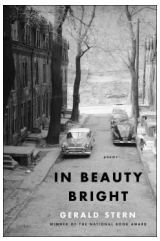
In Beauty Bright

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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