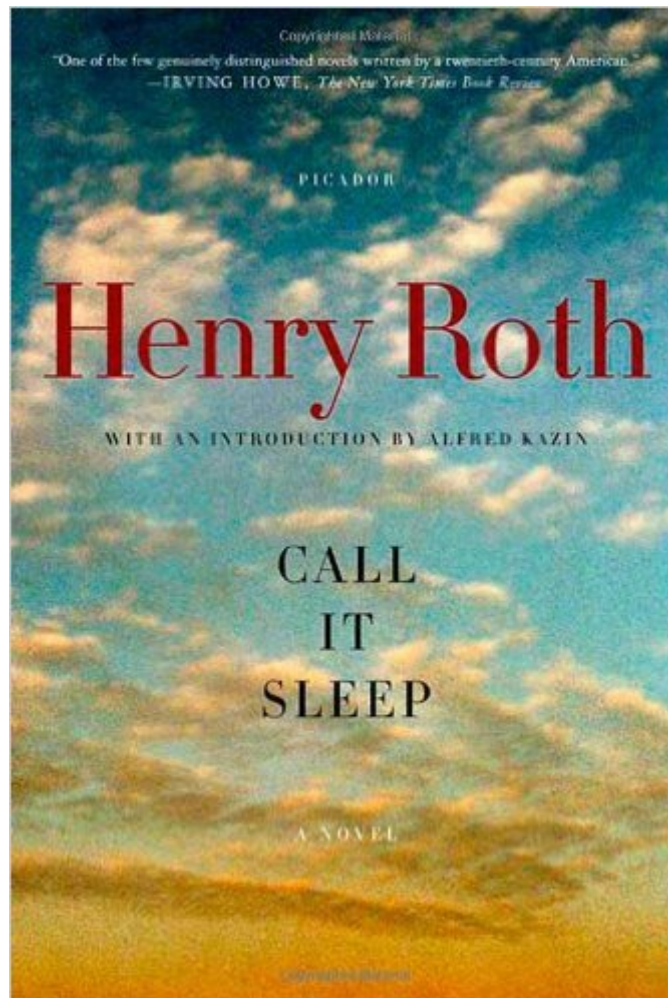


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Call It Sleep: A Novel



Synopsis

When Henry Roth published his debut novel *Call It Sleep* in 1934, it was greeted with considerable critical acclaim though, in those troubled times, lackluster sales. Only with its paperback publication thirty years later did this novel receive the recognition it deserves -- and still enjoys. Having sold to date millions of copies worldwide, *Call It Sleep* is the magnificent story of David Shearl, the "dangerously imaginative" child coming of age in the slums of New York.

Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Picador; Reprint edition (July 1, 2005)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (72 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #94,545 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #137 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Jewish](#) #1853 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Coming of Age](#) #3654 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Contemporary](#)

Customer Reviews

Henry Roth wants to do two things well in this book: first, accurately describe the experience of being a child -- not a tough, bully-type child, but a shy kid with no friends. (I can relate.) Secondly, he wants to capture the language spoken by native New Yorkers and by immigrants to the city. It might be best to explain the book's trick as "inside versus outside." Most of the time, we stand in a position of semi-omniscience, much like in *Crime and Punishment*: while the godlike narrator in *Crime and Punishment* could see inside Raskolnikov's head and no one else's, we are allowed into David Shearl's mind while he wanders terrified through the world. David understands perfectly well why he's so scared, and by the end so do we -- but we also understand why he can't explain his terror to anyone else. We are trapped in the child's head with him. It's been a very long time -- probably since I was David's age -- since I've remembered those feelings. The language of New York's Jewish ghettos in *Call It Sleep* also has an inside and an outside, and Roth's great trick is to pull us so deeply into that world that it's a slap on the face when we're back outside. The immigrants talk to one another in their native Yiddish, in which there's great poetry and biblical allusion (as well

as more than a few "may your remaining days be dark"-type curses). We're steeped in that world. Only occasionally do the immigrants step outside and talk haltingly with, say, a local policeman. They are shy, awkward, and adrift. Roth is so ingenious in the delivery that we feel their shyness and awkwardness as though it were our own. It's rare to find a book that is so committed to its characters. Roth has no ulterior motive.

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