

TAKE YOUR POET TO WORK DAY

Celebrated the 3rd Wednesday in July

W.S. Merwin

William Stanley (W. S.) Merwin was born on September 30, 1927 in New York City, and lived as a child in Union City, NJ and then in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He was fascinated by both the natural world and the past from a young age, and started writing hymns for his father, a Presbyterian minister, at the age of five, "as I could write at all, illustrating them..." he explained.

He attended Princeton University on a scholarship, then moved to Europe where he worked as a tutor and a translator. His earlier collections of poetry were classically inspired, while his later work would become more autobiographical and would experiment with lack of punctuation.

He married three times, to Dorothy Jeanne Ferry, then Dido Milroy, both of whom he divorced, and finally to Paula Dunaway. His collection of poems *Garden Time* (2016) was dictated to his wife as he lost his eyesight, soon before he died.

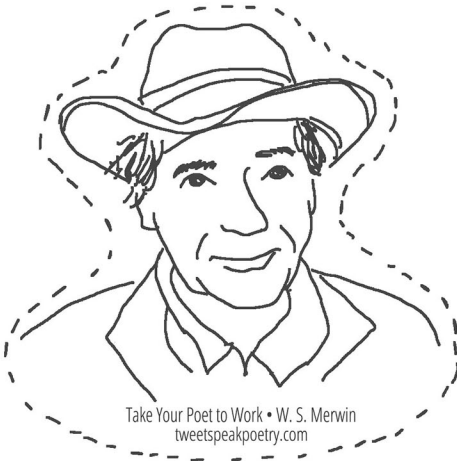
Merwin published 30 poetry collections, and 4 prose collections, was a playwright in residence, a poetry editor, and worked on many translations, both on his own and in collaboration with others, some of which included Osip Mandelstam, Pablo Neruda, Dante's *Purgatorio*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as haiku in collaboration, and he was named U.S. poet laureate twice.

His collection *The Carrier of Ladders* (1970) won the Pulitzer Prize, and Merwin, who had staunch objections to the Vietnam War, donated the money to the draft resistance movement, writing an article about it in the *New York Review of Books*, to which W. H. Auden argued in response.

Merwin said "I think there's a kind of desperate hope built into poetry ... one really wants, hopelessly, to save the world. One is trying to say everything that can be said for the things that one loves while there's still time, ... expressing our anger ... [hoping] ... that it will have some effect. But ... one can't live only in despair and anger without eventually destroying the thing one is angry in defense of. The world is still here, and there are aspects of human life that are not purely destructive, and there is a need to pay attention to the things around us while they are still around us. And you know, in a way, if you don't pay that attention, the anger is just bitterness."

He moved to Hawaii to study Zen Buddhism with Robert Aitken in 1976. In 2010, he and Paula co-founded The Merwin Conservancy, a nonprofit dedicated to the collection of palm trees (one of the largest and most biodiverse in the world) created on their 18-acre property in Maui on what had once been a plantation, with totally degraded land. It eventually held nearly 500 species of palm tree.

Merwin died peacefully in his sleep at home, on March 15, 2019.



*"Poetry is like making a joke,
If you get one word wrong
at the end of a joke,
you've lost the whole thing."*

How to take your favorite with you on Take Your Poet to Work Day

1. Color your poet
2. Cut out your poet along dotted lines
3. Attach a popsicle stick to the back of your poet with tape or glue
4. Take your poet to work



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