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THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE TIGER IN THE SELECTED PROSE OF  
WILLIAM SAROYAN

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice, 27. 7. 2022

..... Matyáš Hůlka

**Poděkování:**

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Einat Adar, M.A., Ph.D., for her valuable advice, patience, and guidance.

## **Anotace**

Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl analyzovat pojem tygra, který William Saroyan představil ve své krátké novele Tracyho tygr, v originále Tracy's Tiger. Práce se bude opírat o některá prozaická díla tohoto amerického autora arménského původu. Samotný význam vyobrazení tygra bezesporu pramení ze způsobu autorova vyprávění a činů jeho postav. Pro tyto postavy je příznačným to, že si často během dospívání procházejí mnohým štěstím i neštěstím. Je nutno tedy říct, že pravá podstata tygra pochází ze samotného nitra každého člověka; jde o duševní mládí, které probouzí v duši elán a posiluje mysl. Na Saroyanovu obraznost tygra lze nahlížet jako na filozofii života. Aby člověk měl tygra, je potřeba, aby vykročil ze své komfortní zóny a překonal své vlastní hranice. Výsledkem je pak plně prožitý život.

Klíčová slova: William Saroyan, obraznost tygra, filosofie, interpretace, Tracyho tygr

## **Abstract**

This bachelor's thesis will analyse the philosophy of the tiger introduced in William Saroyan's short novella *Tracy's Tiger*. The thesis will explore and describe the meaning of this philosophy based on the selected literary works written by the Armenian-American author. The imagery of the tiger is manifested through the narration and behaviour of Saroyan's characters. These protagonists encounter many fortunes and misfortunes during their journey through life up to the point of near adulthood. The true essence of the tiger comes from within every human being, it is the inner youth that evokes the vitality of the soul while empowering the mind. We may comprehend Saroyan's imagery of the tiger as a philosophy of life. To have a tiger means to step out of one's comfort zone, dare oneself, and as a result live one's life to its fullest potential.

Key words: William Saroyan, philosophy, tiger imagery, interpretation, Tracy's Tiger

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# 1. Introduction

This bachelor's thesis aims to analyse three books written by the Armenian-American author William Saroyan: *Tracy's Tiger*, *The Human Comedy*, and *My Name is Aram*. The main argument of this thesis is that William Saroyan included a philosophy that can be found between the lines of his prose. The philosophy reveals itself through the metaphorical imagery in which a tiger is present. For that reason, the philosophy is regarded as the philosophy of the tiger throughout the thesis. As is shown in the individual chapters, the imagery of the tiger may take on many forms – the tiger may be present in the story, or it may be absent. As *Tracy's Tiger* could be regarded as the book of origin for the tiger philosophy, the main objective will be to first carefully determine the role of the tiger based on the interpretation of this book. The thesis will then continue in its research of how the philosophy of the tiger applies to the remaining two books.

The thesis is divided into four parts, beginning with a brief description of the author's biography. Because William Saroyan's work is often biographical, it is important to learn about his early life. His childhood, family, the hometown of Fresno, and the vast lands of California proved to be considerably inspiring for him – here, Saroyan gained his life experience that significantly impacted his work. On that note, the first chapter follows the author's journey from the beginnings when he published his stories just to several magazines, through his first bigger success as a writer to his rise as an author as he gained recognition in the world of literature.

The second chapter offers a detailed analysis of the short novel *Tracy's Tiger*. This chapter establishes the core of the tiger philosophy with support of the poem "The Tyger" by the British poet William Blake. Since the poem is important for the interpretation of

the tiger philosophy, there is a subchapter that deals with this poem in relation to the short novel because the poem is directly quoted in the story by the protagonist.

The last two chapters deal with the philosophy of the tiger in the novel *The Human Comedy* and in the collection of short stories *My Name is Aram*. The interpretation of the philosophy in these two chapters is based on several themes and their meaning. The chapter that interprets *The Human Comedy* also contains another poem by William Blake called “The Lamb” whose interpretation the chapter also offers. The last chapter deals with *My Name is Aram* and follows the manner of interpretation of the tiger philosophy through themes. The chapter states that the philosophy of the tiger makes its appearance in the stories through the themes of dream and reality. These themes are presented in analysis, through which the tiger philosophy is then interpreted.

The reason I specifically chose these three books is that they contain the most relevant narrative and author’s point of view and opinions that correspond with the philosophy of the tiger which is examined in this thesis. However, the topic itself has not yet been thoroughly examined on an academic level and so there is a scarcity of academic research that would be concerned with the philosophy of the tiger or even with the key novel *Tracy’s Tiger* in general. For that reason, this thesis supports its arguments mostly with the primary sources.



## **2. William Saroyan**

William Saroyan (1908-1981) was an American author born in Fresno, California to Armenian immigrants Armenak and Takoohi Saroyan, who had immigrated to the United States of America in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Armenak, his father, had high hopes for life in America as he anticipated it to promise a better life for his family. He aspired to take up a job as a preacher on the east coast in New Jersey, however, his family was not fond of their new home. Together, the Saroyan family moved to California, a land much more resembling their homeland where many Armenian immigrants chose to settle. William was the fourth child, the only one of all his siblings who was born in the United States. After the unfortunate event of their father passing away in 1911, the mother of the Saroyan siblings had no other choice than to put her children into an orphanage in Oakland, as she struggled financially to take care of the children on her own. However, after five years had passed, she managed to reunite with her family in Fresno, where they lived in one household together with William's maternal grandmother Lucy, who strongly influenced her grandchildren during their coming of age. In his essay "Saroyan's Life and Work: An Overview" Brian Darwent states that she was described by William as "the family's force, authority, intelligence, wisdom and faith" (Darwent 23-25).

William Saroyan worked several jobs to financially support his family, such as a newspaper boy or a telegraph messenger, but he sensed that he desired to become a writer. As he was a young boy who was endowed with intelligence, he attended college for a period of time, although due to him being disinterested in the slow way of learning at school and troubled by the constant reminders of his peers that his father was an immigrant he soon dropped out (Darwent 25). However, he managed to learn how to type-write, which proved itself to be a helpful skill for an aspiring writer.

## 2.1 William Saroyan's journey to becoming a writer

When he was still a young boy, his mother Takoohi showed William his father's old unpublished writings. According to Darwent, this is what initially sparked ambition in Saroyan to become a writer, and only after he had read Guy de Maupassant's short story "The Bell", this ambition was confirmed (Darwent 25). At the age of eighteen, Saroyan set off his career by publishing short stories in magazines. One of these magazines was *Overland Monthly*, a renowned journal that published the work of well-known writers such as Jack London or Ambrose Bierce. Before that, he felt the urge to leave Fresno and travel in order to fulfill his dream. Saroyan visited Los Angeles and also New York, however, things were not going as he had imagined. He wandered through the city and spent some of his time in the New York Public Library. As the time passed, Saroyan suddenly felt homesick and decided to return to Fresno, yet "wiser, more sober, embarrassed, and no longer confident" as he was not successful at writing a story that would make him famous (Darwent 28). Be that as it may, the Saroyan family later moved to San Francisco, where William witnessed his talent for writing finally blossom as he remained dedicated to writing, even though it still did not support him enough to make a living, thus he earned some money as a merchant selling vegetables (Darwent 28).

The earliest successful stories written by William Saroyan appeared in the 1930s. At first, the young author had struggled to have his short stories and articles published, however, an Armenian journal *Hairenik* accepted his work as of sufficient quality to be published. In 1933, Saroyan sent a short story he named "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" to the national magazine *Story*. This short story was exceptional and "part experimental, about a young writer who starves to death, with dignity" (Darwent 28). With this story, the breakthrough he was waiting for finally

arrived. He continued to write one short story each day for a whole month, in January 1934, which were then published in the same magazine. His approach to work was rather unusual, as Darwent states in his essay that Saroyan really would not prepare in advance the plot of his stories, but he would rather start at a random point from which he then freely developed the story (Darwent 28). Following his successful rise as a writer, Saroyan travelled to Russia and to Europe where he visited cities such as Paris, Vienna, and Edinburgh. In 1940, the *Pulitzer Prize for Drama* was awarded to William Saroyan for his play *The Time of Your Life*. However, Darwent points out that Saroyan refused to accept it as he did not believe prizes awarded in the field of art were relevant, due to his disapproval of commercialized arts. Saroyan then became the author of some outstanding theatre plays, although Darwent claims that in comparison to *The Time of Your Life*, his other plays seemed to be rather unsuccessful. However, Saroyan managed to establish his own theatre in 1941, and owing to his success as a playwright, he could afford to move into a luxurious apartment in New York (Darwent 29-30).

As time passed, the second world war began in Europe, and Saroyan was drafted into the army. During this time, his career as a writer was postponed. Despite the grave events of the war, however, Nona Balakian points out how William Saroyan managed to maintain both his simple way of writing and humour when depicting in his stories heroes who were struggling to get by, yet remained strong-willed not to give up (Balakian 7). The war had an extensive impact on the perception of literature and it also contributed to the consequent decline of William Saroyan as a writer. Darwent suggests that Saroyan's "rhapsodic optimism couldn't survive the harsh truth about human nature uncovered at the end of the war" (Darwent 31). Some distressed years followed, during which Saroyan's marriage broke up. Kevorkian points out that by the end of Saroyan's life, most people thought that he had stopped writing. That was never the truth, as

Kevorkian writes that “Saroyan never stopped writing, for writing was as necessary to him as breathing” (Kevorkian 245). This devotion to his occupation is visible in his stories, where he often states that a person writes their own book just by being alive – each day they experience or witness something that adds another page to their story. Let us illustrate this statement within an excerpt from Saroyan’s novel *Papa You’re Crazy*:

A writer has *got* to be in love with the world, or else he can’t write. ... Because everything good comes forward out of love. When a writer is in love with the world, he’s in love with everybody, and he can write. ... One day a long time ago I asked my father what he was writing, and he said a novel, so then I asked him to tell me what a novel is, and he said it’s just life in the form of a long story written by a writer. ... I told him I wanted to write a story someday, and he said, ‘You write one every day’ (Saroyan, *Papa You’re Crazy* 38-40).

In this excerpt, we are able to observe how the author essentially demonstrates his belief that a writer would become immortal through his own writing (Balakian 118).

Even though Saroyan never gave up on writing, what changed was his relationship with reviewers and publishers, as Kevorkian states that Saroyan was unyielding when it came to discussion of his writings and he only trusted in his own judgement. Saroyan refused to work with agents and stayed true to himself “by not accepting the world of business that controls the artist’s world” (Kevorkian 245). This is the reason why Saroyan refused to accept the *Pulitzer Prize* for *The Time of Your Life*. The last book William Saroyan published was *Obituaries* (1979), in which he is preoccupied with the theme of death. As an autobiography, it was nominated for a *National Book Award* and according to Darwent, the book “provided a fitting finale to his long and distinguished career” (Darwent 35).

## 2.2 Style of writing

Nona Balakian describes Saroyan's writing style as independent of contemporary literature (Balakian 12). This means that William Saroyan chose rather an unusual approach to narrate his stories, as he did not follow any given rules in his narration. An interview "Candid Conversation" done by Garig Basmadjian proves to be helpful for us to understand Saroyan's method of writing. It remarks that Saroyan wrote his stories just how they crossed his mind, without much further elaboration (Basmadjian 154). On that account, his method of writing may seem negligent, as usually, an author takes time to write their story with much thoroughness achieved through time spent over the text itself. Thus in the eyes of some critics who assessed his writings, what William Saroyan produced seemed to be simple and trivial, as he did not require much time to come up with a single story. Sometimes he even bragged about his ability of swift realization of short novels that he made bets claiming he could write a short story in a single day (Jařab 211). William Saroyan was indeed, as he declared a "swift writer, but not careless" (Basmadjian 155). He was an author who cherished writing, as it was not only his occupation but also a significant part of his life. Thus when Nona Balakian said that "when he seems most artless, he is most artful and in full control" (Balakian 12), she meant that William Saroyan may seem artless in his spontaneous approach to writing, however, this attitude is essentially what contributes to his books being so admirable. In his short story "Myself Upon the Earth" William Saroyan states the following words:

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, and the tricks of composition. I have something to say and I do not wish to speak like Balzac (Saroyan, *The Daring Young Man on a Flying Trapeze* 53).

For William Saroyan, the objective of writing was to write about life so as to improve it. In her research, Nona Balakian highlights a quotation taken from one of Saroyan's early stories "Panorama Unmerciful":

"I don't know if it is ever possible for anyone actually to improve life, and I imagine that it isn't, but all the same it is worthwhile to want to, and the more I think about this, the more I am convinced that this is essentially the job of every man who writes and that anything else any of us do is irrelevant" (Balakian 13).

She comments on it saying: "Saroyan places art and life in close proximity" (Balakian 13). Thus, it is worth noting that the essence of William Saroyan's writing comes from within the author himself, with one simple goal – to tell a story. A story based on true events, often inspired by his own experience and embellished with bits of Saroyan's own imagination. In his essay "Saroyan's Defence of Sentiment and Dreaming", Josef Jařab creates a fitting metaphor when proposing his understanding of Saroyan's writing style: "His personal experience represents merely a seed which is further developed and ripened in the oasis of author's poetic imagination" (Jařab, my translation 211).

Pete Hamill remembers William Saroyan as a writer who cherished his own optimistic view on life. Despite the many grave events that preceded Saroyan's writings, such as the second world war, the Holocaust and the atomic bombs, Saroyan remained a writer with hope and faith in humanity. Pete Hamill points out that some critics could not look past this as they criticized the "sunniness of some of his stories, his insistence in the face of post-war despair that this world did contain some good men and women" (Hamill 192). This is indeed confirmed in Nona Balakian's research on William Saroyan in which she points out that it was peculiar to Saroyan to have "unflinching faith in the intrinsic goodness of all human creatures" (Balakian 111). Nona Balakian then

describes Saroyan's style as open, honest, and revolutionary in the way of narration and use of humour. Simply put, the author uses straightforward phrasing and vocabulary to form the story and its humour, as it is shown in the following extract from *Tracy's Tiger*:

"I want to be a taster," Tracy said.

...

"What do you know about tasting?" Valora said.

"I *like* coffee," Tracy said.

"What do you know about tasting?" Valora said again.

...

"When the coffee was good I knew it," Tracy said. "When it was bad I knew it."

"How did you know?"

"By tasting."

...

"You know all about coffee tasting?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's good coffee taste like?"

"Coffee."

"What's the *best* coffee taste like?"

"Good coffee."

"What's the difference between *good* coffee and the *best* coffee?"

"Advertising," Tracy said (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 18-20).

The conversation between Tracy and the man named Valora is simple in its form. There can be observed subtle and ingenious humour in Tracy's honest answers to questions about coffee quality. Valora possibly expected Tracy's response to be more elaborate,

yet Tracy's answers could be described as uncomplicated and carefree, as this attitude fits his character.

William Saroyan did not care much about how his writing would fit among the literature of his time. He wrote his stories with honesty and often based them on true events while adding some of his imagination. When writing about serious topics, he would lighten the mood with simple humour or comforting words. Even though his writing was usually imaginative, it told an honest story about life as experienced by the author himself, thus serving as a possible guide on how to cope with different life situations. It all depends on the reader's interpretation – some may read his stories as simple fiction, and others may look deeper and seek guidance between the lines.



### 3. Tracy's Tiger

*Tracy's Tiger* is a short novel published in 1951. It tells a story of a young man Thomas Tracy, who just arrived in New York City in search of a new job as a coffee taster. At first, Tracy's only companion is his tiger, who follows him everywhere he goes. The two engage in several conversations, commenting on all kinds of deeds Tracy does, whether he likes it or not. The tiger usually responds with just an utterance or a sound: "Tracy talked to the tiger all afternoon, but all the tiger did was hum" (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 35).

#### 3.1. The role of the tiger in the plot of the novel

From the very beginning of the novel, the tiger is described as something that a person can possess as the novel opens up with the following lines: "Thomas Tracy *had* a tiger. It was actually a black panther, but that's no matter, because he *thought* of it as a tiger" (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 1). The very moment the idea of having his own tiger occurred in his mind, the young Thomas Tracy was only three years old. This beginning of the story may represent a crucial memory the protagonist has of his childhood, as it was his first interaction with a tiger, or just the idea of it, which he experienced through his senses: "When he was three and went by the sound of things somebody said *tiger!* Whatever a *tiger!* was, Tracy wanted his own" (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 11). From this moment on, Thomas Tracy began his search for his own tiger, or at least for that which corresponded with his idea of the *tiger*. The search spanned across several years whilst he was coming of age:

For years Tracy saw pictures of all kinds of animals in dictionaries, paintings, encyclopaedias, and movies. Among these animals stalked many black

panthers, but not once did Tracy think of one of them as his own tiger (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 14).

This shows us that the tiger Tracy eventually finds and keeps is truly special to him, as it is *the* one tiger he was looking for.

The day Tracy found his tiger, he was at a zoo. "... Tracy was at the zoo alone, fifteen years of age, smoking a cigarette and leering at girls when all of a sudden he came face to face with his tiger" (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 14). This passage taken from the beginning of the novel precisely reveals how Tracy acquired his tiger and how quite simple it is. Tracy was just enjoying the present moment while indulging in possibly some of his favourite activities: smoking, and peeking at girls passing by. Tracy came into genuine contact with a black panther – they looked in each other's eyes, carefully inspecting one another. Then both Tracy and the black panther returned to mind their own business:

It was a sleeping black panther ... it stood for a moment looking at Tracy, then wandered back to the platform on which it had been sleeping. ... Tracy in turn stood staring at the black panther. He stared five minutes, chucked away his cigarette, cleared his throat, spit, and walked out of the zoo. 'That's my tiger', he said (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 14-15).

As if the black panther, now his tiger, filled Tracy with vitality and vigour that continued to encourage him for the following years of his life.

The story continues with now much older Thomas Tracy and his tiger accompanying him as they both arrive in New York, where Tracy's job is to carry bags of coffee at a coffee importer's company. There follows a moment when Tracy gets a glimpse of a girl he instantly admires. At first, he is not aware of her, however, his tiger

somehow feels her presence in advance and begins to voice incomprehensible words to Tracy, hinting at what is to come:

“Lune,” it said.

“What do you mean?” Tracy said.

“Alune.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Ah lune.”

“What’s that?”

“Lunalune.”

“Doesn’t mean anything.”

“Ah lunalune,” the tiger said patiently.

“Speak English if you want to say something,” Tracy said.

“La,” the tiger said.

“That’s almost French,” Tracy said. “Speak English. You know I don’t know French.”

“Sola.”

“Solar?”

“So,” the tiger said.

“Don’t *shorten* the words,” Tracy said, “lengthen them, so I can figure out what you’re trying to say.”

“S,” the tiger said.

“You can talk better than that,” Tracy said. “Talk or shut up” (Saroyan, *Tracy’s Tiger* 30).

It seems that the tiger was so amazed by its sensing of the girl that its tongue got all tied up.

The girl with whom Tracy falls in love is called Laura Luthy. She is one of the important characters in the novel, as she also has a tiger, more precisely a tigress. The previous excerpt showed us how Tracy's tiger reacted after sensing Laura before Tracy even saw her, desperately trying to communicate with Tracy. Suddenly, during a lunch break, Tracy comes to a realisation why his tiger acted the way it did:

He was trying to figure out what the tiger had said when a girl in a tight-fitting yellow knit dress came walking down Warren Street. ... The muscles of Tracy's tiger became taut, its slim head pushed forward toward the girl, its tail shot straight out, rigid except for the almost imperceptible vibrating of it, and the tiger hummed low and violently, saying *Eyeej* (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 31).

It can be said that these sounds, or tiger's words, are the interpretation of the feelings and emotions the protagonist experiences right as he begins to fall in love. The tiger is an image through which we can better understand the protagonist's emotions and thoughts. Thus, in this case, the tiger could be described as the courage, the lust, the passion – any emotions that remind the protagonist of their existence.

Thomas Tracy and Laura Luthy eventually go on a date together. They sit by a table, and both of their tigers are running around them. At the end of the day, Tracy's tiger stands on the sidewalk where they saw Laura Luthy for the first time. Thus, the tiger could also be understood as an image that represents the protagonist's thoughts. It is easy to imagine that Tracy must have been thinking all day about the first time and place he saw Laura. "The tiger was now standing in the middle of the sidewalk staring into space. ... On his way home after work that day Tracy found the tiger still standing in the middle of the sidewalk. ... He stood there beside the tiger a long time" (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 38).

### 3.2. The philosophy of the tiger

William Saroyan introduced his imagery of the tiger long before the publication of his short novel *Tracy's Tiger*. The tiger as a metaphor or an image appears earlier in his collection of short stories *The Trouble With Tigers* (1938) in the short story called "Tiger". Nona Balakian interpreted this story as "fanciful, comic, lyric, and metaphysical" (Balakian 145), depicting Saroyan's story precisely. The short story contains many philosophical insights on life and people's attitude to it while interpreting the imagery of the tiger as well. Nona Balakian sees the tiger as a metaphor and argues that this is the first Saroyan title in which a metaphor has found its way. For her, the tiger stands to portray a piece of fantasy that is integral to the everyday life of each person (145). Balakian goes as far as to describe the story as "the spearhead of a group of stories that have an element of unreality about them" (Balakian 145).

In her research on William Saroyan, Nona Balakian views the tiger as "a slippery symbol" (Balakian 145). The reason for this is that the tiger's character expresses a vast range of emotions that the protagonist endures and perceives just through the presence of the tiger. Sometimes the tiger is meant as a metaphor. Sometimes it is materialized and reveals itself in the story as a real tiger that may cause trouble. The tiger is simply let loose into the story and as a proper cat would do, it does as it pleases (Hilský 220). Balakian further explains her understanding of the tiger with the following words: "Mostly unseen but always a presence, the tiger stalks those who pursue false dreams; he turns a few gleeful somersaults when reason is defeated, and runs amuck when complacency takes over" (Balakian 145). Saroyan's imagery of the tiger can be interpreted as an expression of all feelings and emotions that a human being is able to process. In the novel, the tiger's behaviour is dependent on the emotions the main character experiences. After all, Saroyan himself states in the novel *Tracy's Tiger* that

the tiger is love (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 143). And to be able to love, a human being must be capable of expressing and feeling all kinds of emotions.

The tiger could also stand for a memory a person has, as memories are connected to emotions. Be it a cheerful or a bitter memory, it does not necessarily matter, as it was previously stated that a tiger represents a combination of symbols representing a variety of emotions. Even though the tiger is sometimes presented as a troublesome symbol, it reflects the fact that life itself can be challenging. From a philosophical point of view the symbol of a tiger may be understood as a representation of human emotions, feelings, and state of mind:

Thus, Thomas Tracy, on a pleasant Sunday afternoon in October, was placed in Bellevue<sup>1</sup>. He found the people there quite mad. He also found that each one of them had a tiger: a very troubled one, a very angry one, a most deeply wounded one, a tiger deprived of humor and love, of freedom and fun, imagination and hope. ... Only Tracy was without a tiger. Tracy's tiger was hiding ... The place was dark, secret, and deathly. The tiger was hiding under a room ... The tiger lay there in terror and loneliness, bereaved, heartsick, and eager itself to be dead (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 83-86).

It can be said that rather than describing people's feelings directly, William Saroyan chose to show the reader an image of their tigers through which he implied their emotional state.

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<sup>1</sup> Bellevue is a sanatorium

William Saroyan encourages his characters to overcome their struggles by discovering rather comical or cheerful solutions to their troubles (Hilský, 212). Let us observe this argument on the following excerpts from the book:

Tracy was examined by Dr. Scatter, who found it irresistible to interpret Tracy's replies in a manner convenient to his education and prejudices. Dr. Scatter had no difficulty in proving, step by step, that Tracy was in fact mad ... when the subject was asked what his reaction would be to an indefinite visit at Bellevue for the purpose of more prolonged and thorough psychiatric investigation, he replied that he would rather go home but that if forced to go to Bellevue he would make the most of his visit and feel just as much at home there as anywhere else, if not more at home (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 81-82).

We can observe that Tracy accepts life as it comes to him, with all its surprises. And instead of worrying, he voluntarily agrees to go to the sanatorium as he sees it as an opportunity for a new experience. I would argue that this acceptance of unexpected turns in life with a positive attitude also plays a part in defining how having a tiger affects a person. This stems from Saroyan's optimistic approach to life, as Kevorkian describes the author in his essay as someone exceptional – he states that he has never met someone “as alive, as vibrant, as hilarious, as seeing, and as sensitive as Bill Saroyan” (Kevorkian 245). As someone who knew Saroyan personally, Kevorkian describes him as a person who had a positive point of view. In his essay, Kevorkian recalls a troublesome period of his life and how Saroyan cheered him up with the words: “Aram, there is no need to be anxious. When the time comes to make the move, go with joy in your heart” (Kevorkian 245). These words were deeply influential and touching, as Kevorkian states: “They kindled my soul, I knew immediately that he was right, that the courage to make the big step must be mingled with joy” (Kevorkian 247).

### 3.3. William Blake – The Tyger

The metaphorical tigers that William Saroyan created in his novel are not the only ones present in the story. In the eighth chapter, there is a direct reference to an earlier tiger that inspired the author to create one of his own in *Tracy's Tiger*. Sitting in an armchair, the protagonist recites a poem while conversing with a psychiatrist called Dr. Pingitzer. The poem in question is “The Tyger” (1794) written by William Blake, a renowned English poet of the Romantic era.

“The Tyger” (1794) is included in William Blake’s collection of poems *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The poem is structured into six stanzas each consisting of four lines. One of the distinguishing features of this poem is the repetition of the first stanza at the end of the poem with the last line being altered. Blake wrote this poem as a parallel to his other poem, “The Lamb” in which the author implies that the lamb is a symbol of a certain innocence, while in the poem “The Tyger” he expresses more of wildness of the animal (Kazin 41). The tiger of Blake’s poem is created around a few religious motives that possibly make the poem a bit challenging to comprehend, but at the same time, they are important for our understanding of the poem.

The poem opens up by questioning the tiger’s existence and creation. We may ask questions: Who is the person responsible? Can we be sure it actually *is* a person? Then the second stanza moves freely around the question of the environment of the tiger’s creation, before moving to question the creator himself (Kazin 43). Blake’s Tyger is brought to life by a mystical persona – the origins of its creation are unknown to the reader. As the tiger is surrounded by mystery, it creates a certain sensation of astonishment around the tiger’s ‘personality’. Its presence in the forest is so unusual that it gives off an impression of it burning among the trees. After reading Blake’s poem, the reader understands that the tiger is to be both admired and feared in respect:



Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

There can be found distinct imagery of fire in this stanza. We are introduced to the tiger as a majestic creature that truly stands out due to its burning aura. The poem later continues by explaining how the tiger was created in a furnace, possibly depicting a blacksmith's workplace:

What the hammer? What the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? What dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

There is certainly a feature of spirituality that Blake intended to include in this poem, as the reader is almost forced to meditate upon *who* is the persona that gave life to this majestic tiger. Furthermore, this mystery of the tiger's creation makes it even more worthy of awe. Blake's tiger originates from a vision. In this vision, the tiger suddenly appears in the middle of a forest. The strangeness of this appearance makes the tiger seemingly burn among the trees. To answer the question of the tiger's creation, we should look at the third line of the second stanza: "What immortal hand or eye". The word "immortal" is of great importance here, as it suggests that the creator was not a human being, but rather someone of divine origins. The overall sensation of this poem suggests that the tiger is to be both admired and feared and may be understood as a symbol of strong will and vigour. In this sense, Blake's tiger may be blessed by some superior or divine power.

### 3.4. William Saroyan – The Tiger, or The Tyger

Both Saroyan's and Blake's tigers are mysterious creatures, as the reader has to guess and find out more about them through their own interpretation. The mystery of the creation of both of the tigers is what connects them. Although Saroyan's tiger may present itself as less threatening, it still has the ability to become dire. As previously stated, Blake's tiger was born in fire. What makes him stand out is that he is to be respected and feared, as he is possibly dangerous. This is important to keep in mind, as it is exactly the moment when Tracy's tiger is in danger, injured, and afraid when Blake's poem makes its appearance in the short novel:

"They shot my tiger," Tracy said.

"I am sorry," Dr. Pingitzer said (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 67).

...

"I am mad because they wounded the tiger," Tracy said. "I'm mad because they put the tiger in the cage in the first place. I'm mad because they put it in the circus. But I am also mad, from birth" (Saroyan, *Tracy's Tiger* 79).

It is important to note here that William Blake's poem is possibly the reason why Tracy came to have his tiger. The poem probably influenced Tracy to a degree that through his knowledge of the poem, he was able to create a tiger of his own. We may understand the poem as one of the earliest memories Tracy's tiger has. It is believed that Tracy's tiger is now on the brink of death, thus it reflects upon its own creation through Tracy as he recites the poem. Moreover, Tracy comes to a discovery that already from birth he carries certain anger in himself that was just now released. The tiger represents Tracy's state of mind, emotions, and feelings. In this case, Tracy's tiger is in danger, thus Tracy feels rather negative emotions.

To further develop the similarity between Blake's and Saroyan's tigers, we need to briefly consider William Saroyan's collection of short stories called *The Trouble with Tigers* in which we find a story named "Tiger". In this story, a man called Brook sits in a diner while being asked several questions, one of them being whether or not he believes in God. Nona Balakian notes that Brook is Saroyan's alter ego: "When the old lady asks if he believes in God, Brook replies: Could I disbelieve in that which I once was and even now sometimes am?" (Balakian 145). This brings us back to the topic of Blake's tiger and how the tiger is a creation of divine power. In a sense, Saroyan's tiger is also a creation of divine power. However, it is believed that in this case, Saroyan ponders upon the idea of pantheism. That God's existence is possible through the presence of all living beings, thus even through Tracy, who created the tiger in his mind and through him the tiger exists. That is why the tiger is able to express human emotions, as it is essentially a part of Tracy's own being. This brings us closer to understanding the connection between Blake's and Saroyan's tigers. For William Blake's tiger, he was possibly created directly by the will of a divine being. William Saroyan's tiger is a creation of a human being's imagination empowered by human emotions.

### **3.5. Conclusion - the philosophy of the tiger**

The short novel *Tracy's Tiger* discussed in this chapter is in particular abundant in emotions, described as "too evanescent to be grasped by the rational mind alone" (Balakian 12). In order to understand the philosophical view on the meaning of the tiger, what we must not do when reading this novel is to only *think* about the story using rationality. On the contrary, we should also read the story with our hearts and focus on the impression of the novel. By doing so, we may understand the story to a greater degree, through the impression the story leaves. This is hinted at in the eighth chapter after Tracy recites William Blake's poem: "You *understand* this poem?" Dr. Pingitzer

said. “I don’t *understand* anything,” Tracy said. “I *like* this poem” (Saroyan, *Tracy’s Tiger* 76-77). This short excerpt leads us to understand that rationality alone is not a fitting tool when trying to understand Saroyan’s writing. William Saroyan’s unique literary style allows the reader to delve into and rediscover their feelings, as Balakian argues that “the very individual voice we heard in the stories ... evoked feelings and sentiments we had repressed” (Balakian 12). A person who *has* a tiger is a person who enjoys life, and who takes into account even life’s hardships. In this sense, the tiger represents the vitality, the light-heartedness, and the liberty of life which allow a person to have a positive attitude to life.

What affects the imagery of the tiger is without a doubt the author’s narration, style of writing, and also the behaviour of his characters. William Saroyan’s protagonists are usually children or young adults, who go through many ups and downs during their journey through life and their coming of age. In his essay, Josef Jařab raises a question of whether it is naïve to search for the fundamental and primal force that dwells deep inside every human being (Jařab 211). This force is supposedly the source and the true essence of the tiger that comes from within each human being alive. This is the philosophy of William Saroyan’s tiger – it represents the inner youth that evokes the vitality of our soul and encourages our mind. Thus, Saroyan’s imagery of the tiger may be comprehended as a philosophy of life. To have a tiger means to dare oneself to step out of one’s comfort zone and to live fully. The way the meaning of Saroyan’s tiger is interpreted depends on each reader. Each reader may have their own, more or less different interpretation. Saroyan clearly states at the end of his novel that the tiger means love: “That was the story of Thomas Tracy, Laura Luthy, and the tiger, which is love” (Saroyan, *Tracy’s Tiger* 143). However, there are many more interpretations by which the reader may answer the question of the meaning of the tiger.

To summarize what was previously stated, it is argued that from the general point of view, the tiger symbolizes the vivid variety of human emotions – be it emotions that are pleasant and cheerful, or those that are rather downbeat. The tiger should be perceived as a guide through which we may better understand and observe the emotions and also the events that Saroyan's protagonists live through. The tiger represents an inner force that allows William Saroyan's characters to brave hardships and essentially accept life as it happens. This corresponds to Saroyan's positive grasp of life and his rather optimistic view of humanity.

## 4. The Human Comedy

When William Saroyan began writing the first draft of *The Human Comedy* in 1941, he intended for it to be a movie scenario. He eventually sold the final product to Hollywood, however, he was not allowed to further partake in the movie's development. Even though the movie celebrated great success among viewers and critics, William Saroyan was not satisfied with it. Thus, he turned the script into a novel, which he published in 1943 under the same name *The Human Comedy*. This new novel quickly gained popularity, making it the author's most popular book so far. Nevertheless, in the years to come, William Saroyan confessed to being uneasy about how the novel turned out to be. He meant to finish the story on a different note, but in the interest of time, he instead concluded the story while implying that there may be positive outcomes of war (Darwent 30).

The story takes place in Ithaca, in California's San Joaquin Valley. Its main storyline recounts the adventures of a fourteen-year-old messenger boy, Homer Macauley, whose progressive coming of age is visible throughout the novel. The San Joaquin Valley is no place with growling tigers running around since no real or imaginary tiger is explicitly mentioned in the story, as in the case with *Tracy's Tiger*. However, it is argued that taking into consideration the way William Saroyan wrote this novel he also breathed the essence of the tiger into the narration and the characters as well. The presence of the tiger may be noticed through the contradiction between the general goodness of Saroyan's characters and the sadness of the world at war that they live in, but still, they persist to have optimistic views on life. In an essay titled "Beginnings" Edward Halsey Foster talks about a "special Saroyan voice":

That voice is usually whimsical, humorous, and at times ironic – but also underneath all the good fun, there is a deep sadness. One couldn't have the Saroyan voice without it. ... And what is the source of that sadness, that melancholy? (Foster 40)

This voice is indeed noticeable during the whole of the novel, as there are references to the war and even the characters acknowledge it, however, in some cases with humour:

“Comes from a good, poor family on Santa Clara Avenue. No father. Brother in the Army. ... He's a couple of years underage, that's all.<sup>2</sup>”  
“I'm a couple overage,” Mr. Grogan said. “We'll get along” (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 19).

#### **4.1. The philosophy of the tiger**

Even though *The Human Comedy* is a novel written during a time of the ongoing second World War, Foster points out how William Saroyan chose to remain optimistic in his writing, to guard faith and hope in humanity. This chapter aims to inquire into the philosophy of the tiger presented in the novel, regarding its main characters when exploring the themes of innocence, innocence lost, love, and hope, as this thesis argues that the philosophy of the tiger may be observed through these themes.

##### **4.1.1. Innocence**

Ulysses Macauley is the first character that we are introduced to in *The Human Comedy*. He is only four years old, the youngest of the Macauley family. Ulysses is an observant child who is greatly sensitive to little details and is fond of ordinary

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<sup>2</sup> Referring to Homer Macauley

occurrences that he perceives as miracles. His attitude represents one portion of the tiger philosophy - the ability to cherish life and simply rejoice over being alive:

The little boy named Ulysses Macauley one day stood over the new gopher hole in the backyard of his house ... . The gopher of this hole pushed up fresh moist dirt and peeked out at the boy, who was certainly a stranger but perhaps not an enemy. Before this miracle had been fully enjoyed by the boy, one of the birds of Ithaca flew into the old walnut tree in the backyard ... moving the boy's fascination from the earth to the tree (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 11).

The child is captivated by the world around him, he is eager and curious to learn as much about it as he can. Ulysses uses his senses to get in touch with the surrounding world – what he sees, he perceives with interest and astonishment: “There it was, all around him, funny and lonely – the world of his life. The strange, weed-infested, junky, wonderful, senseless yet beautiful world” (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 12).

In the chapter called “Big Chris”, Ulysses' curiousness leads him to a grotesque situation, as he ends up trapped in a harmless animal trap in a store for hunters. He merely utters a word, as he is more bewildered by the situation than scared. Mr. Covington, the shopkeeper, engages in a conversation with a customer Big Chris, neither of them pays much attention to Ulysses, peeping behind their backs:

Mr. Covington was under the impression that Ulysses belonged to Big Chris and Big Chris was under the impression that Ulysses belonged to Mr. Covington, so that between the two of them they had no reason to account for the small boy's presence. As for Ulysses himself, he was under the impression that he belonged wherever there was something interesting to see (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 62).



Ulysses is an innocent child in his experience, he sees the world through a child's eyes, with a bit of naivety and false interpretation. Alfred Kazin in his essay "Ulysses in Fresno" claims the following: "Ulysses is in the chrysalis, of the purely physical stage of the world's disillusion; he has only preposterous little adventures" (Kazin 62). The chrysalis, as Kazin put it, symbolizes Ulysses' perception of the world. He can go and get to know the world only as far as his child's capability allows him. His perception of the world is to a certain degree subjective, as Ithaca is his hometown, a safe place where each day is ordinary, allowing Ulysses to experience life only on the bright side. Thus, his innocence originates in his limited experience with the world. Little Ulysses stands for what his older brother Homer slowly begins to lose – a carefree childhood.

In the chapter "The Lion in the Net" we witness two other child characters. They are a few years older than Ulysses and their endeavour is representative of, as Kazin called it, "the frolic of Ulysses' life" (Kazin 62). August Gottlieb is an adventurous young boy who is determined to accomplish anything he sets his mind on. In the chapter, he is struggling to knot an old tennis net together into a new one, because he wishes to trap animals in it, possibly a lion. His friend, Enoch Hopper stops by, but is bored and unimpressed by his effort, as he wishes to do something more adventurous:

Come on, let's start a baseball game or go out to Guggenheim's water tank and climb it. ... Come on, let's go. Let's go out to Malaga and go swimming. ... Let's go down to the courthouse park, to the city jail there, and talk to the prisoners. ... You couldn't catch a teddy-bear with that net. Let's go down to Chinatown and walk down China Alley (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 175).

Ulysses' curiousness and courage, together with both the eagerness to catch big animals in a net and to go on several small adventures is what emits the tiger philosophy. The

children's efforts may seem negligible, but seeing it from their point of view amplifies the value of their endeavour, proving that they are daring and unafraid to challenge whatever they may encounter in life.

#### **4.1.2. Innocence lost**

At the beginning of the novel, Homer Macauley and his brother Ulysses are not so different in their nature. At first, Homer is also introduced as an observant child who is fond of all possible details of the things he sees or encounters: "Homer was not missing any of the charm of the region. Look at that! he kept saying to himself of earth and tree, vine and sun and cloud. Look at that, will you?" (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 14-15). However, we see Homer's mental coming of age come quickly. His older brother Marcus is in the army, and their father has passed away a long time ago, so Homer feels the responsibility to provide money for the family. He takes up a job after school as a telegraph messenger, which proves to be important for the development of his character.

Homer is ambitious about his new job, as he says: "I'm going to be the best messenger this office ever had" (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 18). Being a messenger during an ongoing war in the world, his job consists mostly of delivering telegraphs sent by the war department. "Homer Macauley stands for youth, for expectancy, for the keenness of an adolescence spent in the offices at night ... where each ticking brings some special knowledge" (Kazin 61). By delivering telegraphs, Homer gets to find out more about the world outside Ithaca and its unfortunate aspects such as death, war, or grief. This is what causes Homer's character to shift from his innocence, as he loses it through experience.

In the chapter “Mrs. Sandoval” Homer is to deliver a telegraph informing Mrs. Sandoval of the death of her son who died in the war. This is the breaking point for Homer’s development – it brings out strong feelings in him, making it hard for him to cope with all of his emotions at once, as he is sensitive and empathetic:

He felt awkward and almost as if he *alone* were responsible for what had happened. ... The woman suddenly took him in her arms, saying, ‘My little boy, my little boy!’ ... He didn’t know why, because he only felt wounded by the whole thing, but for some reason he felt sick and thought he would need to vomit. ... He felt neither love nor hate but something very close to disgust, but at the same time he felt great compassion, not for the poor woman alone, but for all things and the terrible way of their enduring and dying (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 26-28).

Kazin explains Homer’s mental maturing with the following argument:

But Homer has entered into the human realm; everything Homer sees on his rounds leads him from the songs of innocence to the songs of experience; and where he saw only Blake’s lamb, and was the lamb, he now sees the ‘tyger burning bright’ (Kazin 62).

The presence of the ‘tyger’ in Homer means that he sees the world in its true light. It makes him empathetic, as he feels compassion for the people who lost their family members because of the war. It makes him open his eyes and see behind the world’s false image as seen from a child’s view. Thus, Homer feels emotions that are too far greater than himself – he feels the shared emotions of humankind that is affected by the war. We may understand Homer’s character to represent the struggle between his native innocence, as in Ulysses’ case, and the world’s experience, to which Homer is gradually exposed.

#### **4.1.3. Interpretation of “The Lamb” in connection to Ulysses Macauley**

For this chapter, the poem “The Lamb” by William Blake may be considered to indirectly represent the character of Ulysses Macauley. We may imagine the contrasting animal the “tyger” to be stalking its prey – the lamb. The lamb in the poem is a symbol of innocence and in relation to *The Human Comedy*, it symbolizes the same attribute. The innocence of the lamb is also supported by the poem’s first six lines, in which the speaker questions the lamb’s knowledge of its own origins. Ulysses is an innocent child whose experience is limited by his age. On the other hand, the “tyger” stands for experience. I would argue that as Ulysses grows up, he will too gradually shift from the “innocence” to the “experience”. The transition from one to the other is inevitable, as even the stars fall from the sky to make way for the creation of the “tyger” (Drake 546). This could be metaphorically understood as the transition from the innocence to the experience – this fits well with the position of the poem “The Lamb” in the *Songs of Innocence* part and “The Tyger” in *Songs of Experience*. Taking into consideration the poem “The Tyger” and its fourth line of the second stanza “What the hand, dare seize the fire?”, we may interpret the transition from the world of innocence to the world of experience as conditioned by the necessity of grasping the fire – to metaphorically touch the fire with our hands, which could be interpreted as the experience.

#### **4.1.4. Love and Hope**

Love, together with hope, is another strong theme that is present in the novel. It is a theme that bears the philosophy of the tiger, given the fact that one possible interpretation of the tiger imagery is love. In the novel, there can be observed love for one’s own family, love for one’s friends, and love for the world. The theme of love for family is the strongest because it is safe to presume that William Saroyan meant the Macauley family to represent his own family. The similarity is extensive – Homer

Macauley is young William Saroyan himself, as he also earned money as a messenger boy at his young age. The character of Marcus stands for the author as well, only a bit older, when he also served in the army as Marcus does in the novel. William Saroyan's mother was left alone to take care of her family, like Mrs. Macauley who takes care of little Ulysses and his sister Bess. Through the character of Homer Macauley, the author expresses his fondness for his own family and people.

Homer Macauley cares deeply for his family and so he does everything in his power to provide for them. There is no wonder then that he is especially devastated when he learns about the death of his brother Marcus, whom he loved deeply. Homer's love for his family makes him grow up and teaches him to be responsible. Even though he is a child, his way of speaking and thinking resembles to that of an adult. In the following excerpt, Homer speaks of himself as of a man, rather than a boy while he reflects upon life after his brother's death:

What's a man supposed to do? ... I don't know what to do. How does a man go on living? Who does he love? ... What about my brother? When my father died it was different. He had lived a good life. ... We were sad because he was dead, but we weren't mad. Now I'm mad and I haven't got anybody to be mad at. Who's the enemy? Do you know, Mr. Spangler? (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 186-187).

Mr. Spangler is the manager of the telegraph office Homer works at. For Homer, he is a grandfather figure, as the two developed a strong friendship. Mr. Spangler is there to give wise advice and return hope to Homer whenever he needs it:

Try to remember that a good man can never die. You will see your brother many times again – in the streets, at home, in all the places of the town. The person

of a man may go, but the best part of him stays. It stays forever (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 187).

This way of comforting Homer in his grief carries the author's love for people and his hope that people are good at their core. We may notice a belief in certain immortality of a human being due to the love of their family members, who remember all that is good about them.

In "William Saroyan and The Family Matter" Margaret Bedrosian reflects upon how we may better understand what family meant to William Saroyan and how it was reflected in his writing. "The thrust of Saroyan's life and art came from a radical existentialism. It was an orphan's creed, sinewy and street-wise, marbled with a rigidity that rejects self-pity and forgives slowly" (Bedrosian 14). Indeed, Homer Macauley is a child who is street-wise and at first does not allow himself to meditate on his feelings for too long: "When he got back to the telegraph office the tears had stopped. 'Otherwise I'm just as good as dead myself,' he said" (Saroyan, *The Human Comedy* 28). According to Bedrosian, the author refers to the Armenians as a 'dying race' – and the people in *The Human Comedy* are perceived by Saroyan as members of this race: "The melancholy that plagues the 'dying race' has seeped into the protagonist's soul, where it can only find a healthy outlet in swift motion – flying, gambling, racing" (Bedrosian, 14). Thus, we may interpret Homer's swift riding on a bike as a certain way of escaping the harsh truth of the world that he learns about.

The answer to Homer's troubles comes in a form of his mother's comforting words, as Kazin confirms that "the resolution is Love" (Kazin, 62). She says to Homer:

The loneliness you feel has come to you because you are no longer a child.

But the whole world has always been full of that loneliness. The loneliness does

not come from the War. The War did not make it. It was the loneliness that made the War (Kazin 62).

#### **4.2. Allusion to Homer's Odyssey**

The two Macauley brothers share their names with Homer, the author of the famous Greek epic *The Odyssey*, and with Odysseus, the epic's protagonist. The core similarity between William Saroyan's novel and Homer's epic is the fact that Homer based his epic on the concept of the hero's return journey home (Bloom 7), an element that is also present in *The Human Comedy*. In both stories, the end destination is Ithaca, which in Saroyan's case stands for his hometown of Fresno. And although the journey home may seem like a simple task, Homer's protagonist Odysseus finds many difficulties on his way back home in the form of god's hatred (Bloom 8). In Saroyan's novel, the oldest of the Macauley brothers Marcus goes through a similar struggle. He too, like Odysseus, is expected to return home after fighting in a war. However, it is not Marcus that returns home to Ithaca at the end of the novel, but Marcus' close friend Tobey who knows everything about the Macauley family and the people of Ithaca. The Macauley family welcomes him to their home, hinting that Tobey may be accepted as an equal member of their family. Ulysses' name is an allusion to Odysseus, the king of Homer's Ithaca. In *The Human Comedy*, he is the youngest brother, adventurous and curious about the world. In a way, Ulysses also embarks on a journey, in fact on many, only he never leaves Ithaca, as he is still a child.

#### **4.3. Conclusion – the philosophy of the tiger**

We may comprehend the philosophy of the tiger in *The Human Comedy* as a polarity between the different worlds of the two brothers Ulysses and Homer. Even though they both live in the same physical world, in their hometown of Ithaca, their attitude toward life differs. If we are to take into consideration William Blake's poems

“The Lamb” and “The Tyger” and understand them as opposites when analysing *The Human Comedy*, then Ulysses stands for the former poem and Homer stands for the latter. Ulysses’ character symbolizes pure joy and innocence, something he shares with his brother, but only for a short time. Homer gradually loses his innocence as the circumstances force him to become more of an adult, thus through his new experience, he becomes more aware of the world around him. His awareness is expressed through his intense thinking about life and his empathy and expressiveness of emotions.



## 5. My Name is Aram

A book of short stories published in 1940, in which William Saroyan recalls his memories of his homeland in California through the fictional character of a nine years old boy Aram Garoghlanian. Aram serves as a narrator, who tells the story in retrospect, as he is an adult in the present time. He recollects his childhood memories and remembers the peculiar members of the Garoghlanian family, who may or may not represent the members of William Saroyan's own family in the real world, as the author notes: "No member of my family will be able to find himself in any one person of this book, but at the same time none will be able to find himself wholly *absent* from any one of them" (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* vii).

William Saroyan was inspired by the inner goodness and undying hope of young adults or children, and he often put it in contrast with the dissatisfaction with the reality of adult people (Barter 3). This thesis argues that the philosophy of the tiger reveals itself through the rivalry of the themes of dream and reality that pervade the stories of *My Name is Aram*. And it is precisely the contrast between these two themes that this chapter aims to analyse, based on chosen stories of the book, with support of one poem by William Wordsworth.

### 5.1. The philosophy of the tiger in the themes of dream and reality

The collection of short stories contains two competing motives or themes: dream and reality. In his book *William Saroyan*, Howard Russel Floan also further describes these two themes as the poetic and the practical, stating that the short stories of *My Name is Aram* fall into two categories. The first category focuses on the importance of one's goal in life or one's dream. The characters often pursue their dream in a childish or naïve way, giving hope much greater value instead of realizing the true conditions and

probabilities of their desire – we may understand this as the poetic. The second category disturbs the dreamy approach to life with factual reality, bringing the book’s characters to a disappointing realization that it is not always possible to fully accomplish their dreams – we may understand this as the practical (Floan 84-85).

By this contrast between dream and reality, Floan states that William Saroyan also meant to refer to the Armenian community that immigrated to America and their pursuit of a new home. They imagined the land of California to be something close to a paradise, however, it turned out to be more ordinary than they dreamed it to be, in terms of life conditions. It was simply a suitable place to live in, but not perfect. Still, the Armenians were willing to work hard to achieve their dreams, only sometimes they failed, which resulted in them reconsidering “the validity of hope against the constant pull of disappointment” (Floan 83). This newly acquired awareness of reality that leads to disappointment is what William Saroyan assigned to some of his characters in his stories.

In fact, there is little distance between the two themes employed by William Saroyan. The themes of dream and reality are presented through the interaction between the young and the adult characters. It is believed by Floan that these themes merge into one another since the author does not differentiate between youth and age in his stories. We may observe adult characters whose behaviour and way of thinking prove that they still have a young soul, as well as characters that are children who seem to be much wiser and know more about the world than the grown-ups do (Floan 83). Thus, the child is able to teach the grown-up a thing or two about the world or even themselves.

### 5.1.1. William Wordsworth – My Heart Leaps Up

The retrospective narration of the whole book is also an important element of the two theme because it allows the narrator to review his memories with an adult mind, but to still recall them as remembered by a child. There is a poem “My Heart Leaps Up” by the English romantic poet William Wordsworth that is worth mentioning, as it provides an insight into the matter of a child behaving like an adult in William Saroyan’s collection. Moreover, Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American transcendentalist, suggested that a child is able to bring us closer to the discovery of truth (Floan 82). The poem reads as follows:

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die!

The Child is Father to the Man;

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.

(Wordsworth 70)

For this chapter, the seventh line is the most important to interpret. The seventh line “The Child is Father to the Man” deals with the mutual relationship of a child and an adult. Moreover, the line could be interpreted as a continuum of memory through which one’s life becomes meaningful (Elliott 69-70). Life is remembered and essentially created by the child as the child eventually becomes an adult. The narrator of *My Name*

*is Aram* is an adult who recalls his childhood memories, thus he is retrospectively recreating his memories through his younger self.

## 5.2. “The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse”

In this story, the reader is introduced to Aram Garoghlanian when he is still a young boy, and his cousin Mourad. The narrator recalls one early morning when “he was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream” (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 3). This one particular morning is remembered by the narrator as picturesque because he is recollecting his memories of it through the eyes of his younger self.

We may find the theme of the dream in this chapter to be visible through the optimistic grasp of life. Here, the dream represents the philosophy of the tiger through the sheer will and desire to live a life worth remembering, with no ties to reality and without worries. To support this statement, let’s have a look at the character of cousin Mourad whose carefree and rascally behaviour is representative of this theme. One early morning, Mourad shows up at Aram’s house, sitting on the back of a beautiful white horse.

I knew my cousin Mourad enjoyed being alive more than anybody else. . . .

I *knew* my cousin Mourad couldn’t have bought the horse, and if he couldn’t have bought it he must have stolen it. No member of the Garoghlanian family could be a thief (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 5).

Aram denies the possibility that his cousin might have actually stolen the horse for his own delight. As he is also thrilled by the sight of the animal and cannot wait to ride it, he banishes the thought that the horse is stolen and joins his cousin for a ride. The theme of the dream is manifested here through the denial of what is actually real. Of course,

the horse is stolen and of course, both Aram and Mourad very well know it. However, their desire to have a good time is much stronger. The tiger is present in their emotions that prevail over their rational thinking.

The angry and at all times annoyed character of uncle Khosrove stands for the theme of reality. His past is not stated in the stories, but still, we can assume that he has already lost his hope in accomplishing his dream, whatever kind of a dream it may be. Uncle Khosrove is an old man, honest yet harsh with his words, as most of the time he shouts “It’s no harm!”. This phrase suggests his conciliation with reality. In the chapter, a man called John Byro comes looking for his horse, the one that Mourad and Aram borrowed for early morning rides. He makes a complaint about it:

My white horse which was stolen last month is still gone. I cannot understand it. My uncle Khosrove became very irritated and shouted, It’s no harm. What is the loss of a horse? Haven’t we all lost the homeland? What is this crying over a horse? ... He got up and stalked out of the house, slamming the screen door (Saroyan, *My Names is Aram* 12-13).

Uncle Khosrove’s dream was shattered when he had to leave his homeland of Armenia. His homeland is something he will never get back, which is the source of his irritated nature. He came to accept reality as it is. Through the character of uncle Khosrove, William Saroyan alludes to the shared experience of the immigrant Armenian community, who had to put up with any possible obstacle in their new homeland (Justus 214).

### **5.3. “The Journey to Hanford”**

Aram Garoghlanian is about to set out on a journey to Hanford with his uncle Jorgi, who is perceived as foolish by his family for his hobby of playing the zither and

doing nothing all day. Aram's grandfather demands that Jorgi leaves the house for the summer and earns money far away by harvesting watermelons – the goal is to get some rest from his foolish son. The tiger indirectly reveals itself in the humour of this chapter and in the theme of uncle Jorgi's dream that is presented through his untroubled attitude.

The grandfather wants to send Jorgi away as a punishment, however, I believe that the grandfather only pretends that he means to punish his son. In reality, he is metaphorically sending himself on a journey, as he feels his inner youth awaken inside of him. Even though he is old, the essence of the tiger is still present within his soul and he desires to feel the youth once more and embark on an adventure.

Let him go and sweat under the sun for a while. ... You say that now, my grandmother said, but wait a week. ... You'll be a melancholy man. I shall see you walking about like a tiger. ... It is simply that you are not young any longer. That is the thing that is making you roar (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 20).

By sending his son Jorgi away to experience something new, the grandfather wishes to undergo the same adventure through the experience of his son.

However, Jorgi is not willing to change. He simply wishes to play his zither and lay in the shadow of a tree, that is the goal of his life. When he arrives to Hanford, he finds that the watermelon season has already passed. To take an advantage of this situation, he spends a month in Hanford together with Aram, playing the zither and eating rice.

#### **5.4. “The Pomegranate Trees”**

In this chapter, the theme of the dream is supported by hope and is followed by the theme of reality. We are introduced to Aram's uncle Melik, who has a dream of owning his own piece of land, a farm on which he would grow pomegranate trees and sell them to larger cities. Uncle Melik is one of the characters who have a child's soul

and unreal expectations. His dream seems to be impossible to achieve, as the farm he bought stands on barren land where only cacti grow and the soil is full of small rocks. Aram confesses about his uncle's nature: "My uncle Melik was just about the worst farmer that ever lived. He was too imaginative and poetic for his own good" (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 35). The character of uncle Melik stands in opposition to the character of uncle Khosrove. Melik remains optimistic and to the last moment, he has hope. On the other hand, uncle Khosrove does not hope for anything, as he learned to accept the truth a long time ago. Instead, he gets angry when someone hints at him something they have hope in. And uncle Melik's naivety proves to be the undoing of his dream of owning a productive farm.

Uncle Melik does not see his farm in the true light, in its desolate state. Instead, he envisages it blooming with life, full of fruit trees and flowers: "Here in this awful desolation a garden shall flower, fountains of cold water shall bubble out of the earth, and all things of beauty shall come into being" (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 35-36). His hope urges him to work hard on his dream that is in contrast with the real conditions of the land scorched by the sun. His inner vitality is the source of the dream that he desires to achieve.

As the story goes on, the theme shifts from the dream to the reality. Uncle Melik learns and accepts the fact that it is impossible to grow anything on this land. Sadly for him, he is forced to sell the farm back to the previous owner.

So my uncle lost the land, and the trees, too. ... The trees were all dead. The soil was heavy again with cactus and desert bush. Except for the small dead pomegranate trees, the place was exactly the way it had been all the years of the world (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 55).

Uncle Melik was simply delighted to have his own piece of land. Even though he knew little to nothing about it, he was content with having it. Unfortunately, he did not manage to fulfill his dream. Instead, because of his experience, he came to meet the reality.

### **5.5. Conclusion – the philosophy of the tiger**

At the end of the book, in the chapter “A Word to Scoffers” we witness Aram’s transition from his young self, which represents the dream and the carefree life full of adventure, to now his almost grown-up self that ventures further away, as Aram is about to board a bus that will take him out to see the world. He comes closer to discovering the reality. William Saroyan added to the end of this chapter a piece of his life philosophy, with a character of a bizarre-looking man who gives Aram a piece of important advice: “You stop trying to figure things out and you believe. Believe, I said. Believe what? Why, everything, he said. Everything you can think of. That’s the little secret. Took me fifty years to find out” (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 219). As if the author himself did not lose hope and chose to believe more in the importance of one’s dream than the possible failures that lie ahead.

The man also explains to Aram how everyone who is alive essentially searches for the truth with every deed they do and have done. Because as it is known of William Saroyan, he suggested that a human being is obliged to live their life to the fullest (Justus 214). This thesis argues that by “Every man is looking for truth” (Saroyan, *My Name is Aram* 218) the author meant that a human being has to overcome obstacles in life in order to discover the true self. Through understanding our true selves, we may continue to understand the truth in the world and in others (Justus 214).

Even though there are no tigers in the short stories of *My Names is Aram*, William Saroyan kept their energy between the lines, in the book’s themes, and in the



behaviour of its characters, who are sometimes adults with a young soul, or children with adult's view of the world. The book may be read as a bibliographical piece of literature, as the author implemented in it many elements of his own life, often accompanied by humour. The book is another work by William Saroyan which may be read as both a fictional story and a story containing life advice.

## 6. Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to analyse the three books written by William Saroyan: *Tracy's Tiger*, *The Human Comedy*, and *My Name is Aram*. The stories they include were assessed in order to provide an analysis of the philosophy of the tiger for each of them. William Saroyan's biography and life opinions were also considered within the assessment of the tiger philosophy. The author's life proves to be important for our understanding of the imagery of the tiger itself, as Saroyan's experience and also beliefs were projected into the philosophy alone.

The thesis opened up with an introduction to the author's life and his journey to becoming a well-known author. The first chapter then offered an insight into the background of Saroyan's family, childhood, and adulthood. The next chapter was focused on the novel *Tracy's Tiger*. Here, I concluded the general characteristics of the philosophy of the tiger and stated my ideas on how we may interpret it, with the support of academic literature. The conclusion of the chapter states that the imagery of the tiger is best observable when we emphasize emotions. The knowledge of the tiger serves as a guide through which we may better interpret William Saroyan's stories. The tiger is also something that gives the book's protagonists the courage to overcome life's challenges. Overall, it was concluded that the philosophy of the tiger stems from William Saroyan's positive approach to life.

In the chapter about *The Human Comedy*, I concluded that the philosophy of the tiger in this novel can be observed through the family ties between the two brothers Ulysses and Homer. To support my arguments, I added a comparison of the two brothers with the poems by William Blake – “The Lamb” and “The Tyger” as they correspond to the nature of the two brothers. The last chapter explained how William Saroyan made a comparison

of a child's and an adult's life through retrospective narration. The chapter showed how the child is often presented as wiser than an adult, suggesting the importance of our childhood memories, as they gradually form our lives. A poem by William Wordsworth was presented to better understand the relationship between a young and an adult character in Saroyan's collection. This poem stressed the importance of childhood memories, as such memories play a role in interpretation of the tiger philosophy.

Even though William Saroyan may not be as widely read author today as he was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I believe it is important that his work remains read and interpreted. His stories are still relatable, as they carry within themselves a certain air of nostalgia to which each reader may relate individually. William Saroyan's stories inspire the reader to ponder upon life, to realize life's good side, and even if William Saroyan wrote stories that suggested life is not always easy, he offers a bit of life advice or guidance hidden between the lines.

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