

GLOBE EDITORIAL

## Stanley Kunitz at 100

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STANLEY KUNITZ, the poet, turns 100 today. It has been a century of metaphors, marriages, and wars, of grief and gardening, of teaching and winning famous prizes, of confronting, as he has written, "the great simplicities."

*"I have walked through many lives, / some of them my own, / and I am not who I was, / though some principle of being / abides, from which I struggle / not to stray,"* Kunitz writes in his poem "The Layers." He asks: *"How shall the heart be reconciled / to its feast of losses? / In a rising wind / the manic dust of my friends, / those who fell along the way, / bitterly stings my face. / Yet I turn, I turn, / exulting somewhat, /with my will intact to go / wherever I need to go, / and every stone on the road / precious to me."*

Born in Worcester, where he went to high school, Kunitz graduated from Harvard, has won the Pulitzer Prize, and twice served as the nation's poet laureate. He lives in New York City and summers in Provincetown.

In his book "The Collected Poems," Kunitz writes: "Our poems can never satisfy us, since they are at best a diminished echo of a song that maybe once or twice in a lifetime we've heard and keep trying to recall."

But if he is unsatisfied, his readers should not be. They can find insight, advice, and recognition. They can find the vast -- *"We are not souls but systems, and we move / In clouds of our unknowing / like great nebulae"* -- in his poem "The Science of Night."

And readers can find the specific, the call of the road heard in his poem "Route Six," which starts: *"The city squats on my back. / I am heart-sore, stiff-necked, / exasperated. That's why / I slammed the door, / that's why I tell you now, / in every house of marriage / there's room for an interpreter. / Let's jump into the car, honey, / and head straight for the Cape."*

Before he was born, Kunitz's father committed suicide. His stepfather died of a heart attack when Kunitz was a teenager. In "Father and Son," he writes, *"At the water's edge, where the smothering ferns lifted / Their arms, 'Father!' I cried, 'Return! You know / The way. I'll wipe the mudstains from your clothes.'"*

Still, Kunitz has comic grace, a healing irony found in his poem "Signs and Portents." *"On Twelfth Street in Manhattan, / opposite St. Vincent's Mental Pavilion, / while I was sweeping the sidewalk / of its increment of filth, / deposited by dogs and unleashed humans, / a blue van rolled by / with its sidepanel reading; / WORLD FINISHING AND DYEING COMPANY. / I did not catch the face of the driver."*

At this age, Kunitz almost certainly has all the presents he needs, so it's best to mark his birthday by treating oneself, by reading or writing work that converts life into legend, as Kunitz says poetry does. Throw a party that's a celebration of walking through many lives. ■