



The Dance Most of All: Poems

Jack Gilbert

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A remarkable late-in-life collection, elegiac and bracing, from master poet Jack Gilbert, whose *Refusing Heaven* captivated the poetry world and won the National Book Critics Circle Award as well as the Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

In these characteristically bold and nuanced poems, Gilbert looks back at the passions of a life—the women, and his memories of all the stages of love; the places (Paris, Greece, Pittsburgh); the mysterious and lonely offices of poetry itself. We get illuminating glimpses of the poet's background and childhood, in poems like "Going Home" (his mother the daughter of sharecroppers, his father the black sheep in a family of rich Virginia merchants) and "Summer at Blue Creek, North Carolina," a classic scene of pulling water from the well, sounding the depths.

The title of the collection is drawn from the startling "Ovid in Tears," in which the poet figure has fallen and is carried out, muttering faintly: "White stone in the white sunlight . . . Both the melody / and the symphony. The imperfect dancing / in the beautiful dance. The dance most of all." Gilbert reminds us that there is beauty to be celebrated in the imperfect—"a worth / to the unshapely our sweet mind founders on"—and at the same time there is "the harrowing by mortality." Yet, without fail, he embraces the state of grief and loss as part of the dance.

The culmination of a career spanning more than half a century of American poetry, *The Dance Most of All* is a book to celebrate and to read again and again.

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