



The Wild Braid: A Poet Reflects on a Century in the Garden

Stanley Kunitz , Genine Lentine , Marnie Crawford Samuelson (Photographer)

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Throughout his life (1905-2006) Stanley Kunitz created poetry and tended gardens. This book is the distillation of conversations, none previously published, that took place between 2002 and 2004. Beginning with the garden, that "work of the imagination," the explorations journey through personal recollections, the creative process, and the harmony of the life cycle. A bouquet of poems and a total of 26 full-color photographs accompany the various sections. *The Wild Braid* received a 2006 American Horticultural Society Book Award.

The Wild Braid: A Poet Reflects on a Century in the Garden Details

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Author : Stanley Kunitz , Genine Lentine , Marnie Crawford Samuelson (Photographer)

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From Reader Review The Wild Braid: A Poet Reflects on a Century in the Garden for online ebook

Jimmy says

The book is based on conversations between Genine Lentine and Mr. Kunitz. One particularly great scene when he has a health crisis and he talks about his garden with young Ms. Lentine.

"My garden, my life, my poems--a planned disorder."--Stanley Kunitz

Wendy says

This lovingly composed book - a mix of poems, reflections, dialogue, photographs - is like a stroll through the garden with this great soul. Dedicated gardeners in particular may want to keep it by the bedside to read a little at a time. One example:

"The compost pile is a site of transformation, taking what has been cast off and returning it to the garden. It's not just garbage, after all.

"The distillation of any philosophy of composting has some connection with the positive concept of waste and death. The contribution that mortality makes to civilization is the equivalent of what composting contributes to a garden.

"We are all candidates for composting. So we cannot approach the compost without a feeling of connection."

I found myself looking out the window this morning at the snow melting off my compost pile: grateful.

Molly says

This is a gorgeous, perfect book! The poems, which are classic, fit perfectly with the conversations throughout which they are interspersed. The whole idea and execution of this book is just really, really commendable--I want to read it over and over and over again; it's pleasurable down to the texture of the pages. Kunitz's ideas concerning poetry, gardening, and his life story are so unified, how he sees them as all parts of the same thing. I stumbled upon this book at a poetry reading in a mattress store, and it was a true find.

Jann says

I heard Stanley Kunitz himself read "The Long Boat" on NPR on his 100th birthday, and was so moved I had to pull my car over to the side of the road. Since then, he has been my favorite poet. He, like me, was a "licker of the earth"---a person who truly loved life. This beautiful book of his thoughts on his garden, interspersed with his poems, and transcripts was an exquisite reading experience for me. I am also a

gardener. How wonderful to have an entire century of bringing beauty to the earth!

Barry says

The ultimate combination of gifts to be bestowed upon man - that of being an accomplished gardener and a poet. I do not think there is any greater achievement in life, and it is one that I have secretly been harbouring and hoping for myself! Stanley Kunitz lived to be one hundred years old, and in that time he created a living legacy, both with his garden, and the bouquet of poems that he has left behind. Forget the unending spew of mass market book a year authors, and come bask in the quiet solitude of a man whose every action [in the garden and on a sheet of paper] speaks of life, poetry and the kindred spirit that dwells within all living things.

James says

This is a unique collection of scintillating poems intertwined with conversations. The poems alone are worth the price of the book. The addition of the conversations is what makes this collection so special. With gardening as the starting point the reflections touch on many topics including personal history, poetry, the creative process, and the cycle of life. The garden was, for Stanley Kunitz, a source of solace and renewal as he dealt with personal health issues and the death of his wife in the spring of 2004.

For Kunitz "a garden holds infinite possibilities. What sense of its nature, or its kingdom, is it going to convey? It represents a selection, not only of whatever individual plants we consider to be beautiful, but also a synthesis that creates a new kind of beauty, that of a complex and multiple world. What you plant in your garden reflects your own sensibility, your concept of beauty, your sense of form. Every true garden is an imaginative construct, after all."

It is similar for poetry in that the creative process yields via the imagination a work of art, a poem, a thing of beauty. Yet for Kunitz "a poem seems to have no maker at all. Poems gather their own momentum and you feel they're moving on their own. You are part of the world in which they are born and come to maturity, but they have an identity beyond the person to whom they are confiding because the poem doesn't really belong to anyone, it belongs to a great tradition. The great tradition includes what I think of as the essential spirit of the poem which belongs to centuries, not to any single moment in time." This is finally a collection of beautiful poetry, deep thoughts, and moving moments of conversation filled with meaning.

Violette Stepaniuk says

You don't need to be a gardener or to love poetry to enjoy *The Wild Braid*, an unassuming volume of less than 150 pages of prose, poems and beautiful photographs by Marnie Crawford Samuelson of the poet in his garden. This mini-memoir – based on conversations between Stanley Kunitz and Genine Lentine, collected between 2002 and 2004, as the poet was approaching his hundredth birthday in 2005 – is a touching reflection on a creative life that anyone can be inspired by. I was hooked after the first few lines:

“Why is the act of cultivation so compelling?

“All my life, the garden has been a great teacher in everything I cherish. As a child I dreamed of a world that was loving, that was open to all kinds of experience, where there was no prejudice, no hatred, no fear. The garden was a world that depended on care and nourishment. And it was an interplay of forces; as much as I responded to the garden, the garden, in turn, responded to my touch, my presence.”

Thoughtful and graceful, the poet’s words unfold like a perfect, slow summer day, making *The Wild Braid* a wonderful summer read – short enough to enjoy over a weekend, or even in a day, yet contemplative and inspiring to savour one lazy hour at a time. You may want to have a journal handy as you stroll through the gentle landscape of the artist’s life and enjoy the scenery he paints. His love of gardening, poetry and creativity is likely to make you pause and reflect on your own creative life.

“There’s a conversation that keeps going on beyond the human level, in many ways, beyond language, extending into the atmosphere itself. Weather is a form of communication. There is an exchange between the self and the atmosphere that sets the tone for an entire day...That’s why each morning, the first thing I look at is the sky, and that puts me in tune with the day.”

What a lovely meditation – taking a moment to look at the sky first thing each morning. Not surprisingly this wonderful book has never found its way to a bookshelf, since I got it. It belongs on the shelf with my other favourite books, but I can’t imagine it ever joining the company. It will continue making its rounds from the coffee table to the night stand, from the writing desk to the travel bag, always inspiring, comforting, nudging, and enticing.

(Excerpt from my post originally published on STUDY28: Art Appreciation Tutorial, study28.com)

Michael says

This was a lovely, insightful little book. Using his literal garden and the garden as metaphor, the poet reflects on writing and on life. The first half (plus) of the book meditates on gardening and how it is very much like writing. His poems are wound throughout. The last part of the book is a meditation on death and dying. Each part is lovely and beautiful and true. Beautiful color photographs of the poet in his garden are scattered throughout. I’m so very glad I read it.

Amanda says

A beautiful idea for a book, Kunitz's poems are interspersed with his reflections how his experience with the natural world-- how he came to see his place & his memories within a cosmic pattern-- shapes his life, and therefore, his writing. Very simple but moving, I think this is an especially interesting read for writers because it contextualizes how all themes are dug straight from a muddy, emotional well.

Nicole Kapise-Perkins says

I have never read any of Stanley Kunitz's poetry before finding this book. This volume is a collection of essays interspersed with poems, written when Kunitz was one hundred years old, reflecting on garden life and metamorphosis. He draws parallels between tending the garden and tending the poetic spirit; Kunitz likens the cultivation and nurturing of plants to the creation and construction of a poem, all the while making the two so real, a tangible process that the mind and heart can fully understand. This is a book I am going to be buying.

Jgrace says

The Wild Braid: A Poet Reflects on a Century in the Garden – Stanley Kunitz with Genine Lentine
Photographs by Marnie Crawford Samuelson

5 stars

Before his death at 101 in 2006, Stanley Kunitz engaged in a series of conversations about gardening, poetry, the creative process, and life. This is a beautiful book of related essays, poetry, and photographs of the great poet in his garden. Every word in this book feels like a distillation of great wisdom. Each sentence is very easy to understand, and yet I have to keep thinking about them. I especially appreciated the last section in which Kunitz talks specifically about approaching death as I have a dear friend who is currently suffering a slow death by cancer. These are the last lines of his poem, The Round:

I can scarcely wait till tomorrow
When a new life begins for me
As it does each day,
As it does each day.

Deborah Feingold says

Kunitz helps the reader appreciate not only the importance of the garden as "wilderness" but of the necessity of accessing one's own wilderness, or unconscious, when composing poetry. I also loved his thoughts, linked metaphorically to his experience in the garden, about what is important to a poem. Rather than the showy flower, he is more interested in the underlying structure, the "tensions and physicality." Finally this hybrid text, which presents many candid pictures of the hale nonagenarian, offers some important observations about aging; there is nothing sugar coated here, just the life force of a man who "loved the earth so much/ he wanted to stay forever."

Sloane Scott says

"When Hopkins wrote, in "Inversaid," "Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet," that's exactly what he

was saying. When people say they are moved by a poem, they are saying that they have been in touch with the untouchable."

"These are questions that can never be answered completely so you have to keep on asking, and in some strange way every poem that you write impinges on that mystery. If it doesn't, you shouldn't really write it because it's not really yours."

"To be like Orpheus, who could talk
with animals in their own language:
in sleep I had that art, but now
I've walked into the separate
wilderness of age,
where the old libidinous beasts
assume familiar shapes,
pretending to be tamed."

Kitty says

A treasure of a book to read and read again. Given to me for my 57th birthday, and in this year of much summer rain, the poems, reflections and discussions of the book, match the energy of my garden -- which says, "I am not done with my changes" -- and invites living in the layers. Check out Stanley Kunitz reading "Touch Me" on Youtube and you will tremble. We discussed "The Long Boat" 9/28/09, "An Old Cracked Tune" and "the Testing Tree" yesterday. Haunting music for the dance -- whether flying in magic keds, or preparing to lie "in the slop of the cradle".

Trisha says

Stanley Kunitz will certainly be remembered as one of our most beloved, as well as distinguished, poets. He was the recipient of many prestigious awards including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for poetry. He was over one hundred years old when he died in 2006 and all throughout his life he was a gardener as well as a poet because he associated both gardening and poetry with the whole experience of being alive. "One of the mysteries of gardening," he says, "is that the garden reflects the viewer's own state of being at the time, just as your response to a poem lets you know something about your preoccupations or your susceptibility as you read it." This beautiful book is filled with gorgeous illustrations of his gardens interspersed with examples of some of his most evocative poetry. It was written in collaboration with his friend and fellow poet Genine Lentine who put together a collection of his reflections, poems, recollections and conversations about the importance of the creative process as it manifests itself through poetry and gardening. Among the many photographs that grace this lovely book, none are as touching as those that provide a glimpse of Kunitz, nearly 100 years old at the time the book was written, still at work in his garden. This is the kind of book that should not be tucked back on the shelf or given away after it's been read the first time. It belongs out in the open -- just like a garden -- so we can come back to it again and again because what is to be found there is so beautiful.
