



Algren: A Life

Mary Wisniewski

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A tireless champion of the downtrodden, Nelson Algren, one of the most celebrated writers of the 20th century, lived an outsider's life himself. He spent a month in prison as a young man for the theft of a typewriter; his involvement in Marxist groups earned him a lengthy FBI dossier; and he spent much of his life palling around with the sorts of drug addicts, prostitutes, and poor laborers who inspired and populated his novels and short stories.

Most today know Algren as the radical, womanizing writer of *The Man with the Golden Arm*, which won the first National Book Award, in 1950, but award-winning reporter Mary Wisniewski offers a deeper portrait. Starting with his childhood in the City of Big Shoulders, Algren sheds new light on the writer's most momentous periods, from his on-again-off-again work for the WPA to his stint as an uninspired soldier in World War II to his long-distance affair with his most famous lover, Simone de Beauvoir, to the sense of community and acceptance Algren found in the artist colony of Sag Harbor before his death in 1981.

Wisniewski interviewed dozens of Algren's closest friends and inner circle, including photographer Art Shay and author and historian Studs Terkel, and tracked down much of his unpublished writing and correspondence. She unearths new details about the writer's life, work, personality, and habits and reveals a funny, sensitive, and romantic but sometimes exasperating, insecure, and self-destructive artist. biography

The first new biography of Algren in over 25 years, this fresh look at the man whose unique style and compassionate message enchanted readers and fellow writers and whose boyish charm seduced many women is indispensable to anyone interested in 20-century American literature and history.

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