

ical studies on Beckett because nobody has as yet written on this Irish-born writer with the finality that Morrisette has written on Robbe-Grillet.

The Dismemberment of Orpheus comes as close as possible to avoiding artificial boundaries set up between criticism and literature. Hassan's words seem, at every turn, to (in his own language) "touch the fringes of literature."

Reviewed by MELVIN J. FRIEDMAN

¹See my "A Revaluation of *Axel*," *Modern Drama*, February 1959, pp. 236-243.

²Hassan in no way rejects the nineteenth century but his avoidance of it reminds one a bit of the French critic Léon Daudet's arrogant dismissal of it as "le stupide dix-neuvième siècle."

The Time of His Life

I Used to Believe I Had Forever, Now I'm Not So Sure, by William Saroyan, *New York: Cowles Publishing Company, 1968. 234 pp. \$5.95.*

Days of Life and Death and Escape to the Moon, by William Saroyan, *New York: The Dial Press, 1970. 139 pp. \$5.95.*

IN AMERICAN LETTERS it really does pay to mind your ideological P's and Q's, for if you don't, you run the serious risk of being fairly regularly Passed Over. William Saroyan will be 64 in August, with more than fifty books to his credit—novels, plays, and collections of short stories. Since 1934, except for three years in the army during World War II, he has earned his living solely as a writer, receiving (and spending) several million dollars. Yet, somehow,

the eternal little boy from the orphanage in Fresno has missed being thought of in the terms reserved for Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Lewis, Wolfe, Mailer, O'Neill, Odets, Miller, Steinbeck, and the rest. Early on, it seems, he was put Out There with Salinger (J. D., not Pierre) because, after all, where else *can* you put a twentieth-century American author who says, "During the time of [my] apprenticeship, which coincided with what I later learned had been the Depression, I had to make my own way." A remark like that is just outrageous.

Oh my, yes. What can be done about a man who goes on like this?

It was very difficult in those days . . . for a writer not to be sympathetic to what was known as the Communist or People's Cause, and to be angry about the Capitalist or Rich Man's Cause. The best novelists, story writers, and poets stood with the Communists or humanitarians, including a new group of writers clustered around W. H. Auden: Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNiece, and C. Day-Lewis, among others.

"But," O'Brien [Edward J., founder and editor of the yearly *The Best Short Stories*] said, "I know these chaps, and they don't *like* people. As a matter of fact they can't stand them. I once saw three of them walking up Piccadilly when a beggar asked them for a coin. They pretended that he wasn't there, a man not much unlike themselves, as a matter of fact, but unfortunately not a writer and not a humanitarian."

Such a writer is cocky, impudent, a bit of a braggart. He may have had it thirty years ago, but he hasn't got it now.

Actually, Saroyan has published a great deal in the last ten years, and a very great deal in the last twenty. But, as he says:

I haven't had a best-seller since my seventh book. Readers are reading other

writers, and not one respectable critic wants to *mention* my name, let alone say something nice. Intellectuals (but don't be offended, I may be half-intellectual myself) consider my work out of style, not in the current any more, far afield, unaware, unconcerned about the holocaust of contemporary reality, indifferent to the corruption in the government at local levels, and scornful of Zen, a thing I know nothing about except that it is supposed to be helping people for whom my contempt is constant and open.

Perhaps he brought it all on himself. That must be it. After winning (and rejecting) the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics' Award in 1940, and after tossing in *The Beautiful People* and *Love's Old Sweet Song* for good measure, Saroyan withdrew from the Dramatists Guild. "I will believe the Dramatists Guild is a fine useful sensible organization when it permits me to join or not join, as I see fit," he declared [Mercy sakes, the sky was falling!]. "I would be willing to donate twenty-five percent of my earnings in the theatre to needy playwrights if I were permitted not to be a member of the Dramatists Guild, and would not be obstructed." The Guild averted its gaze, and Saroyan hasn't been seen on Broadway for more than two decades, though he has continued to write plays.

Days is a diary, of sorts. *I Used to Believe I Had Forever* is a collection of fifty-two stories, poem, essays, and little plays, some previously published, some not. Taken together with *Here Comes, There Goes You Know Who* (1961), *Not Dying* (1963), and *One Day in the Afternoon of the World* (1964), the two impel us to look again at the man who so long ago wrote *The Human Comedy* and *The Time of Your Life*. Certainly they impel us to wrestle with the question "Whatever Became of William Saroyan?" even while William Saroyan is still around.

It is revealed that the boy has been living

in Paris not worrying about his masculinity. He has been taking walks whenever possible.

There was a great earth-splitting thunder this afternoon and heavy rain fell three times for about five minutes. I liked the way the whole thing was overplayed. It was so bogus it was funny. One thought of a retired stockbroker trying to behave like Lear. Part of the sky was open and blue during the whole performance.

He has been writing new plays, gambling, entertaining his son and daughter, and wondering about life.

Nobody is able to do anybody any good . . . After we make the small discovery that anybody can do anybody else a little *insignificant* good now and then, we make the large discovery that not only is it not possible for anybody to do anybody else any *real* good, it is almost impossible for everybody not to do everybody else a great deal of harm.

Surely, a man in his sixties who writes the same sort of stuff he wrote in his thirties is either a little mad or on to something. Yes. "I do permit myself to notice that nothing I have ever written has been destructive, hateful, anti-people, anti-life, or anti-God—anybody's God." The sexagenarian is plainly mad. Remember, I was the one who said it last.

Reviewed by KENNETH PAUL SHOREY