

Hurt Hawks

I

- The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,
The wing trails like a banner in defeat,
No more to use the sky forever but live with famine
And pain a few days: cat nor coyote
- 5 Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game without talons.
He stands under the oak-bush and waits
The lame feet of salvation; at night he remembers freedom
And flies in a dream, the dawns ruin it.
He is strong and pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is worse.
- 10 The curs of the day come and torment him
At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble that head,
The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.
The wild God of the world is sometimes merciful to those
That ask mercy, not often to the arrogant.
- 15 You do not know him, you communal people, or you have forgotten him;
Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him;
Beautiful and wild, the hawks, and men that are dying, remember him.

II

- I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk; but the great redtail
Had nothing left but unable misery
- 20 From the bone too shattered for mending, the wing that trailed under his talons when he moved.
We had fed him six weeks, I gave him freedom,
He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the evening, asking for death,
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
Implacable arrogance. I gave him the lead gift in the twilight. What fell was relaxed,
- 25 Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded river cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.

Questions for Discussion

What is the tone of the poem? Discuss the aspects of the poem that help establish this tone: structure, diction, style, imagery, etc.

What is the primary theme of the poem? Discuss the aspects of the poem that help convey this theme: imagery, figurative language, direct commentary, etc.

Why does the speaker include the phrase “there is game without talons” (line 5), and what does it suggest about the hawk? What do you think the phrase “the curs of the day” (line 10) refers to, and what does the term “curs” imply?

Why do you think the speaker says that “pain is worse to the strong” (line 9)? What is “unable misery” (line 19)? What is “the wild God of the world” (line 13), and what characteristics does it have? Why do “you communal people” (line 15) not know him?

What are “the penalties” (line 18)? Why do you think the speaker would “sooner kill a man than a hawk”?

What does the phrase “intrepid readiness” (line 12) refer to? What is “the lead gift” (line 24), and why does the speaker give it to the hawk? How is the hawk “not like a beggar” (line 23)? What is the effect of the paradox in lines 24-26 and the term “unsheathed” (line 27)?

Discuss the similarities and differences between Part I and Part II. What is the effect of their juxtaposition?

What rhetorical devices are used to describe the hawks? Why are they “arrogant”?