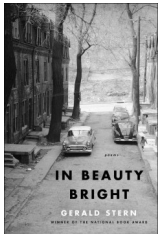


In Beauty Bright

Pick up a Book of Poetry



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If you're new to poetry and find it difficult, you may want to try the work of Gerald Stern. At eighty-eight, he's one of the grand masters of poetry still composing poems. He's won lots of awards but writes in understandable language about everyday things: travel, frogs, New York, cafeteria (spelled with a *k* as are all of the *c* words in this poem), his childhood, flowers, and love. What I like about his latest collection *In Beauty Bright* and all of his work is that he celebrates living in an almost ecstatic way--most of his poems could be songs. Check out these lines: "Like fools we waited to hear the tomatoes; we knew / what greenness means to the vine." or "Take a dog to the vet's, he knows what you're doing, / a cat becomes a muscle, she leaps from your arms."

You can tell from his work that he's the kind of quirky writer that does weird things on occasion to discover his latest poem; for instance, "Day of Grief" begins: "I was forcing a wasp to the top of a window / where there was some sky and there were tiger lilies?" Another insect poem starts this way, "I lost my rage while helping a beetle recover / and stood there with precision, balancing / grass with stone."

And see how immediate and tactile this poem simply titled "Love" is, "I loved your sweet neck but I loved your shoulder blades more / and wondered whether I should kiss your cheek first / or your hair."

Stanley Kunitz called Gerald Stern "the wilderness of American poetry." Did Kunitz mean that Stern always finds in the environs of city flowers, fauna, and people a wildness inside himself that burns brightly?

For a totally different kind of poetry that also celebrates the natural world through the lens of inner landscapes, read Jane Hirshfield's work including her latest, *Come Thief*. She brings a Zen worldview to her poems that is very interesting.

Posted by Dory L. on June 10, 2013

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