

An Analysis of ‘Closure’ and ‘Equilibrium’ in Mathew Quick’s *The Silver Linings Playbook* in the Light of Gestalt Psychology

Ali Taghizadeh

Department of English, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

Moein Moradi

Department of English, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

Abstract—The present paper moves in the line of cognitive literary studies. Its project is to interpret Mathew Quick’s *The Silver Linings Playbook* in the light of the theories of Gestalt psychology. Quick portrays a pair of mentally unbalanced protagonists suffering from the loss of their partners. Analyzing the psychological aftermaths which befall these figures afterwards, this paper attempts to highlight some facts through Gestalt therapy. As such, this paper tries to show the role of ‘Closure’ in the psychological imbalance of Quick’s characters, arguing that in their search for ‘Equilibrium’ they pass through a phase of neurotic problems. Deciphering part of the novel’s message as such, this paper elaborates upon the life of some mentally damaged guys who come to help each other in order to pass normal and healthy lives.

Index Terms—Gestalt psychology, closure, equilibrium, *The Silver Linings Playbook*, Mathew Quick

I. INTRODUCTION

The Berlin School of Experimental Psychology was founded at the University of Berlin in the early 1890s. The attempt was to analyze the behaviors of psychic patients through a set of psychological theories. However, in the early 1920s this school was replaced by the Gestalt School of Psychology. The new school was founded by Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler, who were the students of the founder of the Berlin School. These new founders named their school “Gestalt” which stands for ‘form’ or ‘shape’ in English and has something to do with the totality of psychological entities.

Sdorow (1993) highlights a well-known aspect of Gestalt psychology, that “the whole is different from the sum of its parts” (p. 13). Thus, the founders of Gestalt psychology insisted that in examining the functions of the mind, structuralist psychologists have gone a wrong way, because through a study of the elements of an entity we cannot identify the whole of that entity as it really is. Accordingly, the emphasis which structuralist psychologists put on the study of the constitutional elements of a structure is, for Gestalt psychologists, a naivety, a flaw.

Structuralist psychologists primarily attempted theoretically to describe the fundamental capacities of the mind like sensing, imagining, and excitement. To discover how man feels cold or warm, for example, structuralists often try to perform a series of objective and introversive experiments, while they pay no attention to the role of the subjective associations of the performer. But the holism of Gestalt psychology puts it in a polar position with the atomism of structuralist psychology, which means that Gestalt psychology is interested in the investigation into the “component parts” of psychic entities. Arnheim notes that,

the primary impulse of Wertheimer’s psychology was a respect for nature, human as well as organic and inanimate. From this respect derived the protest against the ‘atomistic’ method, that is, the dissection of integrated entities and against the pretension of rebuilding a whole by the summation of its elements. (1969-1970, p. 97-103)

That is because in examining the functioning of man’s psyche as systematic and organizational, structuralists attempt to realize, among other things, how the mind breaks its conceptions into ‘atoms’ or constitutional elements, how it creates connections among those elements, and how it renders those inter-connected compartments of conception into hierarchical, unified, and goal-oriented structures.

Gestalt psychology seemingly opposes behaviorist psychology; for determining an individual’s behaviors in different situations, behaviorists focus on the influential power of the environmental stimuli on his/her thought and decisions. Accordingly, they find the human mind not more than a passive recipient of those stimuli, while Gestalt psychology is “in keeping with Immanuel Kant’s notion of the mind as a manipulator of environmental input” (Sdorow, 1993, p. 14). However, parallel with the work of Gestalt theoreticians, Fritz and Laura Perls founded Gestalt Therapy. Although these two notions are not essentially identical, both of them inherit the main essence of the Berlin school.

Attempting to analyze Mathew Quick’s *The Silver Linings Playbook* (2008) in the light of the theories of Gestalt psychology, the present paper focuses on the ‘Law of Closure’ within the novel. In its simplest case, Closure befalls us

when we observe a set of shapes or images some parts of which have been omitted. In such a case of psychological production, and for the sake of better perceptions, the human mind fills the visual gaps with its own created perceptions and then makes an inference about the shape or the image. As a result of this process, the mind works like a machine which constantly mixes forms and reshapes them into unified, complete, and perceivable images.

But apart from these theoretical implications, there is a subtle relationship between closure and psychological balance. Psychological balance may incorporate the mental balance of the reader of a story. So the Gestalt principle of closure can be taken “as a modification of structure that makes stasis, or the absence of further continuation, the most probable succeeding event It creates in the reader the expectation of nothing” (Smith, 1968, p. 34). Accordingly, the present study bases its analytical approach to Quick’s novel on the relationship between closure and psychological balance.

The Silver Linings Playbook retells a part of Patrick People’s life story. Patrick, a neurotic school teacher, has been recently released from a neural health clinic where he was trying to figure out how he could reach a state of psychological stability. In the middle of the story, his friendship with Tiffany Maxwell, the female protagonist of the story, provides a closure for him. This is where the reader can witness a perfect ‘Equilibrium’ in a fictional character, although for Quick’s character it happens at the end of the story.

The novel is among the best sellers. However, there has been little academic research on it, especially psychoanalytic ones. A significance of the present project is that it is the first that attempts to apply the theories of Gestalt psychology to Quick’s novel. As such, a key objective of this paper is to examine the notion of ‘Closure’ in Quick’s novel, not only as a general cultural belief but as a ‘Law’. To achieve this objective, and as a solution to the psychological problem of ‘Disequilibrium’, the paper tries to investigate into the story by analyzing its atmosphere and dialogues.

II. DISCUSSION

A. *On Delaware Memorial Bridge*

Bit by bit, Patrick Peoples’ course of life appears out of horizon. For four years, he has been locked up in a neural health facility in Baltimore. Settling up a deal in the court, his mother has finally got the permission to take him out of there. And now he is coming back home. As they drive through Maryland and Delaware, they reach Delaware Memorial Bridge which is a twin suspension bridge connecting Delaware to New Jersey. The bridge is so named to memorize both those US soldiers and the veterans who died in World War II. Like Patrick himself, Quick grew up in Collingswood, New Jersey, which points to the fact that he understands how this memorial bridge stands for ‘Change’ and ‘Progress’. Passing the Memorial Bridge, which objectively signifies a transfer from modernity to postmodernity, a unilateral declaration of cross-state multiculturalism and a symbol of socio-cultural and political conglomeration, Quick gives the reader an impression of the aims of his story through the eyes of Patrick’s mother and her hope for the well-being of his son. Apparently, Quick’s story could have started in Baltimore, but it starts romantically as their car is passing through the iconic bridge:

On the Delaware Memorial Bridge, she looks over at me and asks if I want to get better, saying ‘you do want to get better, Pat right?’ I nod. I say I do. . . . As we drive down Haddon Avenue into the heart of Collingswood-my hometown-I see that the main drag looks different. . . I wonder if this is really my hometown at all. I start to feel anxious, breathing heavily like I sometimes do. (Quick, 2008, p. 6)

Patrick and his mother have a moment of promise, a moment which is comparable to a scene in *Casablanca* the movie (1942) when Rick Blaine decides to sacrifice his love for the sake of change and a better world. At the end of many stories such turning points may often happen. But Quick is able to surprise his readers by starting the story *in medias res*, in the middle of an important event in the life of his protagonist. So, Quick juxtaposes the spirit of change in the city with the seeds of hope flourishing in the heart of Patrick’s mother. His aim is to show the reader how much the change is eminent for Patrick. Taking a look at Collingswood City official website, we can develop a historiographic sense about the notion of ‘Change’ and ‘Progression’ in the city, especially when Quick talks about Haddon Avenue which symbolizes development:

Collingswood shared in the growth. Haddon Avenue and its West Collingswood counterpart, Richey Avenue, welcomed new business establishments every year. Earl Lippincott and other builders developed new neighborhoods out of what had once been forests, ball fields, and open spaces. The Delaware River Bridge (now the Ben Franklin) opened and made possible more commercial intercourse between Collingswood and its big Pennsylvania neighbor. (<http://www.collingswood.com/living/a-brief-history-of-collingswood>)

Accordingly, this moment between Patrick and his mother represents the main subject of the novel and Patrick’s fate. Just like the progress of his home town, the time has come for Patrick to change; and dramatic shifts are taking place in his life. From now on, his days will be like a movie which is fast forwarded. However, the problem is that he does not yet have a clear view about it. Because there is a gap between Patrick’s power of ‘Perception’ and his ‘Mental Cognition’, he seems unnaturally slow in coping with the social changes and not capable enough to control the cruel forces running his private life.

Gestalt psychology benefits from a multimodal scientific approach toward the human behavior. It assumes that on the one hand humans are constantly under the influence of environmental stimuli, while on the other hand they also affect their environment in one way or another. This school of practical psychology focuses on the effects and theoretical bases of neurosis problems. It also elaborates enough upon the scope of experimental psychology. The main similarity

between Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology is that the former stresses “the need to achieve wholeness of the personality”, which means that “one’s emotions, language, and actions should be congruent with one another” (Sdorow, 1993, p. 609). To achieve congruence in its patients, Gestalt therapy diagnoses them in a way that they take the responsibility of what they do in their lives. Patrick’s case is no exception. He lacks the ability to link the images which he sees, the forms or ‘Gestalts’ which he perceives, and the ideas and concepts which he should bear in mind.

Gestaltian laws, on the other hand, stress the relation between seeing, knowing, and deciding. Patrick’s problem is more or less evident in his first few dialogues. When his mother asks him if he wants to get better, he answers in the affirmative, but his childish act resembles his un-decidability toward his own fate. Thus, his differentiation between good and bad and his ability to make reasonable decisions depend on the firmness of his stance. As long as he is undecided, he is vulnerable, and his position is unstable and problematic. Delaware Memorial Bridge, which is an emblem of change in the American social habits, stands also for the economic diversity between the west of Delaware River and Philadelphia in the east. These locations represent two separate segments in Patrick’s life. His passage on the bridge stands for leaving his problems behind, for passing from the neurosis of an alienated life condition to the comfort and security of a family life, for passing from the Baltimorean style of rationality to the Pennsylvanian love and liberty. In a way or another, this story has an ambiance of following the dream about the ‘pursuit of happiness’. To Patrick, unfortunately, all the symbolic changes of the appearance of both his home town and his countrymen seem vague enough to push him to a loop of denial, mainly because he has been away from the society for several years and he is not aware of his environment yet. In this regard, Gestalt personality theory highlights the significance of the individual’s awareness of oneself and one’s surroundings “in terms of the senses, bodily sensations, and emotional feelings.” Paying attention to one’s contact with oneself as well as others and the being aware of oneself and others are issues that happen “in the present rather than the past or future” (Sharf, 2012, p. 245). But Patrick’s past is full of ‘Disequilibrium’ and the inability to create an objective and healthy life style. Nonetheless, his future is revolving around ‘Equilibrium’ and balance. At the end of the plot, we witness that he faces ‘Closure’ to wrap up his problems. This ‘Closure’ links his perception with moments of unbiased cognition.

A key factor about Patrick’s ex-wife’s infidelity is his past exaggerating behaviors. According to Gestalt psychology, the human mind has a dual relationship with the world, so his behavior affects the environment and is also affected by it. Thus, when the boundary between the patient and his environment becomes obscure, or when it is lost or impermeable, mental and emotional disturbances result. So we are bound to believe that Patrick and Nikki have been censured for their marriage.

But because Quick focuses more closely on Patrick’s part in this regard, a critical evaluation of his past behavior is more useful in this research. In a visit to Dr. Patel who is his therapist, Patrick makes up a false story of his life. But listening to this false story is narratively worthwhile, for it creates an illusion of reality in which the reader’s disbelief gets suspended. Patrick’s perversion of reality looks like the Baudrillardian ‘Simulacrum’ of the third phase which tries hard to mask and pervert the reality, although the reader can see the real and actual past behind it. Patrick says, “A few months ago I agreed to give Nikki some space, and she agreed to come back to me when she felt like she had worked out her own issues enough so we could be together again. So we are sort of separated, but only temporarily” (Quick, 2008, p. 9). Patrick’s denial masks the real. He is hiding the truth about his cognition because he indifferently and deliberately undermines the factuality of his memories. His earlier life is clearly not a triumph. But if or not it embarrasses him, before gaining the ability to move on to a different stage, he needs to accept it. By giving his wife an opportunity to breathe in a new condition, he unknowingly admits that his neurosis has made her feel suffocated. Elsewhere in the novel, his neurosis comes to be more devastating, as he tries to convince the reader that he himself has been the reason behind his separation from Nikki. However, the story does not give us much direct information about her. On the other hand, by the use of the first person narration, the author creates such sincere atmosphere for Patrick to take us through his role in his marriage.

According to Gestalt psychology, a bipolar disorder has a significant role in pushing a love partner to the edge and forcing the other party to commit infidelities. Nonetheless, this pretext is not solid enough in justifying Nikki’s actions, which will be discussed later. Quick narrates Patrick’s story from the day he is released from Baltimore health institutions. But he only illustrates the aftermath as well as the cure of his problematic behaviors.

Before the beginning of the story Patrick was a mentally equilibrated husband. Even his ideas about his best friends often originated from Nikki’s talks, who was both his beloved wife and a part of his problematic mentality. Thus, as we read the novel, a master key for opening the secret of his delusional past is her role in the formation of his life. Anyway, the storyteller is watchful enough not to talk directly about Nikki. Yet, the present researchers want to find out more about her inevitable part in the creation of such a personality out of Patrick. As mentioned before, almost throughout the story he is closely influenced by Nikki. When the novel introduces Ronnie, we see him only from Nikki’s point of view as well. “Nikki told me that Ronnie would never visit me in Baltimore, and she was right,” as Patrick says (Quick, 2008, p. 14). This technique of indirection is an evidence for Patrick’s un-decidability and ignorance toward his own intuition. His ignorance, which is related to his lack of self-confidence, is known as ‘Disequilibrium’ in the Gestalt school. But when Patrick starts to feel interested in Tiffany, it appears in him in a full-scale. However, although he now likes Tiffany, he resists his intuitions and insists that he should remain married to Nikki. “Look, I enjoyed spending time with you, and I think you’re really pretty, but I’m married’, I say, and lift up my wedding ring as proof” (p. 23).

B. 'Closure' and 'Equilibrium'

From the outset, we see Patrick mentally unbalanced due to which he is diagnosed to have a bipolar disorder. Because he attempts to kill his wife's lover, he is kept in a mental hospital in Baltimore about four years. The second problem which the novel deals with is Patrick's divorce from his wife, which is in turn due to the fact that the court has decided he should stay away from her. But what really happens in Baltimore is almost unknown to the reader. In the hospital, Patrick's therapists practice some drugs on him to help him forget about his problematic days and keep him away from emotional attacks. He cannot go or at least does not want to go out of such synthetic memory deletion. A side of his problem shows itself when he disregards the concept of time. Here for example Patrick is not aware that he has been locked up in Baltimore for four years, so he refers to Dr. Patel's warnings that his medication may make him hallucinate, because he doesn't believe that his favorite stadium was demolished two years ago:

"I think I just saw Veterans Stadium demolished on Jake's computer."

[...] "It was demolished over two years ago."

"What year is it?"

[...] "Two thousand and six."

That would make me thirty-four. Apart time would have been in progress for four years. Impossible, I think." (p. 16)

Due to time negligence, it seems that Patrick's mind cannot cope with the current realities. For example, it is a time that Nikki has left him and has got married to another man, but he does not want to see its reality. When he is denied the advantages of her love, he cannot bear the problems of the "apart time". Thus, he keeps hoping for a silver lining to happen so that she would join him again. Lying down on his bed and picking up Nikki's picture, Patrick says, "I can't wait for apart time to end so Nikki and I can share raisin bran at some diner and walk through the cool early September air" (p. 31). Patrick's illusions continue until his old friend Ronnie invites him to dinner where he meets Tiffany, a recently widowed young woman who is handicapped with a severe depression because of which she behaves strangely. However, at their first meeting she talks mean to him by persisting that she is tired and wants to get home (p. 23).

In the course of the story, one finds in Patrick's neurosis an illustration of the Gestalt psychological notion of 'Disequilibrium'. Mortola argues that if a man is constantly able to change his mental position from equilibrium to un-equilibrium and then again from un-equilibrium back to equilibrium, in the view of Gestalt therapy, he is healthy (1999, p. 311). But what bothers Patrick the most is that he is unable to perform this cycle of replacements. Stuck in the past, he cannot improve his mentality and put an end to his false perceptions about his ex-wife. His inability to create a dynamic psychological balance exemplifies what is often called 'Disequilibrium'. From the beginning of the novel, the reader witnesses Patrick's concerns; he finds it hard to come to terms with his society and return to it. According to Arnheim, "Gestalt theory demanded of the individual citizen that he derive his rights and duties from the objectively ascertained functions and needs of society" (1969-1970, p. 99). But Patrick is unable to fulfill a normal commitment to his society. For example, when he visits his therapist, he loses his control only by hearing a piece of music (Quick, 2008, p. 8). These radical reactions reveal the depth of his psychic 'Disequilibrium', a problem which is not limited to him as the text shows that Tiffany is disabled with it as well. Like that of Patrick, her problem is that she is far from a stable 'Equilibrium'. Each morning, when Patrick runs 10 miles around his home town, she follows him "without saying anything" (p. 32).

According to Mortola, the human being is constantly trying to pass over unbalanced emotions and to reach a desired 'Equilibrium' which is "the concept of a central, three-part, or 'triadic' process involving a movement through equilibrium, disequilibrium, and modified equilibrium." In Gestalt theory, this movement is essential to "the ongoing process of Gestalt formation and closure" (1999, p. 310). Thus, in order for Gestalt therapists to define a passing from 'Disequilibrium' to 'Equilibrium', the patient simultaneously needs to get to a 'Closure'.

However, before discussing the concept of 'Closure', it's noteworthy to mention that although Tiffany and Patrick try hard to reach a psychological balance, they do not recognize their true objectives. The latter tries to control his anger by practicing bodybuilding for long hours every day, and the former regularly visits a therapist and participates in a festival called "Dance Away Depression". Later in the novel, when she sends him a letter and invites him to participate in dance competitions, she explains the objective of her program:

I want to win this year's Dance Away Depression competition, and I need a strong man to do it. [...] it is an annual competition organized by the Philadelphia Psychiatric Association that allows women diagnosed with clinical depression to transform their despair into movement. The sole focus is supposed to be diminishing depression through use of the body. (Quick, 2008, p. 80-81)

Ironically, they both try hard to release themselves from mental concerns, but so far they are unable to achieve anything by themselves. Both of them wish to receive a final 'Closure', but their problem is that they see only one side of their situation. They do whatever they can to free themselves psychologically, but entangled in the pitfall of their past experiences they are not determined to stop thinking about themselves and move on toward the future. Each morning, Patrick comes up from his basement, and as he looks to the horizon and the silver linings, he feels a magical hope that Nikki would come back home soon (p. 11).

Apparently Patrick does anything his therapist prescribes to alleviate his anxiety, but he cannot reach a 'Closure'. Instead, he dives into imaginary facts or phantoms in the space of which he gets involved in a sequence of denials regarding his past. As a result, he cannot reach 'Equilibrium', because he considers an imaginary reunion with Nikki as

his 'Closure', which is only a fake solution to his problems. If Patrick could think about a correct symbol or concept as his aim in life, he might be able to overcome his problems. Some researchers have provided different analyses on this notion in Gestalt psychology. For example, in her influential *Closure: the Rush to End Grief and what it Costs us*, Berns argues that, in 1923, Max Wertheimer made use of the concept of closure in explaining "how our brains group objects together as a whole rather than as individual part." The "mind fills in missing information to complete an image." Closure also highlights the fact that people remind better those events or tasks which have remained "unfinished or not closed" (2011, p. 7-8).

One can suggest that to the practitioners of Gestalt psychology 'Closure' is a key concept. According to Koffka (1935), a principle of Gestalt psychology is 'Closure'. However, it can be reached only on the ground of an established balance and 'Equilibrium'. According to Perls, "Just as balance and discovering are not on all levels of existence, so are frustration, satisfaction and closure" (1969, p. 86-87). In this way, for Quick's protagonists to end their grief over losing their partners, they need to reach a state of 'Equilibrium'. In this regard, their friendships as well as their trust in each other play major roles in healing their emotional injuries. For instance, after Patrick punches an arrogant man in the face in defense of his own brother, he becomes ashamed of his deed and feels the need to talk to someone other than Tiffany, but nobody realizes his true feelings. "I'm starting to think Tiffany is the only one who might understand," says Patrick, "since she seems to have a similar problem" (Quick, 2008, p. 51).

The next item entangling Quick's characters in disequilibrium is a sense of 'Self-Realization'. Karen Horney defines 'Self-Realization' as an attempt to solve inner conflicts (1936, p. 221-230) which is similar to 'Equilibrium'. However in *Karen Horney: Gentle Rebel of Psychoanalysis* (1978), Rubins holds that "Self-Realization is the innate tendency of the individual to grow in a healthy direction" (p. 316). The problem of self-realization is more evident in the novel when Patrick first understands that his brother Jake has been happily married for two years (Quick, 2008, p. 67). The sequence of mental problems is extended almost in the whole story. In a final episode, Tiffany decides to provide Patrick with a 'Closure'. Berns claims that "'Closure' is not some naturally occurring emotion that we can simply 'find' with the right advice. Rather, closure is a made-up concept: a frame used to explain how we should respond to loss" (2011, p. 4). So Patrick needs someone to help him with closure and Tiffany is that someone. Firstly, she tries to share with him her experience about Tommy's death who was her husband. She tells him that Tommy, killed in duty, was a socially responsible cop. After revealing the depth of her depression to Patrick, Tiffany designs a plan. She tells him that she could act as a liaison between him and Nikki. So each time he sends a letter through Tiffany to his ex-wife, Tiffany sends him a letter which she pretends is a reply from her. But this pretension is just a scheme, because it is Tiffany, not Nikki, who has written the replies. In the whole of this scheme, Tiffany has been disguising herself as Nikki and has been suggesting that he has to forget everything about Nikki. Some chapters afterwards, when Patrick finds out about Tiffany's scheme, he turns away from her. However, Tiffany, who is now committed to help him get out of his catch, writes him a letter to explain the purpose of her "liaison scheme". It has been to provide him a 'Closure':

I wrote those letters hoping to provide you with the closure ... Please know I began the liaison scheme only after I was certain that Nikki would never agree to talk to you again under any circumstance. Maybe you will never be able to forgive me, but I wanted you to know I had the best intentions—and I still love you...I miss you, Pat. I really do. Can we at least be friends? (Quick, 2008, p. 120)

Tiffany's direct talks about 'Closure' help one to believe that the aim of the processes of 'Equilibrium' and 'Self-Realization' throughout the story is to afford Patrick with a realizable 'Closure'. In this regard, in her 2011 socio-cultural research, Berns argues that 'closure' has also advantaged from a culture within which people's grief is of central importance but largely limited by "patience and expectations", so that the individual will solve his/her problems within a brief course of time, without much meditation over of the pains, and through "a relatively quick resolution" that "bystanders can assume that the person is moving on" (p. 11). But reaching 'Closure' in a special case of divorce is even harder. In chapter 3 of her research Berns adds that "the lack of closure is emphasized in many descriptions of why divorce is hard." Some believe that divorce is even worse than death, since there is no closure (p. 41). So with the help of Tiffany, Patrick can provide himself a route to a real 'Closure'. About the end of the novel, when Patrick's brother is taking him to his old house, from afar he sees Nikki happily playing in the snow with Phillip and her two children; he understands that she is happily married, and decides no longer to think about her. A few days later, he visits Tiffany and retells her about his 'Official' and final 'Closure':

[...] I guess I just want Nikki to be happy, even if her happy life doesn't include me, because I had my chance and I wasn't a very good husband. (Quick, 2008, p. 122)

Patrick's proper understanding of the facts of his life shows that he has reached 'maturity' in a Gestaltian sense. But what is maturity? Karen Horney suggests "two ingredients" of it. One is "the ability to see the stark reality of persons or situations outside ourselves and to base our judgments and observations on the factors actually operating", while the other one is "the ability to assume responsibility for ourselves" (1947, p. 85). Patrick starts to assume 'responsibility' when he accepts the fact that Nikki is happier without him.

C. Rise of Patrick's Problems

Aside from attempting to provide a psychotherapeutic analysis of Patrick's behavior, the present paper will attempt to answer a question about the nature of his mental problem. It is observed that Quick initiated Patrick's journal of daily events in 2006. But still a remarkable rupture, about 4 years before that, bothers the curious reader who should wait

until the final episodes of the story when Patrick finds his ex-wife at home with her lover whom he attempts to kill. Nevertheless, the author does not go further backward, and Patrick's life in the past remains a mystery. The reader may guess that before his wife's infidelity Patrick lives with her for at least five years. The way the narrator registers the events of the day when Patrick gets crazy because of his wife's infidelity, along with how he describes Phillip's conformity with his beloved Nikki, encourages the reader to take Patrick for an outsider in her life. The following example is perhaps more suggestive how the author accomplishes his aim.

He's so small, I can hold him up against the tiles with one hand. I cock my elbow back, squeeze a tight, teeth shattering fist, and take aim. His nose explodes like a packet of ketchup. His eyes are rolling into the back of his head; his hands have fallen away from mine. (Quick, 2008, p. 116)

Here it is clear that the author really attempts to judge his characters and to blame Patrick for his ex-wife's infidelity.

It is ironic that as the victim of the cheating reactions of his wife a husband should get convicted to pass many years of isolation in an asylum, and soon after, the cheater's adulterous lover should win her consent to marry her. It is also ironic that Quick, as the creator and observer of this situation, should take the side of the cheater and consider the cheater's ex-husband both as the victim and the culpable, as the 'oppressor' and the 'oppressed'.

This 'mad' Patrick can be taken as a token of the cruelty of the modern 'Woman'; instead of an asylum where he is sent to as a culprit to pass a big part of his life silently in a 'marginalized' situation, he should have been sent to a hospital for receiving medical treatments.

In spite of this cruelty, Patrick is kind-hearted enough to remember the good side of his wife when he says, "Nikki—likes—a—man—with—a—developed—upper—body" (p. 4-5). He is really influenced by Nikki's disapproval of him, and he tries to better his physique in order to get her consent, while remembering that Nikki is a part of his daily life. But as the above example shows, these biased descriptions are little helpful to the reader if he wants to know Nikki better. We can admit that Nikki and Patrick started their married life happily, due to a handful of examples in the novel such as when he remembers their wedding day and Nikki talking to the camera, as if talking to him, saying "I love you, Pat Peoples" (24). In addition to the knowledge about their happy marriage, it is crucial to know what happens during their married life, a process which pushes Patrick toward madness. It is ironic that in the novel an attempt is traceable to avoid solving this structure-making mystery. For instance, it's not clear to what degree Nikki is responsible for the fate of their marriage. In what follows, an investigation into Patrick's memories can provide us with interesting keys for opening the secret.

D. Under the Impact of (Rejected) Love

Nikki's lover is Phillip, who is Quick's absent antagonist. He is the man who ruins Patrick's love, life, and mind. In an episode, Patrick talks about the circle of Nikki's friends, all English teachers, who occasionally visit her for a "tea conversation". Because of his illiteracy, Patrick has to remain silent every time. Phillip is a member of the circle whom Patrick teases "about being such a tiny man", while Philip mostly teases him by making fun of him or calling him names such as "an illiterate buffoon" (p. 7).

It may seem normal for the couples to call one another funny names, and Nikki calls her husband as such even after this incident. It might even reveal the dynamism of their relations. But as to Patrick's current mental situation, it can raise doubts about our initial judgment. Take the example below.

Here's another surprise: I'm going to read all the novels on her American literature class syllabus, just to make her proud, to let her know that I am really interested in what she loves and I am making a real effort to salvage our marriage, especially since I will now be able to converse with her swanky literary friends. (p. 7)

At this particular scene, Patrick — as a recovering neurotic — tells us how much he longs to read Nikki's entire syllabus in order to gain self-confidence, because he does not want to be ashamed in front of her friends any more. This shows how much he is damaged by Nikki's embarrassing behavior and how much he longs for her approval. Gestalt psychology holds that if a mental patient is overtly anxious or if he has some hallucinations, it may signify that he has lost his memories or is enmeshed by old and devastating ones. Looking at Patrick's sensitivity to Kenny G. makes this Gestaltian notion clear that our cognitions are rooted in our relevant perceptions, while each of our reactions is bound to our power of reasoning. Take as an example when Patrick describes the events of his cursed day.

But when I enter my house, I hear a soprano sax moaning, and it's strange to hear Kenny G's smooth jazz coming from my bathroom at a time like this. [...] I open the bathroom door; I feel the steam lick my skin, and I wonder why Nikki is listening to our wedding song in the shower. Kenny G's solo has reached a climax once more. [...] Sexy synthesizer chords, faint high-hat taps. "You ...!" I scream as I rip the shower curtain off the rod, exposing so much awful, soapy flesh. (p. 116)

Thereafter, each time Patrick listens to the song he loses his control, because the song has been a favorite to him and they have played it on the occasion of their wedding ceremony. Patrick has always been a caring and attached lover to Nikki, and both have been in love with the song, which they used to play in special occasions. But the reader suddenly finds out that Nikki deliberately plays it aloud when she is in the shower with Philip. Is not this event an openly warning message to a loving husband who just returns home from work? And is not this occasion the trap which Nikki has provided for Patrick to excite him to react madly, because of which she can make a case against him in the court and arrange for him to be sent to an asylum as a mental patient, thus eliminating him from her life through an easy divorce

and then making for herself to marry Philip? The song played on Patrick's cursed day is in fact, in the hands of the novelist, a significant technique that empowers the subtle plot of his work.

Although Patrick is currently mentally ill, his personality is the product of a damaged marriage in which the role of Nikki as the wife is inevitable. In this process, she initially breaks his self-confidence. Then she starts to embarrass him repeatedly, to make him believe that he is incompatible and guilty. Meantime, she commits adultery with a man whom she selects from among their mutual friends. The whole of this process is more than enough to push Patrick toward self-destruction and madness, which the reader then identifies as his "bipolar disorder" in the light of Gestalt psychology. As it was discussed earlier, in this problematic situation Patrick receives a closure to the blessing of which he can commence a married life with another woman, Tiffany.

Patrick is likely to continue living in our mind, because he embodies the totalitarian and psychic lover with whom we often come across in the nooks and corners of our lives. We often pass by them without recognizing them. Also, we often see Nikki living in Patrick's old house but with her new lover.

III. CONCLUSION

Mathew Quick's *The Silver Linings Playbook* puts the reader in the life of a pair of mentally damaged characters, which he can critically analyze in the light of the theories of Gestalt psychology. Each character in this novel believes in a series of ideas which are well established in his/her mind. In Gestalt psychology, such ideas are called 'dogma'. People use such dogmas to express the reality of their worlds, while it is one of their psychological capabilities. But their mind is armed with another capability too, which is 'hypothesis' making (or structure making) about which they are nonetheless often skeptical. Relying on such assertions, comparing 'dogma' with 'hypothesis', one realizes that keeping such dualities in their mind could be frustrating or even devastating. However, psychologically they are inclined to contrive a coherent combination of these notions to reach 'Equilibrium' between them. Relying on the aforementioned criteria for developing psychological balance, the present research has come to recognize Patrick as a mental patient trapped in 'Disequilibrium', yet as a patient whose friendship with Tiffany helps him to reach a Gestaltian notion of 'Equilibrium' through 'Self-Realization', 'Maturity', and 'Closure'. The findings of the paper additionally suggest that in the background of Gestaltian 'Closure' Quick's protagonists are able to create a healthy environment in which to develop a better life for themselves.

REFERENCES

- [1] Arnheim, Rudolf. (1969-1970). "Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Psychology." *Salmagundi*. 10 (11): 97-103.
- [2] Berns, Nancy. (2011). *Closure: The Rush to End Grief and What It Costs Us*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- [3] Horney, Karen. (1947). "Maturity and the Individual." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 7 (1): 85-87.
- [4] Horney, Karen. (1936). "Culture and Neurosis." *American Sociological Review*, 1: 221-230.
- [5] Koffka, K. (1935). *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. New York: Harcourt.
- [6] Mortola, P. (1999). "Narrative Formation and Gestalt Closure: Helping Clients Make Sense of 'Disequilibrium' through Stories in the Therapeutic Setting." *Gestalt Review*, 3 (4): 308-320.
- [7] Perls, Friedrich. Salomon. (1969). *In and Out the Garbage Pail*. California: Real People Press: 86-87.
- [8] Quick, Matthew. (2008). *The Silver Linings Playbook*. New York: Sarah Crichton Books.
- [9] Rubins, J. L. (1978). *Karen Horney: Gentle Rebel of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Dial Press.
- [10] Sdorow, Lester M. (1993). *Psychology*. 2nd ed. Madison: Brown & Benchmark Publishers. (1st edition published in 1990).
- [11] Sharf, R.S. (2012). *Theories of Psychotherapy and Counseling Concepts and Cases*. 5th Edition. California: Brooks/Cole.
- [12] Smith, R.E. (1968). *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ali Taghizadeh is an assistant professor at the English Department of Razi University of Kermanshah, Iran, where he has taught English for 18 years. His M. A. thesis is a comparative study of the major fiction of Hardy and Faulkner, while his doctoral dissertation, which he has done in John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies of Free University of Berlin, is a structuralist and post-structuralist study of the fiction of Henry James. "Contemporary English Fiction," "Shakespeare Studies," "Contemporary Dramatic Literature," "Novel," "Literary Theory", and "Literature in Linguistics" are the graduate courses which he has taught. The main research interests of Ali Taghizadeh are fiction, literary theory, narrative studies, literature from the perspective of linguistics, and cultural studies in literature. He has translated J. Hillis Miller's *On Literature* into Persian, and has published some research articles both in English and his mother tongue.

Moein Moradi has a bachelor degree in Electronics Engineering, but he has always been very interested in English literature. Currently he is a graduate student at the English Department of Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. Besides Persian which is his mother tongue, he can fluently speak in English, French, and Arabic. The research interests of Moein Moradi include the postmodern American Fiction.