

Chris Hayes

Animal Husbandry

I'll never understand my wife,
but I know the pain she felt in childbirth
wasn't punishment
for some long-ago ancestor's trespass
in the royal orchard of a Hammurabi slumlord.

Why would anyone trust a talking snake?
Only Pentecostal preachers
wrap pythons around their thighs for bigger tips.
Only Hollywood still believes
birds are viable symbols of a soul's salvation.

Last year, I saw a bald eagle
expiring in the Memphis Zoo, one whose feathers
had mostly fallen out,
its beak dented like a beer can, and thought

This is freedom?

I remember chasing a pretty girl at recess,
how she patted boys on the head,
saying *Duck...duck...duck...*
and finally *goose!* when she touched me.

That's how I knew, how I learned
what a tongue could do,
but neither one of us were animals yet.
Neither of us had entered the backseat arena
of elbows and bad angles,

kicking like two wet frogs in a bucket.
That would take years to reach, so many more
movies and a few sacred nights
of hearing our fathers
make sweet, horrible noises in the dark.