

JOHN WALL BARGER

The Public Gardens

Ah father of the girl who runs in an emerald dress her arms in the air—
 you man of pedigree,
 your bloodline a river whose current has swept
 generations of Guardians of the State
 to the safety of the next rich port
 —What's so funny?

Your laughter crosses
 the midafternoon,

that swan drifts toward you
 unruffled by your voice,
 a sound disentangled from the cords of beauty,
 a laughter laughing coldly at itself!

A pedophile with a runny nose
 on a green bench reads Dante's
Paradiso & giggles a bit with you.

Here, father of the girl her eyes closed o tiny nose smelling petunias,
 as a student years ago

you wrung a swan's neck—*C'mere ya little ...!*

daring yourself & then cramming
 the floppy white bread-fed dame head-
 first into your backpack,
 the Lord Nelson Hotel
 behind you.

Up there, now, behind cheap Venetian blinds,
 the miserable Dead observe you
 dressed in their feathered garments
 like birds. They eat dung, pearls & little girl's curls
 all the livelong day, repeating your name

in separate rooms, & *He throttled the trumpeter . . .*
They recall particulars: how you cooked it that night
for friends, how you claimed
it was chicken, how the meat was so bland
they had to ask—you
just smiled

as you now smile
at your daughter
who seems to be under a kind of spell
at pond's edge
watching this splendid swan
emerge, lift its wings,
crane its beak
over her—

Yes, move fast!

She & the swan are shrieking at each other with
tongues of decomposing
white bread.