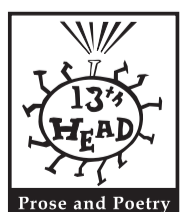


Roses

There was a rose called Guy de Maupassant,
a carmine pink that smelled like a Granny Smith
and there was another from the seventeenth century
that wept too much and wilted when you looked;
and one that caused tuberculosis, doctors
dug them up, they wore white masks and posted
warnings in the windows. One wet day
it started to hail and pellets the size of snowballs
fell on the roses. It's hard for me to look at
a Duchess of Windsor, it was worn by Franco
and Mussolini, it stabbed Jews; yesterday I bought
six roses from a Haitian on Lower Broadway;
he wrapped them in blue tissue paper, it was
starting to snow and both of us had on the wrong shoes,
though it was wind, he said, not snow that ruined
roses and all you had to do was hold them
against your chest. He had a ring on his pinky
the size of a grape and half his teeth were gone.
So I loved him and spoke to him in false Creole
for which he hugged me and enveloped me
in his camel hair coat with most of the buttons missing,
and we were brothers for life, we swore it in French.



Gerald Stern, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA in 1925, is the author of 15 books of poetry including *This Time: New and Selected Poems*, which won the 1998 National Book Award and a book of personal essays titled *What I Can't Bear Losing*. He has won the Ruth Lilly Prize and the Wallace Stevens Award, and his *Early Collected: Poems from 1965-1992* will be published by W. W. Norton in 2010. "Roses" appears in *American Sonnets*, published by W. W. Norton, in 2002.



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