Poets of the Past and Present

2012

Family: Reconnecting Our Hearts to Home Topic III

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Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib

Encyclopedia of Modern Asia , 2003

Born: 1797

Died: 1869

Nationality: Indian

Occupation: Poet

(1797–1869), Indian poet. Ghalib (Mirza Asadullah Khan), commonly regarded as the greatest Urdu poet, also wrote poetry and prose in Persian and was a great wit and conversationalist. Born to a noble family of Mughal descent in Agra, India, he migrated to Delhi around 1813 and later became the poetic mentor of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (1837–1858). As he was accustomed to living like an aristocratic nobleman, his needs far outstretched his means, so that he was forced into a life of penury.

Ghalib started writing poetry at a very early age under the pen name Asad, which he later changed to Ghalib. A study of his earliest manuscripts demonstrates that he produced most of his significant verses before he was twenty-one. He spent much of his youth writing poetry in Persian, putting together his Persian Diwan (*Diwan-e Farsi,* c. 1835) at least three years before the Urdu Diwan (*Diwan-e Ghalib,* c. 1838). His two collections of letters, *Ud-e Hindi* (Indian Harp) and *Urdu-e Mua'lla* (High Urdu), show him to be a classic writer of Urdu prose. *Dastanbu* (Persian, Pellet of Perfume, 1858) records his impression of the 1857 upheaval (the Sepoy Mutiny; also regarded by some as the first war of Indian independence), while *Mihr-e Nim Roz* (Persian, Midday Sun, 1854–1855) is the first volume of a projected multivolume history of the Timurid dynasty (ruled in India 1513–1857, with a brief interruption of Pathan rule).

However, Ghalib's Urdu Diwan, containing 1,458 verses, has been most instrumental in establishing his reputation as a great writer. Each generation reads the poetry of Ghalib for its own reasons; the metaphysical cogitations and the tough intellectual content strike a chord in every mind.

The themes of Ghalib's poetry are varied—love, the nature of human life and existence, people's role in the universe, free will versus predestination. However, love between a man and a woman, the

traditional subject of the *ghazal* (Arabic, a poetic genre), does not substantially engage his mind, and he views this transcendental passion with profound skepticism. Ghalib was a product of the Sufi tradition and had a highly eclectic mind and an attitude of cheerful irreverence toward God and institutionalized religion. If he asserted the dignity and self-respect of people in their relationship with God, he also advocated the value of humans as human, regardless of their religion and race.

To Ghalib, the poet, sorrow and pain are essential conditions of human life. He does not neglect or underplay any experience but savors each to the fullest, even if it is painful. To him, every experience becomes an ontological end in itself, regardless of the attendant pain or pleasure. In one of his couplets, he yearns for the inclusion of hell in heaven, as that would provide greater scope for his mind and imagination. In another verse, he exhorts his heart to find solace even in sorrow's song, because one day the body would be deprived of even this sensation, having become insensate and inert. This insatiable appetite for new experiences remains the driving force behind much of his poetry and imparts to his images a private significance and an illuminating power.

Mohammad Asaduddin

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Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī

RŪMĪ, JALĀL AL-DĪN (AH 604–672/1207–1273 CE), Muslim mystic and poet. No Ṣūfī poet has exerted a vaster influence on Muslim East and Christian West than Jalāl al-Dīn, called Mawlānā, or Mawlawī, "our master." His Persian works are considered the most eloquent expression of Islamic mystical thought, and his long mystico-didactic poem, the *Mathnavī*, has been called "the Qurʾān in the Persian tongue" by the great fifteenth-century poet Jāmī of Herat.

LIFE

Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn was born in Balkh, now Afghanistan; the Afghans therefore prefer to call him "Balkhī," not "Rūmī," as he became known after settling in Anatolia, or Rūm. Although the date of his birth seems well established, he may have been born some years earlier. His father, Bahaʾ al-Dīn Walad, a noted mystical theologian, left the city some time before the Mongol invasion of 1220 and took his family via Iran to Syria, where Jalāl al-Dīn studied Arabic history and literature. They then proceeded to Anatolia, an area that had not yet been reached by the Mongol hordes and thus offered shelter to numerous mystics and scholars from the eastern lands of Islam. They enjoyed the liberal patronage of the Seljuk Sulṭān ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Kaykōbād. After Bahāʾ al-Dīn's family settled in Laranda (now Karaman), Jalāl al-Dīn married, and in 1226 his first son, Sulṭān Walad, was born. The aged Bahaʾ al-Dīn was invited to Konya (ancient Iconium), the capital of the Anatolian Seljuks, to teach in one of the city's numerous theological colleges. After his death in early 1231, Jalāl al-Dīn succeeded him in the chair.

A disciple of Rūmī's father, Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaiqqiq, reached Konya in the early 1230s and introduced Jalāl al-Dīn into the mystical life and to the ideas of his father, whose *Maʿārif*, a collection of sermons and a spiritual diary, were later to form an important source of inspiration for Rūmī. He also studied the Persian poetry of Ḥakim Sanāʾī of Ghazna (d. 1131), the first poet to use the form of *mathnavī*, "rhyming couplets," for mystical instruction. Rūmī may have visited Syria in the 1230s, but nothing definite is known. His teacher later left Konya for Kayseri (Caesarea), where he died about 1242.

Shams al-Dīn

After ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's death in 1236, the Mongols invaded Anatolia, and the internal situation deteriorated owing to the incompetence of his successors. In the midst of the upheavals and troubles in eastern and central Anatolia, Jalāl al-Dīn underwent an experience that transformed him into a mystical poet. In October 1244 he met the wandering dervish Shams al-Dīn, "Sun of Religion," of Tabriz, and, if the sources are to be believed, the two mystics spent days and weeks together without eating, drinking, or experiencing any bodily needs. The discussions of Rūmī and Shams, who must have been about the same age, led Jalāl al-Dīn into the depths of mystical love but also caused anger and jealousy among his students and his family. Shams left Konya, and in the pangs of separation, Mawlānā suddenly turned into a poet who sang of his love and longing while whirling around to the sound of

music. He himself could not understand the secret of this transformation and expressed his feelings in ever-new verses, declaring that it was the spirit of the beloved that made him sing, not his own will. There was no question of seeking a fitting rhyme or meter—they came to him spontaneously, triggered by a casual sound, a word, or a sight. The poems of this early period, which excel in their daring paradoxes and sometimes eccentric imagery, do not mention the name of the beloved but allude to it with frequent mention of the sun, which became Rūmī's favorite symbol to express the beautiful and destructive but always transforming power of love. In addition to classical Persian, he sometimes used the Turkish or Greek vernacular as it was spoken in Konya.

When news reached Konya that Shams al-Dīn had been seen in Damascus, Mawlānā's elder son, Sulṭān Walad, traveled there and succeeded in bringing his father's friend back. As Sulṭān Walad says in his poetical account of his father's life, "They fell at each other's feet, and no one knew who was the lover and who the beloved." This time, Shams stayed in Mawlānā's home, married to one of the young women there, and the intense spiritual conversation between the two mystics continued. Again jealousy built up, and Shams disappeared in December 1248. It seems certain that he was assassinated with the connivance of Mawlānā's younger son. Rūmī knew what had happened but refused to believe it; his poetry expressed the certitude that "the sun cannot die," and he even went to Syria to seek the lost friend. But eventually he "found him in himself, radiant as the moon," as Sulṭān Walad says, and most of his lyrical poetry came to be written in the name of Shams al-Dīn.

WORKS

Mawlānā's writings can be divided into two distinct parts: the lyrical poetry that was born out of his encounter with Shams and is collected in the more than thirty-six thousand verses of the so-called *Dīvāni Shams-i Tabrīz*, and the didactic *Mathnavī-yi maʿnavī* with about twenty-six thousand verses, written in a simple meter that had already been used for similar purposes by ʿAṭṭar. Mawlānā's "table talks" have been collected under the title *Fīhi mā fīhi*; these prose pieces sometimes supplement the poetry, since the same stories are used at times in both works. More than a hundred letters, written to dignitaries and family members, have also survived; they show that Mawlānā was also practically-minded and looked well after those who entrusted themselves to him.

Dīvān-i Shams

The *Dīvān* is a remarkable piece of literature in that it translates the author's ecstatic experiences directly into poetry. The form is the traditional *ghazal* with its monorhyme. The rhythm is strong, and often the verses invite scanning by stress rather than by the rules of quantitative classical Persian prosody, although Rūmī uses the traditional meters most skillfully. He is also a master of rhetorical plays, puns, and unexpected ambiguities, and his allusions show that he had mastered Arabic and Persian classical literatures and history as well as religious writings completely. In some poems one can almost follow the flow of inspiration: Beginning from a seemingly trivial event, such as a strange sight in the street, the mystic is carried away by the music of the words and the strength of his rapture until, at least in some longish poems, the inspiration tapers off even though the rhyme continues to carry him through some more verses.

Mathnavī

As the *Dīvān* was largely born out of an ecstatic experience that was expressed in unusual and extremely rich imagery, it is difficult to analyze. The *Mathnavī* is somewhat more accessible, and it has been a source for mystical instruction ever since it was written. For the Western reader, the book is still not easy to understand, for stories grow out of stories to lead to a mystical adage or a highly lyrical passage, and after long digressions the poet may return to the original anecdote only to be carried away by a verbal association or, as we may surmise, by the interruption of a listener who set him on a different train of thought. The *Mathnavī* is a storehouse not only of Ṣūfī lore but also of folklore, proverbs, and sometimes very crude, even obscene stories that, again, turn into surprising symbols of spiritual experiences. The book contains so little technical terminology of the Ṣūfīs and so few theoretical discussions of "stages," "states," and so forth that some listeners objected to the master's simple "storytelling," as becomes evident from scattered remarks in the *Mathnavī* itself.

ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL (1987)

Source Citation

Schimmel, Annemarie. "Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn." *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Lindsay Jones. 2nd ed. Vol. 12. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 7935-7938. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 4 Jan. 2012.

Khalil Gibran

Born: January 06, 1883 in Syria, Bechari

Died: April 10, 1931 in United States, New York, New York

Nationality: American

Occupation: Poet, prose writer, painter, and sculptor.

Family: Born in 1883, in Bechari, Lebanon; immigrated to the United States, 1904; died of liver disease, April 10, 1931, in New York, NY. Education: Studied art at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Religion: Maronite Christian.

"Sidelights"

Since World War II, Kahlil Gibran has emerged as one of the most popular authors in the bookselling world. His best known work, *The Prophet,* has been translated into at least twenty different languages, and lyrical passages from Gibran's body of work are commonly read at weddings, baptisms, and funerals throughout the Western world. He has been called the most successful writer that the Arabic region has ever produced, and critics often cite the influence of biblical literature upon Gibran's style. Much of his work was infused with mysticism and dramatize a quest for self-fulfillment. Scholars have suggested comparisons between the Lebanese-American writer and nineteenth-century predecessors such as the American poet Walt Whitman, or German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, but overall Gibran's work has received little academic examination. As an introductory essay in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism* pointed out, "Generally, most critics agree that Gibran had the refined sensibility of a true poet and a gift for language, but that he often marred his work by relying on shallow epigrams and trite parables."

Gibran was born in Bechari, Lebanon, in 1883. From an early age he displayed a range of artistic skills, especially in the visual arts; he continued to draw and paint throughout his life, even illustrating many of his books. Gibran's family immigrated to the United States when he was twelve and settled in the Boston area, but he returned to the Middle East for schooling two years later. Pursuing his artistic talents further, he entered the famed Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he studied under the French sculptor Auguste Rodin. Gibran's first efforts at writing were poems and short plays originally penned

in Arabic that attracted a modest success. In 1904 Gibran returned to the United States, where he befriended Mary Haskell, headmistress of a Boston school. She became his advisor, and the two wrote lengthy romantic missives to one another for a number of years. These were later reproduced in the 1972 book *Beloved Prophet: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell, and Her Private Journal.*

During these early adult years, Gibran lived in Boston's Chinatown, and scholars note that the works from this period show a preoccupation with his homeland and a sadness stemming from his status as an exile. One of his first published books, 1910's *'Ar' is al-muruj* (later published in English as *Nymphs of the Valley*), was a collection of three stories set in Lebanon; two subsequent works written during this era, later published as *Spirits Rebellious* and *The Broken Wings,* are, respectively, a collection of four stories and one novella. In each, a young man is the hero figure, rebelling against those inside Lebanon who are corrupting it; common literary targets include the Lebanese aristocracy and the Christian church.

Gibran's first collection of poetry appeared in Arabic in 1914 and was translated into English several years later and published as *A Tear and a Smile.* "The tears, which are much more abundant here than the smiles," observed N. Naimy in *Journal of Arabic Literature,* "are those of Gibran the misfit rather than of the rebel in Boston, singing in an exceedingly touching way of his frustrated love and estrangement, his loneliness, homesickness and melancholy." Naimy called this book a bridge between a first and second stage of Gibran's career: the writer's longing for Lebanon gradually evolved into dissatisfaction with the destructive attitude of humankind in general. By now Gibran's body of work was received enthusiastically in the extensive Arabic-speaking world, winning a readership that stretched from Asia to the Middle East to Europe, as well as across the Atlantic. Soon his writings were being deemed "Gibranism," a concept that "Gibran's English readers will have no difficulty in divining," wrote Claude Bragdon in his book *Merely Players.* "Mystical vision, metrical beauty, a simple and fresh approach to the so-called problems of life."

In 1912 Gibran left Boston and moved to New York City. During World War I his growing success as an emigre writer was tempered by Lebanon's abysmal wartime situation, when many of its citizens starved to death. Scholars of the poet's body of work hypothesize that Gibran's sorrow manifested itself in a more pronounced quest for self-fulfillment in his works, and a spirituality that sought wisdom

and truth without the aid of an organized religion. At one point in his career the writer was excommunicated from the Christian Maronite church. His first work both written and published in English was 1918's *The Madman: His Parables and Poems.* Its title comes from a previously published prose work in which the hero sees existence as "a tower whose bottom is the earth and whose top is the world of the infinite . . . to clamour for the infinite in one's life is to be considered an outcast and a fool by the rest of men clinging to the bottom of the tower," explained Naimy in the *Journal of Arabic Literature.*

Gibran's most critically acclaimed work is *The Prophet,* first published in 1923. The author planned it to be first in a trilogy, followed by *The Garden of the Prophet* and *The Death of the Prophet.* The initial book *The Prophet* chronicles, through the title character Almustafa's own sermons, his life and teachings. Much of it is given in orations to the Orphalese, the people among whom Almustafa has been placed. Gibran's biographer, Mikhail Naimy, found similarities in *The Prophet* with Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathrustra.* In each the author speaks through a created diviner, Naimy asserts, and both prophets walk among humankind as outsiders. Some elements are autobiographical: the critic saw a parallel in Gibran's dozen-year stay in New York City with the twelve-year wait Almustafa endured before returning home from the land of the Orphalese. "In this book, more than in any other of his books, Gibran's style reaches its very zenith," declared Naimy. "Many metaphors are so deftly formed that they stand out like statues chiselled in the rock."

Another critic compared *The Prophet* to Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself.* Mysticism, asserted Suhail ibn-Salim Hanna in *Literature East and West,* is a theme common to both, with Gibran having rejected the attitudes termed Nietzschean in favor of the more benign European ideology that unfolded during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. "Like Whitman, Gibran came to see, even accept, the reality of a benevolent and harmonious universe," wrote Hanna. Critiquing *The Prophet* from a more practical standpoint, Gibran's biographer, Khalil S. Hawi, faulted its structure. Writing in *Kahlil Gibran: His Background, Character and Works,* Hawi noted that "behind the attempts to perfect the sermons and each epigrammatical sentence in them lies an artistic carelessness which allowed him to leave the Prophet standing on his feet from morning to evening delivering sermon after sermon, without pausing to consider that the old man might get tired, or that his audience might not be able to concentrate on his sermons for so long."

Despite any shortcomings, *The Prophet* went on to become the best-selling title in Alfred A. Knopf's history. It was followed by two more works in the trilogy Gibran had planned, *The Garden of the Prophet* and *The Death of the Prophet,* both published after their author's death. Another of Gibran's books considered noteworthy by scholars is *Jesus the Son of Man: His Words and His Deeds as Told and Recorded by Those Who Knew Him,* published in 1928. Personalities from the Bible--as well as ordinary characters created by Gibran--who came into contact with Christ recall their encounters with and impressions of the religious leader, although not all are adherents to what would become the Christian faith. In a review of the work for *New York Herald Tribune Books,* John Haynes Holmes termed Gibran well-suited to undertake such an ambitious work. "First of all he is a countryman of Jesus. . . . He therefore knows Palestine, its people, the cadences of their speech and the insights of their spirit," Holmes declared. "It is as though a contemporary sat down, at a belated hour, to write another and different gospel."

Gibran died of a liver ailment in 1931, and he had specified in his will that all future royalties due his estate should be donated to Bechari, his birthplace in Lebanon. Ironically, the writer's generous impulse provoked a legal battle. When copyright renewal came up for some of the works two decades later, Gibran's will was challenged, and the issue was kept in litigation for several years. At the same time, the increasing wealth entering the village from the growing international popularity of Gibran's works caused another legal conflict over the administration of the funds.

Source Citation:

"Khalil Gibran." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.

Muhammad Iqbal

Encyclopedia of India , 2006

Born: November 09, 1877 in Punjab, India, Sialkot

Died: April 21, 1938 in India, Lahore, Punjab

Nationality: Indian

Occupation: Poet

IQBAL, MUHAMMAD *(1877–1938), Indian poet and philosopher.* Muhammad Iqbal was born on 9 November 1877 at Sialkot, a border town of the Punjab. Iqbal's grandfather, Shaykh Muhammad Rafiq, had left Kashmir not long after 1857, as part of a mass migration of Kashmiri Muslims fleeing repression from the British-backed Hindu Dogra rulers installed in Kashmir in 1846. Although the family never returned to Kashmir, the memory of the land and its people never left Iqbal, and he remained dedicated to the principle of self-determination for the people of Kashmir.

Life

Iqbal's parents raised him in a deeply Islamic environment. After Iqbal finished high school, he enrolled in the Scotch Mission College (later renamed Murray College). After two years he went on to the Government College in Lahore. By this time, Iqbal had mastered Urdu, Arabic, and Farsi under the guidance of Sayyid Mir Hasan (1844–1929), who had been markedly influenced by the Aligarh Movement of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817–1898). Under Sayyid Mir Hasan, Iqbal studied classical Urdu and Persian poetry, and his own poetic genius blossomed early. Iqbal then found a master of Urdu poetry in Navab Mirza Khan Dagh (1831–1905). Iqbal was on the creative path that was to bring him success and international fame; however, his personal life was marred by unhappiness that was to follow him for much of his life. In 1892 his parents had arranged his marriage to Karim Bibi, the daughter of an affluent physician in the city of Gujarat. Two children were born to the couple, but soon differences developed, and they separated. Iqbal married again and also had two children with his second wife.

Iqbal graduated cum laude from the Government College at Lahore and was also awarded a scholarship for further study toward a master's degree in philosophy. During his studies at the Government College, Iqbal was strongly influenced by Sir Thomas Arnold, an accomplished scholar who combined a profound knowledge of Western philosophy with a deep understanding of Islamic culture and Arabic literature. Arnold helped to instill a blending of Eastern and Western sensibilities in Iqbal, and inspired him to pursue higher graduate studies in Europe. In May 1899, a few months after Iqbal received a master's degree in philosophy, he was appointed the Macleod-Punjab Reader of Arabic at the University Oriental College in Lahore. From January 1901 to March 1904, he taught English intermittently at Islamia College at the Government College of Lahore.

In 1905 Iqbal went to Europe, studying in both Britain and Germany. In London he studied law at Lincoln's Inn. There he received the Bar-at-Law degree on 1 July 1908. At Trinity College of Cambridge University, he enrolled as a student of philosophy while simultaneously preparing a doctoral dissertation in philosophy for Munich University. The German university exempted him from a mandatory stay of two terms on campus before submitting his dissertation, "The Development of Metaphysics in Persia," and he was awarded a doctorate in philosophy on 4 November 1907. Iqbal's dissertation was published the following year in London. In Cambridge, Iqbal came under the influence of the neo-Hegelians John McTaggart and James Ward. Two outstanding Orientalists at Cambridge, E. G. Brown and Reynold A. Nicholson, also became his mentors; the latter translated Iqbal's Persian masterpiece *Asrar-i Khudi* when it was first published in 1915.

Iqbal never felt at home in politics, but he was invariably drawn into it. In May 1908 he joined the British Committee of the All-India Muslim League, to which he belonged for most of this life. Iqbal was elected a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly from 1926 to 1930. In 1930 the All-India Muslim League invited him to preside over its annual meeting, and his presidential address became a landmark in the Muslim national movement anticipating the creation of Pakistan. Iqbal called for "the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state" as "the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India."

Iqbal returned to England to attend the second (1931) and third (1932) London Round Table Conferences, called by the British government to consult with Indian leaders on constitutional reforms for India. In February 1933 Iqbal was back in Lahore. Seven months later, Muhammad Nadir Shah, the king of Afghanistan, invited him to visit Kabul to advise the Afghani government concerning the establishment of a new university utilizing the best of modern Western and traditional Islamic values.

After his return from Afghanistan, Iqbal's health steadily deteriorated. His intellect remained sharp, however, and during this time he conceived many new projects, including proposed studies on Islamic jurisprudence and the study of the Qur'an. During this period Iqbal also invited a younger Muslim scholar, Sayyid Abu al-A`la Mawdudi, to the Punjab, where he began to publish his well known journal, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*. Iqbal had hoped that Mawdudi would become a modernist scholar who would update Islamic ideas. Just before the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Mawdudi established Jamat-i-

Islami; after 1947, he moved to Lahore and involved himself in the struggle for power in Pakistan, presenting a very conservative paradigm of Islamic polity.

By 1938 Iqbal's health had sharply declined, and he died on 20 April. He was buried to the left of the steps leading to the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore; construction of the mausoleum over his grave was started in 1946, its marble provided by the government of Afghanistan.

Religious and Political Thought

Iqbal lived exclusively under British colonial rule, a period during which Muslims in the Indian subcontinent were profoundly influenced by the religious thought of Shah Wali Allah (1703–1762) and Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan. Shah Wali Allah was the first Muslim thinker to realize that Muslims were encountering a modern age in which old religious assumptions and beliefs would be challenged. His monumental study *Hujjat Allah albalighah* provided the intellectual foundations for updating Islam. Sir Sayyid, who lived through the life of the last Mughal emperor, was profoundly influenced by British political culture. He engendered an intellectual movement that came to be known as the Aligarh movement; it attempted to update Islam, popularize Western education, modernize Muslim culture, and encourage Muslims to cooperate with the British government in order to gain a fair share in the administration and political framework of India. This was the intellectual legacy inherited by Iqbal.

Iqbal's most notable philosophical and political prose works were: *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (Cambridge, U.K., 1908); *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, 1930); and his *Presidential Address to the Annual Meeting of the All-India Muslim League, 1930.* Iqbal here expounded the concept of two nations in India. Subsequently, his address came to be known as the conceptual basis for the state of Pakistan, although he did not use the name "Pakistan." The emphasis was on Muslim nationalism, giving shape and content to the national liberation movement of Muslims in India. Iqbal stressed the necessity of self-determination for the Muslims: "I'd like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Sindh and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British empire or without the British empire, and the formation of a consolidated North-West Muslim Indian State appears to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India."

Intellectually, however, Iqbal was not an enthusiastic supporter of nationalism, and especially nationalism among Muslims. He attempted to resolve this dilemma in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, his younger contemporary, writing:

> Nationalism in the sense of love of one's country and even readiness to die for its honor is part of the Muslim faith; it comes into conflict with Islam only when it begins to play the role of a political concept and claims that Islam should recede to the background of a mere private opinion and cease to be a living factor in the national life. Nationalism was an independent problem for Muslims only in those countries where they were in the minority. In countries with a Muslim majority, nationalism and Islam are practically identical, but in countries where Muslims are in the minority, their demands for self-determination as cultural unification are completely justified. ("Reply to Questions Raised by Jawaharlal Nehru," in S. A. Vahid, ed., *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, Lahore, 1964)

Iqbal composed his poetry in both Persian and Urdu. His six Persian works include: *Asrar-i khudi wa Rumuz-i Bikhudi* (Secrets of the self and mysteries of selflessness, 1915); *Payam-i Mashriq* (Message of the East, 1923); *Zabur-i ʿAjam* (Scripture of the East, 1927); *Javid-namah* (Book of eternity, 1932); *Pas chih bayad kard, ay aqvam-i sharq* (What should be done, oh nations of the East, 1926); and *Armaghan-i Hijaz* (A gift of the Hejaz, 1938). His Urdu works, which are primarily responsible for his popularity in Pakistan as well as in India, are: *Bang-i dara* (Voice of the caravan, 1924); *Bal-i Jibril* (Gabriel's wing, 1935); and *Zarb-i Kalim*(The rod of Moses, 1936). Poetry, like visual art, is susceptible to varied interpretations; consequently his admirers, relying primarily on his poetry, have variously attempted to prove him a Pakistani nationalist, a Muslim nationalist, a Muslim socialist, and even a secularist.

Relations with Jinnah and the Emergence of Pakistan

Iqbal remained a steady supporter of the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. During 1936 and 1937, Iqbal wrote eight letters to Jinnah, emphasizing the partition of India into two states; earlier, during the 1920s, Jinnah was still groping for coexistence with the Indian National Congress, and Iqbal had opposed Jinnah's policies.

Reluctantly but steadily, Iqbal had supported the establishment of a separate Muslim identity in the Indian subcontinent, while to the British and the Congress he often extended tactical cooperation. In the 1920s, Jinnah was willing to compromise with the Congress by abolishing separate electorates for Muslims in the provincial legislatures. Jinnah had agreed with the president of the Congress on 20 March 1927 to accept the joint electorates under certain conditions. Muslim seats in the central legislature were to be no less than one-third of the total seats. This agreement came to be known as the Delhi Proposals. In May 1927 the Punjab Muslim League, under the leadership of Mian Muhammad Shafi, Mian Fazl-i-Husein, and Iqbal, denounced the Delhi Proposals. The Punjab's opposition seriously weakened Jinnah's bargaining position with the Congress, which nevertheless participated in the All Parties Conference from 12 February to 15 March 1928, which produced the revisions of the Nehru Report. This proposal granted Muslims only 25 percent of the legislative representation. The Congress adopted the Nehru Report and decided to initiate a policy of nonviolent noncooperation against the British if they did not accept it by 31 December 1929.

This reflected the Congress's determination to defy the British government for not including an Indian in the Simon Commission, which was established to make recommendations for future constitutional reforms in India. The appointment of the Simon Commission split the All-India Muslim League into two factions, one led by Jinnah and Saif-ud-Din Kitchlew and the other by Mian Muhammad Shafi and Iqbal. The Shafi League met in 1928 in Lahore, rejected the Delhi Proposals, and offered cooperation to the Simon Commission.

At Calcutta in 1928, the Jinnah League disavowed the Punjab Muslim League, adopting the Delhi Proposals and accepting the Nehru Report, subject to four amendments; all four proposed amendments were rejected by the Congress. The Jinnah League was thus repudiated by the Congress and simultaneously alienated from significant Muslim opinion. The split in the ranks of the Muslim League did not end until 1934, when Jinnah was finally elected president of the united Muslim League.

In the interim period, 1930 to 1934, Iqbal provided ideological leadership, articulating the Muslims' demand for a separate Muslim state. It is in light of this political split within the ranks of the League that Iqbal's presidential address of 1930 should be examined. That Allahabad address formulated the two-nation theory, which Jinnah finally accepted when he presided over the Muslim League's annual meeting in Lahore in 1940. He then demanded that India should be partitioned. Even

though Iqbal was by no means a skillful politician, he nevertheless may thus be seen as a political guide of Jinnah in regard to the creation of Pakistan.

Hafeez Malik

Source Citation:

Malik, Hafeez. "Muhammad Iqbal." *Encyclopedia of India*. Ed. Stanley Wolpert. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 4 Jan. 2012.

Al-Khansa

World Eras , 2002

Born: 575

Died: 644?

Occupation: Poet

Early Life.

Tumadir bint 'Amr of the tribe of Sulaym, a pastoral tribe in Najd in central Arabia, was a well-known pre-Islamic poet whose poetry continued to be celebrated in the Muslim era. Her nickname was al-Khansa', possibly meaning "gazelle" or "pug-nosed," the latter being the better-known explanation. A strong-willed woman, she rejected the marriage proposal of a renowned tribal chief, Durayd ibn al-Simmah al-Jushami, because she considered him too old. Perhaps the most traumatic events in her life, perhaps, were the deaths of her brothers Mu'awiyah and Sakhr in tribal battles in 612 and 615. Much of her poetry consists of sorrowful eulogies for them, through which she encouraged her tribe to avenge itself on their killers. Al-Khansa' is also said to have appeared at the festive market of 'Ukaz in Makkah for the poetry contests.

Conversion to Islam

In about 630, late in the Prophet Muhammad's career, al-Khansa is said to have gone to Madinah and embraced Islam, and Muslim tradition states that four of her six sons were slain in 637 while fighting for Islam against the Persians at al-Qadisiyyah, a battle at which she is also said to have been present. Afterward, she returned to her Arabian homeland, where she died.

Poetry. Although she lived into the Muslim era and became a Muslim, al-Khansa's poetry remained rooted strongly in pre-Islamic times and themes. Of her poetic output, nearly a thousand lines remain. Most of her poems are elegies (*marathi*), particularly for her brothers. Al-Khansa' became recognized as a true master of this ancient genre. She greatly added to its breadth of expression, and her innovations became standard in later elegiac tradition. The intensity and force of her expression, coupled with her tenderness and her concentration on the necessity and centrality of grief, make her poetry particularly striking and impressive. A poem commemorating her brother Sakhr includes these lines:

> The rising of the sun reminds me of Sakhr,
>
> and I remember him with every setting of the sun.
>
> If not for the numerousness of those bewailing
>
> their brothers, I would have killed myself!
>
> But I do not cease seeing one bereft of her child
>
> and one weeping over the dead on an unlucky day.
>
> I see her distracted by grief, weeping for her brother
>
> the evening of his loss or on the day after.
>
> They do not bewail the like of my brother, but
>
> I console myself over him through their sorrow.

Al-Khansa's elegies were eventually collected in a *Diwan* (Collected Poems) by Ibn al-Sikkit (802-858), a literary scholar of the early Abbasid era.

Source Citation:

"Al-Khansa'." *World Eras*. Ed. Susan L. Douglass. Vol. 2: Rise and Spread of Islam, 622-1500. Detroit: Gale, 2002. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 4 Jan. 2012.

Emily Dickinson

Encyclopedia of World Biography , December 12, 1998

Born: December 10, 1830 in Massachusetts, Amherst, United States

Died: May 15, 1886 in Amherst, Massachusetts, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Poet

One of the finest lyric poets in the English language, the American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was a keen observer of nature and a wise interpreter of human passion. Her family and friends published most of her work posthumously.

American poetry in the 19th century was rich and varied, ranging from the symbolic fantasies of Edgar Allan Poe through the moralistic quatrains of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to the revolutionary free verse of Walt Whitman. In the privacy of her study Emily Dickinson developed her own forms and pursued her own visions, oblivious of literary fashions and unconcerned with the changing national literature. If she was influenced at all by other writers, they were John Keats, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Isaac Watts (his hymns), and the biblical prophets.

Dickinson was born on Dec. 10, 1830, in Amherst, Mass., the eldest daughter of Edward Dickinson, a successful lawyer, member of Congress, and for many years treasurer of Amherst College, and of Emily Norcross Dickinson, a submissive, timid woman. The Dickinsons' only son, William Austin, also a lawyer, succeeded his father as treasurer of the college. Their youngest child, Lavinia, was the chief housekeeper and, like her sister Emily, remained at home, unmarried, all her life. The sixth member of this tightly knit group was Susan Gilbert, an ambitious and witty schoolmate of Emily's, who married Austin in 1856 and moved into the house next door to the Dickinsons. At first she was Emily's confidante and a valued critic of her poetry, but by 1879 Emily was speaking of her "pseudo-sister" and had long since ceased exchanging notes and poems.

Early Education

Amherst in the 1840s was a sleepy village in the lush Connecticut Valley, dominated by the Church and the college. Dickinson was reared in Trinitarian Congregationalism, but she never joined

the Church and probably chafed at the austerity of the town. Concerts were rare; card games, dancing, and theater were unheard of. For relaxation she walked the hills with her dog, visited friends, and read. But it is also obvious that Puritan New England bred in her a sharp eye for local color, a love of introspection and self-analysis, and a fortitude that sustained her through years of intense loneliness.

Dickinson graduated from Amherst Academy in 1847. The following year (the longest time she was ever to spend away from home) she attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary at South Hadley, but because of her fragile health she did not return. At the age of 17 she settled into the Dickinson home and turned herself into a competent housekeeper and a more than ordinary observer of Amherst life.

Early Work

It is not known when Dickinson began to write poetry or what happened to the poems of her early youth. Only five poems can be dated prior to 1858, the year in which she began gathering her work into hand-written fair copies bound loosely with looped thread to make small packets. She sent these five early poems to friends in letters or as valentines, and one of them was published anonymously without her permission in the *Springfield Republican* (Feb. 20, 1852). After 1858 she apparently convinced herself she had a genuine talent, for now the packets were carefully stored in an ebony box, awaiting inspection by future readers or even by a publisher.

Publication, however, was not easily arranged. After Dickinson besieged her friend Samuel Bowles, editor of the *Republican,* with poems and letters for 4 years, he published two poems, both anonymously: "I taste a liquor never brewed" (May 4, 1861) and "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" (March 1, 1862). And the first of these was edited, probably by Bowles, to regularize (and thus, flatten) the rhymes and the punctuation. Dickinson began the poem: "I taste a liquor never brewed--/ From Tankards scooped in Pearl--/ Not all the Frankfort Berries/ Yield such an Alcohol." But Bowles printed: "I taste a liquor never brewed,/ From tankards scooped in pearl;/ Not Frankfort berries yield the sense/ Such a delicious whirl." She used no title; Bowles titled it "The May-Wine." (Only seven poems were published during her lifetime, and all had been altered by editors.)

Years of Emotional Crisis

Between 1858 and 1866 Dickinson wrote more than 1100 poems, full of aphorisms, paradoxes, off rhymes, and eccentric grammar. Few are more than 16 lines long, composed in meters based on English hymnology. The major subjects are love and separation, death, nature, and God--but especially love. When she writes "My life closed twice before its close," one can only guess who her real or fancied lovers might have been. Higginson was not one of them. It is more than likely that her first "dear friend" was Benjamin Newton, a young man too poor to marry, who had worked for a few years in her father's law office. He left Amherst for Worcester and died there in 1853.

During a visit to Philadelphia a year later Dickinson met the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. Sixteen years her senior, a brilliant preacher, already married, he was hardly more than a mental image of a lover. There is no doubt she made him this, but nothing more. He visited her once in 1860. When he moved to San Francisco in May 1862, she was in despair. Only a month before, Samuel Bowles had sailed for Europe to recover his health. Little wonder that in her first letter to Higginson she said, "I had a terror...--and so I sing as the Boy does by the Burying Ground--because I am afraid." She needed love, but she had to indulge this need through her poems, perhaps because she felt she could cope with it no other way.

When Bowles returned to Amherst in November, Dickinson was so overwhelmed she remained in her bedroom and sent a note down, "... That you return to us alive is better than a summer, and more to hear your voice below than news of any bird." By the time Wadsworth returned from California in 1870 and resettled in Philadelphia, the crisis was over. His second visit, in 1880, was anticlimax. Higginson had not saved her life; her life was never in danger. What had been in danger was her emotional equilibrium and her control over a talent that was so intense it longed for the eruptions that might have destroyed it.

Last Years

In the last 2 decades of her life Dickinson wrote fewer than 50 poems a year, perhaps because of continuing eye trouble, more probably because she had to take increasing responsibility in running the household. Her father died in 1874, and a year later her mother suffered a paralyzing stroke that left her an invalid until her death. There was little time for poetry, not even for serious consideration of marriage (if it was actually proffered) with a widower and old family friend, Judge Otis Lord. Their love

was genuine, but once again the timing was wrong. It was too late to recast her life completely. Her mother died in 1882, Judge Lord 2 years later. Dickinson's health failed noticeably after a nervous collapse in 1884, and on May 15, 1886, she died of nephritis.

Posthumous Publication

How the complete poems of Dickinson were finally gathered is a publishing saga almost too complicated for brief summary. Lavinia Dickinson inherited the ebony box; she asked Mabel Loomis Todd, the wife of an Amherst astronomy professor, to join Higginson in editing the manuscripts. Unfortunately, they felt even then that they had to alter the syntax, smooth the rhymes, cut some lines, and create titles for each poem. Three volumes appeared in quick succession: 1890, 1891, and 1896. In 1914 Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, published some of the poems her mother, Susan, had saved. In the next 3 decades four more volumes appeared, the most important being *Bolts of Melody* (1945), edited by Mrs. Todd and her daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, from the manuscripts the Todds had never returned to Lavinia Dickinson. In 1955 Thomas H. Johnson prepared for Harvard University Press a three-volume edition, chronologically arranged, of "variant readings critically compared with all known manuscripts." Here, for the first time, the reader saw the poems as Dickinson had left them. The Johnson text of the 1,775 extant poems is now the standard one.

It is clear that Dickinson could not have written to please publishers, who were not ready to risk her striking aphoristic style and original metaphors. She had the right to educate the public, as Poe and Whitman eventually did, but she never had the invitation. Had she published during her lifetime, adverse public criticism might have driven her into deeper solitude, even silence. "If fame belonged to me," she told Higginson, "I could not escape her; if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase... My barefoot rank is better." The 20th century has lifted her without doubt to the first rank among poets.

Source Citation:

"Emily Dickinson." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Detroit: Gale, 1998. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 4 Jan. 2012.

Walt Whitman

Encyclopedia of World Biography , December 12, 1998

Born: May 31, 1819 in United States, West Hills, New York

Died: March 26, 1892 in Camden, New Jersey, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Poet

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is generally considered to be the most important American poet of the 19th century. He wrote in free verse, relying heavily on the rhythms of native American speech.

In all, over a 37-year period, Walt Whitman published nine separate editions of his masterpiece, *Leaves of Grass*. The final, 1892 edition, is the one familiar to readers today. He has strongly influenced the direction of 20th-century American poets, especially Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, and, most recently, Allen Ginsberg and other "beat" poets.

Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, in West Hills, Huntington town, Long Island, the second of nine children. His family soon moved to Brooklyn, where he attended school for a few years. By 1830 his formal education was over, and for the next five years he learned the printing trade. For about five years, beginning in 1836, he taught school, on Long Island; during this time he also founded the weekly newspaper *Long-Islander*.

Whitman and the Civil War

Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War, Whitman went to Virginia to search for his brother George, reported wounded in action. Here Whitman experienced the war at first hand. He remained in Washington, working part-time in the Paymaster's Office. He devoted many long hours serving as a volunteer aide in the hospitals in Washington, ministering to the needs of the sick and wounded soldiers. Whitman's humanity was such that he brought comfort to Federal as well as Confederate soldiers. His daily contact with sickness and death took its toll. Whitman himself became ill with "hospital malaria." Within a few months his health was "quite reestablished." In January 1865 he took a clerk's position in the Indian Bureau of the Department of the Interior.

The impact of the war on Whitman was reflected in his separately published *Drum-Taps* (1865). In such poems as "Cavalry Crossing a Ford," "The Wound-Dresser," "Come Up from the Fields Father," "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," "Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim," and "Year

That Trembled and Reel'd Beneath Me," Whitman caught with beautiful simplicity of statement the horror, loneliness, and anguish caused by this national calamity.

A Different Emphasis in Themes

Following the Civil War and the publication of the fourth edition, Whitman's poetry became increasingly preoccupied with themes relating to the soul, death, and immortality. He was entering the final phase of his career. Within the span of some dozen years, the poet of the body had given way to the poet of internationalism and the cosmic. Such poems as "Whispers of Heavenly Death," "Darest Thou Now O Soul," "The Last Invocation," and "A Noiseless Patient Spider," with their emphasis on the spiritual, paved the way for "Passage to India" (1871), Whitman's most important (and ambitious) poem of the post-Civil War period.

In "Passage to India," Whitman explored the implications to mankind of three great scientific achievements of the age--the completion in 1869 of the Union Pacific Railroad, spanning the continental United States and of the Suez Canal, connecting Europe with Asia, and the completion, a decade earlier, of the Atlantic cable, connecting America and Europe. To Whitman, these three great events had symbolically brought mankind together in a one-world federation. After centuries of struggle against bitter odds, man had at last achieved a harmony and unity with nature. What remained was for him to achieve his complete spiritual union with God, a transcendent universal spirit, or life force. This was the soul's "Passage to India," a passage to the very cradle of civilization.

Democratic Vistas

In 1871 Whitman published *Democratic Vistas,* perhaps his most important prose work. He was thoroughly disenchanted with the pervading corruption in the United States during the period of Reconstruction. However, he believed in the ultimate triumph of the democratic ideal in the United States: "Many will say it is a dream ... but I confidently expect a time when there will be seen ... running ... through ... America, threads of manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long, carried to degrees hitherto unknown."

In 1871-1872 and 1876, Whitman published the fifth and sixth editions of *Leaves*. The most notable poems were "The Base of All Metaphysics," "Prayer of Columbus," and "Song of the Redwood-Tree." In 1873 Whitman suffered a paralytic stroke and moved from Washington to Camden, N.J.

Thereafter, he devoted much of his time to putting *Leaves of Grass* into final order. He had recovered sufficiently from his stroke to take a trip West in 1879 and to Ontario a year later.

In 1881 Whitman settled on the final arrangement of the poems in *Leaves of Grass,* and thereafter no revisions were made. (All new poems written after 1881 were added as annexes to *Leaves* .) The seventh edition was published by James Osgood. The Boston district attorney threatened prosecution against Osgood unless certain objectionable poems were expurgated. When Whitman refused, Osgood dropped publication of the book. However, a Philadelphia publisher reissued the book in 1882.

Specimen Days and Collect

Whitman's reminiscences of the Civil War and other prose pieces were published as *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882). The so-called "Death-bed Edition" of *Leaves of Grass,* published in 1892, is the one familiar to readers today.

In his last years Whitman received the homage due a great literary figure and personality. He died on March 26, 1892, in Camden. *Leaves of Grass* has been widely translated, and his reputation is now worldwide. His emphasis on his native idiom, his frank approach to subject matter hitherto thought unsuitable to poetry, and his variety of poetic expression have all contributed to making him a strong influence on the direction of modern poetry.

Source Citation:

"Walt Whitman." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Detroit: Gale, 1998. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 4 Jan. 2012.

Maya Angelou

Contemporary Black Biography , August 1, 1997

Born: April 04, 1928 in United States, Missouri, St. Louis

Nationality: American

Occupation: Writer

Contributor of articles, short stories, and poems to periodicals, and of material to books.

Author, poet, playwright, professional stage and screen producer, director, and performer, and singer. Taught modern dance at Habima Theatre, Tel Aviv, Israel, and the Rome Opera House, Rome, Italy. Appeared in *Porgy and Bess* on twenty-two-nation tour sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, 1954-55; appeared in Off-Broadway plays *Calypso Heatwave*, 1957, and *The Blacks*, 1960; produced and performed in *Cabaret for Freedom*, with Godfrey Cambridge, Off-Broadway, 1960; University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies, Legon-Accra, Ghana, assistant administrator of School of Music and Drama, 1963-66; appeared in *Mother Courage* at University of Ghana, 1964, and in *Meda* in Hollywood, 1966; made Broadway debut in *Look Away*, 1973; directed film *All Day Long*, 1974, and *Down in the Delta*, Miramax, 1998; directed her play *And Still I Rise in California*, 1976; directed Errol John's *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* in London, England, 1988; appeared in film *Roots*, 1977. Television narrator, interviewer, and host for Afro-American specials and theatre series, 1972; radio show host for XM Satellite Radio, 2006. Lecturer at University of California, Los Angeles, 1966; writer in residence at University of Kansas, 1970; distinguished visiting professor at Wake Forest University, 1974, Wichita State University, 1974, and California State University, Sacramento, 1974; professor at Wake Forest University, 1981--. Northern coordinator of Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1959-60; appointed member of American Revolution Bicentennial Council by President Gerald R. Ford, 1975-76; member of National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year.

Nominated for National Book Award, 1970, for *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Yale University fellowship, 1970; Pulitzer Prize nomination, 1972, for *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie*; Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award nomination from League of New York Theatres and Producers, 1973, for performance in*Look Away*; Rockefeller Foundation scholar in Italy, 1975; honorary degrees from Smith College, 1975, Mills College, 1975, Lawrence University, 1976, and Wake Forest University, 1977; named Woman of the Year in Communications by *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1976; Tony Award nomination for best supporting actress, 1977, for *Roots*; named one of the top one hundred most influential women by *Ladies Home Journal*, 1983; North Carolina Award in Literature, 1987; named Woman of the Year by *Essence* magazine, 1992; named Distinguished Woman of North Carolina, 1992; recipient, Horatio Alger Award, 1992; Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word or Non-Traditional Album, 1994, for recording of "On The Pulse of the Morning"; Coretta Scott King Award for Illustration, 1994, for *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*; Presidential Medal of Arts, 2000; Quills Award for

Poetry, 2006, for *Amazing Peace*; Lincoln Medal, 2008; named one of *Glamour*'s Women of the Year, 2009.

The life experiences of the richly talented Maya Angelou--author, poet, actress, singer, dancer, playwright, director, and producer--are the cornerstone of her most acclaimed work, a multi-volume autobiography that traces the foundations of her identity as a twentieth-century American black woman. Beginning with the best-selling *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou's autobiographical books chart her beginnings in rural segregated Arkansas and urban St. Louis, her turbulent adolescence in California, and through her adult triumphs as a performing artist and writer, her work in the Civil Rights Movement, her travels to Africa, and her return to the United States. "One of the geniuses of Afro- American serial autobiography," according to Houston A. Baker in the *New York Times Book Review*, Angelou has been praised for the rich and insightful prose of her narratives and for offering what many observers feel is an indispensable record of black experience. Author James Baldwin wrote on the publication of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: "This testimony from a Black sister marks the beginning of a new era in the minds and hearts and lives of all Black men and women."

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou was sent at the age of three to live with her paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas, an event that served as the starting point for *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The book depicts Angelou's early years in Stamps, where her grandmother ran the town's only black-owned general store, and is a revealing portrait of the customs and harsh circumstances of black life in the segregated South. Economic hardship, murderous hate, and ingrained denigration were part of daily life in Stamps, and Angelou translates their impact on her early years. "If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat," she wrote in the book. "It is an unnecessary insult."

Angelou also spent part of her youth in St. Louis with her mother--a glamorous and dynamic figure who occasionally worked as a nightclub performer. The book concludes with Angelou's early adolescent years in California and the birth of her illegitimate son, Guy. Much of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is grim--particularly Angelou's rape at the age of eight--yet it marks her distinct ability to recollect personal truth through insightful and powerful images, sights, and language. Angelou earned high marks from critics who praised her narrative skills and eloquent prose. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in the *New York Times* called *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* "a carefully wrought,

simultaneously touching and comic memoir ... [the] beauty [of which] is not in the story but in the telling." Sidonie Ann Smith wrote in the *Southern Humanities Review* that Angelou's "genius as a writer is her ability to recapture the texture of the way of life in the texture of its idioms, its idiosyncratic vocabulary and especially in its process of image-making.... That [Angelou] chooses to recreate the past in its own sounds suggests to the reader that she accepts the past and recognizes its beauty and its ugliness, its assets and its liabilities, its strength and its weakness.... Ultimately Maya Angelou's style testifies to her reaffirmation of self-acceptance, [which] she achieves within the pattern of the autobiography."

In the 1950s Angelou embarked upon a career as a stage performer, working as an actress, singer, and dancer. *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* recounts Angelou's transition from late adolescence to early adulthood, when she began to define herself as a performing artist. She toured Europe with a U.S. State Department production of the black opera *Porgy and Bess* in the mid-1950s, a period that became a turning point in her life. While with the theater company Angelou began to link the turmoil of her past with her identity as a black adult, and, as Cudjoe commented, the book documents the "personal triumph of [a] remarkable black woman." Cudjoe wrote: "The pride which she takes in her company's professionalism, their discipline onstage, and the wellspring of spirituality that the opera emoted, all seem to conduce toward an organic harmony of her personal history as it intertwined with the social history of her people."

In *The Heart of a Woman*, Angelou covers the late 1950s and early 1960s, a period in which black artists in the United States were increasingly addressing racial abuse and black liberation. In the book Angelou herself makes a decision to move away from show business in order to, as she describes it, "take on the responsibility of making [people] think. [It] was the time to demonstrate my own seriousness." She joined a group called the Harlem Writers Guild and in 1960 co-wrote the musical revue *Cabaret for Freedom*, which opened in New York City. Later that year she was asked by Martin Luther King, Jr., to become northern coordinator for the then-fledgling civil rights organization he had helped found, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. *The Heart of a Woman* concludes with Angelou and her son, Guy, moving to Africa, where she first worked for an English-language newsweekly in Cairo, and then at the University of Ghana. Dictionary of Literary Biography contributor Lynn Z. Bloom called *The Heart of a Woman* a particularly inspired book. Angelou's "enlarged focus and

clear vision transcend the particulars," Bloom wrote, and like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the book presents "a fascinating universality of perspective and psychological depth."

Commenting on Angelou's autobiographical writings, O'Neale wrote that one of the author's overall achievements is the elevation of the black female in literature. "One who has made her life her message and whose message to all aspiring Black women is the reconstruction of her experiential 'self,' is Maya Angelou. With the wide public and critical reception of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in the early seventies, Angelou bridged the gap between life and art, a step that is essential if Black women are to be deservedly credited with the mammoth and creative feat of noneffacing survival." Cudjoe similarly commented that Angelou's autobiographies rescue not only her personal history, but the collective history of all black women: "It is in response to these specific concerns that Maya Angelou offered her autobiographical statements, presenting a powerful, authentic and pro- found signification of the condition of Afro-American womanhood in her quest for understanding and love rather than for bitterness and despair. Her work is a triumph in the articulation of truth in simple, forthright terms."

In addition to her books of autobiography, Angelou has written several volumes of poetry that further explore the South, racial confrontation, and the triumph of black people against overwhelming odds. According to Tate, Angelou's poems "are characterized by a spontaneous joyfulness and an indomitable spirit to survive." Among her many accomplishments, Angelou wrote the screenplay and score for the 1972 film *Georgia, Georgia*, and in 1979 penned the screen adaptation of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She has made numerous television appearances, including her 1977 role in the landmark television movie,*Roots*, and as a guest on many talk shows.

Maya Angelou's writings and speeches which stress the hopeful innocence of children has earned her wide acclaim and many fans. Such devoted enthusiasts include Oprah Winfrey and President Bill Clinton, who invited Angelou to deliver a poem at his inauguration in 1993. Angelou became the first African American to read a poem at a presidential inauguration. The poem, "On the Pulse of Morning," electrified the audience and was published in a hardcover edition of Angelou's poetry. Because of her moving literary works and devotion to the power of expression, Maya Angelou was awarded the NAACP's Spingarn Medal in 1993 and the first Medal of Dist inction from the University of Hawaii Board of Regents in 1994.

Angelou, with her booming laughter and deep rhythmic voice, has always been a symbol of strength and leadership for the plight of women and the underprivileged. She was named keynote speaker for the Chicago Foundation for Women in 1994. In September 1996, Angelou and Camille Cosby joined to help African American women chart new directions in their lives with a $30 million dollar fund raising campaign for the National Council of Negro Women.

In 1995, Angelou starred in the film *How to Make an American Quilt* with Winona Ryder and Ellen Burstyn. She also delivered her poem "A Brave and Startling Truth" at the United Nations 50th birthday bash in San Francisco. Angelou contributed short stories to the HBO program *America's Dream*, which aired during Black History Month in 1996 and collaborated with musicians Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson on their 1996 release *Been Found*. She also wrote the lyrics to the musical *King*, which premiered in Washington DC on January 19, 1997 as part of the inaugural festivities for President Bill Clinton. In 1998, she directed a motion picture entitled *Down in the Delta*. The film focused on a woman from Chicago who traveled to Mississippi to locate her African-American roots.

Angelou continued to publish new works and to remain in the public eye in the early 2000s. In 2004, she published *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories and Recipes*, a cookbook which included many autobiographical anecdotes related to food in her life. *Bookseller* called it "a joy to read." A year later, Angelou composed an anti-war poem, "Amazing Peace," for the White House Christmas tree lighting ceremony. Like "On the Pulse of Morning," "Amazing Peace" was published in book form and became a best-seller. In 2006, Angelou launched a career in a new medium when she began hosting an inspirational show on the "Oprah and Friends" channel for XM Satellite Radio.

In 2008, Angelou published *Letter to My Daughter,* which, according to the author's website, is "dedicated to the daughter she never had but sees all around her." A contributor to *Publishers Weekly* noted that the insights in the slim volume, which Angelou draws from personal experiences throughout her life, are "earnest and offered with warmth." Angelou also added to her film credits in 2008, narrating and providing poetry for the documentary film *The Black Candle: A Kwanzaa Celebration.* Directed by M.K. Asante Jr., the film focuses on the African American experience and the seven principles at the core of the Kwanzaa holiday.

Angelou published another cookbook in 2010. *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart*, like*Hallelujah! The Welcome Table*, includes autobiographical sketches about the recipes' place in Angelou's life but also focuses on the importance of portion control.

Fluent in French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, and Fanti, a language of southern Ghana, Angelou is a popular lecturer and tours throughout the United States.

Source Citation: "Maya Angelou." *Contemporary Black Biography*. Vol. 15. Detroit: Gale, 1997. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 4 Jan. 2012.

Robert Lee Frost

Encyclopedia of World Biography, December 12, 1998

Born: March 26, 1874 in United States, California, San Francisco

Died: January 29, 1963 in Massachusetts, United States, Boston

Nationality: American

Occupation: Poet

Pulitzer Prize for poetry, 1924, for *New Hampshire;* Pulitzer Prize for poetry, 1931, for *Collected Poems;* Pulitzer Prize for poetry, 1937, for *A Further Range;* Pulitzer Prize for poetry, 1943, for *A Witness Tree.*

Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) was an intentionally American and traditionalist poet in an age of internationalized and experimental art. He used New England idioms, characters, and settings, recalling the roots of American culture, to get at universal experience.

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco on March 26, 1874. His father came from prerevolutionary Maine and New Hampshire stock but hated New England because the Civil War it had supported had robbed his own father of employment in the cotton mill economy. When Frost's father graduated from Harvard in 1872, he left New England. He paused in Lewistown, Pa., to teach and married another teacher, Isabelle Moodie, a Scotswoman. They moved to San Francisco, where the elder Frost became an editor and politician. Their first child was named for the Southern hero Gen. Robert E. Lee.

When Frost's father died in 1884, his will stipulated burial in New England. His wife and two children, Robert and Jeanie, went east for the funeral. Lacking funds to return to California, they settled in Salem, Mass., where Mrs. Frost taught school.

Transplanted New Englander

Robert had been a city boy, a proud Californian, and no student. Transplanted, he grew sensitive to New England's speechways, taciturn characters, and customs. He also became a serious student and graduated from Lawrence High School as valedictorian and class poet in 1892. He enrolled at Dartmouth College but soon left. He had become engaged to Elinor White, classmate and fellow valedictorian, who was completing her college education. Frost moved from job to job, working in mills, at newspaper reporting, and at teaching, all the while writing poetry. In 1894 he sold his first poem, "My Butterfly," to the *New York Independent*. Overjoyed, he had two copies of a booklet of lyrics privately printed, one for his fiancée and one for himself. He delivered Elinor's copy in person but did not find her response adequate. Thinking he had lost her, he tore up his copy and wandered south as far as the Dismal Swamp (from Virginia to North Carolina), even contemplating suicide.

In 1895, however, Frost married Elinor and tried to make a career of teaching. He helped his mother run a small private school in Lawrence, Mass., where his first son was born. He spent 2 years at Harvard (1897-1899), but again undergraduate study proved uncongenial. With a newborn daughter as well as a son, he tried chicken farming at Methuen, Mass., and in 1900, when his nervousness was diagnosed as a forewarning of tuberculosis, he moved his poultry business to Derry, N.H. There his first son soon died. In 1906 Frost was stricken with pneumonia and almost died, and a year later his fourth daughter died. This grief and suffering, as well as lesser frustrations in personal life and business, turned Frost more and more to poetry. Once again he tried teaching, in Derry and then in Plymouth, N.H.

Creation of the Poet

In 1912, almost 40 and with only a few poems published, Frost sold his farm and used an annuity from his grandfather to go to England and gamble everything on poetry. The family settled on a farm in Buckinghamshire, and Frost began to write. Ezra Pound, the expatriate American poet, helped him get published in periodicals, but Frost resented Pound's excessive management.

Frost published *A Boy's Will* (1913), and it was well received. Though it contains some 19th-century diction, the words and rhythms are generally colloquial and subtly simple. Written in conventional rhymed stanzas and blank verse, the poems begin in delight and end in wisdom, as Frost later said poems should. They move through various subjective moods toward modest revelations. Such poems as "Into My Own," "Mowing," and "A Tuft of Flowers" convey an inclination toward nature, solitude, and meditation, toward the beauty of fact, and toward a New England individualism that acknowledges a need for love and community.

North of Boston (1914), also published in England, is more objective, made up mainly of blank verse monologues and dramatic narratives. "The Death of the Hired Man," soberly suspenseful and compassionate, with lyric moments of waiting, has more to do with the mutual understanding in a marriage than with death. "Mending Wall" is a bantering satire contrasting a tradition-bound farmer and his neighbor, a straight-faced tease. In "After Apple-picking" the picker asks quizzically whether he should settle for being plain tired or inflate his state by identifying it with the drowsiness of autumn. "Home Burial" and "A Servant of Servants" dramatize respectively a hysteria bred of loneliness and death, and the precarious sanity of a rural drudge.

North of Boston compounded the success of *A Boy's Will,* and the two volumes announced the two modes of Frost's best poetry, the lyric and the narrative. Although immediately established as a nature poet, he did not idealize nature. He addressed not only its loveliness but also the isolation, harshness, and anxiety its New England intimates had to endure. The reticence of his poetry, however, is not simply that of a taciturn New Englander; it restrains tremendous psychic and sexual forces, a violent and suicidal bent, and deep emotional needs that occasionally flashed out in his poetry and personal life.

Frost's place in literary tradition had also begun to clarify. His work led back to aspects of Thomas Hardy, Emily Dickinson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Yankees Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, and John Greenleaf Whittier, and to characteristics of William Wordsworth, English 18th-century meditators on landscape, John Donne, and the Latin idylls and eclogues of Theocritus and Virgil. But Frost's irony and ambiguity, his concreteness and colloquial tone, his skepticism and honesty bespoke the modern.

A Public Figure

When the Frosts returned to America in 1915, *North of Boston* was a best seller. Sudden acclaim embarrassed Frost, who had always avoided crowds. He withdrew to a small farm in Franconia, N.H., but financial need soon compelled him to respond to demands for readings and lectures. In 1915 and 1916 he was respectively Phi Beta Kappa poet at Tufts College and at Harvard. He conquered his shyness, developing an epigrammatic, folksy platform manner that made him one of the most popular performers in America and abroad. His tall muscular body and rugged face with its pale watchful eyes became a familiar sight; as the hair whitened, the face grew craggy, and the body thickened, those eyes remained the same.

From Frost's talks, his few published essays, and his poems, the outline of a poetic theory emerged. He strove for the sound of sense, for the colloquial, for a tension between the natural rhythm of speech and the basic iambic meter of English verse. He felt that the emotion that began a poem should generate a form through likenesses and contraries and lead to a clarification of experience. This was the way to spontaneity and surprise.

Mountain Interval (1916) brought together lyrics and narratives. The five dramatic lyrics of "The Hill Wife" look at a marriage dying on a solitary farm. On the other hand, "Meeting and Passing" uses a few vivid images to infuse a courtship walk with the promise of joy. The hilarious slide in "Brown's Descent" and the youthful tree-swinging of "Birches" (although its exuberance is restrained from hyperbole by "matter of fact") are countered by the deadly accident of "Out, Out--."

In 1917 Frost became one of the first poets-in-residence on an American campus. He taught at Amherst from 1917 to 1920, in 1918 receiving a master of arts, the first of many academic honors. The following year he moved his farm base to South Saftsbury, Vt. In 1920 he cofounded the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College, serving there each summer as lecturer and consultant. From 1921 to 1923 he was poet-in-residence at the University of Michigan.

Frost's *Selected Poems* and a new volume, *New Hampshire,* appeared in 1923. For the latter, in 1924 Frost received the first of four Pulitzer Prizes. Though the title poem does not present Frost at his best, the volume also contains such lovely lyrics as "Fire and Ice," "Nothing Gold Can Stay," and "To Earthward." In "For Once, Then Something" Frost slyly joshes critics who ask for deep, deep insights;

and in the dramatic narrative "The Witch of Coös" he turns a rustic comedy into a grotesque story of adultery and murder. "Two Look at Two" dramatizes a hushed encounter between human lovers and animal lovers.

Frost returned to Amherst for 2 years in 1923 and to the University of Michigan in 1925 and then settled at Amherst in 1926.

West Running Brook (1928) continued Frost's tonal variations and mingling of lyrics and narratives. The lyric "Tree at My Window" appeared along with "Acquainted with the Night," a narrative of a despairing nightwalker in a city where time is "neither right nor wrong." The title poem, recalling John Donne, is a little drama of married lovers and their thoughts upon a stream that goes "by contraries," a stream that itself contains a contrary, a wave thrown back against the current by a rock, a "backward motion toward the source" that emblems the lovers' own tendency.

Frost visited England and Paris in 1928 and published his *Collected Poems* in 1930. In 1934 he suffered another excruciating loss in the death of his daughter Marjorie. He returned to Harvard in 1936 and in the same year published *A Further Range*.

Later Work and Personal Tragedy

Honors, forebodings, and tragedies continued to crowd in on Frost. Because of his weak lungs, his doctor ordered him south in 1936, and thereafter he spent his winters in Florida. Frost served on the Harvard faculty during 1936-1937 and received an honorary doctorate. After his wife died of a heart attack in 1938, Frost resigned from the Amherst faculty and sold his house. That same year he was elected to the Board of Overseers of Harvard College. In 1939 his second *Collected Poems* appeared, and he began a 3-year stay at Harvard. In 1940 his only surviving son committed suicide.

A Witness Tree (1942) included the lyric "Happiness Makes Up in Height for What It Lacks in Length" and "Come In," in which the speaker prefers the guiding light of stars to the romantic dark of the woods and the song of an unseen bird. *Steeple Bush* (1947) contained the beautiful elegy of decay "Directive." The monologist visits an abandoned village where he used to live and, through allusions to the Holy Grail, converts the visit into a journey back toward a source, a stream beside which he administers communion to himself: "Drink and be whole again against confusion."

In 1945 Frost essayed something new in *A Masque of Reason,* a verse drama, too chatty for the stage. A modernization of the biblical story of Job, it is theistic and sets forth good-humoredly the Puritanic conviction that man, with his finite mind, must remain separate from God. *A Masque of Mercy* (1947), a companion verse drama based on the story of Jonah, has a heretical or individualistic air about it but still comes out essentially orthodox, suggesting that man with his limited knowledge must try to act justly and mercifully, for action is his salvation if it complies with God's will. "Nothing can make injustice just but mercy."

Frost's *Complete Poems* appeared in 1949, and in 1950 the U.S. Senate felicitated him on his seventy-fifth birthday. In 1957 he returned to England to receive doctoral degrees from Oxford and Cambridge. On his eighty-fifth birthday the Senate again felicitated him. In 1961, at the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, Frost recited "The Gift Outright," the first time a poet had honored a presidential inauguration. A final volume, *In the Clearing,* appeared in 1962.

On Jan. 29, 1963, Frost died in Boston of complications following an operation. He was buried in the family plot in Old Bennington, Vt. His "lover's quarrel with the world" was over.

Source Citation:

"Robert Lee Frost." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Detroit: Gale, 1998. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.

Shel Silverstein

Encyclopedia of World Biography , September 10, 1999

Born: November 23, 1932? in Illinois, United States, Chicago

Died: May 10, 1999 in United States, Key West, Florida

Nationality: American

Occupation: Writer

Michigan Young Readers' Award for *Where the Sidewalk Ends,* 1981; George C. Stone Center for Children's Books Award (twice), 1984.

Although Shel Silverstein (1930-1999) did not intend to become a children's writer, he is best known for his poetry for children. *The Giving Tree, Where the Sidewalk Ends,* and *A Light in the Attic* are some of his most notable works.

Shel Silverstein was born in 1930 in Chicago, Illinois. He started drawing and writing in his early teens because, according to him, he was not popular with the girls and was not good at sports. He did not have a lot of influences when he started to write and draw. But as he told Jean F. Mercier of *Publishers Weekly,* "I was also lucky that I didn't have anyone to copy, be impressed by. I had developed my own style." Indeed, that style is what has made him what some call a "literary cult figure."

Silverstein served with the U.S. armed forces in the 1950s, spending time in Korea and Japan. While in the service he drew cartoons for the *Pacific Stars and Stripes.* In 1952, he began his career as a writer and cartoonist for *Playboy* magazine. He was introduced to the distinguished book editor at Harper and Brothers, Ursula Nordstrom, who convinced him he could write for children.

A Unique Style

Silverstein's poetry for children is often silly, humorous, and a little strange. The accompanying black-and-white illustrations, amusing and sometimes rather morbid, are an integral part of the poetry, often needed in order to interpret the poem itself. Silverstein has been compared to poets such as Edward Lear, A. A. Milne, and Dr. Seuss. Many of his poems are adapted from his song lyrics, and the influence of his song-writing background is apparent in the poems' meters and rhythms. Eric A. Kimmel, in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers,* characterized Silverstein this way: "His poems read like those a fourth grader would write in the back of his notebook when the teacher's eye was turned." Kimmel goes on to say: "that may be precisely their appeal."

To say there is more than one interpretation of Silverstein's work is an understatement. Some believe it is simply amusing and fun; others contend that the silliness hides deeper symbolism. That symbolism has been classified by some as educational; by others as harmful to children. Regardless of the mixed critical reaction, Silverstein's books seem to be everywhere: libraries, classrooms, children's bookshelves, and they are being widely used in elementary schools to teach poetry.

Silverstein's first book for children, *Uncle Shelby's ABZ Book: A Primer for Tender Minds,* was published in 1961. This was followed by *Uncle Shelby's Story of Lafcadio, the Lion Who Shot Back* in 1963, about a lion who had kept a gun from an earlier encounter with a hunter and with practice became a good marksman. Zena Sutherland, in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books,* called the book "daft" and described it as "a nonsense story about utter success."

The Giving Tree

One of Silverstein's most successful early books was *The Giving Tree* (1964). At first, publishers rejected the story. They thought that it fell between child and adult literature and would not sell. The story begins simply: "Once there was a tree ..." and tells the story of a tree who gives everything to the boy she loves (the tree is characterized as female in the story). As a child the boy plays in the tree, gathers its leaves, swings on its branches, and eats its apples. Later he carves his and a girl's initials in its trunk, and as a young man he takes the tree's branches to build a house. As an old man, he needs a boat to take him away from it all, so the tree tells him to cut it down and make a boat, which the old man does. The tree, now just a stump, tells the man when he returns, now very old, to "Sit down and rest," and the tree is happy. But, as is common in Silverstein's work, it is not a happy ending. The tree has given up everything to the boy, who is now a bitter old man.

The story has been interpreted in many ways. Silverstein states in *Something About the Author* that it simply represents "a relationship between two people: one gives and the other takes." Barbara A. Schram classified it as "dangerous" due to its sexism and called it a "glorification of female selflessness and male selfishness," while William Cole called its message "a backup of 'more blessed to give than to receive.'" Christian ministers read it in terms of Christian self-sacrifice, and Alice Digilio assumed the tree represented the selfless love of parents and the boy the ingratitude of children (*Children's Literature Review*). Despite some negative reviews and some concerns that the book may be too advanced for children, it put Silverstein on the best-seller list for the first time.

Where the Sidewalk Ends **Brought Continued Popularity**

Silverstein published three other children's books in 1964, in addition to *The Giving Tree.* They include *A Giraffe and a Half, Uncle Shelby's Zoo: Don't Bump the Glump,* and *Who Wants a Cheap Rhinoceros?* It was not until ten years later that he wrote his next children's book, but it became an

instant success. *Where the Sidewalk Ends: The Poems and Drawings of Shel Silverstein* (1974) is considered a classic by many. Kimmel in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers* asserts that, "No discussion of children's poetry can ignore*Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *A Light in the Attic.* [1981]. For better or worse, the monumental success of these two books has transformed the way poetry is taught in American schools." Myra Cohn Livingston in the *New York Times Book Review* compared one of Silverstein's poems in *Where the Sidewalk Ends,* part of which reads, "But the taste of a thumb / Is the sweetest taste yet," to Heinrich Hoffmann's 1846 piece "Little Suck-a-Thumb," in which children hear about "the scissors-man," who cuts off the offending thumbs of those who exercise this horrible habit. Unlike Hoffmann, Silverstein placed himself in the child's place much of the time, and his poetry, according to some, makes children feel like they have found a grown-up who understands them.

Where the Sidewalk Ends won the Michigan Young Readers' Award in 1981. The book was immensely popular, despite some content that was deemed "indelicate." For example, the collection includes poems about belching, nose picking, and smelly, disgusting garbage. Some critics continued to point out that Silverstein was "by no stretch of the imagination, a great poet" (Kimmel in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*). Still, Bernice E. Cullinan credited *Where the Sidewalk Ends* with making more children into poetry-lovers than any other book. Kimmel agreed that Silverstein's greatest contribution was in "convincing millions of children that poetry is neither difficult nor threatening."

The "Missing Piece" Stories

Silverstein provided another challenge of interpretation to readers when he published the two books *The Missing Piece* (1976) and *The Missing Piece Meets the Big O* (1981). In the first, the "character" of the book is a circle with a wedge-shaped piece missing who is rolling along in search of its mate. When it does come across the missing piece, however, it is rolling too fast and goes right by it. Instead of ending the book there, Silverstein makes a point of telling the reader that the circle continues on, singing and still searching. Critics have approached the story from many angles, from accrediting it with a life-is-a-journey theme, to condemning it for suggesting that being alone is better than committing to another. In *The Missing Piece Meets the Big O,* the character is the wedge-shaped piece, first introduced in the previous book, who is looking for an object into which it can insert itself and thus gain a free ride in the world. Acting on the advice of the Big O, the wedge discovers that it can get around by itself after all and does not need someone to carry it. Most assume the message deals

with the issue of independence, but not all agree whether such a message is more appropriate for children or divorced adults.

Another Best-Seller

In 1981, Silverstein published another collection of poems and drawings, *A Light in the Attic.* This book was chosen by *School Library Journal* as one of the best books of 1981. Leigh Dean in *Children's Literature Review* credited it with making Silverstein the guru of elementary school teachers' poetry units. It remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for more than three years. Containing 136 poems and 175 pages, *A Light in the Attic* again incorporates sometimes bizarre drawings with light, humorous rhymes about the fears and fantasies of children.

Something for Everyone

Silverstein continued to work as a roving reporter and cartoonist. He was divorced and had one daughter. Because he kept a low profile and avoided publicity in general, little more is known about his personal life. He was a "free spirit," as is evidenced by his statement to Jean F. Merier in *Publishers Weekly:* "I'm free to leave ... go wherever I please, do whatever I want; I believe everyone should live like that. Don't be dependent on anyone else---man, woman, child, or dog. I want to go everywhere, look at and listen to everything. You can go crazy with some of the wonderful stuff there is in life." As mentioned in *Something About the Author,* he did "hope that people, no matter what age, would find something to identify with in my books, pick one up and experience a personal sense of discovery." Silverstein died at his home in Key West, Florida on May 10, 1999.

Source Citation:

"Shel Silverstein." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Vol. 19. Detroit: Gale, 1999.*Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.

Langston Hughes

Contemporary Heroes and Heroines , 1992

Born: February 01, 1902 in United States, Decatur, Alabama

Died: May 22, 1967 in New York, United States, New York

Nationality: American

Occupation: Poet

"I didn't know the upper class Negroes well enough to write much about them. I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren't the people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard of Bach. But they seemed to me good people, too."

Born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri, Langston Hughes was for several decades the most popular Black American writer in the U.S. He died on May 22, 1967, in New York City.

One of the most talented and prolific writers to emerge from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, Langston Hughes enjoyed a long and successful career as a poet and author of short stories, novels, magazine and newspaper articles, plays, and numerous other works. His respect for the lives of "plain Black people" resonated throughout everything he produced, as did his gentle, folksy humor and compassion tinged with sorrow. Early in his career, he endured criticism from those who felt he betrayed his race by portraying the less attractive aspects of Black-American life; later, he was rejected by a younger and more militant generation of Black-American writers for his reluctance to display bitterness or take a strong political stand in his writings. Through it all, Hughes remained true to his own vision of a world where most people were basically good and the future still offered hope that all races would one day live together in harmony and understanding.

A native of Joplin, Missouri, who spent most of his youth in Lawrence Kansas, James Langston Hughes was the only child of James and Carrie Langston Hughes. James Hughes deserted his wife before Langston was born and moved to Mexico to seek his fortune; he did not even meet his son until the child was five years old. While Carrie Hughes went from city to city searching for work, first her mother, Mary Langston, and then some family friends, James and Mary Reed, raised young Langston. In 1915, he joined his mother and her second husband in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended high school. An excellent student, he wrote verses for the school magazine in a style similar to that of his favorite poets, Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman, but incorporating Black-American dialects, words, and rhythms.

After graduating from high school, Hughes turned to his long-absent father for financial help so that he could attend New York City's Columbia University and become a poet. The elder Hughes

scoffed at the notion of a Black man studying anything so impractical and refused to help unless Langston agreed to study engineering instead. After a brief stint as a teacher in Mexico (during which time he also contributed his first material to NAACP publications, including *Crisis* and *Brownies' Book*, a magazine for children), the young man finally agreed to his father's conditions and enrolled at Columbia in the fall of 1921. But Hughes soon grew bored with his classes and dropped out of school after spring term in 1922 to spend more time with members of the NAACP staff and others who were part of the "Harlem Renaissance," a growing Black-American intellectual and artistic movement.

Supporting himself by doing odd jobs, Hughes soaked up life in Harlem and its environs during this exciting period and published poems on a steady basis, including "The Weary Blues," a brilliant piece that perfectly captured the sounds and rhythms of street talk and music. He also traveled to Africa and Europe, working his way across the Atlantic on board various freighters. (He reported on his experiences in Africa in a popular series of articles written for *Crisis*.) In early 1924, on his third trip overseas, Hughes quit his job and headed for Paris, where he worked as a dishwasher in a nightclub and managed to save enough money to travel to Spain and Italy before returning to New York in November, 1924.

In early 1925, Hughes moved to Washington, D.C., with hopes of attending Howard University. Denied a scholarship, he instead worked at a series of menial, low-paying jobs. Then his luck suddenly began to change. Around mid-year, "The Weary Blues" won an award and attracted the attention of writer and critic Carl Van Vechten, a prominent supporter of Black-American authors and artists, who used his influence to have some of Hughes's poems published in *Vanity Fair* magazine. Van Vechten also persuaded his own publisher, Knopf, to bring out an edition of the young poet's works. Its publication in January, 1926 (under the title *The Weary Blues*), coincided with poet Vachel Lindsay's "discovery" of Hughes. While working as a busboy in a New York City hotel where Lindsay was dining before giving a reading, Hughes slipped him a few of his own pieces, which Lindsay then shared with his audience as the work of a promising young Black-American poet. The exposure quickly made Hughes a celebrity and launched his career as a writer.

With royalties from *The Weary Blues*, payments for various magazine articles, and some prize money, plus financial help from Amy Spingarn, a member of a wealthy family that contributed generously to the NAACP and other Black-American organizations, Hughes was at last able to attend

college. He chose Lincoln University, an all-Black school near Philadelphia. Between the time he enrolled in February, 1926, and his graduation in 1929, Hughes spent most of his free time writing. In 1927, Knopf brought out another collection of his poems, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, an earthy and unsentimental look at life among those at the bottom of society--prostitutes, alcoholics, and the miserably poor. Although the book was a success with literary magazines and the White press, middle-class Black-American intellectuals condemned it as trash and attacked Hughes for perpetuating negative views of Black people.

During the 1930s, Hughes periodically experienced spiritual crises and creative slumps, which seriously affected the quality and quantity of his work. His antidote was often travel, which not only revitalized him but afforded him the opportunity to do research and reach "his people" through poetry readings. Over the course of the decade, he visited Cuba several times (where he met and became lifelong friends with many young writers), Haiti, the Soviet Union, Japan, China, Mexico, and Europe and toured throughout the southern and western United States. When he was able to write, he produced numerous poems, articles, and other works, including a much-praised semiautobiographical novel, *Not Without Laughter*; a collection of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks*; a Broadway play, *Mulatto*; and an autobiography, *The Big Sea*.

The 1930s also saw the awakening of Hughes's political radicalism as he observed the effects of the Depression during his travels. Like so many artists and intellectuals of his era, he was particularly impressed by the Soviet Union and regarded it as a symbol of hope and a model of action. While he was never officially a member of the American Communist party, he did become affiliated with various other left-wing groups, causes, and publications. Gradually, some of his writings took on a more radical tone, which made them difficult to sell to mainstream publishers in the United States. Finally, following a visit to Spain during which he reported on the civil war there for the Associated Press, the Baltimore *Afro-American*, and the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals, Hughes came to the realization that he could not be quite as militant as he had been if he expected to be able to earn a living as a writer.

Returning to the United States in 1938, Hughes at first focused on writing and producing plays for the Harlem Suitcase Theater. He then served a brief stint as a screenwriter in Hollywood but found the experience humiliating because he was expected to adhere to the racial stereotypes then common

in films. After completing *The Big Sea*, Hughes went back to writing poetry and short stories. Although he was still committed to social justice and racial equality, he toned down his radicalism and opted for a gentler approach incorporating humor and irony. His principal mouthpiece was Jesse B. Semple (also known as just "Simple"), a character who debuted in 1943 in a series of extremely popular short stories that appeared over a twenty-three-year period, first in the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Post* and later in four separate book collections. A sort of barfly philosopher who shares his troubles with a writer in exchange for a drink, the folksy Simple does not directly challenge racism yet clearly illustrates the difficulties a poor Black man faces in a racist society and the quiet determination necessary to overcome those difficulties.

By the end of the 1940s, more and more Americans were coming to recognize Hughes as one of the country's major writers. In the early 1950s, however, his radical past came under scrutiny by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which ordered him to explain his ties to the Communist party. At his hearing, he admitted to his past associations but, unlike many others who were called before the committee, he was not asked to name his fellow "subversives." Despite this rather lenient treatment, Hughes nevertheless felt the impact of the investigation on his career as some groups picketed his lectures and reading tours or canceled them altogether. He was able to continue writing, however, publishing *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, an ambitious series of poems describing a day and a night in Harlem; *I Wonder As I Wander*, the second volume of his autobiography; and *Selected Poems*, a collection he assembled himself that omitted many of his more politically radical pieces.

During the last decade of his life, Hughes continued to write, focusing mainly on plays that proved commercially unsuccessful. He also reviewed the fiction of younger Black-American authors and toured Africa and Europe on behalf of the U.S. State Department as a cultural ambassador. In early 1967, his health began to fail, and on May 22 of that year, he died of uremia.

Although he was often called the poet laureate of his people, Langston Hughes nevertheless endured the criticism of many of his fellow Black Americans for displaying a lack of "responsibility" in his writing. Yet he enjoyed the unconditional love and acceptance of those whose lives he knew best--the "workers, roustabouts, and singers, and job hunters on Lenox Avenue in New York, or Seventh Street in Washington or South State in Chicago--people up today and down tomorrow, working this

week and fired the next, beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten, buying furniture on the installment plan, filling the house with roomers to help pay the rent, hoping to get a new suit for Easter--and pawning that suit before the Fourth of July."

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