



A Daring Young Man: A Biography of William Saroyan

John Leggett

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He was so famous that Saroyanesque entered the vocabulary of his time, an adjective expressing the childlike sweetness, the evocation of loneliness, the innocence that characterized his work.

His name was known to anyone in America who read a magazine, listened to the radio, cared about theater, or bought a book. At one time he had three plays simultaneously on Broadway, including *My Heart's in the Highlands* and *The Time of Your Life* (which won the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics' Circle Award). His first collection of stories, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, was published by Bennett Cerf when Saroyan was twenty-six years old; it was a critical and commercial success. Saroyan went to Hollywood and wrote *The Human Comedy* over a Christmas holiday; it became a major wartime movie and won him an Oscar for best screenplay.

His writing was a mixture of old-world suffering and new-world optimism. But for all of his promise and brilliance, and his half-century struggle to reach the pantheon of American writers, his gift was not large enough to sustain him.

Now, in this full-scale biography, John Leggett gives us Saroyan whole, from the immigrant boy and his lonely orphanage years to the internationally acclaimed American writer. Here is the all-encompassing story—the fun, the follies, the lights, and the shadows of his life.

Leggett writes about Saroyan's roller-coaster courtship and two marriages to the beautiful Carol Marcus (she was seventeen and he thirty-four when they met); about his relationships with his publishers and with his long-time agent, Hal Matson; about his friendships with Budd Schulberg, Irwin Shaw, George Jean Nathan, and others, and the many productions (on Broadway and off) of Saroyan's plays. He writes about Saroyan's constant struggle with his addictions to gambling and extravagant living . . . his disappointments as a writer and his undiminished belief in his own talent, a belief that it would prevail, no matter how many colleagues turned away from his excesses and his demands.

Drawing on interviews and on Saroyan's letters, notes, and diaries, John Leggett, author of *Ross and Tom* ("A great book"—Leon Edel), gives us a revealing portrait of the man and the writer whose work charmed and touched the heart of mid-twentieth-century America.

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