

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

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

<sup>2</sup>Hassan 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."

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## *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

## *The Ways of Mortality*

**The Single Heart**, by Robert Drake,  
Nashville and London: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1971. 171 pp. \$4.95.

ROBERT DRAKE is gifted with a memory for conversations. He hears voices, and in his second collection of short stories, *The Single Heart*, we are privileged to hear them too, thanks to the accuracy of his recording. Most of the voices belong to women, older women eager to talk of their youthful past. All are Southerners, from either West Tennessee or East Tennessee. Some are citified and have been all the way to Memphis or Chattanooga; some are countrified ladies who used to have malaria every summer as a matter of course, and who kept open house for trouble. To them all Robert Drake has bent a sympathetic ear.

In his first fine book, *Amazing Grace*, the author, with wit and compassion, introduced us to the people of his small hometown. In this new book the fun and compassion are still there, but some bitterness has been added. Illness, death, hospitals, bowels, undertakers, loneliness are recurring themes. Religion—or ir-religion—almost always pops up somewhere. Big Baptists, as opposed to devout Catholics, prominent Methodists and staunch Presbyterians, abound. Trained nurses “who probably knew too much, and certainly saw too much” are in conflict with practical nurses who could “do more with the patient than anybody else.” “The Stark Naked Baptist” is not only of that persuasion (a Baptist who went all the way) but is also a practical nurse “cut on the bias and with the appearance of an aging jaybird.”

Nearly every story has its disease: sprung pizzums (strictly a male affliction), terminal cancer (“They Cut Her Open and Then Just Sewed Her Back Up”), ruptured appendices (“She is not a well woman. No, not well at all”), tumors of required weight

(“... doctors wouldn’t look at a tumor unless it weighed a certain number of pounds”). But there are no transplants here. Single or multiple-hearted, all of these stories (of which thirteen have not been previously published) belong to Robert Drake and to Ripley, Tennessee.

Drake has such a distinct facility for the appropriate title and phrase that the temptation to quote him is irresistible. “Don’t They Look Natural?” is an exposé of the funeral parlor set. “There were two things she never expected to see in her lifetime: her name on a tombstone and her diamond ring on another woman’s hand.” “Deep in the Interior and Everything and All” reveals the sad and confused loneliness of a mother newly placed in a nursing home. “Oh, daughter, I am deep in the interior. It’s all darkest Africa and wooden legs everywhere I turn. And my heart is broken and everything and all, but I can’t get out. And there’s nobody anywhere that can help me.” “She Was Strangely Affected” tells of lonely, sick old women “who can’t seem to die to save their souls.”

Though told through the voices of women many of the stories are naturally about men. “The Fifth Wheel” is one of these. “Papa died standing straight up in bed, fighting like a wildcat and cussing a blue streak. We were well out of *that*.” “The Ring-Tail Tooter” is another and funny. (A real pistol!) The title story, “The Single Heart,” is serious. A doctor, afraid of love, has in death the appearance of a man “who had frozen to death in front of a roaring fire.” “The Music Lover” has not “gone on” with either music or love. Arrived at his middle years, lonely, joyless, he fears to become another “two-edged geriatric miracle . . . the old man waiting for the end that would not come, querulous in sickness, crotchety in loneliness, not really despised but—what could be worse—patronized, then neglected, forgotten.”

Some of the stories in this collection are too naïve for this reader’s taste, and some tend to be too much alike in their insularity. It would appear to this reviewer that