When next this story is read I may be with my father in the earth we both love and I may have sons alive on the surface of this old earth, young fellows whom I shall ask to be humble, as my father has asked me to be humble.

In a moment a century may have elapsed. and I am doing what I can to keep this moment solid and alive.

Musicians have been known to weep at the loss of a musical instrument, or at its injury. To a great violinist his violin is a part of his identity. I am a young man with a dark mind, and a dark way in general, a sullen and serious way. The earth is mine, but not the world. If I am taken away from language, if I am placed in the street, as one more living entity, I become nothing, not even a shadow. I have less honor than the grocer's clerk, less dignity than the doorman at the St. Francis Hotel, less identity than the driver of a taxi-cab.

And for the past six months I have been separated from my writing, and I have been nothing, or I have been walking about unalive, some indistinct shadow in a nightmare of the universe. It is simply that without conscious articulation, without words, without language, I do not exist as myself. I have no meaning, and I might just as well be dead and nameless. It is blasphemous for any living man to live in such a manner. It is an outrage to God. It means that we have got nowhere after all these years.

It is for this reason, now that I have my typewriter again, and have beside me a bundle of clean writing paper, and am sitting in my room, full of tobacco smoke, with my father's photograph watching over me - it is for this reason that I feel as if I have just been resurrected from the dead. I love and worship life, living senses, functioning minds. I love consciousness. I love precision. And life is to be created by every man who has the breath of God within him; and every man is to create his own consciousness, and his own precision, for these things do not exist of themselves. Only confusion and error and ugliness exist of themselves. I have said that I am deeply religious. I am. I believe that I live, and you've got to be religious to believe so miraculous a thing. And I am grateful and I am humble. I do live, so let the years repeat themselves eternally, for I am sitting in my room, stating in words the truth of my being, squeezing the fact from meaninglessness and imprecision. And the living of this moment can never be effaced. It is beyond time.

I despise commerce. I am a young man with no money. There are times when a young man can use a small sum of money to very good advantage, there are times when money to him, because of what it can purchase, is the most important thing of his life. I despise commerce, but I admit that I have some respect for money. It is, after all, pretty important, and it was the lack of it, year after year, that finally killed my father. It wasn't right for a man so poor to wear the sort of clothes he knew he deserved; so my father died. I would like to have enough money to enable me to live simply and to write my life. Years ago, when I labored in behalf of industry and progress and so on, I purchased a small portable typewriter, brand new, for sixty-five dollars. (And what an enormous lot of money that is, if you are poor.) At first this machine was strange to me and I was annoyed by the racket it made when it was in use; late at night this racket was unbearably distressing. It resembled more than anything else silence which had been magnified a thousand times. If such a thing can be. But after a year or two I began to feel a genuine attachment toward the machine, and loved it as a good pianist, who respects music, loves his piano. I never troubled to clean the machine and no matter how persistently I pounded upon it, the machine did not weaken and fall to pieces. I had great respect for it.

And then, in a fit of despondency, I placed this small machine and carried it to the city. I left it in the establishment of a money-lender, and walked through the city with fifteen dollars in my pocket. I was sick of being poor.

I went first to a bootblack and had my shoes polished. When a bootblack is shining my shoes I place him in my place in the chair and I descend and polish his shoes. It is an experience in humility.

Then I went to a theatre. I sat among people to see myself in patterns of Hollywood. I sat and dreamed, looking into the faces of beautiful women. Then I went to a restaurant and sat at a table and ordered all the different kinds of food I ever thought I would like to eat. I ate two dollars' worth of food. The waiter thought I was out of my head, but I told him everything was going along first rate. I tipped the waiter. Then I went out into the city again and began walking along the dark streets, the street where the women are. I was tired of being poor. I put my typewriter in hock and I began to spend the money. No one, not even the greatest writer, can go on being poor hour after hour, year, after year. There is such a thing as saying to hell with art. That's what I said.

After a week I became a little more sober. After a month I got to be very sober and I began to want my typewriter again. I began to want to put words on paper again. To make another beginning. To say something and see if it was the right thing. But I had no money. Day after day I had this longing for my typewriter.

This is the whole story. I don't suppose this is a very artful ending, but it is the ending just the same. The point is this: *day after day I longed for my typewriter.*

This morning I got it back. It is before me now and I am tapping at it, and this is what I have written.

7.3 - "A Cold Day"

Dear M-,

I want you to know that it is very cold in San Francisco today, and that I am freezing. It is so cold in my room that every time I start to write a short story the cold stops me and I have to get up and do bending exercises. It means, I think, that something's got to be done about keeping short story writers warm. Sometimes when it is very cold I am able to do very good writing, but at other times I am not. It is the same when the weather is excessively pleasant. I very much dislike letting a day go by without writing a short story and that is why I am writing this letter: to let you know that I am very angry about the weather. Do not think that I am sitting in a nice warm room in sunny California, as they call it, and making up all this stuff about the cold. I am sitting in a very cold room and there is no sun anywhere, and the only thing I can talk about is the cold because it is the only thing going on today. I am freezing and my teeth are chattering. I would like to know what the Democratic party ever did for freezing short story writers. Everybody else gets heat. We've got to depend on the sun and in the winter the sun is undependable. That's the fix I am in: wanting to write and not being able to, because of the cold.

One winter day last year the sun came out and its light came into my room and fell across my table, warming my table and my room and warming me. So I did some brisk behind exercises and then sat down and began to write a short story. But it was a winter day and before I had written the first paragraph of the story the sun had fallen back behind clouds and there I was in my room, sitting in the cold, writing a story. It was such a good story that even though I knew it would never be printed I had to go on writing it, and as a result I was frozen stiff by the time I finished writing it. My face was blue and I could barely move my limbs, they were so cold and stiff. And my room was full of the smoke of a package of Chesterfield cigarettes, but even the smoke was frozen. There were clouds of it in my room, but my room was very cold just the same. Once, while I was writing, I thought of getting a tub and making a fire in it. What I intended to do was to burn a half dozen of my books and keep warm, so that I could write my story. I found an old tub and I brought it to my room, but when I looked around for books to burn I couldn't find any. All of my books are old and cheap. I have about five hundred of them and I paid a nickel each for most of them, but when I looked around for titles to burn, I couldn't find any. There was a large heavy book in German on anatomy that would have made a swell fire, but when I opened it and read a line of that beautiful language, *sie bestehen aus zwei Hüftgelenkbeugemuskeln des Oberschenkels, von denen der eine breitere*, and so on, I couldn't do it. I was asking too much. I couldn't understand the language, I couldn't understand a word in the whole book, but it was somehow too eloquent to use for a fire. The book had cost me five cents two or three years ago, and it weighed about six pounds, so you see that even as fire wood it had been a bargain and I should have been able to tear out its pages and make a fire.

But I couldn't do it. There were over a thousand pages in the book and I planned to burn one page at a time and see the fire of each page, but when I thought of all that print being effaced by fire and all that accurate language being removed from my library, I couldn't do it, and I still have the book. When I get tired of reading great writers, I go to this book and read language that I cannot understand, *während der Kindheit ist sie von birnförmiger Gestalt und liegt vorzugsweise in der Bauchhöhle.* It is simple blasphemous to think of burning a thousand pages of such language. And of course I haven't so much as mentioned the marvelous illustrations.

Then I began to look around for cheap fiction.

And you know the world in chock full of such stuff. Nine books out of ten are cheap worthless fiction, inorganic stuff. I thought, well, there are at least a half dozen of those books in my library and I can burn them and be warm and write my story. So I picked out six books and together they weighed about as much as the German anatomy book. The first was *Tom Brown At Oxford: A Sequel to School Days At Rugby*, Two Volumes in One. The first book had 378 pages, and the second 430, and all these pages would have made a small fire that would have lasted a pretty long time, but I had never read the book and it seemed to me that I had no right to burn a book I hadn't even read. It looked as if it ought to be a book of cheap prose, one worthy of being burned, but I couldn't do it. I read, *The belfry-tower rocked and reeled, as that peal rang out, now merry, now scornful, now plaintive, from those narrow belfry windows, into the bosom of the soft southwest wind, which was playing round the old gray tower of Englebourn church.* Now that isn't exactly tremendous prose, but it isn't such very bad prose either. So I put the book back on the shelf.

The next book was *Inez: A Tale of the Alamo*, and it was dedicated to The Texan Patriots. It was by the author of another book called *Beulah*, and yet another called *St. Elmo*. The only thing I knew about this writer or her books was that one day a girl at school had been severely reprimanded for bringing to class a book called *St. Elmo*. It was said to be the sort of book that would corrupt the morals of a young girl. Well, I opened the book and read, *I am dying; and, feeling as I do, that few hours are allotted me, I shall not hesitate to speak freely and candidly. Some might think me deviating from the delicacy of my sex; but, under the circumstances, I feel that I am not. I have loved you so long, and to know that my love is returned, is a source of deep and unutterable joy to me.* and so on.

This was such bad writing that it was good, and I decided to read the whole book at my first opportunity. There is much for a young writer to learn from our poorest writers. It is very destructive to burn bad books, almost more destructive than to burn good ones.

The next book was *Ten Nights In A Bar Room, and What I Saw There* by T.S. Arthur. Well, even this book was too good to burn. The other three books were by Hall Caine, Brander Matthews, and Upton Sinclair. I had read only Mr. Sinclair's book, and while I didn't like it a lot as a piece of writing, I couldn't burn it because the print was so fine and the binding so good. Typographically it was one of my best books.

Anyway, I didn't burn a single page of a single book, and I went on freezing and writing. Every now and then I burned a match just to remind myself what a flame looked like, just to keep in touch with the idea of heat and warmth. It would be when I wanted to light another cigarette and instead of blowing out the flame I would let it burn all the way down to my fingers.

It is precisely this: that if you have any respect for the mere idea of books, what they stand for in life, if you believe in paper and print, you cannot burn any page of any book. Even if you are freezing. Even if you are trying to do a bit of writing yourself. You can't do it. It is asking too much.

Today it is as cold in my room as the day I wanted to make a fire of books. I am sitting in the cold, smoking cigarettes, and trying to get this coldness onto paper so that when it becomes warm again in San Francisco I won't forget how it was on the cold days.

I have a small phonograph in my room and I play it when I want to exercise in order to keep warm. Well, when it gets to be very cold in my room this phonograph won't work. Something goes wrong inside, the grease freezes and the wheels won't turn, and I can't have music while I am bending and swinging my arms. I've got to do it without music. It is much more pleasant to exercise with jazz, but when it is very cold the phonograph won't work and I am in a hell of a fix. I have been in here since eight o'clock this morning and it is now a quarter to five, and I am in a hell of a mess. I hate to let a day go by without doing something about it, without saying something, and all day I have been in here with my books that I never read, trying to get started and I haven't gotten anywhere. Most of the time I have been walking up and down the room (two steps in any direction brings you to a wall) and bending and kicking and swinging my arms. That's practically all I have been doing. I tried the phonograph a half dozen times to see if the temperature hadn't gone up a litte, but it hadn't, and the phonograph wouldn't play music.

I though I ought to tell you about this. It's nothing important. It's sort of silly, making so much of a little cold weather, but at the same time the cold is a fact today and it is the big thing right now and I am speaking of it. The thing that amazes and pleases me is that my typewriter hasn't once clogged today. Around Christmas when we had a very cold spell out here it was always clogging, and the more I oiled it the more it clogged. I couldn't do a thing with it. The reason was that I had been using the wrong kind of oil. But all this time that I have been writing about the cold my typewriter has been doing its work excellently, and this amazes and pleases me. To think that in spite of the cold this machine can go right on making the language I use is very fine. It encourages me to stick with it, whatever happens. If the machine will work, I tell myself, then you've got to work with it. That's what it amounts to. If you can't write a decent short story because of the cold, write something else. Write anything. Write a long letter to somebody. Tell them how cold you are. By the time the letter is received the sun will be out again and you will be warm again, but the letter will be there mentioning the cold. If it is so cold that you can't make up a little ordinary Tuesday prose, why, what the hell, say anything

that comes along, just so it's the truth. Talk about your toes freezing, about the time you actually wanted to burn books to keep warm but couldn't do it, about the phonograph. Speak of the little unimportant things on a cold day, when your mind is numb and your feet and hands frozen. Mention the things you wanted to write but couldn't. This is what I have been telling myself.

After coffee this morning, I came here to write an important story. I was warm with coffee and I didn't realize how really cold it was. I brought out paper and started to line up what I was going to say in the important story that will never be written because once a lose a thing I lose it forever, this story that is forever lost because of the cold that got into me and silenced me and made me jump up from my chair and do bending exercises. Well, I can tell you about it. I can give you an idea what it was to have been like. I remeber that much about it, but I didn't write it and it is lost. It will give you something of an idea as to how I write.

I will tell you the things I was telling myself this morning while I was getting this story lined up in my mind:

Think of America, I told myself this morning. The whole thing. The cities, all the houses, all the people, the coming and going, the coming of children, the going of them, the coming and going of men and death, and life, the movement, the talk, the sound of machinery, the oratory, think of the pain in America and the fear and the deep inward longing of all things alive in America. Remember the great machines, wheels turning, smoke and fire, the mines and the men working them, the noise, the confusion. Remeber the newspapers and the moving picture theatres and everything that is a part of this life. Let this be your purpose: to suggest this great country.

Then turn to the specific. Go out to some single person and dwell with him, within him, lovingly, seeking to understand the miracle or his being, and utter the truth of his existence and reveal the splendor or the mere fact of his being alive and say it in great prose, simply, show that he is of the time of the machines and the fire and smoke, the newspapers and the noise. Go with him to his secret and speak of it gently, showing that it is the secret of man. Do not deceive. Do not make up lies for the sake of pleasing anyone. No one need be killed in your story. Simply relate what is the great event of all history, of all time, the humble, artless truth of mere being. There is no greater theme: no one need be violent to help you with your art. There is violence. Mention it of course when it is time to mention it. Mention the war. Mention all ugliness, all waste. Do even this lovingly. But emphasize the glorious truth of mere being. It is the major theme. You do not have to create a triumphant climax. The man you write of need not perform some heroic or monstrous deed in order to make your prose great. Let him do what he has always done, day in and day out, continuing to live. Let him walk and talk and think and sleep and dream and awaken and walk again and talk again and move and be alive. It is enough. There is nothing else to write about. You have never seen a short story in life. The events of life have never fallen into the form of the short story or the form of the poem, or into any other form. Your

own consciousness is the only form you need. Speak of this man, recognize his existence. Speak of man.

Well, this is a poor idea of what the story was to have been like. I was warm with coffee when I was telling myself what and how to write, but now I am freezing, and this is the closest I can come to what I had in mind. It was to have been something fine, but now all that I have is this vague remembrance of the story. The least I can do is put into words this remembrance. Tomorrow I will write another story, a different story. I will look at the picture from a different viewpoint. I don't know for sure, but I may feel cocky and I may mock this country and the life that is lived here. It is possible. I can do it. I have done it before, and sometimes when I get mad about political parties and political graft I sit down and mock this great country of ours. I get mean and make man out to be a rotten worthless, unclean thing. It isn't man, but I make out as if it is. It's something else, something less tangible, but for mockery it is more convenient to make out that it is man. It's my business to get at the truth, but when you start to mock, you say to hell with the truth. Nobody's telling the truth, why should I? Everybody's telling nice lies, writing nice stories and novels, why should I worry about the truth. There is no truth. Only grammar, punctuation, and all that rot. But I know better. I can get mad at things and start to mock, but I know better. At its best, the whole business is pretty sad, pretty pathetic.

All day I have been in this room freezing, wanting to say something solid and clean about all of us who are alive. But it was so cold I couldn't do it. All I could do was swing my arms and smoke cigarettes and feel rotten.

Early this morning when I was warm with coffee I had this great story in my mind, ready to get into print, but it got away from me.

The most I can say now is that it is very cold in San Francisco today, and I am freezing.

7.4 - "Aspirin in a Member of the N.R.A."

Remember above all things the blood, remember that man is flesh, that flesh suffers pain, and that the mind being caught in flesh suffers with it. Remember that the spirit is a form of the flesh, and the soul its shadow. Above all things humor and intelligence, and truth as the only beginning: not what is said or done, not obviousness: the truth of silences, the intelligence of nothing said, nothing done. The piety. Faces. Memory, aour memory of the earth, this one and the other, the one which is now this and the one that was once another, what we saw, and the sun. It is our life and we have no other. Remember God, the multitudinous God.

Remeber laughter.

There were nights, in New York, when my hair would freeze on my head, and I would awaken from sleeplessness and remember. i would remember stalking through print, the quiet oratory of some forgotten name, a quiet man who put something down on paper: yea

and yea and yea. Something wordless but precise, my hair frozen, and the small attic room in the heart of Manhattan, across the street from the Paramount Building, and myself in the room, in the darkness, alone, waiting for morning. I used to leave my bed sometimes and smoke a cigarette in the darkness. The light I disliked, so I used to sit in the darkness, remembering.

One or two faces I saw coming across the Continent: the boy with a bad dose, riding in the bus, going home to his mother, taking a bad dose with him from a South American resort, talking about the girl, just a young kid and very beautiful, and God, what a pain, every moment and nothing to do about it. He was eighteen or nineteen, and he had gone down to South America to sleep with a girl, and now he had got it, where it hurt most, and he was drinking whisky and swallowing aspirin, to keep him going, to deaden the pain. York, Pennsylvania, a good town, and his people living there. Everything, he said, everything will be all right the minute I get home. And the sick girl, going back to Chicago, talking in her sleep. The language of fear, the articulation of death, no grammar, exclamations, one after another, the midnight grief, children emerging from the grown girl, talking.

And the faces of people in the streets, in the large cities and in the small towns, the sameness.

I used to get up in the middle of the night and remember. It was no use trying to sleep, because I was in a place that did not know me, and whenever I tried to sleep the room would declare its strangeness and I would sit up in bed and look into the darkness.

Sometimes the room would hear me laughing softly. I could never cry, because I was doing what I wanted to do, so I couldn't help laughing once in a while, and I would always feel the room listening. Strange fellow, this fellow, I would hear the room say; in this agony, he sits up, with his hair frozen, in the middle of the night, and he laughs.

There was enough pain everywhere, in everyone who lived. If you tried to live a godly life, it didn't make any difference, and in the end you came up with a dull pain in your body and a soul burning with a low fire, eating its substance slowly. I used to think about the pain and in the end all I could do was laugh. If there had been a war, it would have been much easier, more reasonable. The pain would have been explicable. We are fighting for high ideals, we are protecting our homes, we are protecting civilization, and all that. A tangible enemy, a reasonable opposition, and swift pain, so that you couldn't have time enough to think about it much: either it got you all the way, carrying you over into death and calm, or it didn't get you. Also, something tangible to hate, a precise enemy. But without a war it was different. You might try hating God, but in the end you couldn't do it. In the end you laughed softly or you prayed, using pious and blasphemous language.

I used to sit in the dark room, waiting for morning and the fellowship of passengers of the subway. The room had great strength. It belonged. It was part of the place. Fellows like me could come and go, they could die and be born again, but the room was steady and static, always there. I used to feel its

indifference toward me, but I could never feel unfriendly toward it. It was part of the scheme, a small attic room in the heart of Manhattan, without an outside window, four dollars a week: me or the next fellow, any of us, it didn't matter. But whenever I laughed, the room would be puzzled, a bit annoyed. It would wonder what there was for me to laugh about, my hair frozen, and my spirit unable to rest.

Sometimes, during the day, shaving, I used to look into the small mirror and see the room in my face, trying to understand me. I would be laughing, looking at the room in the mirror, and it would be annoyed, wondering how I could laugh, what I saw in my life that was amusing.

It was the secrecy that amused me, the fact of my being one of the six million people in the city, living there, waiting to die. I could die in this room, I used to say to myself, and no one would ever understand what had happened, no one would ever say, Do you know that boy from California, the fellow who is studying the subway? Well, he died in a little room on Forty-fourth Street the other night, alone. They found him in the little room, dead. No one would be able to say anything about me if I died, no one knew I was from California and that I was studying the subway, making notes about the people riding in the subway. My presence in Manhattan was not known, so if I came to vanish, my vanishing would not be known. It was a secret, and it amused me. I used to get up in the middle of the night and laugh about it quietly, disturbing the room.

I used to make the room very angry, laughing, and one night it said to me, You are in a hurry but I am not: I shall witness your disintegration, but when you are destroyed I shall be standing here quietly. You will see.

It made me laugh. I knew it was the truth, but it was amusing to me. I couldn't help laughing at the room wanting to see me go down.

But there was an armistice: what happened was this: I moved away. I rented another room. It was a war without a victor. I packed my things and moved to the Mills Hotel.

But it isn't easy to escape a war. A war has a way of following a man around, and my room in the Mills Hotel was even more malicious than the other. It was smaller and therefore its eloquence was considerably louder. Its walls used to fall in upon me, with the whiteness of madness, but I went on laughing. In the middle of the night I used to hear my neighbors, old and young men. I used to hear them speaking out against life from their sleep. I used to hear much weeping. That year many men were weeping from their sleep. I used to laugh about this. It was such a startling thing that I used to laugh. The worst that can happen to any of us, I used to laugh, is death. It is a small thing. Why are you men weeping?

It was because of remembrance, I suppose. Death is always in a man, but sometimes life is in him so strongly that it makes a sad remembrance and comes out in the form of weeping through sleep.

And it was because of the pain. Everybody was in pain. I was studying the subway and I could see the pain the faces of everybody. I looked everywhere for one face that was not the mask

of a pained life, but I did not find such a face. It was this that made my study of the subway so fascinating. After months of study I reached a decision about all of us in Manhattan. It was this: the subway is death, all of us are riding to death. No catastrophe, no horrible accident: only slow death, emerging from life. It was such a terrific fact that I had to laugh about it.

I lived in many rooms, in many sections of the city, East Side, West Side, downtown, uptown, Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, all over the place. It was the same everywhere, my hair frozen at night, alien walls around me, and the smile of death in my eyes.

But I didn't mind. It was what I had wanted to do. I was a clerk in one of thousands of offices of a great national enterprise, doing my part to make America the most prosperous nation on earth, more millionaires per square inch than all the other nations put together, etc. I was paying cash for my sleeplessness, for the privilege of riding in the subway. I was eating in the Automats, renting vacant rooms all over the place, buying clothes, newspapers, aspirin.

I do not intend to leave aspirin out of this document. It is too important to leave out. It is the hero of this story, all of us six million people in New York, swallowing it, day after day. All of us in pain, needing it. Aspirin is an evasion. But so is life. The way we live it. You take aspirin in order to keep going. It deadens pain. It helps you to sleep. It keeps you aboard the subway. It is a substitute for the sun, for strong blood. It stifles remembrance, silences weeping.

It does not harm the heart. That is what the manufacturers say. They say it is absolutely harmless. Maybe it is. Death does not harm the heart either. Death is just as harmless as aspirin. I expect casket manufacturers to make this announcement in the near future. I expect to see a full page advertisement in the *Saturday Evening Post*, making a slogan on behalf of death. *Do not be deceived ... die and see your dreams come true ... death not not harm the heart ... it is absolutely harmless ... doctors everywhere recommend it ...* and so on.

You hear a lot of sad talk about all the young men who died in the Great War. Well, what about this war? Is it less real because it destroys with less violence, with a ghastlier shock, with a more sustained pain?

The coming of snow in Manhattan is lovely. All the ugliness is softened by the pious whiteness. But with the snow comes the deadly cold. With the snow death comes a little closer to everyone. If you are pretty rich, it doesn't bother you much: you don't have to get up in the morning in a cold room and rush out to an Automat for a cup of coffee and then dive into the subway. If you are rich, the snow is only beautiful to you. You get up when you please, and there is nothing to do but sit in warm rooms and talk with other rich people. But if you aren't rich, if you are working to make America a nation of prosperous millionaires, then the snow is both beautiful and ghastly. And when the cold of the snow gets into your bones you are apt to forget that it is beautiful; you are apt to notice only that it is ghastly.

A few evenings ago I was listening to the radio, out here in San Francisco. Aspirin days are over for me. I depend on the sun these days. I was listening to a very good program, sponsored by one of America's most prosperous manufacturers of aspirin. You know the name. I do not intend to advertise the company. It does enough advertising of its own. The radio announcer said the cold and sore throat season had come, and of course it had. I could see snow falling over Manhattan, increasing the sales of aspirin all over the city. Then the announcer said, Aspirin is a member of the N.R.A.

It made me laugh to hear that. But it is the truth. Aspirin is a member of the N.R.A. It is helping everyone to evade fundamentals, it is helping to keep people going to work. Aspirin is helping to bring back prosperity. It is doing its part. It is sending millions of half-dead people to their jobs. It is doing a great deal to keep the spirit of this nation from disintegration. It is deadening pain everywhere. It *isn't* preventing anything, but it is deadening pain.

What about the N.R.A.? Well, I leave that to you. Maybe the N.R.A. is a member of aspirin. Anyhow, together they make a pretty slick team. They are deadening a lot of pain, but they aren't preventing any pain. Everything is the same everywhere.

All I know is this: that if you keep on taking aspirin long enough it will cease to deaden pain.

And that is when the fun begins. That is when you begin to notice that snow isn't beautiful at all. That is when your hair begins to freeze and you begin to get up in the middle of the night, laughing quietly, waiting for the worst, remembering all the pain and not wanting any longer to be half-dead, wanting full death or full life. That is when you begin to be mad about the way things are going in this country, the way things are with life, with man. That is when, weak as you are, something old and savage and defiant in you comes up bitterly out of your illness and starts to smash things, making a path for you to the sun, destroying cities, wrecking subways, pushing you into the sun, getting you away from evasions, dragging you by your neck to life.

It made me laugh, the way I used to laugh in New York, when I heard the radio announcer say that aspirin was a member of the N.R.A., and it made me remember. It made me want to say what I knew about aspirin.

7.5 - "Fight Your Own War"

I am sitting in this small room, two or three months from now or two or three years from now, writing a story about a number of human beings marching in a hunger parade and writing about what is going on in their minds, about all the remarkable things they are dreaming and imagining in connection with themselves and the universe, when I hear a knock at my door, a very emphatic knock.

I know it isn't opportunity because opportunity knocked at my door a number of years ago when I was out, looking for a job, so I imagine it must be my cousin Kirk Minor, the best writer I know who does not write and does not want to write. Or

else, I imagine, it is that young man with the sad face and the ragged blue serge suit who works for the collection agency and comes to my room once a month to inform me politely and nervously that unless I cough up with those four dollars I still owe that employment agency that got me a job in 1927 the case will be taken to court and I will be disgraced, and maybe sent to the penitentiary.

This young man has been coming around to my room so often that I know him very well and in a roundabout way we have come to be friends, even though on the surface we may appear to be enemies. I never did bother to ask him his name but he has told me all about himself and I know he has a wife and a young daughter who is always ill and a source of great worry.

At first I used to dislike this young man and I used to wonder why he worked for such a company as a collection agency, but when he explained about his little sick daughter I began to understand that he *had* to earn money somehow and that he wasn't doing it because he liked to do it, but merely because it was absolutely, almost frantically, necessary. He used to come into my room, melancholy with worry, and he used to try to look at me severely, and then he would say: See here, Mr. Sturiza, my firm is becoming very tired of your evasions, and we must have a full settlement at once. And I used to say: Sit down. Have a cigarette. How is your daughter? Then the young collector used to sigh and sit down and light a cigarette. Duty is duty, he used to begin, and I've got to be severe with you. After all, you owe our client four dollars. All right, I used to say, be severe. I don't owe anybody a dime. I owe my cousin Kirk Minor a half dollar, but he hasn't taken the case to an agency. Then we used to talk for about a half hour or so, and the young collector used to tell me his troubles, how bad it was with him, and I used to tell him my troubles, how bad it was with me, wanting to write well and always putting down the wrong thing, and then faving to go out and walk to the public library to try to find out again how Flaubert did it.

The knock destroys the continuity of my thought, and I go to the door and open it. If it is my cousin Kirk, I think, I will reprimand him; if it is the young man from the collection agency, I will be polite, and I will ask about his daughter.

It is neither, however; it is a small man of fifty with a dull face animated momentarily by some exciting thought, and in his felt hand is a large brown envelope, stuffed, no doubt, with very important documents. The man is a stranger to me, therefore I am greatly interested in him, hoping to be able to learn enough about him to write a good short story.

Enrico Sturiza? he asks, only he shouts it, and I begin to understand that something has happened somewhere in the world, something momentous, historic.

Yes, sir, I reply quietly.

Enrico Sturiza, continues the small man in a manner that suggests that I am about to be sentenced to death for some petty and forgotten misdemeanor, I have the distinguished honor to inform you, on behalf of the International League for the Preservation of Democracy and the Annihilation of Fascism, Bolshevism, Communism and Anarchism, that you are eligible for

active duty in the front line, and that as soon as you are able to get your hat and coat I shall be pleased to escort you in the Packard downstairs to the regimental headquarters. There you will be furnished a brand new uniform, a small book of instructions written in language comprehensible even to seven-year-olds, a good gun and a place to sleep.

The small man has made this speech in a lively and impressive style, but I am not greatly impressed. I pause, light a cigarette and suggest that my guest enter my room and sit down. He enters my room, but declines the chair.

Is there a war? I ask politely.

Yes, of course, smiles the small man, implying that I must be a dunce not to know. War, he announces, was declared this morning at exactly a quarter past six.

That's no hour to be declaring war, I reply. Hardly anyone is awake at that hour. Who did the declaring?

This question disturbs the small man, and he blushes with confusion, making a face and attempting a cough.

The full and written declaration of war was printed in all the morning papers, he replies.

I don't read the papers, I reply. I sometimes glance at the *Christian Science Monitor*, but not often. I am a writer, and reading newspapers spoils my style. I cannot afford to do it. But the war interests me. Who wrote the declaration?

The small man does not like me, and he refuses even to attempt to answer my question.

Are you Enrico Sturiza? he asks again.

I am, I reply.

Very well then, come with me, says the small man. I am sorry, I reply. I am writing a short story about hungry people marching in a parade, and I must finish the story today. I cannot come with you. After I finish the story, I must walk to the Pacific Ocean for exercise.

I demand, says the small man, that you come with me. In the name of the International League, I demand that you come with me.

Get the hell out of here, I reply quietly.

The small man begins to tremble with rage, and I begin to fear that he will have some sort of fit. He turns, however, in a military manner, shouts that I am a traitor, and departs.

I return to my typewriter and try to go on with the story I am writing, but it is not easy to do so. A war is a war, and everybody knows how viciously the last war got on the nerves of writers, bringing about all sorts of eccentric styles of writing, all sorts of mannerisms. News of the war upsets me, and I begin to mope, sitting idly in my chair, trying to think of something intelligent to think.

In not more that a half hour there is another knock at my door, and opening it I look upon the handsome figure of a young man in an officer's uniform. He is obviously a well-bred sort of chap, through the university, cheerful, and not altogether an idiot.

Enrico Sturiza? he asks.

yes, I reply. Please come in.

My name, says the young officer offering me his hand, is Gerald Appleby.

I am very pleased to know your name, I reply. Will you be seated?

Young Mr. Appleby accepts my hospitality, produces a cigarette case, opens it; I accept one, we begin to smoke, and a conversation begins.

Mr. Covington, says Mr. Appleby, paid you a visit this morning, I am informed. His report suggests that you do not - shall I say? - do not particularly wish to be escorted by him to regimental headquarters. My commanding officer, General Egmont Pratt, has suggested that I call on you for the purpose of carrying on a conversation, with the view, we hope, of convincing you of the urgency of your participation in the present war before civilization itself is threatened.

Appleby is very interesting. He is interesting because I can see that nothing short of a war, and nothing short of a threatened civilization, could possibly lift him from the narrowness and emptiness of his life.

What makes you think that civilization is being threatened? I ask him. Where did you get that idea?

Unless we crush the enemy, young Appleby replies, boyishly evading the question, civilization will be crushed, and crushed so badly that the earth will again enter a state of utter barbarism.

Which civilization are you referring to? I ask.

Our civilization, says Mr. Appleby.

I hadn't noticed, I reply. Besides, I am heartily in favor of a return to utter barbarism. I think it would be very good fun. I think even the most highly sophisticated people would enjoy being barbaric for a century or so.

Mr. Sturiza, says the young officer, as one young man to another, I ask you to cease being flippant, and to join your brothers in the battle against the destructive forces of man which are now threatening to overthrow all the noble and decent emotions of man.

Are you sure? I ask.

We must fight for the defense of democratic traditions, and if need be we must die in the battle.

Do you want to die? I ask very politely.

For liberty, yes, replies Mr. Appleby.

I'll tell you, then, I say, how Pascin did it. I think he did it gracefully. He got into a warm tub, gently slashed his wrists, and bled to death, painlessly and artfully. There are, of course, a number of other ways, equally artful. I would not care to recommend leaping from a skyscraper. It is a much too hurried and fidgety way, one of those modern trends in suicide. I myself do not wish to die. It is part of my plan as a writer to try to live as long as possible. I hope even to outlive three or four wars. It is my plan to stay alive indefinitely.

I cannot understand you, says Mr. Appleby. You are a strong young man. You are not ill. You have the erect posture of a soldier, and yet you pretend to wish not to engage in this war, a war which will end all wars, a war of history, an opportunity to participate in perhaps the most extraordinary event ever to happen

on the face of the earth. Our air forces are perfect. Our gas and chemical divisions are prepared to destroy the enemy in wholesale lots. Our tanks are the largest, the fastest and deadliest. Our big guns are bigger than the big guns of the enemy. Our ships outnumber by three to one the ships of the enemy. Our espionage system is functioning perfectly and every secret of the enemy is known to us. Our submarines are ready to sink every ship of the enemy. And you sit here and pretend not to care to be involved in this, the noblest war of all time.

Precisely, I reply. I have no desire to destroy the enemy. I do not recognize an enemy. Who are you supposed to be fighting? Germany? France? Italy? Russia? Who? I am very fond of Germans and of the French and the Italian and the Russian. I wouldn't think of so much as hurting the feelings of a Russian. I am a great admirer of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoi and Turgenyev and Chekov and Adreyev and Gorky.

Mr. Appleby rises, deeply hurt. Very well then, he says. Unfortunately, we have not yet obtained the required authority to demand participation of all able-bodied young men, but our propaganda department is working night and day and we mean to put over a general election and to win the election. It is only a question of time when all you indifferent and cowardly fellows will be in the front ranks where you belong. I assure you, Mr. Sturiza, you shall not be able to escape this war.

Maybe this fellow is right at that, I think.

Come in again sometime, I suggest, and we'll have a little conversation about art. It is an inexhaustible subject; the more you talk about it, the more there is to say and unsay.

I return again, a bit sadly this time, to the short story I am supposed to be writing, but it is no use; the war will not allow me to write. It is like a shadow over every thought and it renders futile every hope for the future. Rather than sit and mope, I go outdoors and begin to walk, moving in the direction of the public library. I notice people, and I notice that something has come over them. They are not the way they were yesterday. It is a very subtle change, and it is hard to explain, but I can tell that they are not the same. I wonder if I am the same. Certainly I am the same, I say, but at the same time I cannot believe in what I am saying. The people, like myself, seem to be the same, but they are not. I can perceive the difference that has come over them, but I cannot identify the difference that has come over me. I am doing my best to remain the same, but in spite of my efforts it is not working very well. Each moment finds me slightly but definitely changed.

The change in the people is hysteria; it is not yet at a high pitch, but it is beginning to grow. The change in myself, I begin to hope, is not the beginning of hysteria. I am quite calm. Only I cannot deny that I am beginning to be a little angry, and unconsciously I have a desire to knock down the next young man who asks me to participate in the war; I believe unconsciously that this is the proper thing for me to do, to knock down such a fool.

In the evening I return to my room and find my cousin Kirk Minor listening to the phonograph. The music is *Elegy*, by Massenet, sung by Caruso. My cousin is smoking a cigarette, looking very calm, listening to the greatest singer the world has

ever known, and, according to my cousin, one of the greatest men the world has ever known.

What about the war? I ask my cousin.

What about it? he replies.

How do you feel about it?

No opinions at all, says my cousin.

You're not telling the truth, I say. How do you feel? You're seventeen: they'll be taking you before long. How do you feel about it?

I don't like crowds, says my cousin.

But they'll make you go.

No, he says. They won't make me go. I hate walking in line. I don't enjoy wars.

They don't care about that, I say. They are working on the government and they will force you to go.

No, says my cousin, I will refuse.

They will put you in jail, I tell him.

Let them, I won't care, says my cousin.

Don't you want to fight for the perpetuation of Democracy or something like that? I ask him.

No, says my cousin. I dislike walking in an army very much. It embarrasses me. I like to walk alone.

Well, I tell him, they sent two officers out here today, and I had to insult both of them.

That's fine, says my cousin. You didn't start the war. Let the men who started the war fight it. You're supposed to be a writer of stories, though I doubt it.

That's your opinion, I tell him. Get the hell out of here; I am going to start writing again.

A week later I am visited by a very stylishly dressed young woman who talks glibly and smokes cigarettes nervously.

We are determined to have your cooperation, Mr. Sturiza, she says. We have learned that you are a writer of short stories, and we should like to have you as a member of our local propaganda department. Your work will be to write human interest stories about young men volunteering to save civilization, heroic sacrifices of mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, and so on. You will be very well remunerated, and there will be many opportunities for advancement.

I'm sorry, I say, I'm no good at human interest stories.

You needn't worry about that, says the young lady. All the forms have been scientifically devised so that the maximum emotional effect will be established in the feelings of the public, and you simply change the names, addresses and other minor details. It is very simple.

I can imagine, I say, but I don't want the job.

It pays fifty dollars a week, says the young woman, and you have the rank of first lieutenant. You participate in all military social functions, and let me tell you you will meet a lot of people who will be useful to you after the war.

Fifty dollars a week is more money than I ever hoped to earn, and people are very interesting to me.

I'm sorry, I say, the job doesn't interest me.

The young woman goes away, asking me to think the matter over. She is stopping at one of the best hotels in town, and

wonders if I wouldn't care to visit her some evening for a drink and a chat. I myself wonder.

Two months later my cousin Kirk Minor comes into my room with a morning paper. In the paper is the information that all able-bodied men will be forced to participate in the war which has not been going any too well for the side which is supposed to be our side. Our casualties have been almost as great as the casualties of the enemy: approximately one million men, twice that number injured. There have been liberty loan drives, mass meetings and thick headlines for weeks.

I read the news and sit down to smoke another cigarette.

Well, I say, this means that they're going to get me after all.

What do you intend to do? my cousin asks.

I have decided, I say, not to allow myself to become involved.

Five days later I receive a letter ordering me to be at regimental headquarters the following morning at eight. The following morning at eight I am in my room, trying to write a short story. At eleven minutes past two in the afternoon Mr. Covington, the small man who visited me first, and four other men like him enter my room. In the hall are two military policemen, and downstairs are two large and expensive automobiles.

Enrico Sturiza? says Mr. Covington.

Yes, I reply.

As chairman of the Committee for the Study of Cases of Desertion in this district, which is the 47th district in San Francisco, it is my duty to question you in regard to your failure to appear for mobilization this morning. Did you receive official letter number 247-Z?

I suppose the letter I received was official letter number 247-Z, I reply.

Did you read it?

Yes, I read it.

Then why, if you please, did you not report this morning for mobilization?

Yes, says another of the small men, why?

Yes, why? says another.

Yes, why? says the third.

The fourth, I think, is incapable of speech. He says nothing.

I had a short story to write, I reply to the Committee, and I was engaged in writing it when I was honored by your visit.

I shall have to ask you, says Mr. Covington, to make direct replies. Were you so ill that you could not report for mobilization?

No, I reply, I was very well, and still am. I never felt better in my life.

Then, says Mr. Covington. I regret to inform you that you are now under arrest as a deserter.

I am standing over my typewriter and looking down on a bundle of clean yellow paper, and I am thinking to myself *this is my room and I have created a small civilization in this room, and this place is the universe to me, and I have no desire to be taken away from this place*, and suddenly I know that I have struck Mr.

Covington and that he has fallen to the floor of my room, and that I am doing my best to strike the other members of the Committee, and they are holding my arms, the four members of the Committee and the two military police, and the only thing I can think is *why in hell don't you bastards fight your own war, you old fogies who destroyed millions of men in the last war, why don't you fight your own God damn wars*, but I cannot say anything, and one of the members of the Committee is telling me, *if Mr. Covington dies, we shall have to shoot you, Mr. Sturiza, it will be our painful duty to shoot you, Mr. Sturiza; if Mr. Covington does not die, you may get off with twenty years in the penitentiary, Mr. Sturiza, but if he dies, it will be our painful duty to shoot you;* and going down the stairs this small old man is saying this to me over and over again.

7.6 - "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze"

I. SLEEP

Horizontally wakeful amid universal widths, practicing laughter and mirth, satire, the end of all, of Rome and yes of Babylon, clenched teeth, remembrance, much warmth volcanic, the streets of Paris, the plains of Jericho, much gliding as of reptile in abstraction, a gallery of watercolors, the sea and the fish with eyes, symphony, a table in the corner of the Eiffel Tower, jazz at the opera house, alarm clock and the tapdancing of doom, conversation with a tree, the river Nile, Cadillac coupe to Kansas, the roar of Dostoyevski, and the dark sun.

This earth, the face of one who lived, the form without the weight, weeping upon snow, white music, the magnified flower twice the size of the universe, black clouds, the caged panther staring, deathless space, Mr. Eliot with rolled sleeves baking bread, Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, a wordless rhyme of early meaning, Finlandia, mathematics highly polished and slick as a green onion to the teeth, Jerusalem, the path to paradox.

The deep song of man, the sly whisper of someone unseen but vaguely known, hurricane in the cornfield, a game of chess, hush the queen, the king, Karl Franz, black Titanic, Mr. Chaplin weeping, Stalin, Hitler, a multitude of Jews, tomorrow is Monday, no dancing in the streets.

O swift moment of life: it is ended, the earth is again now.

II. WAKEFULNESS

He (the living) dressed and shaved, grinning at himself in the mirror. Very unhandsome, he said; where is my tie? (He had but one.) Coffee and a gray sky, Pacific Ocean fog, the drone of a passing streetcar, people going to the city, time again, the day, prose and poetry. He moved swiftly down the stairs to the street and began to walk, thinking suddenly, *It is only in sleep that we*

may know that we live. There only, in that living death, do we meet ourselves and the far earth, God and the saints, the names of our fathers, the substance of remote moments; it is there that the centuries merge in the moment, that the vast becomes the tiny, tangible atom of eternity.

He walked into the day as quietly as might be, making a definite noise with his heels, perceiving with his eyes the artificial truth of streets and structures, the trivial truth of reality. Helplessly his mind sang, *He flies through the air with the greatest of ease; the daring young man on the flying trapeze;* then laughed with all the might of his being. It was really a splendid morning: gray, cold and cheerless, a morning for inward vigor; ah, Edgar Guest, he said, how I long for your music.

In the gutter he saw a coin which proved to be a penny dated 1923, and placing it in the palm of his hand he examined it closely, remembering that year and thinking of Lincoln whose profile was stamped upon the coin. There was almost nothing a man could do with a penny. I will purchase a motorcar, he thought. I will dress myself in the fashion of a fop, visit the hotel strumpets, drink and dine, and then return to the quiet. Or I will drop the coin into a slot and weigh myself.

I was good to be poor, and the Communists - but it was dreadful to be hungry. What appetites they had, how fond they were of food! Empty stomachs. He remembered how greatly he needed food. Every man was bread and coffee and cigarettes, and now he had no more bread. Coffee without bread could never honestly serve as supper, and there were no weeds in the park that could be cooked as spinach is cooked.

If the truth were known, he was half starved, and yet there was still no end of books he ought to read before he died. He remembered the young Italian in a Brooklyn hospital, a small sick clerk named Mollica, who had said desperately, I would like to see California once before I die. And he thought earnestly, I ought at least to read *Hamlet* once again; or perhaps *Huckleberry Finn*.

It was then that he became thoroughly awake: at the thought of dying. Now wakefulness was a state in the nature of a sustained shock. A young man could perish rather unostentatiously, he thought; and already he was very nearly starved. Water and prose were fine, they filled much inorganic space, but they were inadequate. If there were only some work he might do for money, some trivial labor in the name of commerce. If they would only allow him to sit at a desk all day and add trade figures, subtract and multiply and divide, then perhaps he would not die. He would buy food, all sorts of it: untasted delicacies from Norway, Italy, and France; all manner of beef, lamb, fish, cheese; grapes, figs, pears, apples, melons, which he would worship when he had satisfied his hunger. He would place a bunch of red grapes on a dish beside two black figs, a large yellow pear, and a green apple. He would hold a melon to his nostrils for hours. He would buy great brown loaves of French bread, vegetables of all sorts, meat; he would buy life.

From a hill he saw the city standing majestically in the east, great towers, dense with his kind, and there he was suddenly outside of it all, almost definitely certain that he should never

gain admittance, almost positive that somehow he had ventured upon the wrong earth, or perhaps into the wrong age, and now a young man of twenty-two was to be permanently ejected from it. This thought was not saddening. He said to himself, sometime soon I must write *An Application for Permission to Live*. He accepted the thought of dying without pity for himself or for man, believing that he would at least sleep another night. His rent for another day was paid; there was yet another tomorrow. And after that he might go where other homeless men went. He might even visit the Salvation Army - sing to God and Jesus (unlover of my soul), be saved, eat and sleep. But he knew that he would not. His life was a private life. He did not wish to destroy this fact. Any other alternative would be better.

Through the air on the flying trapeze, his mind hummed. Amusing it was, astoundingly funny. A trapeze to God, or to nothing, a flying trapeze to some sort of eternity; he prayed objectively for strength to make the flight with grace.

I have one cent, he said. It is an American coin. In the evening I shall polish it until it glows like a sun and I shall study the words.

He was now walking in the city itself, among living men. There were one or two places to go. He saw his reflection in the plate-glass windows of stores and he was disappointed with his appearance. He seemed not at all as strong as he felt; he seemed, in fact, a trifle infirm in every part of his body, in his neck, his shoulders, arms, trunk, and knees. This will never do, he said, and with an effort he assembled all his disjointed parts and became tensely, artificially erect and solid.

He passed numerous restaurants with magnificent discipline, refusing even to glance into them. and at last reached a building which he entered. He rose in an elevator to the seventh floor, moved down a hall, and, opening a door, walked into the office of an employment agency. Already there were two dozen young men in the place; he found a corner where he stood waiting his turn to be interviewed. At length he was granted this great privilege and was questioned by a thin, scatterbrained miss of fifty.

Now tell me, she said; what can you do?

He was embarrassed. I can write, he said pathetically.

You mean your penmanship is good? Is that it? said the elderly maiden.

Well, yes, he replied. But I mean that I can write.

Write what? said the miss, almost with anger.

Prose, he said simply.

There was a pause. At last the lady said:

Can you use a typewriter?

Of course, said the young man.

All right, went on the miss, we have your address; we will get in touch with you. There is nothing this mornin,. nothing at all.

It was the same at the other agency, except that he was questioned by a conceited young man who closely resembled a pig. From the agencies he went to the large department stores: there was a good deal of pomposity, some humiliation on his part, and finally the report that work was not available. He did not feel

displeased, and strangely did not even feel that he was personally involved in all the foolishness. He was a living young man who was in need of money with which to go on being one, and there was no way of getting it except by working for it; and there was no work. It was purely an abstract problem which he wished for the last time to attempt to solve. Now he was pleased that the matter was closed.

He began to perceive the definiteness of the course of his life. Except for moment, it had been largely artless, but now at the last minute he was determined that there should be as little imprecision as possible.

He passed countless stores and restaurants on his way to the Y.M.C.A., where he helped himself to paper and ink and began to compose his *Application*. For an hour he worked on this document, then suddenly, owing to the bad air in the place and to hunger, he became faint. He seemed to be swimming away from himself with great strokes, and hurriedly left the building. In the Civic Center Park, across from the Public Library Building, he drank almost a quart of water and felt himself refreshed. An old man was standing in the center of the brick boulevard surrounded by sea gulls, pigeons, and robins. He was taking handfuls of bread crumbs from a large paper sack and tossing them to the birds with a gallant gesture.

Dimly he felt impelled to ask the old man for a portion of the crumbs, but he did not allow the thought even nearly to reach consciousness; he entered the Public Library and for an hour read Proust, then, feeling himself to be swimming away again, he rushed outdoors. He drank more water at the fountain in the park and began the long walk to his room.

I'll go and sleep some more, he said; there is nothing else to do. He knew now that he was much too tired and weak to deceive himself about being all right, and yet his mind seemed somehow still lithe and alert. It, as if it were a separate entity, persisted in articulating impertinent pleasantries about his very real physical suffering. He reached his room early in the afternoon and immediately prepared coffee on the small gas range. There was no milk in the can, and half pound of sugar he had purchased a week before was all gone; He drank a cup of the hot black fluid, sitting on his bed and smiling.

From the Y.M.C.A. he had stolen a dozen sheets of letter paper upon which he hoped to complete his document, but now the very notion of writing was unpleasant to him. There was nothing to say. He began to polish the penny he had found in the morning, and this absurd act somehow afforded him great enjoyment. No American coin can be made to shine so brilliantly as a penny. How many pennies would he need to go on living? Wasn't there something more he might sell? He looked about the bare room. No. His watch was gone; also his books. All those fine books; nine of them for eighty-five cents. He felt ill and ashamed for having parted with his books. His best suit he had sold for two dollars, but that was all right. He didn't mind at all about clothes. But the books. That was different. It made him very angry to think that there was no respect for men who wrote.

He placed the shining penny on the table, looking upon it with the delight of a miser. How prettily it smiles, he said.

Without reading them he looked at the words, *E pluribus Unum One Cent United States of America*, and turning the penny over, he saw Lincoln and the words, *In God We Trust Liberty 1923*. How beautiful it is, he said.

He became drowsy and felt a ghastly illness coming over his blood, a feeling of nausea and disintegration. Bewildered, he stood beside his bed, thinking *there is nothing to do but sleep*. Already he felt himself making great strides through the fluid of the earth, swimming away to the beginning. He fell face down upon the bed, saying, I ought first at least to give the coin to some child. A Child could buy any number of things with a penny.

Then swiftly, neatly, with the grace of the young man on the trapeze, he was gone from his body. For an eternal moment he was all things at once: the bird, the fish, the rodent, the reptile, and man. An ocean of print undulated endlessly and darkly before him. The city burned. The herded crowd rioted. The earth circled away, and knowing that he did so, he turned his lost face to the empty sky and became dreamless, unalive, perfect.