

Gerald Stern

Bronze Roosters

How love of every single human creature
took place in my life and how it lasted for almost
a week but I had a fever; and the day
I realized finally I had to give up
running for I had lost the will, almost the
muscles themselves, I was confused since I
was never a runner as an adult, and on the
last day I was taking my antibiotics
I lost a small pink pill while in between
reading the labels, or I convinced myself
that that was the case and it took me almost an hour
to stop my coughing I was in such a state,
and I was light-headed walking over the bricks
and had to hold on to my wooden fence, amazed
that we could last the way we do compared to
birds just blown by the wind, their locomotion
beyond themselves, or ants and beetles, God,
what does the mind do there, or bronze roosters?

Jew

Not that the swan was good to me, not that
she had pity on my *parve* attempts
at swimming without a bladder nor that she
would help me with my spelling nor would read me
the words I couldn't see or she would tell me
how what to do or even how to tie my
tie or button my shirt or what to wear
or that she let me float with her without
reaching over to break my neck for which I
hated her or I was just uncomfortable
at all that beak in the air, that eye in the sky,
that curved neck, and she was brutal when it
came to water rights, and it was the black
between her eyes and her mouth I hated most
although I'm sure she loved it herself and in the
old ponds I ate my vegetables
and reached my neck up for the irrigation;
and such it was that I was despised or was I
only ignored? and what does a white feather
mean among those water fowl and love for
my own lagoon oh drove me you poor bastards
that oh your babies I almost loved I almost
treasured them, what more, what new delectables?

What For

1946 there was an overcoat
with rows of buttons fifteen dollars and two
American flags for some ungodly reason
and a slight rise in the distance as the street
went over the river I would have breathed the air
both in and out for, I was a bellows then
and one by one my lungs were ruined but I wouldn't
change my life, what for? You wouldn't know
unless you crossed the river yourself, unless you
climbed a hill and turned around twice
to stare at the street behind you either mud
or cobblestone and count the wooden steps
or look through the windows longingly the houses
piled up the one below, the next the dirt
supreme your breathing heavy the base of a cliff
even further below, a river shining from
time to time, your mind half-empty, your teacher
a curbstone, the mountain really hill upon hill,
you knew the details the porches pulled you up
your face turned white at a certain point I'm sure
you walked through a cloud how slow you learned how absurd
the goats of arcady or the baskets of apples
in New Jerusalem compared to that.