

Contemporary Authors

New Revision Series

volume 61

Contemporary Authors®

A Bio-Bibliographical Guide to
Current Writers in Fiction, General Nonfiction,
Poetry, Journalism, Drama, Motion Pictures,
Television, and Other Fields

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volume 61



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Preface

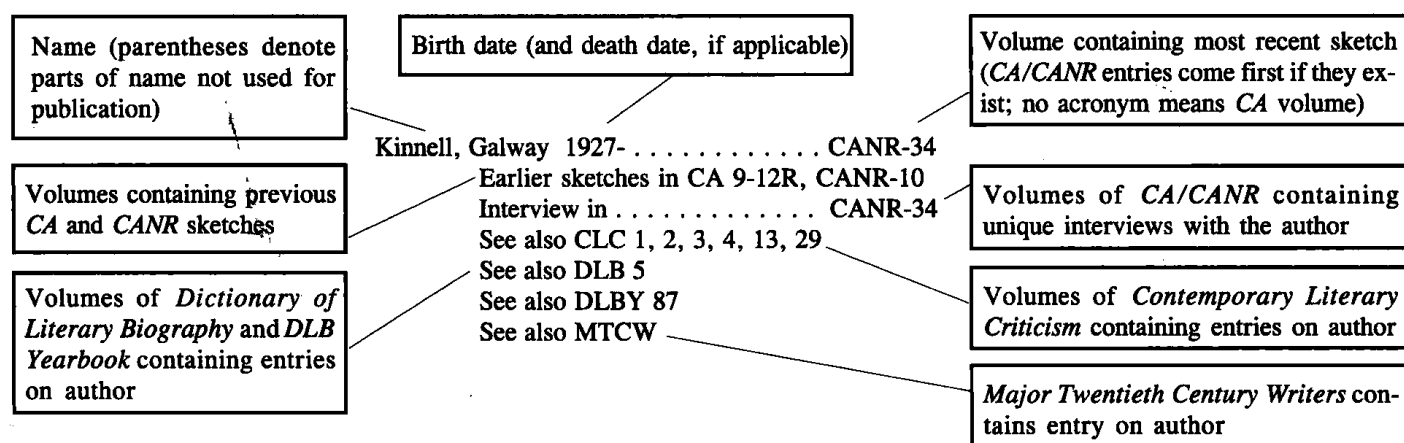
The *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series (CANR)* provides updated information on authors listed in earlier volumes of *Contemporary Authors (CA)*. Although entries for individual authors from any volume of *CA* may be included in a volume of the *New Revision Series*, *CANR* updates only those sketches requiring significant change. However, in response to requests from librarians and library patrons for the most current information possible on high-profile writers of greater public and critical interest, *CANR* revises entries for these authors whenever new and noteworthy information becomes available.

Authors are included on the basis of specific criteria that indicate the need for a revision. These criteria include a combination of bibliographical additions, changes in addresses or career, major awards, and personal information such as name changes or death dates. All listings in this volume have been revised or augmented in various ways and contain up-to-the-minute publication information in the Writings section, most often verified by the author and/or by consulting a variety of online resources. Many sketches have been extensively rewritten, often including informative new Sidelights. As always, a *CANR* listing entails no charge or obligation.

The key to locating an author's most recent entry is the *CA* cumulative index, which is published separately and distributed with even-numbered original volumes and odd-numbered revision volumes. It provides access to all entries in *CA* and *CANR*. Always consult the latest index to find an author's most recent entry.

For the convenience of users, the *CA* cumulative index also includes references to all entries in these Gale literary series: *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, *Authors in the News*, *Bestsellers*, *Black Literature Criticism*, *Black Writers*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography*, *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, *Contemporary Authors Bibliographical Series*, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography Documentary Series*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook*, *DISCovering Authors*, *DISCovering Authors: British*, *DISCovering Authors: Canadian*, *DISCovering Authors: Modules* (including modules for Dramatists, Most-Studied Authors, Multicultural Authors, Novelists, Poets, and Popular/Genre Authors), *Drama Criticism*, *Hispanic Literature Criticism*, *Hispanic Writers*, *Junior DISCovering Authors*, *Major Authors and Illustrators for Children and Young Adults*, *Major 20th-Century Writers*, *Native North American Literature*, *Poetry Criticism*, *Short Story Criticism*, *Something about the Author*, *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, *World Literature Criticism*, *World Literature Criticism Supplement*, and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*.

A Sample Index Entry:



For the most recent *CA* information on Kinnell, users should refer to Volume 34 of the *New Revision Series*, as designated by "CANR-34"; if that volume is unavailable, refer to CANR-10. If CANR-10 is also unavailable, refer to CA 9-12R, published in 1974, for Kinnell's first revision entry.

How Are Entries Compiled?

The editors make every effort to secure new information directly from the authors. Copies of all sketches in selected *CA* and *CANR* volumes previously published are routinely sent to listees at their last-known addresses, and returns from these authors are then assessed. For deceased writers, or those who fail to reply to requests for data, we consult other reliable biographical sources, such as those indexed in Gale's *Biography and Genealogy Master Index*, and bibliographical sources, such as *Magazine Index*, *Newspaper Abstracts*, *LC MARC*, and a variety of online databases. Further details come from published interviews, feature stories, book reviews, online literary magazines and journals, author web sites, and often the authors' publishers supply material.

** Indicates that a listing has been compiled from secondary sources but has not been personally verified for this edition by the author under review.*

What Kinds of Information Does an Entry Provide?

Sketches in *CANR* contain the following biographical and bibliographical information:

- **Entry heading:** the most complete form of author's name, plus any pseudonyms or name variations used for writing
- **Personal information:** author's date and place of birth, family data, ethnicity, educational background, political and religious affiliations, and hobbies and leisure interests
- **Addresses:** author's home, office, or agent's addresses, plus e-mail and fax numbers, as available
- **Career summary:** name of employer, position, and dates held for each career post; resume of other vocational achievements; military service
- **Membership information:** professional, civic, and other association memberships and any official posts held
- **Awards and honors:** military and civic citations, major prizes and nominations, fellowships, grants, and honorary degrees
- **Writings:** a comprehensive, chronological list of titles, publishers, dates of original publication and revised editions, and production information for plays, television scripts, and screenplays
- **Adaptations:** a list of films, plays, and other media which have been adapted from the author's work
- **Work in progress:** current or planned projects, with dates of completion and/or publication, and expected publisher, when known
- **Sidelights:** a biographical portrait of the author's development; information about the critical reception of the author's works; revealing comments, often by the author, on personal interests, aspirations, motivations, and thoughts on writing
- **Biographical and critical sources:** a list of books and periodicals in which additional information on an author's life and/or writings appears

Related Titles in the CA Series

Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series complements *CA* original and revised volumes with specially commissioned autobiographical essays by important current authors, illustrated with personal photographs they provide. Common topics include their motivations for writing, the people and experiences that shaped their careers, the rewards they derive from their work, and their impressions of the current literary scene.

Contemporary Authors Bibliographical Series surveys writings by and about important American authors since World War II. Each volume concentrates on a specific genre and features approximately ten writers; entries list works written by and about the author and contain a bibliographical essay discussing the merits and deficiencies of major critical and scholarly studies in detail.

Available in Electronic Formats

CD-ROM. Full-text bio-bibliographic entries from the entire *CA* series, covering approximately 101,000 writers, are available on CD-ROM through lease and purchase plans. The disc combines entries from the *CA*, *CANR*, and *Contemporary Authors Permanent Series (CAP)* print series to provide the most recent author listing. It can be searched by name, title, subject/genre, nationality/ethnicity, personal data, and as well as advanced searching using boolean logic. The disc is updated every six months. For more information, call 1-800-877-GALE. *CA* is also available on CD-ROM from SilverPlatter Information, Inc.

Online. The *Contemporary Authors* database is made available online to libraries and their patrons through online public access catalog (OPAC) vendors. Currently, *CA* is offered through Ameritech Library Services' Vista Online (formerly Dynix).

GaleNet. *CA* is available on a subscription basis through GaleNet, a new online information resource that features an easy-to-use end-user interface, the powerful search capabilities of the BRS/Search retrieval software, and ease of access through the World Wide Web. For more information, call 1-800-877-GALE.

Magnetic Tape. *CA* is available for licensing on magnetic tape in a fielded format. The database is available for internal data processing and nonpublishing purposes only. For more information, call 1-800-877-GALE.

Suggestions Are Welcome

The editors welcome comments and suggestions from users on any aspects of the *CA* series. If readers would like to recommend authors for inclusion in future volumes of the series, they are cordially invited to write: The Editors, *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series*, 835 Penobscot Bldg., 645 Griswold St., Detroit, MI 48226-4094; call toll-free at 1-800-347-GALE; or fax at 1-313-961-6599.

CA Numbering System and Volume Update Chart

Occasionally questions arise about the *CA* numbering system and which volumes, if any, can be discarded. Despite numbers like “29-32R,” “97-100” and “157,” the entire *CA* print series consists of only 147 physical volumes with the publication of *CA* Volume 159. The following charts note changes in the numbering system and cover design, and indicate which volumes are essential for the most complete, up-to-date coverage.

CA First Revision

- 1-4R through 41-44R (11 books)
Cover: Brown with black and gold trim.
There will be no further First Revision volumes because revised entries are now being handled exclusively through the more efficient *New Revision Series* mentioned below.

CA Original Volumes

- 45-48 through 97-100 (14 books)
Cover: Brown with black and gold trim.
- 101 through 159 (59 books)
Cover: Blue and black with orange bands.
The same as previous *CA* original volumes but with a new, simplified numbering system and new cover design.

CA Permanent Series

- *CAP*-1 and *CAP*-2 (2 books)
Cover: Brown with red and gold trim.
There will be no further *Permanent Series* volumes because revised entries are now being handled exclusively through the more efficient *New Revision Series* mentioned below.

CA New Revision Series

- *CANR*-1 through *CANR*-61 (61 books)
Cover: Blue and black with green bands.
Includes only sketches requiring significant changes; **sketches are taken from any previously published *CA*, *CAP*, or *CANR* volume.**

If You Have:

You May Discard:

CA First Revision Volumes 1-4R through 41-44R and <i>CA Permanent Series</i> Volumes 1 and 2	CA Original Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4 Volumes 5-6 through 41-44
CA Original Volumes 45-48 through 97-100 and 101 through 159	NONE: These volumes will not be superseded by corresponding revised volumes. Individual entries from these and all other volumes appearing in the left column of this chart may be revised and included in the various volumes of the <i>New Revision Series</i> .
CA New Revision Series Volumes <i>CANR</i> -1 through <i>CANR</i> -61	NONE: The <i>New Revision Series</i> does not replace any single volume of <i>CA</i> . Instead, volumes of <i>CANR</i> include entries from many previous <i>CA</i> series volumes. All <i>New Revision Series</i> volumes must be retained for full coverage.

A Sampling of Authors and Media People Featured in This Volume

Amiri Baraka

Described by one critic as a writer who has “significantly affected the course of African-American literary culture,” Baraka’s standing as a major poet and playwright is matched by his importance as a cultural and political leader. The recipient of a PEN-Faulkner Award, a Langston Hughes medal, and numerous other awards for his work, Baraka’s titles include *A Good Girl Is Hard to Find*, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, *Dutchman*, and *Transbluency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961-1995)*.

Samuel Beckett

Along with the work of Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter, Beckett’s stark plays are said to compose the “Theater of the Absurd,” an avant-garde form of drama combining surrealism, existentialism, and black humor to illustrate the absurdity of the human condition. Perhaps most-often identified as the author of the classics *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, and *Happy Days*, Beckett’s work has enjoyed renewed attention with the 1993 publication of his first and previously-unpublished novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, and the 1995 publications of his *Collected Poems, 1930-1989*, a new edition of *Elutheira: A Play in Three Acts*, and *Dramaticulesg*.

Elizabeth Bishop

Bishop’s work has had the ability to make the most diverse groups of poets—those who normally disagree over themes, techniques, and forms—agree on one point: that Bishop was an admirable artist. A highly-celebrated poet and recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Award, and a National Book Critics Circle Award, Bishop died in 1979, prompting Frank Bidart to write: “If the future is smart, surely her poems will continue to be read. Great poems don’t replace one another; each does something nothing else does.” Bishop’s titles include *Poems: North & South*, *Questions of Travel*, and the recently-published *Selected Poetry, 1937-1990* and *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop*.

Cleanth Brooks

From the early-1940s until his death in 1994, Brooks was, according to one critic, “one of the pillars of the American literary-critical establishment.” Best remembered as one of the pioneers of the so-called “New Criticism,” his titles include *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* and *Understanding Poetry: An Anthology for College Students*.

James M. Cain

Best-known for his first novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, which, according to one critic, became “one of those rarest of literary achievements in America: a phenomenal best seller that received the highest acclaim from critics,” Cain has been described as “the twenty-minute egg” of the “hard-boiled” school. His other titles include *Double Indemnity*, *Mildred Pierce*, *Serenade*, and the more-recently published *The Baby in the Icebox*, and *Other Short Fiction* and *Career in C Major*, and *Other Fiction*.

Italo Calvino

Italian novelist and short story writer Calvino was famous for the monumental collection of Italian fables he edited as well as for the fables he wrote. Gore Vidal noted that because Calvino both edited and wrote fables he was “someone who reached not only primary school children . . . but, at one time or another, everyone who reads.” Following his death in 1985, Calvino’s widow oversaw the issue of new volumes of his work in English, including the 1993 edition of *The Road to San Giovanni*. Calvino’s other titles include *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* and *Palomar*.

Benjamin Capps

Described by one critic as “one of the best writers in America today,” Capps writes novels that focus on the American West and are “serious depictions of the real life on the frontier, which explore serious themes of cultures in confrontation, and recreate the people—both whites and Indians—who lived on the plains a hundred years ago.” His titles include *The Trail to Ogallala*, *The Brothers of Uterica*, and *Woman Chief*.

James Dickey

Dickey was widely regarded as a major American poet because of what critics and readers identified as his unique vision and style. "It is clear," said Joyce Carol Oates, "that Dickey desires to take on 'his' own personal history as an analogue to or a microscopic exploration of twentieth-century American history, which is one of the reasons he is so important as a poet." Often focusing on what one critic described as a concern "to get back wholeness of being, to respond full-heartedly and full-bodied to experience," Dickey's works include *Buckdancer's Choice*, *Poems*, 1957-1967, and *Deliverance*.

Will Durant

Durant was a prize-winning historian whose chronicles of world history and civilization reached a mass audience. Perhaps his most enduring work is the eleven-volume *The Story of Civilization*, on which he collaborated with his wife, Ariel. In this collection, the pair endeavored to synthesize the developments in art, science, religion, politics, literature, and economics. Awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1968 for *Rousseau and Revolution*, Durant's other titles include *The Lessons of History* and *Interpretations of Life*.

Ellen Gilchrist

The author of poems, short stories, and novels, Gilchrist opens for her readers a side door through which to view the world of the contemporary American South. Praised for her depictions of "ordinary happenings in out of the way places" and "domestic routine disrupted by violence," she has received numerous awards for her work, including an American Book Award in 1984. Occasionally compared to Carson McCullers and Tennessee Williams, Gilchrist's titles include *In The Land of Dreamy Dreams*, *Victory over Japan*, *The Anna Papers*, and *Rhoda: A Life in Stories*.

Jan Morris

A critically-acclaimed British journalist and travel essayist, Morris has written numerous books on travels and adventures around the world. Known to readers under the name James Morris until changing genders in a sex-change operation in 1972, Morris gained fame in the 1950s for covering the Mt. Everest climbing expedition of Sir Edmund Hillary. Her works often explore the past in the form of the rise and fall of the British Empire and include *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire*, *The Spectacle of Empire*, and *Fisher's Face, or, Getting to Know the Admiral*.

R. K. Narayan

Perhaps the best-known Indian writing in English today, Narayan's long and prolific career has been marked by well-received novels, novellas, and short stories, almost all of which are set in the fictional backwater town of Malgudi and its environs. Malgudi has perhaps inevitably drawn comparisons to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, both because Narayan returns to its setting again and again, and because he uses its eccentric citizens to meditate upon the human condition in a global context. His titles include *The Bachelor of Arts*, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The World of Nagaraj*, and *Salt & Sawdust: Stories and Table Talk*.

Julia O'Faolain

Irish writer O'Faolain has garnered significant acclaim and attention for her novels, short story collections, and works of nonfiction. Drawing on her extensive foreign travels, O'Faolain has used Italy, France, Ireland, and the United States as settings for her stories. Often identified for her works that focus on women in history, including *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians* and *Women in the Wall*, O'Faolain also authored *No Country for Young Men*, *The Irish Signorina* and *The Judas Cloth*.

Valerie Sayers

All of Sayers' five novels have won critical acclaim as fresh reflections of modern life in the time-honored Southern literary tradition. With affectionate but unrelenting satire, Sayers has revised old Southern themes—particularly evoking the strong Southern faith in family—to accord with her view of an uncertain modern world. The forceful writing and Southern wit of the "Due East" novels, in the opinion of several critics, place Sayers in the ranks of such revered Southern writers as Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor. Her titles include *Due East*, *Who Do You Love?*, and *Brain Fever*.

Charles Simic

Simic, a native of Yugoslavia who immigrated to the United States during his teens, has been hailed as one of his adopted homeland's finest poets. Simic's work, which includes *Unending Blues*, *Walking the Black Cat*, and *Hotel Insomnia*, has won numerous prestigious awards, among them the 1990 Pulitzer Prize and the coveted MacArthur Foundation "genius grant."

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Author Listings 1

Indexing note: All *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series* entries are indexed in the *Contemporary Authors* cumulative index, which is published separately and distributed with even-numbered *Contemporary Authors* original volumes and odd-numbered *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series* volumes.

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* Indicates that a listing has been compiled from secondary sources believed to be reliable but has not been personally verified for this edition by the author sketched.

ADAMS, F(rank) Ramsay 1883-1963 (Carl Dane)

PERSONAL: Born July 7, 1883, in Morrison, IL; died October 8, 1963; son of George Bradford (an editor) and Lucy E. (Ramsay) Adams; married Hazel Leslie Judd, 1907 (died); married Lorna D. Margrave, December 1, 1931; children: Penny Adams Munroe. **Education:** University of Chicago, Ph.B., 1904. **Politics:** Republican. **Religion:** Protestant. **Avocational interests:** Vegetable gardening.

CAREER: Reporter for *City Press*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Chicago Herald Examiner*, all Chicago, IL, 1903-04; Playhouse Theater, Whitehall, MI, manager, 1916-32; Sylvan Beach Resort Co., Whitehall, MI, president, 1916-32; Carlson-Adams Garage, Whitehall, MI, owner and operator, 1923-51. **Military service:** U.S. Army, Artillery, American Expeditionary Forces, 1916-19; became first lieutenant; received French Service Medal.

MEMBER: Authors League of America, Screen Writers Guild, American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, American Legion, Veterans of World War One, Chicago Press Vets, Masons, Phi Sigma, Delta Upsilon.

WRITINGS:

Secret Attic, Stanley Paul (London), 1930.
The Long Night, Stanley Paul, 1932.
For Valor, Stanley Paul, 1934.
Pleasure Island, Stanley Paul, 1936.
Men on Foot, Newnes (London), 1937.
Gunsight Ranch, Doubleday, Doran (New York City), 1939.

Arizona Feud, Doubleday, Doran, 1941.
When I Come Back, McBride (New York City), 1944.
The Impossible Dream: A Report, F. Adams (Camarillo, CA), 1976.

PLAYS

(With Will M. Hough) *His Highness, the Bey: A Musical Satire in Two Acts*, produced in Chicago, 1905.
(With Hough) *The Isle of Bong-Bong: A Musical Comedy in Two Acts*, produced in Chicago, 1905.
(With Hough) *The Land of Nod: A Musical Extravaganza with a Prologue and Two Acts*, produced in Chicago, 1905.
(With Hough) *The Time, the Place and the Girl: A Three-Act Comedy with Music*, produced in Chicago, 1906.
Five Fridays, Small, Maynard (Boston), 1915.
Molly and I; or, The Silver Ring, Small, Maynard, 1915.
Stage Struck, Jacobsen-Hodgkinson (New York City), 1925.
Almost a Lady, Jacobsen-Hodgkinson, 1927.
Help Yourself to Happiness, Macaulay (New York City), 1929.
King's Crew, Long and Richard R. Smith (New York City), 1932.

Also author of plays *Honeymoon Trail*, *The Flirting Princess*, *The Golden Girl*, *A Stubborn Cinderella*, *The Goddess of Liberty*, *Miss Nobody from Starland*, *The Prince of Tonight*, *The Heartbreakers*, *Princess April*, and *Fast and Grow Fat*.

OTHER

Author of screenplays *The Cowboy and the Lady*, *Peg o' My Heart*, *Trade-Winds*, *The Virginia Judge*, *She*

Made Her Bed, The Super-Sex, and Scandal Street. Contributor of short stories and serials to *Cosmopolitan*, *Red Book*, *Munsey Magazine*, *Black Cat*, *Illustrated Detective*, *Smart Set*, *MacLean's*, and *Nash's*; stories included in many textbooks and anthologies. Author of lyrics to approximately two hundred songs, including "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," "Honeymoon," and "Blow the Smoke Away."

SIDELIGHTS: F. Ramsay Adams was a writer of plays, screenplays, song lyrics, and novels. Adams, wrote J. Fraser Cocks, III in *Twentieth-Century Western Writers*, "specialized in romantic adventure and mystery fiction featuring bright, sophisticated, articulate people engaged in witty repartee and light-hearted love affairs."

Adams began writing while still attending the University of Chicago at the turn of the century. Along with collaborator Will M. Hough, Adams wrote a number of musical comedies staged in Chicago at this time. Among their most popular works was the song "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now." The song earned national exposure in 1947 when George Jessel produced a film musical by the same title and the song became a nationwide hit.

Adams' novels often featured lightly humorous plots mixed with adventure or mystery. In *Five Fridays*, for example, he wrote of a young woman who takes everything she reads in the magazines seriously, to the point of following an extreme regimen of fasting for the benefit of her health. A critic for the *New York Times* claimed that "Adams tells his hilarious story with much sense of humor and with a happy faculty for quaint conceits and entertaining statement." The novel *King's Crew* combines adventure with mystery in its story of a group of young friends on vacation who encounter a Mexican bandit. A critic for *Springfield Republican* stated: "The characters are intensely alive and the dialog is gaily humorous." "Readers who enjoy a sentimental, swift-moving tale . . . will find the book to their taste," wrote a critic for the *New York Times*.

The mystery element reappears in several of Adams' other popular novels. In *Help Yourself to Happiness*, a young woman is wrongly accused of murdering a prominent artist and must flee the city. Following a train wreck, she assumes the identity of a female passenger on the train. "If," wrote a critic in the *Boston Transcript*, "you want rollicking humor and delicate satire, you will be satisfied." In a similar plot line, *Gunsight Ranch* sees the narrator on the run for

bank fraud, a crime he has not committed. When a man sitting next to him at the train station suffers a fatal heart attack, the narrator assumes the dead man's identity. G. W. Harris in the *New York Times* noted that "Adams has an uncanny deftness in getting his hero into, and out of, tight places." In *Arizona Feud*, a reporter solves a murder and puts an end to a violent family feud. Harris stated that this novel portrayed a "grim and horrible tragedy" but with "lightness and dash and cleverness and wise-cracking dialogue."

BIOGRAPHICAL/CRITICAL SOURCES:

BOOKS

Twentieth-Century Western Writers, second edition, St. James Press (Detroit), 1991.

PERIODICALS

Boston Transcript, November 16, 1929, p. 10.
New York Times, July 14, 1915, p. 20; May 15, 1932, p. 6; April 30, 1939, p. 16; September 14, 1941, p. 17.
Springfield Republican, May 1, 1932, p. 7E.*

* * *

ALGREN, Nelson 1909-1981

PERSONAL: Given name Nelson Ahlgren Abraham; name legally changed to Nelson Algren; born March 28, 1909, in Detroit, MI; died of a heart attack, May 9, 1981, in Sag Harbor, NY; married Amanda Kontowicz, 1936 (divorced, 1939); married Betty Ann Jones, 1965 (divorced, 1967). **Education:** University of Illinois, Urbana, B.A., 1931. **Avocational interests:** Boxing, horse racing, poker and other card games.

CAREER: Salesperson (sold coffee door to door for a time) and migratory worker in the South and Southwest during the Depression; worked at a gas station in Rio Hondo, TX, 1933, which eventually led to the writing of his first published story; worked briefly for a Works Progress Administration writers' project; worked on venereal-disease control for the Chicago Board of Health; edited, with Jack Conroy, an experimental magazine called *The New Anvil*, Chicago, 1939-41; author and journalist, 1941-81, including coverage of the Vietnam War, 1969; columnist, Chi-

cago Free Press, 1970; teacher of creative writing, University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1967, and the University of Florida, Gainesville, 1974. *Military service:* U.S. Army, 1942-45; medical corpsman.

MEMBER: American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

AWARDS, HONORS: American Academy grant and Newberry Library fellow, both 1947; National Institute of Arts and Letters fellowship, 1947, and Newberry Library fellowship, both for the writing of *The Man with the Golden Arm*; National Book Award, 1950, for *The Man with the Golden Arm*; National Institute of Arts and Letters medal of merit, 1974; National Endowment for the Arts grant, 1976; "Nelson Algren fiction contest" established in author's memory by *Chicago Magazine*, 1982, continued by *Chicago Tribune*, 1986—; "PEN/Nelson Algren Fiction Award" established in author's memory by PEN American Center, 1983—.

WRITINGS:

Somebody in Boots (novel), Vanguard, 1935, reprinted with new preface, Berkley Publishing, 1965.

Never Come Morning (novel), Harper, 1942, reprinted, Berkley Publishing, 1968, Seven Stories Press, 1996.

The Neon Wilderness (short stories), Doubleday, 1947, reprinted with afterword by Studs Terkel and a 1955 *Paris Review* interview, Writing and Readers, 1986.

The Man with the Golden Arm (novel), Doubleday, 1949, reprinted, Robert Bentley, 1978.

Chicago: City on the Make (prose poem), Doubleday, 1951, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

A Walk on the Wild Side (novel; also see below), Farrar, Strauss, 1956, reprinted, Greenwood Press, 1978, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990.

(With Jay Landesman, Fran Landesman and Tommy Wolf) *A Walk on the Wild Side* (three-act musical play), first produced at Crystal Palace Theatre, St. Louis, 1960.

(Author of foreword and contributor) *Nelson Algren's Own Book of Lonesome Monsters* (short story anthology), Lancer Books, 1962, Bernard Geis, 1963.

Notes from a Sea Diary: Hemingway All the Way (nonfiction), Putnam, 1965.

Who Lost an American? (nonfiction), Macmillan, 1963.

(Author of introduction) Jan I. Fortune, editor, *The True Story of Bonnie and Clyde: As Told by*

Bonnie's Mother and Clyde's Sister, Signet, 1968.

The Last Carousel (collection of short pieces), Putnam, 1973.

Calhoun: Roman eines Verbrechens, edited and translated by Carl Weissner, Zweitausendeins, 1981, original English language edition published as *The Devil's Stocking*, Arbor House, 1983.

America Eats, University of Iowa Press (Iowa City), 1993.

He Swung and He Missed, Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1993.

The Texas Stories of Nelson Algren, University of Texas Press (Austin), 1995.

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CONTRIBUTOR TO ANTHOLOGIES

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John Lehmann, editor, *The Penguin New Writing*, Penguin Books, 1948.

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OTHER

Contributor of short stories, essays, articles and reviews to numerous periodicals, including *Story*, *Nation*, *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *American Mercury*, *Atlantic*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Partisan Review*, *Playboy*, and *Rolling Stone*. A collection of Nelson Algren's papers are at the Ohio State University Library, Columbus, OH.

ADAPTATIONS: *The Man with the Golden Arm* was produced as a film under the same title by United Artists, 1955. *A Walk on the Wild Side* was produced as a film under the same title by Columbia Pictures, 1962, and as a musical play under the same title at New York's Musical Theater Workshop and later at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys, California, 1988. (Algren did not approve of the productions.)

SIDELIGHTS: The late Nelson Algren's casts of hopeless drifters, prostitutes, petty thieves, con men, addicts and derelicts earned him the designation "poet

of the Chicago slums," but he preferred to call himself "the tin whistle of American letters." Algren's novels, including *A Walk on the Wild Side*, *Never Come Morning*, and the National Book Award-winning *The Man with the Golden Arm*, explore life situations in the seamy sections of town with emphasis on humanity battered by abject poverty and social indifference. As Chester E. Eisinger notes in *Fiction of the Forties*, Algren was "the poet of the jail and the whorehouse; he has made a close study of the cockroach, the drunkard, and the pimp, the garbage in the street and the spittle on the chin. He has a truly cloacal vision of the American experience." Though Algren worked as a journalist, essayist and reviewer most of his life, Eisinger suggests the author earned a reputation for writing fiction that attacked the "bluebird vision of America." According to Eisinger, the criticism in Algren's novels "is not in any sense ideological. It is a compound of resentment and perversity, of feelings; it is a conviction that the respectable classes ought to have their noses rubbed in the poverty and degradation of American life as an antidote to their self-satisfaction; it is a conviction that the poor are just as good as the rich, and more fun to boot; it is sheer sentimental sympathy for the underdog."

Critics such as Ralph J. Gleason and Sheldon Norman Grebstein feel that Algren took a singular responsibility for exploding the myths of opportunity and democracy generated by and for the American middle class. In *Rolling Stone*, Gleason writes: "Up until Algren, no American writer had really combined a poetic gift for words and a vision of truth about the textbook democracy." Grebstein elaborates in *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, noting that Algren's work "depicts but three milieus: life on the road or in the jails of the South-west in the 1930's; life in the slums, bars, and whorehouses of New Orleans of the '30's; life in the poorer working-class neighborhoods . . . in the Chicago of the 1930's and '40's. . . . Nowhere in Algren are there people vibrantly healthy, free of guilt, clean, fulfilled, content." Grebstein concludes that Algren's central theme is "the refutation of what has been among the hallowed official truths of American society, a truth which Algren considers the blackest lie: the belief that the individual retains the power of choice, of deciding between two alternatives, in plotting his destiny."

Kenneth G. McCollum reflects on Algren's vision of hopelessness in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, claiming that Algren's stories and novels are "often loose and rambling, partly because the lives of the

characters are uncertain and disconnected. . . . Algren deals with man in a world of chance in a universe that is indifferent or even hostile to his microcosmic sense of himself." Eisinger likewise cites Algren's "unheroic hero who comes to a blank end in a hostile world," trapped by his own fallible nature and by social circumstances. McCollum contends that this existential viewpoint entered Algren's fiction without the author's conscious philosophical design. "Algren's works abound with manifestations of such existential terms as *dread*, *anxiety*, *despair*, *nothingness*, *alienation*, and the *absurd*," concludes McCollum. Often an Algren protagonist finds momentary redemption or meaning through love, as George Bluestone notes in the *Western Review*: "[In] Algren's central vision, self-destruction becomes operative only after the destruction of some loved object. The moment a central character becomes responsible for such ruin, he is irrevocably doomed. That 'irrational, destructive force,' then, is the impulse to destroy love which is tantamount to death." Eisinger sees Algren as "insisting that nothing can kill the aspiration for a more meaningful life than it is possible for his people to attain. And he is insisting most of all upon the survival of love, not as the romantic passion that men die for but as the only source of warmth in the lives of the hopeless."

Algren wrote for more than forty years, but a conviction that novels require an "all out" single-minded dedication limited his output of longer fiction. In *Conversations with Nelson Algren*, the author told H. E. F. Donohue about his approach to the craft: "If you do the big book there's no way—at least I have no way—of doing a big book and doing anything else. . . . In fact you don't do much of anything but get a scene and you live within the scene and keep pushing that particular scene. . . . You've got to cut everything else out. You're never free. And you've got to do that for a couple of years before you can make a pattern or cut a scene that nobody else has touched." Algren added that he required firsthand experience of his fictional milieus in order to create a novel: "The only way I can write is to try to make something that hasn't been done before, and in order to do that you can't just take notes. You have to *be* there. You write about your own reactions to the scene. You identify yourself with the scene. And you have to get all the details that nobody knows about. You have to be specific." In their study entitled *Nelson Algren*, Martha Heasley Cox and Wayne Chatterton cite Algren for "style and language that are drawn from the world he depicts." They also record Algren's often-quoted assertion about his real-

istic yet poetic prose: "My most successful poetry, the lines people threw back at me years after they were written, were lines I never wrote. They were lines I heard, and repeated, usually by someone who never read and couldn't write."

Algren indeed spent a great deal of time in the company of the homeless and the illiterate. He was born in Detroit but was raised in a working-class section of Chicago, the only son of a machinist. Despite an undistinguished high school career, he enrolled in college at the University of Illinois and majored in journalism. When he graduated in 1931, work was unobtainable; he searched for a job for a year and then began to hitchhike south. The following two years were extremely difficult ones for Algren. He spent some months in New Orleans, selling coffee and bogus beauty parlor discount certificates door-to-door. For a time he accepted responsibility for an all-but-deserted gas station in Rio Hondo, Texas, until an unscrupulous partner began to abscond with the gasoline. Algren then hopped a freight train to El Paso, where he was arrested for vagrancy, thrown in jail, and fined five dollars. When he was released he moved to Alpine, Texas, and discovered that he could use the typewriters at the understaffed Alpine Teachers College without detection. He began to write short stories and letters that he mailed back to Chicago, and it was from among these Depression-era experiences that his early fiction was culled.

Eventually Algren decided to return to Chicago. He chose a typewriter from the Alpine Teachers College and attempted to mail it north. Then he jumped into a boxcar himself, but he only got as far as San Antonio before he was arrested for the theft of the typewriter. He spent the next four months in jail, awaiting trial with a circuit-riding judge. This incident involving rural law enforcement is reflected throughout Algren's fiction, most notably in *The Neon Wilderness*, *Somebody in Boots*, and *A Walk on the Wild Side*. After his trial, Algren left Texas immediately, riding freight trains and hitchhiking back to Chicago.

In *Conversations with Nelson Algren*, the author reminisced about why he decided to write fiction: "I wanted to be a writer in the literary sense. That is, I wanted to find a place in the literary world. . . . But the experience on the road gave me something to write about. It was just an accidental, just a fortuitous thing. I didn't go on the road in order to have something to write about. You do see what it's like, what a man in shock who is dying looks like. . . . Or you're waiting for a boxcar and it seems to be going

a little too fast and some kid makes a try for it and you see him miss and then you get the smell of blood and you go over and you see it sliced off his arm. And all the whores in New Orleans. And all the tens of thousands of Americans literally milling around at that time trying to survive. . . . All these scenes, one after another, piled up into something that made me not just want to write but to really say it, to find out that this thing was all upside down."

Somebody in Boots, Algren's first novel, was published in 1935. The book's emphasis, writes Maxwell Geismar in *American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity*, lies in its "scenes of brutality which mark the life of the 'lumpen proletariat,' the social scum, the passively rotting mass of people who lie at the bottom of the social scale." The hero of *Somebody in Boots*, Cass McKay, is driven from his home in a Texas border town by violence and poverty; the narrative follows the youth's misadventures as a homeless, freight-hopping hobo. Bluestone calls the work "the most uneven and least satisfying, but in some ways the most revealing of [Algren's] books." Eisinger also finds the novel revealing in its "Marxist-angled social criticism," but he adds: "[Algren] displays an unreasoning hatred for the respectable, property-owning classes in America, but unfortunately nothing of what he says has relevance in his story. In this inability to integrate such criticism and the themes of his novel one may find a reason for Algren's surrender of the techniques of frontal attack on social issues." Bluestone likewise cites "parenthetical broadsides" in the novel that are "purely didactic intrusions," but he concludes that *Somebody in Boots* "reveals certain inclinations which will become more important later on: the choice of fallen, barely articulate characters; a narrative sensibility aware of verbal complexity; a prose appropriation of poetic devices; a piecing together of previously published pieces; . . . [and] a central concern with love and survival in the face of loneliness and death."

Much of the critical commentary on *Somebody in Boots* is retrospective, for the book was not widely reviewed or commercially successful when first released. This lack of public enthusiasm for his work led Algren to concentrate on short stories and journalism for nearly five years. He worked as a staff writer for the Works Progress Administration and helped to edit a small leftist magazine, the *New Anvil*, while publishing occasional poems in other magazines. In 1940 he returned to work on longer fiction, and the resulting novel, *Never Come Morning*, was published in 1942 to immediate critical acclaim. Set in a Polish

community of the Chicago slums, the story revolves around Bruno Bicek, an aspiring boxer who turns to criminal activity and murder after allowing his street gang friends to rape his girlfriend. According to McCollum, the book's theme of physical conquest devoid of love is "symbolic of the differences between Algren's perception and the middle-class idea of what was going on in America. To Algren, niceness, purity, and fairness were part of a myth that disguised the strong taking from the weak."

Never Come Morning established Algren as a "Chicago novelist" as well as a practitioner of the style known as native American realism. *New Republic* contributor Malcolm Cowley writes: "It is the poetry of familiar things that is missing in the other Chicago novels and that shows the direction of Algren's talent. In spite of the violent story he tells—and tells convincingly—he is not by instinct a novelist. He is a poet of the Chicago slums, and he might well be Sandburg's successor." According to Philip Rahv in *Nation*, *Never Come Morning* "is pervaded by a feeling of loss rather than of bitterness or horror. And Algren's realism is so paced as to avoid the tedium of the naturalistic stereotype, of the literal copying of surfaces. He knows how to select, how to employ factual details without letting himself be swamped by them, and, finally, how to put the slang his characters speak to creative uses so that it ceases to be an element of mere documentation and turns into an element of style." Bluestone concludes that, in *Never Come Morning*, "Algren's characteristic symbolism and indirection endow the action with pity and concealed prophecy. . . . [One finds] here, woven into the matrix of the prose, those haunting images of deserted cities, symbolizing the characters' life-in-death, which becomes increasingly typical of Algren. . . . More important than any plot or character development is the general doom implicit from the start. Only, the powerful voice behind the events insists on our attention."

Algren served in the U.S. Army as a medical corpsman from 1942 until 1945. After his discharge he began his most productive decade as a fiction writer—between 1947 and 1956 he published a short story collection, *The Neon Wilderness*, a lengthy prose poem, *Chicago: City on the Make*, and two highly acclaimed novels, *The Man with the Golden Arm* and *A Walk on the Wild Side*. It was also during this period that Algren began to undertake the extensive travels that would form a basis for much of his non-fiction. Sometimes accompanied by the French novelist Simone de Beauvoir, he visited Europe, Central

America, and many regions of the United States. Through de Beauvoir Algren met members of prominent Parisian literary circles, including Jean-Paul Sartre. Algren continued to reside primarily in Chicago, however, usually renting a small furnished flat in which he could write through the night.

The Man with the Golden Arm, published in 1949, propelled Algren to the literary forefront. He won the first National Book Award for the work, and it was also a bestseller. Once again centered in the Chicago slums, *The Man with the Golden Arm* details the downfall of Frankie Machine, a card dealer with a morphine addiction who is inevitably pursued by the law. The reaction of the book's reviewers is almost universally positive. Grebstein writes: "Not only is Algren's novel the first serious treatment in our literature of the drug addict, it is also a profoundly felt and profoundly moving book. . . . This novel marks the culmination of Algren's identification with characters the 'normal' man might think beneath or beyond his sympathies, yet such is Algren's craft that he extends the norm." *New York Times* contributor A. C. Spectorsky claims that *The Man with the Golden Arm* "is a powerful book, illuminated by flashes of Algren's grisly, antic, almost horrifying humor, by passages of finely poetic writing, and by his love and understanding, which are, at times, almost morbidly compassionate." A critic for *Time* concludes: "Readers with queasy stomachs may shrink from an environment in which the unbelievably sordid has become a way of life. They will also come away with some of Algren's own tender concern for his wretched, confused and hopelessly degenerate cast of characters. In that, writer Algren scores a true novelist's triumph."

Critics of *The Man with the Golden Arm* cite a strong portrayal of Algren's recurring theme of love, guilt and death. "The particular conflict here," Grebstein writes, "is that between self-sacrifice and self-preservation, a conflict knotted into the relationship between Frankie Machine and his wife Sophie, his friend Sparrow, and his girl Molly. These are the dynamic relationships which fluctuate with the condition of the participants. Such is Algren's version of the whole truth that his people tend to prey on one another, whether in friendship or love." McCollum likewise contends that in *The Man with the Golden Arm* "the personal interactions of the characters have more impact on the progression of the plot than does the effect of the total environment." McCollum also notes an absence of didacticism in the work despite its elucidation of the pernicious nature of slum life. "The

personal tragedy of Frankie Machine,” McCollum concludes, “is not death, but loneliness and isolation in an environment where everybody hustles and everybody is on the take.” Bluestone offers a similar assessment: “Algren’s final image, despite the humor, despite the intensity, despite the struggle to survive, is one of hopelessness and desolation. In this world, death is inescapable. What possible approaches are open to the narrator who wishes to communicate such a vision? He can laugh; or he can lament. Algren does both supremely well. But the laughter is edged with bitterness; before the reality of death, it sadly falls away.”

Algren was known to recycle material, especially memorable lines and scenes. His 1956 novel, *A Walk on the Wild Side*, bears a strong thematic resemblance to *Somebody in Boots*. The protagonist of *A Walk on the Wild Side* is once again a young illiterate Texan who drifts to Depression-era New Orleans and becomes involved in a sordid sex show in a house of prostitution. In his appraisal of Algren’s work, Bluestone writes: “At first glance, *A Walk on the Wild Side* seems to be a mere rewriting of *Somebody in Boots*. . . . From the point of view of Algren’s entire output, however, it represents a fascinating reappraisal of his central theme. Ultimately the differences between the two books are more striking than the resemblances. The narrative alternates between a mood of savage tenderness and one of broad burlesque, but this time the comic mood is strongest. . . . Out of the poetic exploration of this marginal, half-lit world there emerges the image of a universe in which human action must inevitably seem absurd. And yet, within that world, there coexists a real belief that human action can have validity and meaning.” This belief, Bluestone concludes, contrasts with the nihilistic tones and outcomes of Algren’s earlier works.

Critics are divided on the quality of *A Walk on the Wild Side*. *New York Times* contributor Alfred Kazin states: “It is impossible to feel that [Algren] really cares about these people, that he is interested in them, that these are human beings he has observed. What I object to most in this book is the plainly contrived quality of this pretended feeling about characters whom Mr. Algren writes about not because they are ‘lost,’ but because they are freaks.” In his *New Yorker* review, Norman Podhoretz finds the book “more in the spirit of the boozy sentimentality of the broken-down Shakespearean actor declaiming to the boys on the barroom floor than an expression of Rabelaisian exuberance.” Cox and Chatterton express a different opinion in their study of Algren’s work:

“One of Algren’s most remarkable achievements in *A Walk on the Wild Side* is his convincing, compassionate treatment of a group of characters who could, in less skillful hands, be little more than a gallery of freaks and sheer grotesques. . . . The impressive verbal mortar which binds the other stylistic properties is still the concreteness and specificity of detail; the accurate terminology of road, gutter, bar, and brothel; the keen and comprehensive ear for dialect; the eye for significant idiosyncrasies of dress and behavior; the quick grasp of obsessive quirks of thought—the ring of authority.” In the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, Milton Rugoff concludes that the novel “is an American tradition of emotional gigantism: its comedy is farce, its joys are orgies, the feats of its characters Bunyanesque, their sexuality is prodigious, their sorrow a wild keening almost too high for ordinary ears. . . . In a period that hasn’t lacked for novels of degeneracy and cruelty, . . . ‘A Walk on the Wild Side’ is almost without peer.”

Algren’s shorter works—fiction, nonfiction, and poetry—reflect many of the same concerns that motivated him to write novels. Cox and Chatterton call the author’s short stories “a considerable achievement,” adding: “The stories in *The Neon Wilderness* have elicited unexpected discipline from an author so often charged with looseness and with over-rhapsodizing in his novels. . . . Nowhere outside the short stories has Algren been so free to exercise his ability to construct a tale from the single, self-revelatory catch-phrase. . . . Nowhere else has he controlled so stringently his tendency to blend the sordid and poetic; as a result the short stories have largely escaped the adverse reaction which such a controversial mixture has brought against his novels.” Geismar likewise writes: “Algren’s powerful effects are usually in his big scenes rather than in the portrayal or development of character. He is almost at his best in . . . short stories where he can suggest the whole contour of a human life in a few terse pages.”

The “blend of sordid and poetic” that Cox and Chatterton note finds further elucidation in *Chicago: City on the Make*, Algren’s best-known prose poem. Commissioned by *Holiday* magazine as the lead article for a Chicago theme issue, the completed poem “was so unflattering that it was relegated to rear pages,” according to Jack Conroy in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook: 1982*. The work was subsequently published in book form in 1951. In a *Saturday Review* assessment, Emmett Dedmon states: “The qualities of Nelson Algren’s prose essay on