

# GERALD STERN

EARLY  
COLLECTED  
POEMS

1965-1992

# Gerald Stern

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EARLY COLLECTED POEMS

1965-1992



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*Lovesick*

*Paradise Poems*

*The Red Coal*

*Lucky Life*

*Rejoicings*

*The Naming of Beasts*

*For the sorrowful.*

## Author's Note

What I attempted to do in this *Early Collected*—the first six books of my collected poems—is to reach out simultaneously for a new language and a new subject matter. I was interested in that which was overlooked, neglected, and unseen, from a political, religious, and personal point of view and a voice that bespoke this in the simplest, most honest manner. I found myself returning to early—to fundamental—experiences, as I found myself discovering a new language. This constituted a celebration as well as a kind of mourning or elegy, and the results can be seen in such poems as “Lucky Life,” “The Blue Tie,” “Stepping Out of Poetry,” and “Bob Summer: The Final Poem.” This was a difficult road to hoe, for it expressed neither formal, academic niceness nor bohemian madness. If there are sources they are variously in the Hebrew prophets, in Blake, in Whitman, in Ovid, in Coleridge, and, as far as modern poets, in Yeats, Stevens, Pound, and Hart Crane.

I believe the search for the oppressed became identified, in my poetry, with the very particulars of my own life: including the oppression of working-class people in the city of Pittsburgh, where I came from, and the abuse of minorities, particularly Jews and blacks. This even includes the attention I gave not just to individuals but to plants—weeds, say—which are also hated and

neglected. But most of all, the death of my sister, Sylvia, at an early age, who became, as it were, the muse of my poetry. I spent my earliest years reading a little but mostly wandering—endlessly—through the streets of Pittsburgh. The results of this would show twenty, thirty years later.



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