

Is!

in memoriam, Joe Hayman

I had gone to take the bare trees of my thoughts to walk
in the park, seeking consolation in goose honks, coot dives,
the lily-white of swans beneath the ominous
red-tailed glide of a hawk, and the small talk of a sidewalk
bush, alive with dozens of chirping sparrows.
Dozens. Chirping. For today, I was bound to bear
my heart like sad hands hiding in shallow pockets.

Since the news, grief has collected and disquieted
memories tangled like fish lines, sticky, blood-barbed hooks,
sinkers, snares, bobbers and bones,
all thrown in and cast to rattle a racket in a gray pail,
where the stink's cooked in and as sharply pronounced
as the cacophonous, sad-handed carrying of it.

To no avail, I *am* parading in grave-muddy boots,
as if passing like a clarion every hearth where our names
are known and called *is* helpful – Am! Are! Is!
Damned present tense!
Dear friends, our superlatives are but a palliative ruse,
for we have gathered today to past tense our friend's every verb,
pull out each one like a dead fish from a bucket.

What, but an inevitable occupation.
Tis true, tis pity; tis pity, tis true.

But come, cast each in his chowder pot and gather edible nouns –
fish heads first, then turnips and beans, parsnips and greens,
coriander and fenugreek, for a stew he'd simmer all day,
to shut winter's windows and doors against itself,
because gray is a lonely ache.
Is! Again!

Here! give a stir, as he did, humming arias and songs
over the stewing pot, maybe *En Tarbena Quando Sumus*
or *Lydia the Tattooed Lady*. And open plenty of wine bottles
for the long nights and the cold heave.

And come, call on every creature to sing
for a dear friend, a sweet choir-voice, which first rose
in the building of ricks under barn-lofts and weather vane-skies.
And that boy, that hay-man boy who would one day want to feed
and sing for everyone he knew – for he knew how we were

all always so hungry and what for –
that fine fellow, ... my dear friend, ... is dead; is no more is.

Listen, as I was telling you,
this morning, as I wandered the park,
my bare tree thoughts encaged a hawk
not twenty feet above where I stood.
In its thrall, I watched the graceful swivel
of its head and eyes, its bullet-body
as still and hard as its raptor-beak.
But its feathered majesty could not fool me,
not today; I know what its swift,
hollow-boned villainy is here to undo.
Is! Is!