

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Lucille Ball. *Love Lucy*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996. xiv + 286 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-399-14205-5.

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America has had a long-standing love affair with the “queen of comedy,” Lucille Ball. Amid this infatuation, numerous accounts of this American icon’s personal and professional life have been written. A refreshing first person account of the comedienne’s life can be found in her newly discovered autobiography, *Love, Lucy*. Written in the mid-1960s, the book traces her life from her birth in 1911 through 1962. It contains a forward by her daughter, Lucie Arnez, and is illustrated with over fifty photographs.

Lucy begins by writing, in painstaking detail, about her parents, grandparents, and childhood in Celeron, New York. At times, it almost seems as if you can hear her telling you the story herself. By connecting past and present, she provides the reader with intimate details about herself and how her childhood influenced who she became as an adult. For example, readers discover how Lucy attributes her sense of humor to her father and her perfectionism to her step-grandmother.

Perhaps one of the books most interesting features is how Lucy chronicles her struggle to become a successful actress. This desire was sparked by a performance by the monologist, Julius Tannen, and her first stage appearance in the play *Charley’s Aunt*, when she was fifteen. Lucy then takes the reader on a journey from New York to Hollywood. Starting in theater school, moving on to modeling, and then becoming a contracted actress in Hollywood, readers learn about the hard work and tenacity that drove her to success. When discussing her movie roles, she furnishes a brief description of the plot and its level of success at the box office. Lucy also offers personal insights about stars that she worked with such as Ginger Rogers and Bob Hope. Because of her attention to

detail, her book provides a historical perspective of Hollywood from the 1930s through the 1960s.

Lucy then recounts her leap from the movie theater to the television screen. She writes about the creation and overwhelming popularity of the sitcom, *I Love Lucy*. According to the actress, the show was popular because it “was little domestic spats and upsets happily concluded, an exaggeration of American life that came out all right” (p. 239). She also details how the show changed her life and was the beginning of the Desilu Studios empire.

Another strength of the book is the poignant story of Lucy’s love affair and marriage to Desi Arnez. The actress traces their relationship from its beginning to end and openly discusses their happiness and their turbulent times together. Through her storytelling, readers discover the love, passion, and pain associated with their relationship.

Ending her memoir with her marriage to Gary Morton and a renewed relationship with Desi, the now accomplished actress and businesswoman states that she had finally found peace with herself. Readers will find the book filled with wonderful anecdotes, personal insights, and the actress’s own thoughts and feelings about her life. By reading *Love, Lucy*, people will discover the real woman behind the legend.

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