

*Contemporary  
Authors*

*volume 172*

# Contemporary Authors®

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

volume 172

**The Gale Group**  
DETROIT • SAN FRANCISCO • LONDON • BOSTON • WOODBRIDGE, CT

## STAFF

Scot Peacock, *Senior Editor and Project Manager*

Amy Francis, *Project Editor*

John Jorgenson, *Senior Content Editor*

Regie A. Carlton, Dwayne D. Hayes, Jerry Moore, *Content Editors*

Anja Barnard, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Thomas Wiloch,  
*Associate Content Editors*

Kristen A. Dorsch, *Assistant Content Editor*

Susan M. Trosky, *Managing Editor*

Victoria B. Cariappa, *Research Manager*

Andrew Guy Malonis, Barbara McNeil, Gary J. Oudersluys,  
Maureen Richards, *Research Specialists*

Patricia Tsune Ballard, Wendy K. Festerling, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie A.  
Richardson, Corrine A. Stocker, Cheryl L. Warnock, *Research Associates*

Phyllis J. Blackman, Tim Lehnerer, Patricia L. Love,  
*Research Assistants*

While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions, or discrepancies. The Gale Group accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

This publication is a creative work copyrighted by The Gale Group and fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

The Gale Group will vigorously defend all of its rights in this publication.

Copyright © 1999 by The Gale Group  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

All rights reserved including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 62-52046  
ISBN 0-7876-1995-7  
ISSN 0010-7468

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contemporary Authors<sup>®</sup>

A Comprehensive Guide to  
Current Writers in Fiction, General Nonfiction,  
Poetry, Biography, History, Science, Politics,  
and many other fields.



# Preface

*Contemporary Authors (CA)* provides information on approximately 100,000 writers in a wide range of media, including:

- Current writers of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama whose works have been issued by commercial publishers, risk publishers, or university presses (authors whose books have been published only by known vanity or author-subsidized firms are ordinarily not included)
- Prominent print and broadcast journalists, editors, photojournalists, syndicated cartoonists, graphic novelists, screenwriters, television scriptwriters, and other media people
- Authors who write in languages other than English, provided their works have been published in the United States or translated into English
- Literary greats of the early twentieth century whose works are popular in today's high school and college curriculums and continue to elicit critical attention

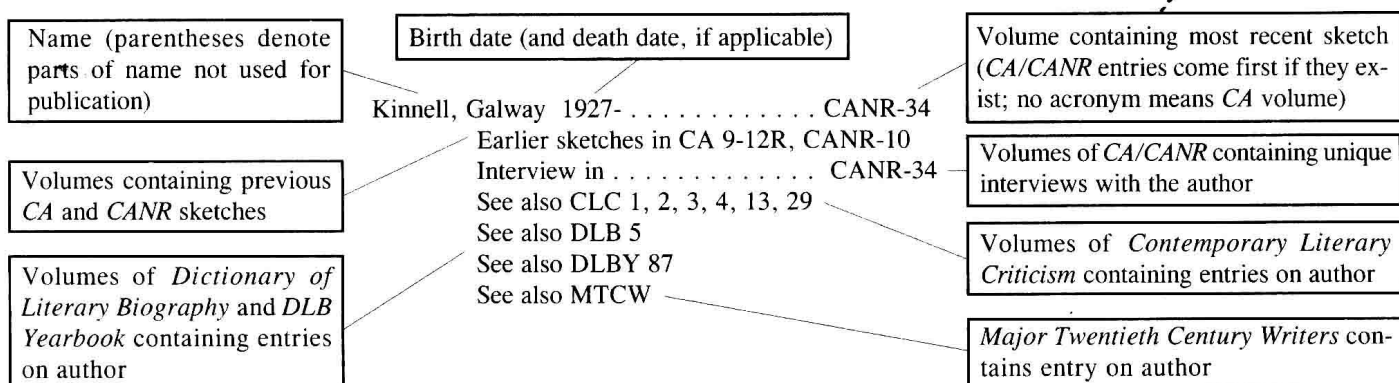
A *CA* listing entails no charge or obligation. Authors are included on the basis of the above criteria and their interest to *CA* users. Sources of potential listees include trade periodicals, publishers' catalogs, librarians, and other users.

## How to Get the Most out of *CA*: Use the Index

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 *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series (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:



## How Are Entries Compiled?

The editors make every effort to secure new information directly from the authors; listees' responses to our questionnaires and query letters provide most of the information featured in *CA*. 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, including *National Union Catalog*, *LC MARC*, and *British National Bibliography*. Further details come from published interviews, feature stories, and book reviews, as well as information supplied by the authors' publishers and agents.

*An asterisk (\*) at the end of a sketch indicates that the listing has been compiled from secondary sources believed to be reliable but has not been personally verified for this edition by the author sketched.*

## What Kinds of Information Does an Entry Provide?

Sketches in *CA* 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

**Obituary Notices** in *CA* provide date and place of birth as well as death information about authors whose full-length sketches appeared in the series before their deaths. These entries also summarize the authors' careers and writings and list other sources of biographical and death information.

### 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 100,000 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. The *CA CD-ROM* is searchable by name, title, subject/genre, nationality/ethnicity, and personal data, as well as by using Boolean logic. The disc is updated every six months. For more information, call 1-248-699-4253.

*Contemporary Authors* 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, an 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 1-248-699-4253.

**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 1-248-699-4253.

### 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; or call at 1-248-699-4253; or fax at 1-248-699-8054.

# 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 “171,” the entire *CA* print series consists of only 175 physical volumes with the publication of *CA* Volume 172. 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 172 (72 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*-76 (76 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 <b>and</b> <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 <b>and</b> 101 through 172	<b>NONE:</b> 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> -76	<b>NONE:</b> 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

### William Dalrymple

A travel writer whose books have provided the basis for two BBC television series, Dalrymple is the author of *In Xanadu: A Quest*. Dalrymple's works, which detail his experiences in Asia and the Middle East, are noted for their sense of humor and adventure.

### Yaron Ezrahi

Ezrahi, a peace activist and professor of political science, earned the 1997 National Jewish Book Award for *Rubber Bullets: Power and Conscience in Modern Israel*. Among his other works is *The Descent of Icarus: Science and the Transformation of Contemporary Democracy*.

### Helen Fielding

Author of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the British Book Award-winning novel that relates the experiences of a British woman who is single and past thirty, Fielding is also a columnist and freelance journalist. Her first novel is titled *Cause Celeb*.

### Valéry Giscard d'Estaing

A politician and former president of France, Giscard d'Estaing is the author of *Democratie Francaise*, his view of the inner workings of the French government written during his presidency. The Legion of Honor recipient also wrote *L'Etat de la France* and *L'Affrontement*.

### Herbie Hancock

Hancock, a celebrated jazz and fusion musician, is noted for both his musical compositions and his lyrics. He is the winner of a 1987 Academy Award for Best Original Score for *'Round Midnight*, a film on which Hancock served as music director, lyricist, arranger, and actor.

### Penny Harter

Harter has authored several volumes of poetry, including *Lizard Light: Poems from the Earth*. Her work, which has been supported by fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on Arts, is noted for its inclusion of haiku and use of vivid imagery. An autobiographical essay by Harter appears in this volume of *CA*.

### Rem Koolhaas

An architect and writer, Koolhaas is the recipient of a Harkness Fellowship. His works include *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, which details the author's views on New York City's evolving architectural styles.

### Alexander Lebed

A Russian politician and military leader, Lebed ran for president of Russia in 1996 before throwing his support to Boris Yeltsin. He later formed the Russian Popular Republican Party. Lebed's works include the memoir *General Alexander Lebed: My Life and My Country*.

### David Miller

A British poet and author, Miller has penned such works as *Pictures of Mercy: Selected Poems* and *Darkness Enfolding: Eight Stories*. Miller contributes an autobiographical essay to *CA* in which he relates the past influences on his writing.

### Meredith Monk

An acclaimed performance artist, Monk has been active in the New York City art world for over three decades. She is a choreographer, director, filmmaker, and composer of modern operas. Monk's works include *Vessel* and *Quarry*, both of which earned Obie awards.

### N. A. M. Rodger

Rodger, recipient of the 1998 Anderson Medal of the Society for Nautical Research, has written several critically acclaimed histories of Great Britain's navy, including *The Admiralty*. He is also the author of *The Insatiable Earl: A Life of John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich, 1718-1792*.

### Ron Rosenbaum

Rosenbaum is a Carnegie fellowship recipient and journalist who has covered politics, celebrities, and other topics. In the critically praised *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil*, Rosenbaum explores theories which attempt to explain the German dictator's personality.

### Karen Sunde

A playwright and actress, Sunde has written many works that focus on historical figures and literary characters, such as *Dark Lady*, which features William Shakespeare. Sunde has also written *kabuki*, a form of Japanese drama.

### Brenda Webster

Webster, a psychoanalytic critic and novelist, has produced literary works which concentrate on poets such as William Blake and William Butler Yeats. Webster contributes an autobiographical essay to *CA* that speaks of her "childhood impulse to investigate the intimate details of peoples' lives."

## Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following publishers, authors, and artists whose works appear in this volume.

**Penny Harter:** Poems and excerpts of poems from: *House by the Sea*, by Penny Harter. From Here Press, 1975. Copyright © 1975 by Penny Harter Bihler. *The Hollow Contagion*, by Penny Harter. Published as a broadside by From Here Press, 1976. Copyright © 1976 by Penny Harter Bihler. *Hiking the Crevasse: Poems on the Way to Divorce*, by Penny Harter. Warthog Press, 1983. Copyright © 1983 by Penny Harter. *In the Broken Curve*, by Penny Harter. Burnt Lake Press, 1984. Copyright © 1984 by Penny Harter. *Stages and Views*, by Penny Harter. Katydid Books, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by Penny Harter. *Grandmother's Milk*, by Penny Harter. Singular Speech Press, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by Penny Harter. *Turtle Blessing*, by Penny Harter. La Alameda Press, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by Penny Harter. Poem "Relativity" appears in *Bedside Prayers: Prayers and Poems for When You Rise and Go to Sleep*, edited by June Cotner. HarperCollins, 1997. Poem copyright © 1996 by Penny Harter. *Lizard Light: Poems from the Earth*. Sherman Asher Publishing, 1998. Copyright © 1998 by Penny Harter. Additional poem and story excerpts copyright © 1997 by Penny Harter. All reprinted by permission of Penny Harter.

**David Miller:** All poems and excerpts from David Miller's prose writings are copyrighted by the author. "Interrelations, Symbiosis, Overlap" was included in *Interaction and Overlap: From the Little Magazines and Small Press Collection at University College London* (with Geoffrey Soar), workfortheeyetodo, London, 1994, and reprinted in *Art and Disclosure: Seven Essays*, Stride Publications, Exeter, 1998. *South London Mix* was published by Gaberbocchus Press, London, 1975; it was also included in *Pictures of Mercy: Selected Poems*, Stride Publications, 1991. The two interviews, with James Crouch (1983) and Andrew Bick (1992), were both included in *At the Heart of Things: The Poetry and Prose of David Miller*, Stride Publications, 1994. "The Dark Path: Notes for/ from/ about Fanny Howe," appeared in *Five Fingers Review* 17, San Francisco, 1998. *W. H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise* was published by Macmillan, London, and St. Martin's Press, New York City, 1990. "In the Field" was originally published by tel-let, Charleston, Illinois, 1992, and republished in *Collected Poems*, University of Salzburg Press, Salzburg, 1997. "Dark Ground" was included in a festschrift titled *Emotional Geology: The Writings of Brian Louis Pearce*, ed. Rupert M. Loydell, Stride Publications, 1993. "At the Heart of the Thicket" was published in *At the Heart of Things*. "Thesis" appeared in *First Intensity*, No. 6, Staten Island, NY, 1996, and was also in a festschrift for James Hogg titled *Summoning the Sea: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, ed. Wolfgang Goertshacher and Glyn Pursglove, University of Salzburg Press, 1996. "Landscape" was published in *Elegy*, Oasis Books, London, 1996, and in the *Collected Poems*. The excerpt from *Spiritual Letters* appeared in *Spiritual Letters (1-7)*, tel-let, 1996, and *Spiritual Letters (1-10)*, with artwork by Andrew Bick, EMH Arts/Eagle Graphics, London, 1997. "Fire Water" was included in *Stromata*, Burning Deck Press, Providence, RI, 1995, and in the *Collected Poems*. "The End of the Kingdom of Necessity, Servitude, and Inertia" was published in *Morning Star Folios*, 2nd series, no. 3, Edinburgh, 1991, to accompany poems by Robert Lax and artwork by Andrew Bick, and reprinted in *Art and Disclosure: Seven Essays*. Benjamin Hollander's essay "On David Miller's *Spiritual Letters*" is unpublished to date. The excerpt here is by courtesy of the author. Michael Thorp's "Breaking at the Fountain: A Meditation on the Work of David Miller" was published by Stride, 1998.

**Jeanie Thompson:** Poems "Litany for a Vanishing Landscape," "Revelation," "A Memory of Slaughter," and "Lament for Your Face," from *Witness*, by Jeanie Thompson. Black Belt Press, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by Jeanie Thompson. Poem "For My Father," from *How to Enter the River*, by Jeanie Thompson. Holy Cow! Press, 1985. Copyright © 1985 by Jeanie Thompson. Poem "In My Father's Workshop," by Jeanie Thompson, unpublished. All reprinted by permission of Jeanie Thompson.

# Contents

Preface . . . . .	vii
CA Numbering System and Volume Update Chart . . . . .	xi
Authors and Media People Featured in This Volume . . . . .	xiii
Author Listings . . . . .	1

**Indexing note:** All *Contemporary Authors* 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.

**As always, the most recent *Contemporary Authors* cumulative index continues to be the user's guide to the location of an individual author's listing.**

# A

\* 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.

## ABEL, Theodora M(ead) 1899-1998

**OBITUARY NOTICE**—See index for *CA* sketch: Born September 9, 1899, in Newport, RI; died December 2, 1998, in Forestburgh, NY. Psychologist and author. Theodora Abel was well known for her study of the Indian tribes of New Mexico. Abel brought an anthropological sensibility to her studies, and incorporated the Indian value of balance into her therapy with Indians, earning her respect and the title “grandmother” among several tribes. Abel completed her education with a Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1925. Among her peers was Margaret Mead, who later authored the introduction for one of Abel’s books. Abel spent much of her career in academia teaching and carrying out research. In 1947 she served as the director of psychoanalysis for the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health located in Manhattan. Abel relocated to New Mexico in 1971 and began research there, working as a clinical professor of psychiatry for the University of New Mexico. She continued to see patients into her nineties. Able co-authored, with Samuel Roll and Rhoda Metraux, *Psychotherapy and Culture*, University of New Mexico Press, 1987, a revised edition of the original 1974 publication of the same title.

### OBITUARIES AND OTHER SOURCES:

#### BOOKS

*Who’s Who of American Women, 1985-1986*, Marquis Who’s Who, 1985.

#### PERIODICALS

*New York Times*, December 13, 1998, p. 67.

## ABELOVE, Joan

**PERSONAL:** Married Steve Hoffman, 1987; children: Andrew. **Education:** Barnard College, B.A., 1966; City University of New York, Ph.D. (anthropology), 1978.

**ADDRESSES:** *E-mail*—JoanAndy@aol.com.

**CAREER:** Taught emotionally disturbed boys in a state hospital; part-time teacher of anthropology at colleges in New York City; technical writer, 1984—.

**MEMBER:** Author’s Guild.

**AWARDS, HONORS:** Notable Children’s Book, American Library Association, 1999, Best Book for Young Adults, American Library Association/YALSA, 1999, *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year, *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, *Booklist* Editor’s Choice, and *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* Blue Ribbon, all for *Go and Come Back*; *Go and Come Back* also chosen as one of *Globe and Mail*’s ten best juvenile books of 1998.

### WRITINGS:

*Go and Come Back*, DK Ink (New York City), 1998.

**WORK IN PROGRESS:** Two short stories for anthologies to be published in 2000, and a novel.

**SIDELIGHTS:** Joan Abelow spent two years in the Amazon jungle of Peru in the 1970s doing her doctoral research in cultural anthropology. She drew on

this experience in writing her young adult novel *Go and Come Back*. The narrator is a teenaged girl, Alicia, a member of the fictional Isabo tribe in the fictional village of Poincushmana. The Isabos have no word that equals goodbye. Their word used in parting is *catanhue*, which, translated, means go and come back. Joanna and Margarita, two American graduate students, come to the village to study and take notes on the culture of the Isabos. The Isabos consider the two women stingy because they refuse to part with their possessions. Isabo cultural dictates that food and supplies be divided equally by all, and the villagers consider stealing from those who will not share a lesser sin than not sharing. The white women are criticized for not washing their hair when bathing. The villagers refer to them as "old white ladies," even though they are in their twenties. "The situation provides countless opportunities for misunderstandings by the observer and the observed, most of them a source of humor for the reader and tension for the participants," wrote a *Horn Book* reviewer. "By juxtaposing these two radically different cultures, Abelow provides humorous yet respectful insight into both."

Alicia is promised to her sister's husband, and she is trying to avoid the marriage. She adopts a sickly abandoned baby, but is unable to save its life. Alicia becomes closer to Joanna and Margarita, whose attitudes are changed as they begin to understand and accept their differences. A reviewer wrote in *Kirkus Reviews* that through the narrator's eyes, "readers will watch the outsiders' adjustments to the rhythms and customs they are studying, as they shed much of their physical and cultural baggage." Alicia also gains new perspectives, especially when the women take her for a plane ride and she sees her village from high above.

Pam Gosner wrote in *School Library Journal* that the anecdotal information "never overwhelms the narrative," and called *Go and Come Back* a "compelling novel." "There is not enough plot to the novel, but by its end the reader has nonetheless become attached to the characters and their relationships," wrote Jen Nessel in the *New York Times Book Review*. "We are left with a lot to think about in our own culture—why we think the things we think and do the things we do." "Full of life and packed with characters that by turns irritate and enlighten, *Go and Come Back* is a startling, vibrant read," concluded a *Booklist* reviewer. "Abelow seamlessly constructs a culture that may feel more real to readers than their own," wrote a contributor to *Publishers Weekly*.

## BIOGRAPHICAL/CRITICAL SOURCES:

### PERIODICALS

- Booklist*, March 1, 1998, p. 1129.  
*Horn Book*, May/June, 1998, pp. 337-338.  
*Kirkus Reviews*, January 15, 1998.  
*New York Times Book Review*, June 21, 1998.  
*Publishers Weekly*, February 2, 1998, p. 91.  
*School Library Journal*, March, 1998, p. 208.

\* \* \*

## ACOSTA, Juvenal 1961-

**PERSONAL:** Born in September, 1961, in Mexico City, Mexico; came to United States, 1986; became U.S. citizen, 1996; son of Juvenal (a schoolteacher) and Laura (an aspiring actress) Acosta; married wife Bettina.

**ADDRESSES:** Home—Berkeley, CA.

**CAREER:** Poet. San Francisco State University, teacher of poetry and creative writing. Also worked as a cookie maker, dishwasher, gas-station attendant, waiter, espresso jockey, house painter, babysitter, and carpenter.

### WRITINGS:

#### POETRY

- Diciendo unas palabras negras*, Comité Editorial del Gobierno de Michoacán, 1985.  
*Paper of Live Flesh*, Brighton Press, 1991.  
*Tango of the Scar*, Ediciones Tarumba, 1996.

#### EDITOR

- Light from a Nearby Window* (poetry anthology), City Lights (San Francisco), 1994.  
 Alberto Blanco, *Dawn of the Senses* (poetry), City Lights, 1997.

#### OTHER

Also translator into Spanish of the works of contemporary poets, including Jack Spicer, Bob Kaufman, Michael McClure, W. S. Merwin, Jack Kerouac, and Charles Bukowski. Author of poetry and literary criticism published in Mexico and the United States.



**SIDELIGHTS:** Mexican-born Juvenal Acosta uses his poetry to reconcile his Native American and European heritages. "Racism is not exclusive to Anglo-dominated cultures," he writes in his *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series (CAAS)* essay. "I can witness to that. What was denied to my father when he married my mother was in turn denied to me." Acosta finds common ground with the "Beat Generation" writers of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as African American writers like James Baldwin, who also felt alienated from their own culture. "Young Mexicans don't leave their parents' house the way young Americans do," he explains in *CAAS*. "But I slammed that door behind me and took off in desperate anguish and solitude."

Acosta came to the United States looking for a measure of the equality he was denied in Mexico. However, he reveals, he found only another kind of alienation. "When James Baldwin found himself in foreign lands," he writes, "he also found that he was 'equal,' but this equality came from his bitter discovery of racism outside of his own home: he was equally distrusted, equally unequal." Acosta compares Baldwin's work to that of Mexican poet Octavio Paz, stating, "Their reflections on the nature itself of identity and the issues that burn us when we think of these bastard sons of the northern portion of our continent, the Black and the Mexican, enable us to further the quest for answers at the end of yet another fistful of years we call millennium."

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY:** Acosta contributed the essay "Notes of a Foreign Son" to *CA*.

*For Gustavo Ramos Rivera, a foreign son.* I am not a James Baldwin scholar. I came upon his books so recently that I felt somehow guilty when I had the idea of acting on the inspiration that Baldwin gave me for some aspects concerning the writing of my own notes. But after studying his bittersweet style and being repeatedly struck by the lightning of his noble rage, I couldn't avoid feeling not the right as much as the need to write my own notes in that spirit. A renegade's American spirit. These are, therefore, the notes of the bastard son from a foreign country who became the unwanted son of this elusive and unwilling "America."

When James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* was first published in 1955, I was not even born for my date with my North American destiny. Around that time another important book was being written in California, perhaps in this same town where I've been

lucky enough to sit and watch the decay of my decade from the comfort provided by the shadow of these Berkeley pine trees. This other book gave—not only to Mexicans but to people from many different national, racial, and cultural backgrounds—important clues for the search of their own identities: *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by the Mexican poet Octavio Paz. It is not by chance—I hope—that I arrive at these two works. They are important pieces of the intellectual machinery that went into building part of the modern consciousness of our neighboring countries at a time when I need to search for answers to my dilemmas of identity in this California limbo.

*Notes of a Native Son* and *The Labyrinth of Solitude* converge in many surprising ways. At first sight one could be shocked at the idea that two writers from such different, and perhaps opposite, backgrounds and experiences could have something in common. But it is not in the land of the obvious where these two giants meet. What I find striking is the hidden dialogue that is established between the quiet, elegant, and eloquent Baldwin, who poses fundamental questions as he invites us to see his scarred back, and the privileged and sophisticated Paz, who tries to deal with questions for which there has been no possible answer for centuries—answers just as questions are always timely. What they share is more profound where silence occupies the always elusive place of words and tells us who we, perhaps, are: citizens of doubt. Both writers are complementary sides of a tossed coin that is still in the air. Their reflections on the nature itself of identity and the issues that burn us when we think of these bastard sons of the northern portion of our continent, the Black and the Mexican, enable us to further the quest for answers at the end of yet another fistful of years we call millennium.

While thousands of my fellow Mexicans cross the frontier between Mexico and the United States—that border that separates hope from desperation, to fulfill their wetback destinies (and demonstrating, by doing so, that the border is a painful and not too imaginary open wound that desire and need do not respect)—I sit and think that what really separates our countries is not an iron fence and not even a language, but a different awareness of ourselves regarding our attitudes towards life and the degree of confidence we have about our destinies.

I did not cross that line "illegally." There were times when I wished I had, but that is the romantic and somehow stupid thought of someone who feels guilty for having had the luck of avoiding misery. Since I

arrived as a guest to teach in California, am I entitled to speak about that border that I didn't have to suffer? To put it in a way that Baldwin himself might have put it, I say, of course I qualify: I am a Mexican.

In my eleven years since my arrival, I have had two radically different experiences of life in this country: that of the intellectual and that of the laboring worker. But what is remarkable in the first place is that I actually came to the United States, a country I had been taught to distrust, a country I had learned to despise.

I grew up in a middle-class family of the Mexico City suburbs where no one ever considered relocating to even another city within Mexico. Our background was deeply nationalistic, leftist, not very religious, and, of course, anti-*yanqui*. Our shelves at home were filled with books, some of which could have sent my parents to jail had we lived in the United States during the fifties: Mao Tse-tung, Marx, Paulo Freire, the diaries of "el Che" Guevara, and a decent selection of our Mexican and Latin American talents: Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, Paz, and Borges, to name a few. There was no Bible on those shelves until I got one from my grandfather who rediscovered God (just in case) towards the end of his life.

Mexico during the sixties and a good part of the seventies was an entirely different country. At the time, outsiders saw us as an upbeat young nation with nothing but future in our hands and a rising economy ready to back up all predictions of prosperity. I was born in 1961, and by the time I was five my very young parents had managed to buy the house they still live in; they had the car, the white picket fence, two kids, and a couple of nice vacations every year. Does it sound familiar? I was raised (despite all nationalisms) on Kellogg's Corn Flakes and ketchup, *The Addams Family* and Mickey Mouse. In a way, I was a North American child, born south of the border.

My father was some sort of immigrant himself. He had come from rural Mexico to the big city, the *Capital*, and was "lucky" enough to marry my mother, who was the daughter of an established Mexico City family. My mother's sisters, four of them, hated my father. He had what middle-class people call bad manners; he looked provincial, was poorly dressed, and didn't fit the profile most middle-class urban girls from Mexico City looked for in a man: He wasn't white; he didn't have a recognizable last name, and he wasn't a doctor. He was not even

a college professor, but a schoolteacher. Even after thirty-five years my father's bitterness shows on his face when he remembers how one of my aunts brought home a white, blue-eyed young man, who eventually became her husband and who in no time at all got the attention and considerations my father didn't get until many years later. His bitterness haunts me once in awhile when I face a mirror: I look very much like him.

Racism is not exclusive to Anglo-dominated cultures. I can witness to that. What was denied to my father when he married my mother was in turn denied to me. I didn't understand the detachment of my grandmother and my aunts until many years later. My father and I weren't white enough; therefore, we were not good enough. The only exception was my grandfather. He was just like us. He had come from rural Mexico and was lucky enough to marry someone's daughter. Like my father and me, he had dark Indian features, was a school teacher, and didn't give a damn about the petty bourgeois preoccupations of his wife and daughters. Grandfather Hernandez was a painter and had a studio on the third floor of the house, and that is where I would go when we visited. He used to receive the most fascinating visitors at his upstairs refuge. There were times I wasn't allowed to be there for too long, since he would be busy with all the people who dropped by (in Mexico no one makes appointments to see friends). With the exception of my mother, the women of the family considered grandfather some sort of a drunken bohemian; he was considered a good-for-nothing who always disregarded the pseudo-aristocratic ways of his wife and daughters.

My grandfather became serious about painting when he retired from teaching, and then he simply died when he got bored after more than twenty years of increasing deafness. The day he died in 1989 I got a call from my mother asking me to come home because it was time for him to go. From Berkeley, I sped to the San Francisco Airport and made it to the hospital in Mexico City six hours later, just in time to see him before he died. He liked me so much that he decided to die twice that day just so he could see me. When I arrived at the hospital his youngest son was outside in the hallway, pale and shaking. He told me Grandpa had been resuscitated just a couple of minutes before my arrival. He had died, but he came back the moment I arrived. I saw him and told him very important things I had not been able to tell him since I had left for the United States three years before that day.

I'm a Mexican writer living at the end of a wonderful and terrible century. Last week I "celebrated" my eleventh year of self-imposed exile in the United States, a country that most Mexicans don't like but need.

The journey that led me to this morning of uncertain California spring began when I was eighteen years old. Young Mexicans don't leave their parents' house the way young Americans do. But I slammed that door behind me and took off in desperate anguish and solitude. Many North Americans can relate to the void in which a person lives when growing up in the suburbs. But a Mexican suburb is probably worse. What made sense in the United States didn't in Mexico City. I didn't know it back then. It took me years to be able to phrase that anguish. I left barely on time; my brains had not died.

When I left I had in mind a lot of unclear questions and a specific project: to become a writer. I had no means of any kind in order to conduct my search, but I had innocence and doubts, which are a valuable tool for any young artist.

For three years I wandered around Mexico City, going back and forth between my parents' house and empty apartments, drinking, falling in and out of love. I mastered the art of surviving without any money. I tried to get laid as much as I could and used poetry as a way of meeting women, usually older than I, usually sadder. I registered at three different colleges and dropped out of all three of them. I was at war with my parents and drank daily. My body was skinny and unhealthy; love was out of sight, and the city had become a nightmare, its unsizable solitude overwhelming.

So I left the city and went to Morelia. Five of my poems had been taken by a little magazine, and by the time I got to Morelia I had copies of it in my backpack to back up my literary background. I arrived in Morelia as a "Mexico City poet" and was befriended by the young artists and intellectuals of that town. It was a very important time in my life. I would just sit for hours in the city's coffeehouses, drinking *café fuerte* and talking Artaud and Rauschenberg, discussing Revueltas and Paz with my new friends. I went to philosophy school at the state university and became some kind of student leader. My life as a full-time young poet and bohemian lasted for two years.

I had come to the United States for twenty days in 1986 to teach some poetry workshops, but I liked

Berkeley and San Francisco so much that I decided to stay a little longer, and then a little longer yet, though it didn't make sense to any of my friends or family that I should be here. Then I met a woman and life took over.

What is it like to come to Berkeley from Mexico City? Well, let me tell you: I woke up after the shock of seeing the night before a huge Hell's Angel riding his hog very politely as I crossed the Bay Bridge from San Francisco towards the East Bay—the radio was playing "Hotel California" as I discovered for the first time the breathtaking sight of the city's Embarcadero. Then I went for a walk, and as I made it to downtown Berkeley I saw about a thousand delirious Deadheads hanging out at a park, a multicolored, dancing, pot-smoking, patchouli-smelling crowd waiting for a concert of the Grateful Dead to start.

Only ten years ago Berkeley was a very different town, and California and the United States were very different places. Life within the boundaries of the United States creates an illusion of self-sufficiency that isolates us: our relations with the rest of the world are always distant. We lack points of reference in time and space. Berkeley during the eighties lived some of its last bohemian years that gave it the glory that still attracts new students and nostalgic tourists in search of long-gone hippie or beatnik radicalism. But today, Telegraph Avenue is no longer that extension of the Haight-Ashbury of San Francisco; it has become a business battleground where the Gap and Ben and Jerry's dispute with the local small merchants for the right to own a piece of the marijuana dream that has turned into a yuppie nightmare. No poets will you find nor flower children, but nineteen-year-old Republicans majoring in computer science. They watch with distrust the homeless who stand on the sidewalks, leftovers of a generation mostly gone bizarre and Birkenstock or Berzerkeley with or without Noah's bagels with cream cheese and lox. People's Park, the piece of land that witnessed the micro-revolution that Ronald Reagan had the dubious honor of putting out with rubber bullets and one death, is the perfect site for small drug dealing and future parking lots. Berkeley has gone to hell by going yuppie style.

Yes, I came as a poet but "a pen is not a spoon," as a South American writer once said. Berkeley gave me cappuccino dreams, blond love, and pizza by the slice—but no money for my words. In a period of less than a year, I became a failed apprentice of several trades: cookie maker, dishwasher, gas-station attendant, waiter, espresso jockey, house painter, and

babysitter. And finally I became a carpenter, an occupation that would become my trade for the years to come. I learned to swing the hammer with the best and found a part of me that I never suspected could exist. I gave Berkeley many retaining walls, foundations, and sheared walls. My being from a city in which ground tends to shake, I understood the ways in which California tends to swing.

Manual labor is very much out of the question for a Mexican or Latin American artist or intellectual. As such, you just are not supposed to do those things; by rejecting manual labor the writers and artists of Latin America don't know what they are missing as protégés of the state who make a living of teaching or working for the cultural institutions sponsored by the government: the Zen of the backbreaking work. But that doesn't mean that the transition from spoiled poet to carpenter is an easy one: the day I found myself immersed in the hard survival game immigrants play in the land of the free, where absolutely nothing or nobody is really free, I felt lost. I couldn't speak the language and didn't know the rules. But I wrote a lot of poetry.

I am a poet from another culture in a foreign country, which—despite its geographic closeness to Mexico—doesn't really know a lot about my culture. This ignorance, however, is well balanced by the ignorance Mexicans have regarding American culture. I have found myself often complaining about the stereotypes that prevail in the United States about my country. (Please, don't talk to me anymore about that weekend you spend in Tijuana!) But what we Mexicans know about the United States is not very much, really.

Because a poet is a “member of the royalty” in my city (a poor—though well-respected—royalty), once in here, I wanted to be acknowledged as a poet rather than as just another Mexican washing your dishes after you had your polenta, but that of course didn't happen. If most Americans cannot name at least one of their Pulitzer Prize winners, why should they care about my privileged but lost status and my own literary traditions?

In 1987, running out of money and between jobs, I was forced to sell some of the books I had brought with me from Mexico. I took works written by some of the most famous writers from Mexico to the Berkeley bookstores that had sections of Spanish literature. But nobody knew who these authors were. They hadn't heard their names. They said they were sorry but refused to buy. I was shocked: these Mexican

talents were nobodies outside their own country. I got to keep my books, bitterly happy.

In one of his most popular poems, the poet Paul Celan said, “Death is the master of Germany.” Solitude, not death, is the master of America. I have seen how America has decided to make of the foreigner its most frightening enemy. I speak about this as America's foreign son. As the unwanted son who inspires not affection but fear.

For Americans, identity has become a crucial question as they discover their own solitude in a world that grows increasingly apart and distant from their own destiny. In an era of information and alleged immediate communication, we paradoxically isolate ourselves more and more everyday.

My attachment to this land that has become my home grants me the right of being critical of its failures. I love California and the San Francisco Bay Area. I have found myself or, at least, a part of myself in the midst of this foggy coast. Every time I go away I miss something very concrete: a walk around the Berkeley Hills looking at the windy city across the Bay, a cup of coffee at Peet's, a cigarette with cappuccino at North Beach's Enrico's after going by City Lights.

My love for California gives me the right to worry about its future. Back home, in my chaotic and terribly beautiful Mexico City, future is a question without answer. Economic disaster has destroyed almost all remaining dreams. But California is that portion of Mexico that we can still keep alive. I have not come to California like Rulfo's Pedro Paramo went to Comala, looking for his father. I have come to California to perhaps encounter myself. I have come to try to look at myself from the mirror of distance. If the United States will decide that its foreign sons are not to be trusted, then my future and the futures of my unborn children are uncertain. When James Baldwin found himself in foreign lands he also found that he was “equal,” but this equality came from his bitter discovery of racism outside of his own home: he was equally distrusted, equally unequal. Baldwin, America's native son, offered a solution based on a tremendous sense of dignity: he claimed his rights as a son of this land and did not take a negative answer. The foreign sons and daughters of America have to face the same dilemma and must act based upon that sense of dignity. This sense will be rediscovered once we realize that at some point in our history most of us were foreign sons.