PART HAWK, PART MAN

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Photography by Paskalina Bourbon.

> "All that is still is dead... Movement is like colour to a hawk; it flared upon the eye like crimson flame." (*The Peregrine*, 102).

Although I like photographs of birds, they always disappoint me. I feel as you might if I showed you photographs of my aunt. I want you to see her wit and charm in her photograph, but you don't, although you don't confess as much. I make it worse when I tell you stories about her to help you see what I see in her picture. My aunt for you is just a prop in a photograph. Photographs of birds seem like that to me. There is something there, some beauty, a bit of grace, but ultimately they miss the point. They offer the wrong kind of intimacy. They are tourist pictures. Pictures of aunt Lucy at the beach. The motive for taking pictures of birds is for me never satisfied by the photograph. What about film? Certainly, film can show the movement and grace of birds, but it too relies on the wrong kind of intimacy. Film remains bedeviled by the

same inadequacy of photography. All photography offers the intimacy of the voyeur. It captures what it sees. There should be no capturing of birds. Paintings sometimes offer portraits of birds flying. Observations cumulate in painting, so that the image reveals a life brought to a focus in the particularity of the image painted. But still all is still in painting. Birds don't have faces that can express their soul. Their feathered bodies mask the expensive movement and vulnerability of the naked human body. All of these ways of picturing birds show something of what birds are and address aspects of my need to see them and to give my seeing of them some more permanent form. But they frustrate when they should reveal. They falsify how I am not a bird.

Do I need convincing that I am not a bird? Am I a bird in certain ways and not in others? Pictures of birds falsify how I am not a bird. Is that a question that should concern me? Well, it does concern me. Birds matter to me partly because I am not like them, I cannot fly as they do. So the pretense that I can fly as they do falsifies with fantasy what my eyes want as they track their flight. The photographic lens and the video camera give me an unearned closeness to birds. I want instead an intimacy that insists that my eyes seeing flight are not enough to produce that flight. I am tempted to by my eyes to imagine I can fly. My seeing flies beyond where I am into what I cannot reach except through my seeing. The flying of birds provides an image for my seeing of them. But that image gives a form to our seeing only to the degree that we remember that seeing and flying are not the same. But who does that, you might ask? I do. And I bet you have—when you were young, your eyes gave you a vision of flight, especially as you watched birds fly. Our eyes are attracted to the flight of birds.

My eyes continue to tempt me into fantasies of flight. But I am not flying with a bird as I watch it, no matter how I might feel. And so my seeing a bird fly is an intimation of flight not an accomplishment of it. As obvious as that might seem, it is why photographs and films of birds frustrate me, since they offer a perspective too close to flight. They show me the kind of thing I already think I know (or that I can discover through scientific study). A photograph gives me the form of the bird, but it remains up to me to see the bird as a bird. And that can be difficult. What do we see when we see a bird? *The Peregrine,* J. A. Baker's masterpiece of descriptive prose, provides an answer, an answer that is as much about how we see as it is about what we see when we see birds.

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Baker comments early in *The Peregrine* that "The hardest thing of all to see is what is really there" (19). Why is that? Because we get in our way. If we want to see, we have to discipline ourselves against ourselves, against our own prejudices, carelessness, weaknesses of judgment, habits of recognition, bluntness of attention. But there are other reasons we see badly. The things we try to see are often obscure. Peregrines, for example, are subtle hunters who hide in the heights of the sky and then stoop with such speed that we often only glimpse them as already vanishing blurs.

But what do we see when we see what is really there? A bird is not just a bird, a raptor not just a raptor. What do we see when we see a peregrine? The fastest bird on the planet or a representative of the living god, Horus, the falcon god, who is incarnate in the living, ruling Pharaoh? As Thoreau comments in *Walden*: "I suspect that Pilpay & Co. have put animals to their best use, for they are all beasts of burden, in a sense, made to carry some portion of our thoughts" ("Brute Neighbors"). Pilpay, falsely believed to have written the Sanskrit fables collected as the Hitopadesa (teller of fables), makes (further?)

fictional worlds out of the creatures and features of the ordinary world. We make the world a bestiary with our fantasies and speculations.

When I see birds I am not sure what I see. Their flight reveals the wildness of life. Birds offer a clarity in purpose and form. They don't worry about falling, for example. They can fall, but they don't worry about it. They are made to fly even if they're not clouds. What are we made to do? We don't know: "Like the lives of so many air and water creatures, it seems a better one than ours. We have no element. Nothing to sustain us when we fall" (*The Peregrine*, 171).

A bird's power of flight gives form to our ideas of freedom. Their hearts are engines of grace that seem about to burst. The heart of a small song bird, for example, ranges from 350 bpm to 480 bpm (*Manual of Ornithology*, 189). It is a rate that eats the life of birds in their defiance of gravity. Baker describes it this way:

> I came late to the love of birds. For years I saw them only as a tremor at the edge of vision. They know suffering and joy in simple states not possible for us. Their lives quicken and warm to a pulse our hearts can never reach. They race to oblivion. They are old before we have finished growing. (10)

Birds race to oblivion. As do we. We chase birds since they are always ahead of us in that race. Birds and other animals in their simplicities of suffering and joy give us back in purity what we feel in confusion. We see ourselves in animals in varying degrees of parody. Some notice our similarities, others our differences.

Peregrines fly from us in panic, and so it is difficult to see them with any intimacy. We are blunt and deadly. That is what we are. Birds fear us. We reek of death: "We are the killers. We stink of death. We carry it with us. It sticks to us like frost. We cannot tear it away" (121). And again:

> As so often on spring evenings, no birds sing near me, while all the distant trees and bushes ring with song. Like all human beings, I seem to walk within a hoop of red-hot iron, a hundred yards across, that sears all life away. (185).

We sear "all life away." We exude death as a constant condition.

Baker must somehow shed his human taint. He must be seen by peregrines as something other than poison. His situation is the inverse of Lewis Carroll's Alice when she meets the mother pigeon in Wonderland. The mother pigeon takes Alice to be a snake, while Alice insists she is a little girl. Baker wants mother falcons to see him not as human poison, but as something peregrine-like. How can he do that?

Alice, in her travels, meets the mother pigeon nesting on her eggs. Alice, by misadventure, has grown a long sinewy neck, and finds herself, or rather, she finds her head, in the foliage of a tree near the nest of this pigeon. The pigeon squawks in distress, accusing Alice of wanting her eggs and of being a serpent. If a creature eats eggs, and secondarily has a long neck, then, for the mother pigeon, that creature is a serpent. Alice protests. She believes that there are distinctions that matter and should distinguish little girls from serpents. But these mean nothing to the pigeon. Alice insists, however, that criteria of identification do not determine identity *per se*; just because she can be described as a serpent does not make her one.

The argument between the pigeon and Alice might look like a conflict between incommensurable concept schemes, tempting us to believe that what is a serpent to a pigeon might be a little girl to a little girl, and that is just how it is. But that is to give the mother pigeon too much conceptual authority. They each can learn how the other understands what they take to be the relevant distinctions. The difference that matters here is found in how they situate themselves relative to these distinctions. And given that the pigeon is a pigeon and Alice a human being, for Alice to accept the pigeon's characterization of

her, to accept that someone else's third person description of her would constitute what she is, would in effect destroy her as *Alice the human being*. Understanding the pigeon's norms of judgment is one thing, accepting them as necessarily binding would in effect blow Alice up and make her something else.

Alice and the pigeon situate themselves differently within their respective intersubjective understandings of things. They exist in different ways relative to the different criteria they each use to define *serpents* and *little girls*. This does not mean that the distinctions they are committed to are subjective. Nor does the seeming absurdity of the situation suggests that there are simple objective criteria they could use to settle the difference between serpents and little girls. Alice and the pigeon exhibit two overlapping but still distinct ways of understanding the same world relative to what they each value. It is not, therefore, a plain fact of the matter that Alice is not a serpent. Alice, herself, when put to the task could not distinguish egg-eating long-necked creatures from herself. The pigeon could be taught to make the distinctions Alice would want to make, but such distinctions would not matter since they would play little role in the pigeon's life. The pigeon insists that there exist only three categories of creatures that matter: serpents, non-serpents, and pigeons. Alice lives in a world of more and different distinctions. Both Alice and the pigeon are acting rationally, they just mean something different by 'snake' and 'girl'.

Baker is reenacting this scene between Alice and the pigeon, except he is attempting to become meaningful to peregrines as something peregrine-like and not human. He is accepting bird-understanding in order to refine himself as something other than human, which is a very human thing to do. No peregrine (or pigeon) would do that.

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Baker can only see peregrines in the right way if they see him as not quite human. If Alice doesn't want to get pigeoned by the pigeon, Baker wants to get peregrined by the peregrines. He offers instructions for such a task of finding peregrines in order to be found by them. It constitutes a discipline:

> Approach him across open ground ... Never hide yourself unless concealment is complete. Be alone. Shun the furtive oddity of man, cringe from the hostile eyes of farms. Learn to fear. To share fear is the greatest bond of all. The hunter must become the thing he hunts. What is, is now, must have the quivering intensity of an arrow thudding into a tree. Yesterday is dim and monochrome. A week ago you were not born. Pursue, endure, follow, watch. (13)

Baker derives the plot of his book from this discipline of "[p]ursue, endure, follow, watch." Robert MacFarlane provides a *précis*: "Dawn. Baker watches, the bird hunts, the bird kills, the bird feeds. Dusk. Thus again, over seven months" (151). What Baker sees happens within these patterns of repetition, and because of them.

> To be recognized and accepted by a peregrine you must wear the same clothes, travel by the same way, perform actions in the same order. Like all birds, it fears the unpredictable. Enter and leave the same fields at the same time each day, soothe the hawk from its wildness by a *ritual* of behavior as invariable as its own. (13, italics added)

The hawk is wild, but its behavior describes a ritual, built not as a form of repetition, but as a repetition that *makes* a form. We match it not by wildness, but by regularity and persistence.

Baker hunts the hunting peregrine in order to become " the thing he hunts" (13):

> I scanned the sky constantly to see if a hawk was soaring, scrutinized every tree and bush, searched the apparently empty sky through every arc. That is how the hawk finds his prey and eludes his enemies, and that is the only way one can hope to find him, and share his hunting. (96).

He hunts as a peregrine does, except Baker does not kill. He wants to share the same space with the bird, to "share his hunting." If Baker is to share the bird's hunting, he needs to enter into a commonality of concern and living, to fit within the pattern of the peregrine's prime activities:

> The predictability of my movements may have made him more curious, and more trusting. He may associate me now with the incessant disturbance of prey, as though I too were a species of hawk. (125)

If Baker is "a species of hawk," however, he is crippled from flight, grounded and slow. He imagines the peregrine sees him as he sees himself, justified by how the peregrine reacts to him.

> I think he regards me now as part hawk, part man; worth flying over to look at from time to time, but never wholly to be trusted; a crippled hawk, perhaps, unable to fly or to kill cleanly, uncertain and sour of temper. (125)

Baker hunts to find, to see, to observe, not to kill. He is not hunting to eat. He hunts out of a human need to be other than himself. We are nothing if not something else.

Baker does in an extreme form what we all do. We dramatize the world so that we can see it. We participate in the ceremonies of our seeing. We do it unconsciously—and yet this unconscious mimicry can become, as it does for Baker, the means for our conscious understanding. We become what we would know:

> I found myself crouching over the kill, like a mantling hawk. My eyes turned quickly about, alert for the walking heads of men. Unconsciously I was imitating the movements of a hawk, as in some primitive ritual; the hunter becomes the thing he hunts. (95)

Baker recognizes his imitation of the hawk, even if at the moment of mantling and hawk-wariness he was unconscious of his behavior. He writes himself into visibility. He has fallen into a primitive mode of identification. He has put on a peregrine mask. He has become a portrait of the bird he hunts.

Later in the book, Baker comes upon an owl. Sensing his presence, the little owl moved from one perch to another to look at Baker. They were ten feet apart. The owl blinked repeatedly, "and the grey nictitating membranes clicked sickeningly across his eyes for a second, like a doll's eyes closing. He did not seem able to focus on me. I felt I was without meaning for him. I was like one of those trick photographs of a familiar object; if it cannot be recognized it is just nothing at all" (173). The owl pigeons Baker like the pigeon does Alice: she's a snake if she eats eggs, otherwise she is nothing at all. And the same of Baker for the owl. Baker for the owl is "without meaning," and thus he was nothing for the owl to see.

At some point, Baker begins to mean something other than fear for the peregrine:

> We met by the brook. For an hour he watched and hovered, perching on many trees. He caught a mouse. To me he was still apparently indifferent, but he kept me in sight, when I moved, by following or flying higher. He has found a meaning for me, but I do not know what it is. I am his slow and moribund companion, Caliban to his Ariel. (176)

They met. The peregrine did not just react to Baker as threat or intruder. The bird's indifference to him is partial and mock. Baker was no longer nothing to the bird, he "had found a meaning" for him. He fit within a pattern worthy of engagement. The peregrine kept him in

sight. They form a pair. Baker sees himself as the lesser of the two, the human marked with death in ways a falcon is not, a moribund Caliban to the vivid and unbound Ariel.

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The hunt alters the hunter; it is a discipline, a ceremony, a purification, a mode of attention, and, thus, an ethic. We must act in certain ways to be seen in certain ways. Baker's pursuit is active, not passive. But he cannot accomplish it by an act of will. No one could. I cannot by means of my will find a hawk in the wild, let alone earn its acceptance of my presence and proximity; similarly, no act of will can force love into visibility, let alone give it the power to startle and obsess us. How can or do we see the revelatory form of a person, a gesture, a situation? If we are to see such revelatory form, then we must make ourselves vulnerable to what we see. That vulnerability need not be overtly confessional or psychological. But who we are must be at stake. If I am to see love, I have to love with all of the risk that entails. Baker operates at the limit of himself; in fact that is the primary motive for his pursuit: "I have always longed to be a part of the outward life, to be out there at the edge of things, to let the human taint wash away in emptiness and silence as the fox sloughs his smell into the cold unworldliness of water; to return to town as a stranger" (10). To live at the edge, in emptiness and silence, in the cold unworldliness, to exist relative to what he is not, this is what his pursuit of the peregrine entails.

The limit of ourselves—the limits of our understanding and of our ways of being—is not simply a place. There are no boundary markers. Like the passage of a peregrine on the hunt, one can see it by its effects—the birds flinging themselves in panic into the air, our own fear and exhilaration at being on the edge of things. We have to recognize that edge. We grasp it, often after the fact.

Words can be a means of that grasping. Baker's compulsion to describe peregrines tracks his need to see them. In writing and in seeing he finds or gives form to the force of life in our corrupted world, that form becoming the way we touch that force. The form matters. It reveals a means of intimacy. How we touch the peregrine matters. Baker does not want to play the peregrine tourist; so his words must not become those of a tour guide. They must find the form in which the peregrine and our attempts to see meet in a way adequate to each. The adequacy must be discovered and demonstrated.

An example. Baker uses the eye and its dilation as an *image* of what he sees when he sees the peregrine far above and away: "He (the peregrine) slowed, steadied, balanced, and again was still. He was a small speck now, like the pupil of a distant eye" (177). And again: "I see for the first time a falcon peregrine circling very high … She stoops, dilates like the pupil of an eye as it passes from the day's brilliance into dusk. She is the size of a lark, then of a jay, now of a crow, now of a mallard" (113). The dilating eye sees the peregrine in its far distance as a dilating eye. What we see matches our seeing. Here is a kind of intimacy of imagery—the metaphor of the dilating pupil creates a parallax between our seeing and what we see. The metaphor does not collapse the bird into the image or the image into the bird. They remain distinct. They are riddles whose sense is both visceral and immediate and yet puzzling, evocative and strange. The image marks a limit-point.

The landscape itself emerges as such a limit-point, revealing and resisting our understanding. Baker describes the lowlands of Essex: "Dim, flat, desolate lands that cauterize all sorrow" (10). The land is there. An expanse. Barren, daunting. We can see the land that would cauterize, but we cannot see its cauterizing. Nor can

we simply report our experience of such cauterizing. Such a report would be simply about ourselves, our feelings or attitudes. Baker's description is *about* the "dim, flat, desolate lands." What is being described is an effect or a sense that the land and how it looks—dim, flat and desolate—has a kind of homeopathic effect, such that in its desolateness it cauterizes, seals a wound, stops the emotional bleeding of our sorrow. The statement is about a way of seeing that is given in the realization, both in thought and in words, that these lands (the lands of Essex) cauterize Baker, and would do the same to us. What the land does to us is part of how we see it. It is not just that *the seeing* becomes the event of cauterizing; *what is seen* becomes the event of cauterizing through our seeing.

The sky is an active landscape for both Baker and the peregrines as well. "The southern sky terraced with mazes of upward winding birds..." (82). The sky is made into the form of the "upward winding birds." "[T]erraced with mazes" gives us the phrasal model by which to see these winding birds, but for Baker the phrase intimates what he saw. The apprehension of the birds takes a form that is matched by words but is not equivalent to them. Through these mazes of sky and birds the peregrine stoops along a course that

> ... seemed curiously inevitable, as though they were moving on hidden wires, or following some familiar pathway through the air. It is beautiful precision, this feeling of pre-ordained movement, that makes the peregrine so exciting to watch. (85)

The peregrine seems to follow a "familiar pathway through the air," "moving on hidden wires." The contingencies of flight have the look of the inevitable. This collapse of the contingent into the necessary produces a thrill; it is an expression of power as grace. To make the contingent or the accidental seem necessary; what else is power but that?

Baker describes the peregrine's mastery of its landscape of sky relative to our own diminished human powers of sight:

> Imprisoned by horizons, I envied the hawk his boundless prospect of the sky. Hawks live on the curve of the air. Their globed eyes have never seen the grey flatness of our human vision. (170).

The curve of the air we apprehend only through imagination and description, since our vision is grey and flat. Words help us bring this peregrine possibility into sight, in the way that mathematics gives a certain form to space and time that we cannot see in any other way.

'The curve of the air' describes the vectors available to birds in three-dimensional space. This curve at times cants strongly towards the vertical. A peregrine slides

> forward and down to his left for 200 feet, and then stopped. After a long still pause, he came down 200 feet to his right...In this vertical zigzag, from wing-hold to wing-hold, he (a peregrine tercel) slowly descended the sheer face of the sky. (177)

The peregrine descends, the sheer face of the sky, from hold to hold as if descending a mountain. This is the sky approaching two dimensions—horizontal and vertical. The curve of the air for the peregrine, however, reveals a world of multi-dimensional fluidity, where the more useful analogy is with water, and thus with swimming: "Crisp and golden in the sunlight, he swam up through the warm air with the muscular undulations of his wings, like the waving flicker of a fish's fins" (96). Or sailing:

> Like the seafarer, the peregrine lives in a pouring--away world of no attachment, a world of wakes and tilting, of sinking planes of land and water ... [The peregrine] finds his way across the land by a succession of remembered symmetries. But what does he understand? Does he really 'know' that

> an object that increases in size is moving towards him? Or is it that he believes in the size he sees, so that a distant man is too small to be frightening but a man near is a man huge and therefore terrifying? He may live in a world of endless pulsations, of objects forever contracting or dilating in size. Aimed at a distant bird, a flutter of white wings, he may feel—as it spreads out beneath him like a stain of white—that he can never fail to strike. Everything he is has been evolved to link the targeting eye to the striking talon. (35-36)

The peregrine lives in a world of airy fluid: "Like the seafarer, the peregrine lives in a pouring--away world ... a world of wakes and tilting..." How does the peregrine understand its world "of no attachment"? Baker questions his way into the alien eye and flight of the peregrine, by confessing the impossibility of our knowing how these birds see. What is certain is that—"Everything he is has been evolved to link the targeting eye to the striking talon." The changes in view and perspective caused by the peregrine's flight and speed create a particular landscape of shape and size and movement. The peregrine's eye tracks these changes, but all at the service of a single imperative—the link between the 'targeting eye' and that which is targeted. The striking talon of the bird embodies the rage of the bird in its furious velocity as it stoops to kill.

Parallax and palimpsest—always comparisons: flying and swimming, bird and fish, air and water, Baker and peregrine, human and animal. We see and understand by comparisons, analogies, and parodies (a parody is a kind of analogy). These comparisons layer the visible with the absent, with the past, with the possibilities of flight and fear. A residue of the bird's flight populates the world through the memory of our seeing.

> [The peregrine] shimmered and coiled and dwindled away over the sharp-spired hill, and was descending beyond it when distance suddenly quenched him. He left the blue sky baroque with fading curves of power and precision, of lithe and muscular flight. (115)

This baroque observation of "curves of power and precision" fits with Wallace Stevens' more subdued confession of a similar residue of bird flight:

> When the blackbird flew out of sight,
> It marked the edge
> Of one of many circles.

What we no longer see marks a boundary with its vanishing; the blackbird is beyond, elsewhere, maybe no more. This edge is like the bodies of the dead that mark what was but are no longer. Words give us the shape of thought, a geometry for sense and memory.

And things—animals or parts of animals—give us images of sense for what is hard to grasp. Thus,

> each butterfly's small plumage
> is one day's shrunken image—
> a tenth its size.
> ("The Butterfly," Brodsky)

The butterfly lives but a day and thus can become an image of every day. Sounds can become images for what has passed as well. Or rather sounds that are close to silence can speak for what is dead or for death. For example, a human battle and its carnage is a kind of killing that produces its own kind of secondary music—the numbers that spill themselves on the field and the different kinds of human rage give this silence a form of horror. Geoffrey Hill describes this in the third poem of his "Funeral Music":

> A field
> After battle utters its own sound
> Which is like nothing on earth, but is earth.

The aftermath of the battle has a different noise than the cacophony that was the battle. And if it

is not quite silence, the field, which is the earth on which the battle was fought, speaks in a voice that is not human; it is "like nothing on earth"—but it remains earth. It will absorb our dead.

"Only a very deadly hawk could sweep three thousand woodpigeons out of the fields simply by soaring above them..." (114). The aftermath is silence. Baker "waited at the bridge. Birds were silent, and there was no wind. The sun shone in mist, like a burning moon. I hid in my own stillness...." (114). The birds are silent because of the hunting peregrine nearby. Baker is quiet like the birds, but not because he is afraid. The mist, the sun become moon, its pale cold surface burning seem to encourage Baker to join himself to the silence of the birds, who remain fearful of the hunting peregrine. It is an odd kind of hiding to hide in one's own stillness; your body and mind stilled, and in being stilled you find yourself in a stillness, hiding in yourself, moved into what has been made quiet as you. Baker quieted himself in that quiet.

If I enter into my own stillness to hide, then I enter into a form of stillness which is already my own. The stillness is mine and it isn't, and thus I can move into it, and yet it is me. I am stilled and silenced, and so are the other animals; together we make a we of silence, a chorus of silence. A chorus that marks a killing and thus death.

We have this same kind of it-is-mine-but it--it-is-not relationship with our words and our thoughts. The means of speaking are normative, learned and shared. My oldest daughter when she was three would say—"Birds are beautiful," then she would pause, think, and then say: "I do believe that." She casually did what Frege formalized; we make statements about which we then take up a stance, what Frege calls its force (an assertion). Our statements and the thoughts that they express are ours and yet not, or not yet. Phrases can claim us—as when we are haunted by gossip or enthralled by the promises of love; they infect us, we absorb their sense; they become our own thoughts and beliefs. But such phrases can turn alien, too; and we can break free of their force and reject them. Our ways with words are intimate but variable. This is also our way with poems.

If Baker can hide in his stillness, he can also enter into his own movement—maybe to hide in a new way, but I rather think to be made visible through that movement and in that movement. Thus, his movement into the hunt for the peregrine exposes him. He is the human being who can take up the mask the peregrine offers him.

No one can leap into the flight of a peregrine. To find a peregrine one must find pathways. Birds jump into flight out of fear: "The most exciting thing about a hawk is the way in which it can create life from the still earth by conjuring flocks of birds into the air" (106). The peregrine is revealed not in itself but through its effect on birds. One is following or coming to the same place through some other route. What is true of moving through the landscape is true of our descriptions. Analogies are pathways into intimacy. There is no way to jump away from giving shape and form to our seeing with words. That would be to give up words and thus to give up the shape of our mind seeing, accepting only our reactions and prejudices. Seeing with words requires that we travel by means of them and use them to hunt what we would see.

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Every discipline of art resists some aspect of our human mode of life and in so doing foregrounds another. If such simplifications of art feel diminishing, then they face us with death. If such simplifications augment or extend our sense of ourselves, then they evoke and intimate divinity. Our relationship with wild animals and extreme landscapes always places us in a tension between

death and divinity—that is, as long as the cost is great enough to make our relating to these (our seeing these) disorienting, scary, sacrificial. The sacred only reveals itself at a cost. In revealing this we are not shown something extraordinary, but we are shown the everyday we usually fail or refuse or pretend not to see.

By means of these limits something else is made manifest, revealed, given a form such that we can relate to it with care and consciously. I don't want to call what this is a transcendent something, let alone transcendence *per se*. Baker's imagined seeing of the hawk makes sense—it fits with the life, height, flight, and biology of the hawk. It is not projection or fantasy, but a way of constraining himself in order to alter how he relates to the peregrine, and with the world, and with life and death. Like the metaphoric simplifications through which so much is described—the direction of imagination is against the limitless and towards the constraints that make flight possible. Flying is not an escape from gravity, but a swimming by means of physics through the fluid of air, a constant, if effortless, negotiation with wind and height. The hawk is presented as a limit to our own fantasies about hawks and ourselves. Wings are modes of balancing forces and pressures. As are words.

Sometimes we pull ourselves into the sight of others and the world emerges as more than its light. We see by being seen. This is not always the case, but it is sometimes. I want to examine such a case, a case of seeing birds by being seen by them. Seeing by being seen is not bird-watching, not identifying or observing. It is not finding birds, but being found with them. A reciprocal intimacy. Not the factitious intimacy of the voyeur, but the intimacy of a participant in a shared and meaningful context. This kind of seeing can happen sometimes through love. It is what Baker achieves, not just with a peregrine, but in his prose: we see his seeing. Without his words we could not do that. His writing towards us requires his seeing our own blindness, and working to help us get out of our own way.

At the end of the book, he sees the peregrine seeing him as something it need not fear:

> The hawk is only five yards away. He sees me at once. He does not fly … The noble head lowers, but lifts again at once. Swiftly now he is resigning his savagery to the night that rises round us like dark water. The great eyes look into mine. When I move my arm before his face, they look still on, as though they see something beyond me from which they cannot look away. The last light flakes and crumbles down. Distance moves through the dim lines of the inland elms, and comes closer, and gathers behind the darkness of the hawk. I know he will not fly now. I climb over the wall and stand before him. And he sleeps. (190-91).

There is no mimicry or mirroring. Baker stands before the peregrine in his human form and yet is no longer seen by the hawk as tainted. Baker can see that he is seen within an intimacy of trust (or indifference), and so the peregrine can sleep.

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