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APPENDICES

1. Synopsis of *Human Comedy*

William Saroyan's 1943 novel *The Human Comedy* is loosely based on his own life in Fresno, California, where he grew up in a fatherless home with his mother and siblings. In the novel, Ithaca, California becomes the setting, rather than Fresno. Saroyan develops several references to the ancient Greek poet Homer, author of *The Odyssey*. Fourteen-year-old Homer Macauley is the main character and narrator of *The Human Comedy*. Homer's younger brother is named Ulysses, a name he shares with the protagonist of Homer's *Odyssey*, as Ulysses is the Roman version of the Greek name Odysseus. Both texts also deal with the concept of "going home". Ithaca, the name of Homer's native town in *The Human Comedy*, is also Odysseus' home in *The Odyssey*. Both stories take place in times of war, and in an allusion to *The Odyssey*'s Helen of Troy, the girl Homer loves is named Helen Eliot.

Saroyan's novel is episodic in nature, emphasizing mood, human emotions, and introspection over plot. The traits of the characters support the themes the novel presents. During World War II, Homer Macauley is a telegraph messenger, a job through which he discovers much about the general human condition and about himself, as he often delivers news dealing with death and loss. In particular, the struggle to cope with loneliness takes on a significant thematic role. At the opening of the novel the pleasures of an innocent, simplistic childhood are exemplified through the presence of Homer's younger brother, Ulysses. Ulysses' ordinary life experiences include his backyard, animals, time with his mother, and seeing a friendly man on a train, all of which represent unscathed joys. The innocence of both Ulysses and Homer begins to change following one of Homer's earliest telegram deliveries.

Homer is charged with delivering a telegram to a middle-aged woman containing the news that her son has died. Homer and Ulysses' idyllic, small-town life is suddenly no longer the self-contained world it had

been, but part of a bigger, more complex existence. In the coming days, as they move about their town, the brothers come in contact with various people from whom they learn about the world around them. Mr. Spangler, who works at the telegraph office, is calm and caring and Homer looks up to him. His calmness helps thwart a robbery at the office. Mr. Grogan, the owner of the office, is often drunk, thus representing a different side of life. At home the brothers are influenced by their widowed mother's combination of sadness and wisdom, and by their older sister Bess, who early in the book feels sorry for some soldiers and goes to the movies with them along with her friend Mary.

Characters representing additional facets of the human condition include Mr. Covington, the owner of a sporting goods store, who helps Ulysses, and Mr. Ara, a generous grocer. There are also characters at school who add to Homer and Ulysses' increasingly worldly awareness. Mr. Byfield is a gym coach who at one point tackles Homer; Miss Hicks is a history teacher from whom the boys learn an important lesson; and Mr. Ek, the principal, remains focused on doing what is right regardless of how it might affect his relationships with parents or his staff. Homer and Ulysses also have an older brother, Marcus, who is to leave soon for the war. The deceased patriarch of the Macauley family even appears at one point to visit Mrs. Macauley in the form of a ghost, offering her comfort and [foreshadowing](#) Marcus' future death.

Throughout the novel, instances of both narration and dialogue present loneliness as being at the heart of the human condition. Actions free of self-interest and that show compassion for others counteract the essential loneliness that permeates humanity. Christian faith is also pointed to as a remedy for loneliness. All of this helps Homer mature and develop an awareness of how to survive in the world. More than at any other time in *The Human Comedy*, Homer's perception of his place in the world is put to the test when he is asked to deliver a telegram to his own home. Coming full circle, reflecting the telegram he delivered early in the book, this one also contains the news of a death: that of his own brother

Marcus. In a final nod to the power of compassion, the Macauleys welcome into their family a young man named Tobey George, who has no family of his own and whom Marcus had befriended while in the army.

Source : <https://www.supersummary.com/the-human-comedy/summary/> .

Accessed : 19 June 2020.

2. Biography of Jane Austen

William Saroyan was born in Fresno on the last day of August 1908. Following their father's death, William, his brother Henry, and his sisters Zabel and Cosette spent several years at the Fred Finch Orphanage in Oakland, while young widow Takoohi took up menial work in nearby San Francisco. The family was eventually reunited back in Fresno, in the San Joaquin Valley, and William Saroyan's formidable maternal grandmother Lucy (also widowed), who was to be a strong influence on him, joined the household. As he grew up there, an American boy also becoming part of the exiled Armenian tribe, he assimilated the raw material for many of his later stories.

It is not surprising that young William Saroyan, who was destined to be a writer strongly in the American unschooled tradition, had an undistinguished academic career. He was urged to go to college, but college was not in his plans. When he was twelve years old, little Saroyan read, by chance, the Guy de Maupassant story "The Bell," and the secret ambition to be a writer started to form. He became, then, a frequent visitor to Fresno's public library and he learned to touch-type at the Technical School. While still at school he had sold newspapers in his spare time to earn money badly needed by his family, who were living in what he describes, in *My Name is Aram*, as "the most amazing and comical poverty in the world."

With the coming of the Great Depression he was more committed to writing than ever, and gave up all pretense of following seriously another career. Occasional winnings from gambling supplemented the scant living he earned at this time by working on Saturday market stalls selling vegetables. Although the prospect for an unknown young writer specializing in his own unorthodox brand of short stories was bleak indeed, during this difficult period he refused to compromise his literary integrity. He continued instead to work in defiance of what was commercially acceptable—a hard and lonely path but the only choice for a writer of true originality.

Late in 1933 he sent to *Story*, a national magazine, “The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze,” a story, part experimental, about a young writer who starves to death, with dignity. It was accepted and he was paid fifteen dollars. This was the decisive moment of acceptance, marking the end of his long apprenticeship. Many years afterwards he was to write that the only success that means anything to a writer happens when he becomes accepted as a writer at all. The rest is beside the point. More pieces were printed in *Story* in later months, and as word spread of this new and exciting literary find, stories were soon appearing in such magazines as *The American Mercury*, *Harper’s*, *The Yale Review*, *Scribner’s*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. By October 1934 Random House was ready to publish *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories*. Surprisingly, for a collection of short stories, the book was a best-seller. William Saroyan—or Saroyan, as he now became known—had arrived on the literary scene with a bang.

More collections of short stories (*Inhale and Exhale*; *Three Times Three*; *Little Children*; *Love, Here is My Hat*; *The Trouble with Tigers*; *Peace, It’s Wonderful*) followed against the continuing background of the Depression. Written in a variety of styles and moods, though with the Saroyan voice always clearly in evidence,

these early stories established his reputation as a writer with staying power and provided the foundation for the rest of his career. His most successful early collection was *My Name is Aram* (1940), a book presenting in a poetical light the Armenians of his hometown in the days on his boyhood. Having known such conditions himself from an early age he did not see the situation as greatly abnormal, and this, in combination with youthful exuberance and a strong poetic streak always present in his work, helped lift his stories of the Depression well above the level of mere realism or mere criticism of wealth and privilege.

Saroyan's career as a playwright began in earnest with *My Heart's in the Highlands* in 1939, a play adapted from one of his best short stories "The Man with the Heart in the Highlands." The play was well received, most importantly by George Jean Nathan, and was swiftly followed by his great theatrical success, *The Time of Your Life*. This American classic earned for the new playwright the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize (it was the first play to win both), though the latter he declined because of his strong feelings about commerce patronizing the arts.

Late in 1941 he took time off from his theatrical activities to write a film scenario in Hollywood, *The Human Comedy*. The film, starring Mickey Rooney, was a hit, but was hardly to Saroyan's liking. He turned the script into a novel, which became his most successful book—and ironically the one he was, later on, least happy with because of the patriotic note he had introduced towards the end.

Marriage and World War II now intervened. In October 1942 he allowed himself to be drafted into the army, despite his pacifist opinions, and early in the following year he married Carol Marcus, a young society girl, and a friend of Oona O'Neill (who was to marry Charlie Chaplin). After the birth of their son Aram, Saroyan was

posted to England. Discharged at last in September 1945, he later said that he had fought the army for three years—and won.

William Saroyan once said that to write was for him simply to stay alive in an interesting way. In a career lasting nearly half a century he remained through the good times and the bad a writer in the purist sense, writing almost invariably out of himself (as he put it), in the manner of a poet, with only surface commitment to the orthodox literary forms. He sought in his fictional work to dispense with the device of emotionality, or spurious excitement. Nor was he much interested in creating strong memorable characters—another phony device. Speaking of a novel sent to him by a publisher, he said it wasn't bad, but it was about specific people in that peculiarly specific way that makes a novel meaningless. He cultivated a simple style of writing that was nevertheless sophisticated in its poetic depth and complexity that was utterly devoid of clichés. He placed little value in what he termed safe writing, and was most pleased by the accidental element in his own work.

Source : <http://williamsaroyanfoundation.org/biography> . Accessed 19 June 2020.