

W. S. Merwin

Poet Description:

Merwin was born in New York and raised first in Union City, New Jersey, and then in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He studied Romance Languages at Princeton University, where he worked with poet John Berryman and poet-critic R.P. Blackmur. It was at Princeton as well, in the midst of World War II when some of his classmates were dying in Europe and the Pacific, that he began writing, but not publishing, poems of despair amid the violence of history. He would return to these themes again decades later, when the Vietnam War would come to seem a comprehensive figure for public life in America. His first published poems, however, made extensive use of mythology and displayed his mastery of traditional meter and form. Then in the 1960s, responding to the pressure of events, he adopted an open, unpunctuated form and a line closer to a unit of breath. Merwin was concerned about the destruction of natural life long before ecological awareness was common; now this deep-seated reverence was fused with rage at the carnage of a mindless and cynical war. Poems of prophecy and witness followed through the 1960s and 1970s, sometimes about the contemporary world and sometimes taking up earlier historical subjects. He also wrote haunting phenomenologies of loss and presence amidst emptiness. Throughout this time he maintained great wariness about institutional entanglements, preferring to support himself through translation and poetry readings rather than by taking a permanent teaching position. In addition to living in New York, he spent long periods in a farm house in the south of France, feeling a need to distance himself from America and its most intense city. He now makes his home on the island of Maui in Hawaii, in the midst of hundreds of rare tropical plants that he has preserved and cultivated. His prose poems and memoirs are as well regarded as his poems.

Race/Ethnicity:

European ^[1]

Picture:



Gender:

Male ^[2]

Sexuality:

Straight ^[3]

First Name:

W. S.

Last Name:

Merwin

Birth & Death Dates:

Friday, September 30, 1927

School of Poetry:

Other ^[4]

Birth Place:

New York City , New York

United States

See map: Google Maps ^[5]

New York US

Group visibility:

Private - accessible only to group members

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[5] <http://maps.google.com?q=46.880607+-87.363281+%28%2C+New+York+City%2C+NY%2C+%2C+us%29>