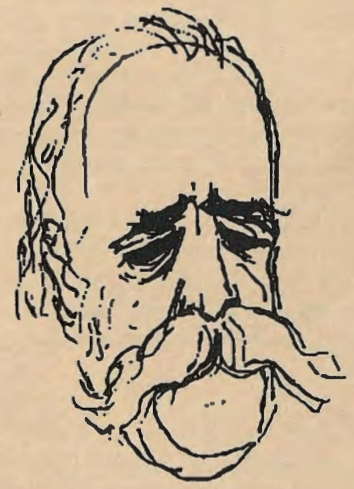
SAROYAN
PLUS FIFTEEN

An International Conference on the Occasion of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Death of William Saroyan (1908-1981)



Drawing by Chik Damadian, Bucharest, Romania

November 15, 1996

Maude Fife Room, 315 Wheeler Hall,
University of California at Berkeley

The conference is sponsored by the William Saroyan Chair of Armenian Studies, The English Department, the Center for Slavic and East European Studies, International and Area Studies, the U.C. Berkeley Armenian Alumni, the Krouzian and Saroyan Endowments, and the U.C. Berkeley Armenian Students Association.
Dickran Kouymjian, William Saroyan Visiting Professor of Armenian Studies, Organizer and Coordinator.

The design, layout, and editing of the program booklet is by Amy Patterson, English Major, U.C. Berkeley. Michael Kloster handled publicity and public relations. Monique Nowicki of the Center for Slavic and East European Studies coordinated travel and lodging for the participants and general logisitcs of the conference.

Thanks to the U.C. Berkeley Armenian Alumni, especially Mimi Malayan, Cynthia Avakian, and Madeline Adrian, for providing the coffee breaks, the final reception, and escorting the speakers. Further thanks to the Armenian Students Association, especially Chaghig and Dzovag Minassian, and Dork Alahaydoian, for help with the participants and logistics. Special thanks to Christine and David Balabanian for their hospitality. Thanks also to the students in English 166 and IAS 150, "William Saroyan," for their support.

Participants:

Anthony Bliss. Curator of Rare Books and Literary Manuscripts at The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. He has degrees in French Literature from Williams College and from the University of California at Los Angeles. Author of many articles on the history of books and printing. Curator of the current exhibition at the Bancroft Library called "Ferlinghetti, City Lights, and the Beats in San Francisco." He is also curator of European manuscripts.

David Stephen Calonne. Assoc. Prof. of English, Siena Heights College & Visiting Lecturer, Armenian Studies/English, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Received his B.A. in Classics at the University of California at Los Angeles, where he also studied Armenian literature and history. He received a doctorate in English from the University of Texas at Austin, and has published widely on Saroyan, including the groundbreaking work: *William Saroyan: My Real Work Is Being* (1984). Articles he has written include "Saroyan among the Soviets," *Armenian Review* (1989), and "Saroyan's Roots", *Ararat* (1987).
Paper: *Two On the Trapeze: Charles Bukowski and William Saroyan.* The essay considers the literary influence of Saroyan on Charles Bukowski. Calonne concentrates on references in Bukowski's poems, stories, and novels, and explores some ways Bukowski was shaped by Saroyan's style. He discusses the themes both men obsessively considered: madness, art, solitude, the quest for love. Bukowski conducted an ongoing "dialogue" with Saroyan and clearly saw himself as a member of the same Califonia class of poets who came of age during the Depression. Calonne also discusses specific similarities between Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, and Bukowski's screenplay *Barfly*. Saroyan is one of a number of writers who are role models for Bukowski in the heroic, romantic, individualist, nonconformist tradition: the artist who bears stoically the ecstacy and burden of genius, and ultimately seeks a recovery of the sacred in life.

Edward Halsey Foster. Prof. of Humantities, Stevens Institute of Technology, Visiting Prof., Graduate School, Drew University. President of Talisman House, publishers of innovative and avant-garde writing in America. He is member of the delegate assembly of the Modern Language Associtation. He is member of the delegate assembly of the Modern Language Association. Foster has been a lecturer at universities around the world, and has published nearly twenty books and monographs, including: William Saroyan: A Study of The Short Fiction (1991), in which he examines his expressionist stance, as well as identifying him as one of the first American writers to work purposefully in an ethnic tradition, and Understanding the Beats (1992). His selected poems, All the Acts Are Simple Acts, were published in 1995.
Paper: *Saroyan and Kerouac: Joy Is the Way I Live.* Jack Kerouac shared with William Saroyan the dilemma of belonging to an "inconspicuous minority." Neither French Canadians nor Armenians had affected American civilization as strongly or decisively as had, for instance, African-Americans, Germans, or the Scotch-Irish. In general, one can divide American fiction in the first two-thirds of this century into two "traditions": a mainstream tradition evolving from nineteenth-century realism, and an expressionist tradition with its source in Emerson and Gertrude Stein. Kerouac said many times that he learned much from Saroyan, and one can argue that it was Saroyan, together with Thomas Wolfe, who introduced him to the latter tradition. Saroyan's early stories--which had great importance for Kerouac--are key works in the American expressionist tradition. The expressionist aesthetic gave Saroyan and Kerouac permission to write a rapturous, lyrical prose that would have been out of place in the sober world of the mainstream, and both authors are principal links in the core American tradition of placing joy over pragmatic necessity.

Barry Gifford. Writer and biographer who spends his time between Berkeley and New Orleans. He is the author of half a dozen novels, including *Landscape with Traveler, Port Tropique, An Unfortunate Woman, Wild At Heart.* His several books of non-fiction include two collaborations with Lawrence Lee: *Jack's Book, an Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac*, and *Saroyan: A Biography* (1984), and numerous volumes of poetry. Gifford has received the Maxwell Perkins Award and a PEN Syndicated Fiction Prize, and was the founding editor of Black Lizard Books. He is currently making a film with David Lynch based on one of his novels.
Paper: *Saroyan and the Sense of the Past.*

Herb Gold. San Francisco writer and sometime professor, originally from Cleveland, but is entrenched in the Bay Area. Educated at Columbia and the University of Paris, Gold has taught at Cornell, Berkeley, U.C. Davis, Stanford and Harvard. He is the author of a dozen novels from *Birth of a Hero* (1951) to *Dreaming* (1988), volumes of short stories, a half a dozen non-fiction books including *Travels in San Francisco* (1991). He has receive numerous awards and has been a Fulbright Fellow as well as recipient of Hudson, Guggenheim, and Ford Foundation fellowships. His lastest novel *She Took My Arm as If She Loved Me* will appear next year. He has often written on Saroyan, mostly recently in the San Francisco Examiner Magazine last August.
Paper: *William Saroyan: A Late Friendship.* I will remember aloud encounters with Bill Saroyan over the twenty-some years of our friendship: meeting him by accident in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (loud bellows instructing his children about the meaning of art); double dating with young women in North Beach, circa 1963; presenting my bride-to-be to him in Paris in 1967; an all-night party with Mary McCarthy, Saroyan, various French folks, Saroyan bewitching everyone; interviewing him for The New York Times upon publication of *Obituaries;* visiting him in Fresno with one of my twin sons (he made a trip to San Francisco, he said out of curiosity to meet the other son); tours through the tract houses in Fresno; correspondence, compaints, wails of pain about his children.... Finally meeting Aram in Bolinas a few days after Bill's death. The man had a soul and it was a privilege to lurk around with it.

Bonnie Hardwick. Librarian at Bancroft Library, U.C. Berkeley. She was responsible for the cataloguing of the William Saroyan archives, a labor of six years, and is editor of the 307 page guide "William Saroyan Papers 1926-1981." Bonnie Hardwick holds a Ph.D. in American Literature from the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently the Curator of the Bancroft Collection of Western Americana at The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. From 1985 until 1988, as head of Bancroft's Manuscripts Division, she supervised the arrangement, description, and preservation of the William Saroyan Papers.

Micah Jendian. Graduate student, English Department, San Diego State University. Jendian is working toward his Masters Degree in English and Comparative Literature with an emphasis in American Literature. He recently presented "A Jungian Analysis of William Saroyan's My Name is Aram" at the Crisis Carnival, at San Diego State and won first prize in the 1995 Armenian Allied Arts Fiction Competition. He is additionally a Dolores Zohrab Liebman Fellow, has graduated from UCLA with a degree in philosophy, is a creative writer, and a Fresno Armenian like Saroyan.
Paper: *I Am Both and I Am Neither: A Jungian Approach to My Name is Aram.* The paper reflects on and responds to William Saroyan's unsustained critical attention. Identifying Saroyan's categorization and subsequent marginalization as an ethnic writer is a significant factor, a Jungian archeypal approach is employed to liberate him from this unfavorable position. Locating the archetypal figures in *My Name Is Aram* illuminates America (particularly the Armenian-American), for Saroyan is telling the human story. His marginalization as an ethnic writer is shown to be unmerited because in in *My Name Is Aram*, as Jung says of visionary art, "the voice of all mankind resounds."

Aram Jack Kevorkian. Writer and attorney, Paris, France. Born in Philadelphia to a family of Armenian immigrants whose life work was publishing a weekly Armenian newspaper called *Groong*. After Harvard Law School (Cum Laude in 1953), he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to France and later returned there to practice international business law for 35 years. In 1961 he met William Saroyan in Paris and became his lawyer. He has been a visiting professor at New York University and the University of Strasbourg. For eighteen years he has written a "Legal Newsletter from France," and has published a book of memoirs in French called *Un Etranger pour mes petits Enfants.* He is currently preparing a book on Saroyan's Parisian years. His article "William Saroyan (1908-1981)" appeared in L. Hamalian's *William Saroyan: The Man and the Writer Remembered* (1987).
Paper: *Saroyan the Hater?* Based on his intimate personal contacts with William Saroyan starting in Paris in 1961, including unpublished conversations, Kevorkian explains how the death of Saroyan's father affected his psyche and shaped his writing. He relates details of Saroyan's loving but troubled relationship with his son and daughter, and shows how they were reflected in his writings. Saroyan's disapointments and frustrations about his family ambitions led to his mind's constant cohabitation with love and hatred. Kevorkian gives new details in his essay of Saroyan's last days which reflect this conflict.

Harry Keyishian. Professor of English at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey. He received his PhD from New York University and is the editor of the *Critical Essays On William Saroyan* (1995). He is also author of *Michael Arlen* (1976). Among his articles on Saroyan are "Rebel or Holdout?" (1961), "The Time of His Life: Autobiographical Writigns of William Saroyan," "Who Was William Saroyan?" (1983), and "The Dark Side of William Saroyan" (1984). He has also reviewed a number of books by and about William Saroyan for Ararat. Keyishian is an editor of *The Literary Review* and Director of Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
Paper: *Immigrant Themes in Saroyan's Fiction.* Saroyan in his fiction explored the mixed legacy of immigration. On the one hand, he respected the fears of the older generation that their experience would be forgotten and extinguished. He cherished the good in their legacy. On the other hand, he feared and detested the power of the past to infect the present with its irrational, debilitating hatreds. He was exhilarated by the possibilities for self-creation that the New World offered. As he wrote in The Daring Young Man..., "I want to lift [man] from the nightmare of history to the calm dream of his own soul."

Michael Kloster. English Major, UC Berkeley, logistical coordinator of conference. Kloster is studying English with a focus on Beat studies and William Saroyan. In addition to traditional academia, he is also interested in the composition of verse, having studied under such poets as DeWayne Rail and Alfred Arteaga. Kloster, a native of Fresno like Saroyan, comes from a farming family and enjoyed many years of pruning grape vines and shearing sheep, while concurrently reading Blake, Levine, Williams, the Beats, and of course Saroyan.
Paper: *Saroyan and Keruoac On a Quest For 'IT'.* Utilizing textual examples, prose theory, and theme, Kloster melds Saroyan's style and inherent humanity with the Beat's new vision as illustrated in Kerouac's writing. Moving from the authors' love of Jazz to the defining moments in their writing, Saroyan and Kerouac are piviotal authors of literature in the Modern Age.

Dickran Kouymjian. Conference Coordinator and William Saroyan Visiting Professor Armenian Studies, UC Berkeley, is the Haig and Isabel Berberian Endowed Chair of Armenian Studies, and is Professor of Armenian Studies at California State University, Fresno. He is the

author of numerous books and articles on Armenian history, literature, and art, including "William Saroyan and the Armenian Experience" (1986), "Saroyan Shoots a Film" (1987), and two collections of previously unpublished Saroyan plays: *An Armenian Trilogy* (1986), and *Warsaw Visitor:Tales From the Vienna Streets* (1991). He received his doctorate from Columbia University, and has taught there and at universities in Cairo, Beirut, Paris, and Erevan. In 1979 he presented the Hagop Kevorkian Lectures in Near Eastern Civilization at New York University. His most recent book is The Arts of Armenia (1992), and he is currently preparing a vast and definitive *Album of Armenian Paleography* to be published in 1998.

Michael Kovacs. English major, UC Berkeley. He will be graduating this December and is currently applying to graduate programs in English around the country. He hopes to pursue a career in writing, and plans to teach 19th and 20th century literature.
Paper: From Fresno to Lowell. The paper explores William Saroyan's influence on writer Jack Kerouac, and through him a group of contemporaries later to be called the Beat Generation. Both writers question the "economy" and available forms of art and come into strong opposition to the "New Critics" conception of what art should be. Saroyan and Kerouac share the same aesthetic assumptions about literature: mainly, that as writers they would ignore all conventions in order to convey the truth of their experiences. The parallel between the two writers is in their ability to write spontaneous and rhythmic sentences in their quests to record the immediacy of experience as they found in life. At the core of their writings is a debt to jazz, which provides a model by which each writer can approach his writing. The analogy to jazz illustrates each writers interest in the pleasures of sound, spontaneity, and improvisation as a way of discarding conventions and form in order to produce works "beyond the arbitrary confines of the story."

John Leggett. A writer who lives in Napa Valley. He graduated with a B.A. from Yale University. Director and lecturer at the Writers' Workshop, University of Iowa. Regents Lecturer at the University of California at Irvine in 1968, Senior Editor at Harper & Row from 1960-1970, and Editor and Publicity Director at Houghton Mifflin from 1950-1960. He has published the biography *Ross and Tom* (1974), and has just finished a major biography on William Saroyan entitled: *The Daring Young Man.* His short fiction and articles have appeared in the *Chicago Tribune, Esquire, Harper's, Ladies Home Journal, Mademoiselle, New Republic, the New York Times Magazine and Book Review*, and *Saturday Review.*
Paper: *Saroyan's War with the Critics.* The conflict between Saroyan and his critics began at the outset of his career by the author's dynamic reactions to reviews of his writing. He rejoiced in the lone dissent of the Akron Beacon-Journal review of *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, and conversely telegraphed several adverse critics of *The Man With His Heart in the Highlands* to inform them they were mistaken. His repeated disagreement with negative reviews of his work becomes a portrait of the artist and his relationship with his critics. Yet beneath the Saroyan bonhomie and indifference lies the suffering of a man torn between hubris and self-doubt over his extraordinary gift.

Ronald Loewinsohn. Prof. of English, UC Berkeley. He was born in the Philippine Islands, then settled in San Francisco, where he grew up just in time for the Beat Generation. After high school he gained his real education in the bars of North Beach, where he began his serious training to become a Beatnik poet, fulfilling all the requirements, including the standard number of hitch-hiking trips back and forth across the United States. Eventually he succumbed to a BA. degree in English from the University of California at Berkeley, and continued further down this well-worn path, going as far as Harvard, where he added a Ph.D. in English to his rap sheet. He has confessed to at least six volumes of poetry and two novels, in addition to other misdemeanors. His first novel, *Magnetic Field(s)*, was one of the five finalists for a National Book Critics Circle Award, and the recipient of the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award for Fiction.
Paper: *Saroyan, Kerouac, and the Beats.* A comparison of the relationship between the two writers and their treatment of the ordinary people of the lower class. Saroyan's approach to these "commoners" is far less self-conscious and strained than Kerouac's. This difference is caused in part by their orientation with their community, and in part by the way the two writers conceive of their audience. Kerouac additionally mentions Saroyan at least once in *On The Road*, and in doing so betrays the literary quality of his interaction with "ordinary" people.

Harold Aram Veeser. Associate Professor, Wichita State University. He received his Ph.D. in English and Comparitive Literature from Columbia University. He has been a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University, and has been awarded numerous fellowships and honors from various universities. He has published such books as *The New Historicism* (1989), and *The New Historicism Reader* (1994), as well as *Confessions of the Critics* (1996). He has also writen a number of articles, including "Saroyan's Final Plays", *Ararat Quarterly*, and "The Last Two Plays of William Saroyan," *Journal of Armenian Studies.*
Paper: *Performance Machine: Saroyan Against Literature 'For All Time.'* Dickran Kouymjian vividly documents Saroyan's efforts to make himself a virtual machine. His attachment to machines such as his Royal 2000 typewriter, and earlier to his bicycle, was an actual physical attachment. The machine worked, in Saroyan's case, to de-transcendentalize art production. When he writes in TV Guide about how to write a play, he begins and ends with earnest instructions to gather together pencils, paper, a typewriter, and other materials required for writing. He clocked in like a line worker at Boeing and stood at his station, processing thoughts, till he clocked out. Kouymjian's inspired account makes it clear that Saroyan approached the typewriter as a sprinter approaches the starting block. Saroyan took positive delight in the utter transitoriness of his typed, printed, and published work. In this he anticipates, by half a century, the current avant-garde interest in "performativity." In perfecting his version of transiency in art and life, Saroyan laid foundations for the most important new art of *fin de siecle.* The powerful work of transitory rappers and hip hop dj's of Eric Bogosian and Jack Kevorkian, owe a debt to Saroyan. It is a debt he would never claim.

Jon Whitmore. Provost, University of Iowa, and formerly Dean of College of Fine Arts, University of Texas, Austin.. Whitmore, who received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Santa Barbara with a dissertation on "The Dramatic Writings of William Saroyan," now serves as Provost and Professor of Theatre Arts at The University of Iowa. He has directed more than 60 theatrical performances, and produced over 50 main stage productions while serving as executive producer of the Department of Theatre at West Virginia University. He has been a Vice President and a member of the Board of Governors of the Administration for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. Whitmore's many publications include the book *William Saroyan: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (1994) Whitmore has edited a major unpublished memoir of Saroyan called *William Saroyan's Last Words.*
Paper: *Adios Muchachos: William Saroyan's Lost Manuscript.* When William Saroyan died in 1981, there was talk that he was working on a final autobiographical manuscript. That manuscript was not found, however, until ten years later. Saroyan wrote the manuscript--which he referred to as "this piece of writing, this history, this rhapsody of life, this dirge, this novel, this unidentified flying object"--over a 108-day period early in 1980. The manuscript is huge (over 335,000 words), and uses as its springboard *Variety's* end-of-year 1979 Necrology List of noted, departed people. Saroyan had first used this format in his well-reviewed *Obituaries*, published in 1979. The writing of this final work came simultaneously with Saroyan's discovery that he had prostate cancer. It became a working out of his personal death, and for that reason alone it is imbued with a life-view that is convoluted: uplifting and insightful, and at the same time conflicting and troubled. Saroyan's words zig-zag among incoherence, rambling descriptions of day-to-day life, colorful pictures of fascinating people, and descriptions of his personal health and state of mind.