

# Simple Poetry

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## Langston Hughes Biography

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Born in Joplin, Missouri, James Langston Hughes was the great-great-grandson of Charles Henry Langston (brother of John Mercer Langston, the first Black American to be elected to public office). He attended Central High School in Cleveland, Ohio, where he began writing poetry in the eighth grade. His father would discourage him from pursuing writing as a career, in favour of something 'more practical'. Langston's tuition fees to Columbia University were paid on the grounds that he study engineering.

After a while, he dropped out of the degree course, but continued to write poetry. His first published poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, was also one of his most famous, appearing in *Brownie's Book*. Later, his poems, short plays, essays and short stories would appear in the NAACP publication, *Crisis Magazine*, in *Opportunity Magazine*, and others.

One of Hughes' most acclaimed essays appeared in the *Nation* in 1926, entitled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain". It spoke of Black writers and poets, "who would surrender racial pride in the name of a false integration," where a talented Black writer would prefer to

be considered a poet, not a Black poet, which to Hughes meant he subconsciously wanted to write like a white poet. Hughes argued, "no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself."

"We younger Negro artists now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they aren't, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too... If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, as strong as we know how and we stand on the top of the mountain, free within ourselves."

Hughes' travels ranged to such diverse locations as Senegal, Nigeria, the Cameroons, the Belgian Congo, Angola, and Guinea in Africa; to Italy, France, Russia and Spain. Whether abroad, or at home in the US, Hughes loved to sit in the clubs listening to blues, jazz and writing poetry. A 'new rhythm' emerged in his writing, as evidenced by his collection of poems, *"The Weary Blues"*. Returning to live in Harlem in 1924 -during a period often referred to as the 'Harlem Renaissance'- his work was frequently published and he wrote prolifically. Moving to Washington D.C., in 1925, his time spent in blues and jazz clubs increased even further.

"I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street... (these songs) had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going."

At this same time, Hughes accepted a job with Dr. Carter G. Woodson, editor of the *Journal of Negro Life and History* and founder of Black History Week in 1926. He returned to his beloved Harlem later that year.

Langston Hughes received a scholarship to Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania, where he received his B.A. degree in 1929. In 1943, he was awarded an honorary Lit.D by his alma mater; a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1935 and a Rosenwald Fellowship in 1940. Based on a conversation with a man he knew in a Harlem bar, he created a character known as My Simple Minded Friend in a series of essays in the form of a dialogue. In 1950, he named this lovable character Jess B. Simple, and authored a series of books on him.

Langston Hughes was a prolific writer. In the forty-odd years between his first book in 1926 and his death in 1967, he devoted his life to writing and lecturing. He wrote sixteen books of poems, two novels, three collections of short stories, four volumes of "editorial" and "documentary" fiction, twenty plays, children's poetry, musicals and operas, three autobiographies, a dozen radio and television scripts and dozens of magazine articles. In addition, he edited seven anthologies. The long and distinguished list of Hughes' works includes: *Not Without Laughter* (1930); *The Big Sea* (1940); *I Wonder As I Wander*" (1956), his autobiographies. His collections of poetry include: *The Weary Blues* (1926); *The Negro Mother and other Dramatic Recitations* (1931); *The Dream Keeper* (1932); *Shakespeare In Harlem* (1942); *Fields of Wonder* (1947); *One Way Ticket* (1947); *The First Book of Jazz* (1955); *Tambourines To Glory* (1958); and *Selected Poems* (1959); *The Best of Simple* (1961). He edited several anthologies in an attempt to popularize black authors and their works. Some

of these are: *An African Treasury* (1960); *Poems from Black Africa* (1963); *New Negro Poets: USA* (1964) and *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers* (1967).

Published posthumously were: *Five Plays By Langston Hughes* (1968); *The Panther and The Lash: Poems of Our Times* (1969) and *Good Morning Revolution: Uncollected Writings of Social Protest* (1973); *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* with Roy DeCarava (1984).

Langston Hughes died of cancer on May 22, 1967. His residence at 20 East 127th Street in Harlem, New York has been given landmark status by the New York City Preservation Commission. His block of East 127th Street was renamed "Langston Hughes Place"

## **I, Too, Sing America by Langston Hughes**

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

## **Life Is Fine by Langston Hughes**

I went down to the river,  
I set down on the bank.  
I tried to think but couldn't,  
So I jumped in and sank.

I came up once and hollered!  
I came up twice and cried!  
If that water hadn't a-been so cold  
I might've sunk and died.

But it was Cold in that water! It was cold!

I took the elevator  
Sixteen floors above the ground.  
I thought about my baby  
And thought I would jump down.

I stood there and I hollered!  
I stood there and I cried!  
If it hadn't a-been so high  
I might've jumped and died.

But it was High up there! It was high!

So since I'm still here livin',  
I guess I will live on.  
I could've died for love--  
But for livin' I was born

Though you may hear me holler,  
And you may see me cry--  
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,  
If you gonna see me die.

Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!

### **Deferred by Langston Hughes**

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

### **Justice by Langston Hughes**

That Justice is a blind goddess  
Is a thing to which we black are wise:  
Her bandage hides two festering sores  
That once perhaps were eyes.

### **Walkers with The Dawn by Langston Hughes**

Being walkers with the dawn and morning,  
Walkers with the sun and morning,  
We are not afraid of night,  
Nor days of gloom,  
Nor darkness...  
Being walkers with the sun and morning



William Blake was born on November 28, 1757 in London, the third of five children. His father James was a hosier, and could only afford to give William enough schooling to learn the basics of reading and writing, though for a short time he was able to attend a drawing school run by Henry Par.

William worked in his father's shop until his talent for drawing became so obvious that he was apprenticed to engraver James Basire at age 14. He finished his apprenticeship at age 21, and set out to make his living as an engraver.

Blake married Catherine Boucher at age 25, and she worked with him on most of his artistic creations. Together they published a book of Blake's poems and drawings called Songs of Innocence.

Blake engraved the words and pictures on copper plates (a method he claimed he received in a dream), and Catherine coloured the plates and bound the books. Songs of Innocence sold slowly during Blake's lifetime, indeed Blake struggled close to poverty for much of his life.

More successful was a series of copperplate engravings Blake did to illustrate the Book of Job for a new edition of the Old Testament.

Blake did not have a head for business, and he turned down publisher's requests to focus on his own subjects. In his choice of subject Blake was often guided by his gentle, mystical views of Christianity. Songs of Experience (1794) was followed by Milton (1804-1808), and Jerusalem (1804-1820).

In 1800 Blake gained a patron in William Hayley, who commissioned him to illustrate his Life of Cowper, and to create busts of famous poets for his house in Felpham, Suurey.

While at Felpham, Blake was involved in a bizarre episode which could have proven disastrous; he was accused by a drunken soldier of cursing the king, and on this testimony he was brought to trial for treason. The case against Blake proved flimsy, and he was cleared of the charges.

Blake poured his whole being into his work. The lack of public recognition sent him into a severe depression which lasted from 1810-1817, and even his close friends thought him insane.

Unlike painters like Gainsborough, Blake worked on a small scale; most of his engravings are little more than inches in height, yet the detailed rendering is superb and exact. Blake's work received far more public acclaim after his death, and an excerpt from his poem Milton was set to music, becoming a sort of unofficial Christian anthem of English nationalism in the 20th century.

William Blake died on August 12, 1827, and is buried in an unmarked grave at Bunhill Fields, London.

### **The Sick Rose by William Blake**

O Rose thou art sick.  
The invisible worm.  
That flies in the night  
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed

Of crimson joy:  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

### **The Tyger by William Blake**

Tyger Tyger. burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat.  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp.  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears  
And watered heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile His work to see?  
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

### **To Autumn by William Blake**

O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stain'd  
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit  
Beneath my shady roof; there thou may'st rest,  
And tune thy jolly voice to my fresh pipe,  
And all the daughters of the year shall dance!  
Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.

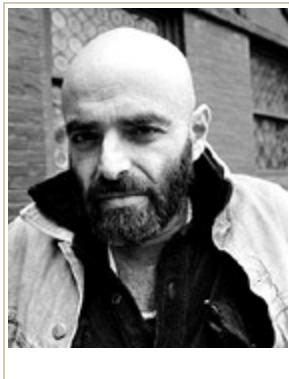
'The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;  
Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,  
Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.

'The spirits of the air live in the smells  
Of fruit; and Joy, with pinions light, roves round  
The gardens, or sits singing in the trees.'  
Thus sang the jolly Autumn as he sat,  
Then rose, girded himself, and o'er the bleak

Hills fled from our sight; but left his golden load.

## Silverstein Biography

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[Enlarge Picture](#)

A truly unique and multi-faceted artist, Shel Silverstein was a renowned poet, playwright, illustrator, screenwriter, and songwriter. Best known for his immensely popular children's books including *The Giving Tree*, *Falling Up*, and *A Light in the Attic*, Silverstein has delighted tens of millions of readers around the world, becoming one of the most popular and best-loved children's authors of all time.

Born in Chicago on September 25, 1930, Sheldon Allan Silverstein grew up to attain an enormous public following, but always preferred to say little about himself. "When I was a kid," he told *Publishers Weekly* in 1975, "I would much rather have been a good baseball player or a hit with the girls. But I couldn't play ball. I couldn't dance. So I started to draw and to write. I was lucky that I didn't have anyone to copy, be impressed by. I had developed my own style."

Silverstein drew his first cartoons for the adult readers of *Pacific Stars and Stripes* when he was a G.I. in Japan and Korea in the 1950's. He also learned to play the guitar and to write songs, a talent that would later produce such hits as "A Boy Named Sue" for Johnny Cash and "The Cover of the Rolling Stone" for Dr. Hook.

Shel Silverstein never planned on writing for children – surprising for an artist whose children's works would soon become available in more than 30 languages around the world. In the early 1960's Tomi Ungerer, a friend whose own career in children's books was blossoming, introduced Silverstein to his editor, Harper Collins' legendary Ursula Nordstrom. That connection led to the publication of *The Giving Tree* in 1964. The book sold modestly at first, but soon the gentle parable about a boy and the tree that loved him was admired by readers of all ages, recommended by counselors and teachers, and being read aloud from pulpits. Decades after its initial publication, with more than five and a half million copies sold, *The Giving Tree* holds a permanent spot atop lists of perennial bestsellers.

*Where the Sidewalk Ends*, Shel Silverstein's first collection of poems, was published in 1974 and was hailed as an instant classic. Its poems and drawings were applauded for their zany wit, irreverent wisdom, and tender heart. Two more collections followed: *A Light in the Attic* in 1981, and *Falling Up* in 1996. Both books dominated bestseller lists for months, with *A Light in the Attic* shattering all previous records for its 182-week stay on the *New York Times* list. His poetry books are widely used in schools as a child's first introduction to poetry.

Silverstein enjoyed a long, successful career as a songwriter with credits that included the popular "Unicorn Song" for the Irish Rovers and "I'm Checking Out" written for the film *Postcards from the Edge* and nominated for an Academy Award in 1991. In 1984, Silverstein won a Grammy Award for Best Children's Album for *Where the Sidewalk Ends* – "recited, sung and shouted" by the author. He performed his own songs on a number of albums and wrote others for friends, including 1998's *Old Dogs* with country stars Waylon Jennings, Mel Tillis, Bobby Bare, and Jerry Reed; and his last children's recording *Underwater Land* with singer/songwriter and longtime friend Pat Dailey.

Shel Silverstein loved to spend time in Greenwich Village, Key West, Martha's Vineyard, and Sausalito, California. Up until his death in May 1999, he continued to create plays, songs, poems, stories, and drawings, and most importantly, in Shel's own words, "have a good time."

Those good times show in the charm and humor of *Underwater Land*. Its seventeen tracks are a perfect blend of Silverstein's irreverent wit and Dailey's inviting vocal style. Produced by Silverstein, and featuring his whimsical artwork, the CD is now available from Olympia Records.

### **Messy Room by Shel Silverstein**

Whoever room this is should be ashamed!  
His underwear is hanging on the lamp.  
His raincoat is there in the overstuffed chair,  
And the chair is becoming quite mucky and damp.  
His workbook is wedged in the window,  
His sweater's been thrown on the floor.  
His scarf and one ski are beneath the TV,  
And his pants have been carelessly hung on the door.  
His books are all jammed in the closet,  
His vest has been left in the hall.  
A lizard named Ed is asleep in his bed,  
And his smelly old sock has been stuck to the wall.  
Whoever room this is should be ashamed!  
Donald or Robert or Willie or--  
Huh? You say it's mine? Oh, dear,  
I knew it looked familiar!

### **Rain by Shel Silverstein**

I opened my eyes  
And looked up at the rain,  
And it dripped in my head  
And flowed into my brain,  
And all that I hear as I lie in my bed  
Is the slishity-slosh of the rain in my head.

I step very softly,  
I walk very slow,  
I can't do a handstand--  
I might overflow,  
So pardon the wild crazy thing I just said--  
I'm just not the same since there's rain in my head.

## **Whatif by Shel Silverstein**

Last night, while I lay thinking here,  
some Whatifs crawled inside my ear  
and pranced and partied all night long  
and sang their same old Whatif song:  
Whatif I'm dumb in school?  
Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?  
Whatif I get beat up?  
Whatif there's poison in my cup?  
Whatif I start to cry?  
Whatif I get sick and die?  
Whatif I flunk that test?  
Whatif green hair grows on my chest?  
Whatif nobody likes me?  
Whatif a bolt of lightning strikes me?  
Whatif I don't grow taller?  
Whatif my head starts getting smaller?  
Whatif the fish won't bite?  
Whatif the wind tears up my kite?  
Whatif they start a war?  
Whatif my parents get divorced?  
Whatif the bus is late?  
Whatif my teeth don't grow in straight?  
Whatif I tear my pants?  
Whatif I never learn to dance?  
Everything seems well, and then  
the nighttime Whatifs strike again!



## Oscar Wilde Biography

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[Enlarge Picture](#)

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was born in Dublin to unconventional parents. His mother, Lady Jane Francesca Wilde (1820-96), was a poet and journalist. Her pen name was Speranza. According to a story she ward off creditors by reciting Aeschylus. Wilde's father was Sir William Wilde, an Irish antiquarian, gifted writer, and specialist in diseases of the eye and ear, who founded a hospital in Dublin a year before Oscar was born. His work gained for him the honorary appointment of Surgeon Oculist in Ordinary to the Queen. Lady Wilde, who was active in the women's rights movement, was reputed to ignore her husband's amorous adventures.

Wilde studied at Portora Royal School, in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh (1864-71), Trinity College, Dublin (1871-74) and Magdalen College, Oxford (1874-78), where he was taught by Walter Pater and John Ruskin. Already at the age of 13, Wilde's tastes in clothes were dandy's. "The flannel shirts you sent in the hamper are both Willie's mine are one quite scarlet and the other lilac but it is too hot to wear them yet," he wrote in a letter to his mother. Willie, whom he mentioned, was his elder brother. Lady Wilde's third and last child

was a daughter, named Isola Francesca, who died young. It has been said that Lady Wilde insisted on dressing Oscar in girl's clothes because she had longed for a girl.

In Oxford Wilde shocked the pious dons with his irreverent attitude towards religion and was jeered at his eccentric clothes. He collected blue china and peacock's feathers, and later his velvet knee-breeches drew much attention. In 1878 Wilde received his B.A. and on the same year he moved to London. His lifestyle and humorous wit made him soon spokesman for Aestheticism, the late 19th century movement in England that advocated art for art's sake. He worked as art reviewer (1881), lectured in the United States and Canada (1882), and lived in Paris (1883). Between the years 1883 and 1884 he lectured in Britain. From the mid-1880s he was regular contributor for Pall Mall Gazette and Dramatic View.

In 1884 Wilde married Constance Lloyd (died 1898) and to support his family Wilde edited in 1887-89 *Woman's World* magazine. In 1888 he published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, fairy-stories written for his two sons. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* followed in 1890 and next year he brought out more fairy tales. The marriage ended in 1893. Wilde had met a few years earlier Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie"), an athlete and a poet, who became both the love of the author's life and his downfall. "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it," Wilde once said. Bosie's uncle, Lord Jim, caused a scandal when he filled in the 1891 census describing his wife as a "lunatic" and his stepson as a "shoeblack born in darkest Africa."

Wilde made his reputation in theatre world between the years 1892 and 1895 with a series of highly popular plays. *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) dealt with a blackmailing divorcee driven to self-sacrifice by maternal love. In *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) an illegitimate son is torn between his father and mother. *An Ideal Husband* (1895) dealt with blackmail, political corruption and public and private honour. *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) was a comedy of manners. John Worthing (who prefers to call himself Jack) and Algernon Moncrieff (Algy) are two fashionable young gentlemen. John tells that he has a brother called Ernest, but in town John himself is known as Ernest and Algernon also pretends to be the profligate brother Ernest. "Rely, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them?" (from

The Importance of Being Earnest) Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Cardew are two ladies whom the two snobbish characters court. Gwendolen declares that she never travels without her diary because "one should always have something sensational to read in the train".

Before the theatrical success Wilde produced several essays, many of these anonymously. "Anybody can write a three-volume novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature," he once stated. His two major literary-theoretical works were the dialogues 'The Decay of Lying' (1889) and 'The Critic as Artist' (1890). In the latter Wilde lets his character state, that criticism is the superior part of creation, and that the critic must not be fair, rational, and sincere, but possessed of "a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty". In a more traditional essay *The Soul of a Man Under Socialism* (1891) Wilde takes an optimistic view of the road to socialist future. He rejects the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice in favor of joy. "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it."

Although married and the father of two children, Wilde's personal life was open to rumours. His years of triumph ended dramatically, when his intimate association with Alfred Douglas led to his trial on charges of homosexuality (then illegal in Britain). He was sentenced two years hard labour for the crime of sodomy. During his first trial Wilde defended himself, that "the 'Love that dare not speak its name' in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare... There is nothing unnatural about it." Mr. Justice Wills, stated when pronouncing the sentence, that "people who can do these things must be dead to all senses of shame, and one cannot hope to produce any effect upon them." During the trial and while he served his sentence, Bosie stood by Wilde, although the author felt himself betrayed. Later they met in Naples.

Wilde was first in Wandsworth prison, London, and then Reading Gaol. When he was at last allowed pen and paper after more than 19 months of deprivation, Wilde had become inclined to take opposite views on the potential of humankind toward perfection. During this time he wrote *DE PROFUNDIS* (1905), a dramatic monologue and autobiography, which was addressed to Alfred Douglas. "Everything about my tragedy has been hideous, mean, repellent, lacking in style. Our very dress makes us grotesques. We are the zanies of sorrow. We are the clowns whose hearts are broken." (*De Profundis*)

After his release in 1897 Wilde lived under the name Sebastian Melmoth in Berneval, near Dieppe, then in Paris. He wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, revealing his concern for inhumane prison conditions. It is said, that on his death bed Wilde became a Roman Catholic. He died of cerebral meningitis on November 30, 1900, penniless, in a cheap Paris hotel at the age of 46. "Do you want to know the great drama of my life," asked Wilde before his death of Andre Gide. "It's that I have put my genius into my life; all I've put into my works is my talent."

Biography from: <http://www.readprint.com>

### **To My Wife - With A Copy Of My Poems by Oscar Wilde**

I can write no stately proem  
As a prelude to my lay;  
From a poet to a poem  
I would dare to say.

For if of these fallen petals  
One to you seem fair,  
Love will waft it till it settles  
On your hair.

And when wind and winter harden  
All the loveless land,  
It will whisper of the garden,  
You will understand.

### **IN THE FOREST by Oscar Wilde**

Out of the mid-wood's twilight  
Into the meadow's dawn,  
Ivory limbed and brown-eyed,  
Flashes my Faun!

He skips through the copses singing,  
And his shadow dances along,  
And I know not which I should follow,  
Shadow or song!

O Hunter, snare me his shadow!  
O Nightingale, catch me his strain!  
Else moonstruck with music and madness  
I track him in vain!

### **A Vision by Oscar Wilde**

Two crowned Kings, and One that stood alone  
With no green weight of laurels round his head,  
But with sad eyes as one uncomforted,  
And wearied with man's never-ceasing moan  
For sins no bleating victim can atone,  
And sweet long lips with tears and kisses fed.  
Girt was he in a garment black and red,  
And at his feet I marked a broken stone  
Which sent up lilies, dove-like, to his knees.  
Now at their sight, my heart being lit with flame,  
I cried to Beatrice, 'Who are these?'  
And she made answer, knowing well each name,  
'Aeschylus first, the second Sophocles,  
And last (wide stream of tears!) Euripides.'

## Emily Dickinson Biography

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Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, to a family well known for educational and political activity. Her father, an orthodox Calvinist, was a lawyer and treasurer of the local college. He also served in Congress. Dickinson's mother, whose name was also Emily, was a cold, religious, hard-working housewife, who suffered from depression. Her relationship with her daughter was distant. Later Dickinson wrote in a letter, that she never had a mother.

Dickinson was educated at Amherst Academy (1834-47) and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (1847-48). Around 1850 she started to compose poems - "Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine, / Unwind the solemn twine, and tie my Valentine!" she said in her earliest known poem, dated March 4, 1850. It was published in Springfield Daily Republican in 1852.

The style of her first efforts was fairly conventional, but after years of practice she began to give room for experiments. Often written in the metre of hymns, her poems dealt not only with issues of death, faith and immortality, but with nature, domesticity, and the power and limits of language. From c.1858 Dickinson assembled many of her poems in packets of 'fascicles', which she bound herself with needle and thread. A selection of these poems appeared in 1890.

In 1862 Dickinson started her life long correspondence and friendship with Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911), a writer and reformer, who commanded during the Civil War the first troop of African-American soldiers. Higginson later published *Army Life in a Black Regiment* in 1870. One of the four poems he received from Dickinson was the famous 'Safe in their Alabaster Chambers.'

### **There is another sky by Emily Dickinson**

There is another sky,  
Ever serene and fair,  
And there is another sunshine,  
Though it be darkness there;  
Never mind faded forests, Austin,  
Never mind silent fields -  
Here is a little forest,  
Whose leaf is ever green;  
Here is a brighter garden,  
Where not a frost has been;  
In its unfading flowers  
I hear the bright bee hum:  
Prithee, my brother,  
Into my garden come!

### **I'm Nobody! Who are you? by Emily Dickinson**

I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
Are you -- Nobody -- Too?  
Then there's a pair of us!  
Don't tell! they'd advertise -- you know!

How dreary -- to be -- Somebody!  
How public -- like a Frog --  
To tell one's name -- the livelong June --  
To an admiring Bog!

### **A slash of Blue by Emily Dickinson**

A slash of Blue --  
A sweep of Gray --  
Some scarlet patches on the way,  
Compose an Evening Sky --  
A little purple -- slipped between --  
Some Ruby Trousers hurried on --  
A Wave of Gold --  
A Bank of Day --  
This just makes out the Morning Sky.

## Robert Frost Biography

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Robert Frost (1874-1963) was born in San Francisco, California. His father William Frost, a journalist and an ardent Democrat, died when Frost was about eleven years old. His Scottish mother, the former Isabelle Moody, resumed her career as a schoolteacher to support her family. The family lived in Lawrence, Massachusetts, with Frost's paternal grandfather, William Prescott Frost, who gave his grandson a good schooling. In 1892 Frost graduated from a high school and attended Dartmouth College for a few months. Over the next ten years he held a number of jobs. Frost worked among others in a textile mill and taught Latin at his mother's school in Methuen, Massachusetts. In 1894 the New York Independent published Frost's poem 'My Butterfly' and he had five poems privately printed. Frost worked as a teacher and continued to write and publish his poems in magazines. In 1895 he married a former schoolmate, Elinor White; they had six children.

From 1897 to 1899 Frost studied at Harvard, but left without receiving a degree. He moved to Derry, New Hampshire, working there as a cobbler, farmer, and teacher at Pinkerton Academy and at the state normal school in Plymouth. When he sent his poems to The Atlantic Monthly they were returned with this note: "We regret that The Atlantic has no place for your vigorous verse."

In 1912 Frost sold his farm and took his wife and four young children to England. There he published his first collection of poems, A BOY'S WILL, at the age of 39. It was followed by NORTH BOSTON (1914), which gained international reputation. The collection contains some of Frost's best-known poems: 'Mending Wall,' 'The Death of the Hired Man,' 'Home Burial,' 'A Servant to Servants,' 'After Apple-Picking,' and 'The Wood-Pile.' The poems, written with blank verse or looser free verse of dialogue, were drawn from his own life, recurrent losses, everyday tasks, and his loneliness.

While in England Frost was deeply influenced by such English poets as Rupert Brooke. After returning to the US in 1915 with

his family, Frost bought a farm near Franconia, New Hampshire. When the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* asked for poems, he gave the very ones that had previously been rejected. Frost taught later at Amherst College (1916-38) and Michigan universities. In 1916 he was made a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. On the same year appeared his third collection of verse, *MOUNTAIN INTERVAL*, which contained such poems as 'The Road Not Taken,' 'The Oven Bird,' 'Birches,' and 'The Hill Wife.' Frost's poems show deep appreciation of natural world and sensibility about the human aspirations. His images - woods, stars, houses, brooks, - are usually taken from everyday life. With his down-to-earth approach to his subjects, readers found it is easy to follow the poet into deeper truths, without being burdened with pedantry. Often Frost used the rhythms and vocabulary of ordinary speech or even the looser free verse of dialogue.

In 1920 Frost purchased a farm in South Shaftsbury, Vermont, near Middlebury College where he cofounded the Bread Loaf School and Conference of English. His wife died in 1938 and he lost four of his children. Two of his daughters suffered mental breakdowns, and his son Carol, a frustrated poet and farmer, committed suicide. Frost also suffered from depression and the continual self-doubt led him to cling to the desire to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. After the death of his wife, Frost became strongly attracted to Kay Morrison, whom he employed as his secretary and adviser. Frost also composed for her one of his finest love poems, 'A Witness Tree.'

Frost travelled in 1957 with his future biographer Lawrance Thompson to England and to Israel and Greece in 1961. He participated in the inauguration of President John Kennedy in 1961 by reciting two of his poems. When the sun and the wind prevented him from reading his new poem, 'The Preface', Frost recited his old poem, 'The Gift Outright', from memory. Frost travelled in 1962 in the Soviet Union as a member of a goodwill group. He had a long talk with Premier Nikita Khrushchev, whom he described as "no fathead"; as smart, big and "not a coward." Frost also reported that Khrushchev had said the United States was "too liberal to fight," it caused a considerable stir in Washington. Among the honors and rewards Frost received were tributes from the U.S. Senate (1950), the American Academy of Poets (1953), New York University (1956), and the Huntington Hartford Foundation (1958), the Congressional Gold Medal (1962), the Edward MacDowell Medal (1962). In 1930 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Amherst College appointed him Saimpson Lecturer for Life (1949), and in 1958 he was made poetry consultant for the Library of Congress.

At the time of his death on January 29, 1963, Frost was considered a kind of unofficial poet laureate of the US. "I would have written of me on my stone: I had a lover's quarrel with the world," Frost once said. In his poems Frost depicted the fields and farms of his surroundings, observing the details of rural life, which hide universal meaning. His independent, elusive, half humorous view of the world produced such remarks as "I never take my side in a quarrel", or "I'm never serious except when I'm fooling." Although Frost's works were generally praised, the lack of seriousness concerning social and political problems of the 1930s annoyed some more socially orientated critics. Later biographers have created a complex and contradictory portrait of the poet. In Lawrance Thompson's humorless, three-volume official biography (1966-1976) Frost was presented as a misanthrope, anti-intellectual, cruel, and angry man, but in Jay Parini's work (1999) he was again viewed with sympathy: "He was a loner who liked company; a poet of isolation who sought a mass audience; a rebel who sought to fit in. Although a family man to the core, he frequently felt alienated from his wife and children and withdrew into reveries. While preferring to stay at home, he traveled more than any poet of his generation to give lectures and readings, even though he remained terrified of public speaking to the end..."

### **Fire and Ice by Robert Frost**

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favour fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

### **The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;  
Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,  
And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

### **Bereft by Robert Frost**

Where had I heard this wind before  
Change like this to a deeper roar?  
What would it take my standing there for,  
Holding open a restive door,  
Looking down hill to a frothy shore?  
Summer was past and day was past.  
Somber clouds in the west were massed.  
Out in the porch's sagging floor,  
leaves got up in a coil and hissed,  
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.  
Something sinister in the tone  
Told me my secret must be known:  
Word I was in the house alone  
Somehow must have gotten abroad,  
Word I was in my life alone,  
Word I had no one left but God.

## William Wordsworth Biography

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WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland County, England, April 7, 1770, and he died on April 28, 1850. He was buried by the side of his daughter in the beautiful churchyard of Grasmere.

His father was law agent to Sir James Lowther, afterward Earl of Lonsdale, but he died when William was in his seventh year.

The poet attended school first at Hawkshead School, then at Cambridge University. William was also entered at St. Johns in 1787. Having finished his academical course, Wordsworth, in 1790, in company with Mr. Robert James, a fellow-student, made a tour on the continent. With this friend Wordsworth made a tour in North Wales the following year, after taking his degree in college. He was again in France toward the close of the year 1791, and remained in that country about a twelvemonth. He had hailed the French Revolution with feelings of enthusiastic admiration.

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive  
But to be young was very heaven.

A young friend, Raisley Calvert, dying in 1795, left him a sum. A further sum came to him as a part of the estate of his father, who died intestate; and with this small competence Wordsworth devoted himself to study and seclusion.

In 1793, in his twenty-third year, he appeared before the world as an author, in "Descriptive Sketches" and "The Evening Walk." The sketches were made from his tour in Switzerland with his friend, and the Walk was among the mountains of Westmoreland.

In 1795 Wordsworth and his sister were living at Racedown Lodge, in Somersetshire, where, in 1797, they were visited by Coleridge. The meeting was mutually pleasant, and a life-long friendship was the result. The intimate relations thus established induced Wordsworth and his sister to change their home for a residence near Coleridge, at Alfoxen, near Neither Stowey. In this new home the poet composed many of his lighter poems, also the "Borderers," a tragedy, which was rejected by the Covent Garden Theatre. In 1797 appeared his "Lyrical Ballads," which also contained Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner."

In 1798, in company with his sister and Coleridge, he went to Germany, where he spent some time at Hamburg, Ratzeburg and Goslar. Returning to England, he took up his residence at Grasmere, in Westmoreland. In 1800 he reprinted his "Lyrical Ballads" with some additions, making two volumes. Two years later he married Mary Hutchinson, to whom he addressed, the beautiful lines, "She was a Phantom of Delight." In 1802, Wordsworth, with his sister and his friend Coleridge, visited Scotland. This visit formed one of the most important periods of his literary life, as it led to the composition of some of his finest lighter poems. In 1805 he completed the "Prelude, or Growth of my own Mind," a poem written in blank verse, but not published till after the author's death. In the same year he also wrote his "Waggoner," but did not publish it till in 1819. At this time he purchased a cottage and small estate at the head of Ulleswater, Lord Lonsdale generously assisting him. In 1807 he published two volumes of "Poems."

In the spring of 1813 he removed from Grasmere to Royal Mount, where he remained for the rest of his life, a period of thirty-seven years. Here were passed his brightest days. He enjoyed retirement and almost perfect happiness, as seen in his lines:

Long have I loved what I behold,  
The night that calms, the day that cheers;  
The common growth of mother-earth



Suffices me--her tears, her mirth,  
Her humblest mirth and tears.

The dragon's wing, the magic ring,  
I shall not covet for my dower,  
If I along that lowly way  
With sympathetic heart may stray,  
And with a soul of power.

At the same time he commenced to write poems of a higher order, thus greatly extending the circle of his admirers. In 1814 he published "The Excursion," a philosophical poem in blank verse. By viewing man in connection with external nature, the poet blends his metaphysics with pictures of life and scenery. To build up and strengthen the powers of the mind, in contrast to the operations of sense, was ever his object. Like Bacon, Wordsworth would rather have believed all the fables in the Talmud and Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind--or that mind does not, by its external symbols, speak to the human heart. He lived under the habitual away of nature:

To me the meanest flower that blows can, give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The removal of the poet to Rydal was marked by an incident of considerable importance in his personal history. Through the influence of the Earl of Lonsdale, he was appointed distributor of stamps in the county of Westmoreland, which added greatly to his income without engrossing all of his time. He was now placed beyond the frowns of Fortune--if Fortune can ever be said to have frowned on one so independent of her smiles. The subsequent works of the poet were numerous--"The White Doe of Rylstone," a romantic narrative poem, yet colored with his peculiar genius; "Sonnets on the River Duddon" "The Waggoner;" "Peter Bell;" "Ecclesiastical Sketches;" "Yarrow Revisited," and others. His fame was extending rapidly. The universities of Durham and Oxford conferred academic honors upon him. Upon the death of his friend Southey, in 1843, he was made Poet Laureate of England, and the crown gave him a pension of per annum. Thus his income was increased and honors were showered upon him, making glad the closing years of his life. But sadness found its way into his household in 1847, caused by the death of his only daughter, Dora, then Mrs. Quillinan. Wordsworth survived the shock but three years, having reached the advanced age of eighty, always enjoying robust health and writing his poems in the open air. He died in 1850, on the anniversary of St. George, the patron saint of England.

### **I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud by William Wordsworth**

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they  
Out-did the sparkling leaves in glee;  
A poet could not be but gay,  
In such a jocund company!  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought

What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

### **London, 1802 by William Wordsworth**

Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

### **Written In March by William Wordsworth**

The cock is crowing,  
The stream is flowing,  
The small birds twitter,  
The lake doth glitter  
The green field sleeps in the sun;  
The oldest and youngest  
Are at work with the strongest;  
The cattle are grazing,  
Their heads never raising;  
There are forty feeding like one!

Like an army defeated  
The snow hath retreated,  
And now doth fare ill  
On the top of the bare hill;  
The plowboy is whooping—anon-anon:  
There's joy in the mountains;  
There's life in the fountains;  
Small clouds are sailing,  
Blue sky prevailing;  
The rain is over and gone!

