



## Savage Joy

**Robert Dunn**

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*Savage Joy encapsulates an era as it captures searches for meaning and connection.*

Robert Dunn's brisk and engaging *Savage Joy* captures a distinct cultural era—a 1970s New York City, when the scene raged with punk music and the halls of the *New Yorker* magazine were hallowed. These separate worlds influence Cole Whitman, an insightful Los Angeles transplant with writing aspirations.

Cole's life is dull and solitary, defined by his job in the typing pool at the *New Yorker*, and his hours spent reading and writing. At his first literary gathering, he meets the gorgeous Emily, a girl he can't quite pin down. The two become linked to, and divided by, the freewheeling Slater, a punk rocker who is Cole's neighbor.

Slater's boundary pushing leads Cole into many adventures, including to Slater's bandmate, Sailor, a drummer styled like a 1940s pinup girl. Each of these vividly sketched characters expands Cole's world, bringing him introspection and world travel. His thoughtful narration, paired with realistic and zingy dialogue, gives the novel depth.

The plot draws from Dunn's experiences in New York, and the city itself becomes a character here. Scenes are rich in detail, from storefront churches to the gritty and legendary punk bar CBGB. Dunn shares priceless moments through his characters: hearing the trendsetting Talking Heads, carefully preserved doodles of magazine cartoonists on office walls, and an epic party in a blighted building with rooftop views of Manhattan.

Dunn's deft writing soars, sharing insights into the lives of young adults who are still defining themselves. Adrift on the city's vast tide, they grow and evolve, seeking understanding. Dunn masterfully weaves his characters together, hinting at their secrets and forcing engagement as they succeed, flounder, and fail.

*Savage Joy* encapsulates an era, as well as capturing universal and hopeful searches for meaning and connection.

FELICIA TOPP (July/August 2017)

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