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Partnership, Not Dominion: Resistance to Decay in the Falconry Memoir

“It is written that man shall have dominion over the fowls of the air, but Genghis is not of the kind that suffer dominion. I asked for partnership.”
—Ronald Stevens, *The Taming of Genghis*

Directing one’s eyes to the birds in our midst is a task that far more people perform than is generally acknowledged in the Western world. Birdwatching is among the fastest-growing sports in the United States (Montgomery 2); watching homing pigeons fly functions as a passion for celebrities like Mike Tyson (Blechman 164). Scientists are now studying bird intelligence in far more species than the widely-celebrated corvids and parrots, and “There are birds that can count and do simple math, make their own tools, move to the beat of music, comprehend basic principles of physics, remember the past, and plan for the future” (Ackerman 1-2). Even widely-despised birds, like the European starlings who have invaded North America, can be kept as pets and defended by the owners who come to love them, the point of Lynda Lynn Haupt’s memoir of her twinned research projects of keeping a pet starling like Mozart and doing research into Mozart’s bird, *Mozart’s Starling*. Haupt admits at one point that her feelings about starlings in general are still negative and she believes their North American numbers should be curbed for the good of native bird species, but only “as long as Carmen [her pet] stays here with me” (65).

Yet the relationships birdwatchers, pigeon-flyers, and scientists have with birds are, variously, competitive sports, ways to soothe hours of loneliness, or scientific experiments. Memoirs like Haupt’s or Margaret Stanger’s *That Quail, Robert* document the relationship between human owner and pet bird, no different in outline if different in detail from canine-centric memoirs like *Marley and Me*. None of these

bonds with birds, as important and diverse as they are, rises to the level of partnership. Only the relationship expressed in falconry memoirs does.

Falconry memoirs, each expressive of an individual partnership with birds of prey, also take measures to safeguard that partnership from decay (which can lead at best to injury in falconer or bird, at worst to a lost or dead hawk). Language—from the language used in falconry itself to the rhetoric of the writers—carefully emphasizes the traditions of falconry; while some have changed, old and new traditions alike require a level of focus on the raptor that is total. Falconers can, in fact, come across as mad, and sometimes accuse themselves of madness, springing from that focus. Their focus is an outlier in almost any culture; master falconer Stephen Bodio says in his memoir, *A Rage for Falcons*, “You know that most people in this [Western, American] or any other civilization wouldn’t put that much time or discipline into anything, let alone training a bird” (120). Decay is held off as the partnership is constantly renewed, constantly balanced in the tension of the tightrope between making the hawk a pet—a relationship into which the human may fall even if the bird does not—and making it so wild that it will decide it can better hunt without its partner. The human must learn to be that partner, the *junior* partner, as master falconer Nancy Cowan tells Sy Montgomery, a nature writer interviewing her (120); the hawk learns to come back to the falconer instead of taking off into the sky, as it could easily do (Bodio *Rage* 92). Fragile, threatened, in danger of being ignored as often as it is complained about, the partnership in falconry resembles the birds themselves. That it is built at all, and then successfully expressed in writing to an outside audience who will include at best only a small number of falconers, is an indication of the memoirs’ enduring success and importance, a triumph like falconry’s triumph in enduring four thousand years.

Language as Resistance to Decay

Sy Montgomery points out that, just as falcons, hawks, and eagles bring a unique hunting style to their prey, falconers tend to regard them as unique among animals:

The language of falconry honors this difference. The falcon isn't sleeping, like ordinary birds or mammals; it's "joinking." When it cleans its beak and feet after eating, it's "feaking." The act of hiding the food with outspread wings and tail while it eats is called "mantling." A bird of prey, in fact, is so rarefied that it doesn't even shit like the rest of us. Hawks "slice"; falcons "mute." (120)

Likewise, the leash to attach a hawk's or falcon's feet to the glove is called a jess, the act of trimming a bird of prey's beak in captivity since they cannot trim them on bone is called coping, the moment when a raptor plunges its talons through the falconer's hand is called footing, and so on. The mere existence of these terms is not impressive; after all, many sports, sciences, and hobbies have their special jargon that outsiders may not have heard of or understood. But, as Montgomery indicates above, the *source* of these terms is. Falconers do not refuse to share them with outsiders, as demonstrated by Montgomery's easy report on them even though she is not a falconer herself. They are not used for mystification, but rather to "honor this difference," to enshrine a certain awed attitude toward the birds. Without this attitude, the falconers might take the birds for granted, as many other humans tend to do with many other animals on our planet, a fact that can lead to profound ignorance and indifference like the kind currently causing a catastrophic rate of species extinction (Dinerstein 4). This will result in more footing, more mantling, and ultimately the hawks or falcons slicing and muting outside the bounds of that partnership.

The awe is expressed in the language of falconry memoirs themselves, which sometimes not only border on but outright cross into religious worship. Contemplating his newly captured gyrfalcon, Genghis, Ronald Stevens asks the reader, "Did I feel sorry for him [in captivity]? Can one feel sorry for something that is fit almost for idolatry" (17)? The "almost" reserves the moment for the audience, enabling them to step back and accept that Stevens's feeling for Genghis is not *actual* idolatry, a sentiment that might break the spell of the memoir and force a false perception of the bird on the reader. Yet this is not the only moment when Stevens also forces the audience to cope with how strong his feeling for Genghis is, not the

feeling for a “companion animal,” a role that from Victorian times, according to researchers Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin Danahay, has tended to ignite more sympathy for pets such as cats and dogs than for most wild animals (2), or a feeling such as a hunter might have for his gun or a fisherman for his rod. Concentrating on the moment when he is teaching Genghis not to be afraid of him, Stevens admits, “Before the intensity of his valiant gaze I do not feel the confusion of one who has much to answer for, but the embarrassment that a mortal would feel if a god had descended to look at him. What have I brought back with me? Is it a bird that I must lead, or is it a Being that has taken charge of me” (35)? Here is no “almost” to rescue the reader from Stevens’s awe or either us or him from embarrassment. Indeed, the capitalization on “Being” makes up for the lack of it on “god,” cutting off the escape route of a purely metaphorical confrontation between deity and worshiper, and the reversal of the “I” in the last sentence, from the subject position it takes before the comma to the accusative position of “me” after the comma, while the references to Genghis go in the opposite direction, beam the awe down like light. Stevens’s questions do not receive an answer in the text. The reader is the one who must reply to them, or Stevens himself in his close partnership with Genghis.

In other writing, the religious awe seems less serious, in that falconers may use it to taunt people they find annoying or make a point, but it is no less present. Bodio tells, as an anecdote, “the time [a fellow falconer] devastated a couple of canvassing Jehovah’s Witnesses by taking them to where his proud peregrine sat on her perch and announcing, “This is what I worship.” You may say he goes too far, yet it is not that rare an attitude,” Bodio adds, going on to talk about a friend who reacts to a proposed anti-falconry law with the statement, ““It’s like they’re messing with my *religion*”” (*Rage* 9, emphasis in original). Intense focus and faith, the dedication necessary to training a hawk, infuse the language of all these memoirs. As with the relationship becoming that of god-worshiper, it can tilt away from partnership in other ways; a falconer may see him- or herself not just as the junior partner to a hawk, but as its servant. “A hawk is your master or mistress,” Bodio flatly declares (*Rage* 4). Yet this relationship in the language

does not overpower the notion of partnership, being necessary, perhaps, to convey that same sense of total dedication and overwhelming intent that powers the partnership. (Without this language, outsiders would not take it seriously enough). References to partnership far outnumber them, and a falconer can reconcile both sentiments, as with Nancy Cowan's statement that "If you think in terms of rewards and punishment, you're not thinking partnership. They don't serve us. We serve them" (Montgomery 134).

Even if the falconer is the junior partner, he or she is still the partner. Ronald Stevens wishes for partnership and not dominion with Genghis, and adds, "How generously this lord of the air gave me his share of it can be appreciated from the story that follows" (15). The language of lordship still places Genghis above, Stevens below, but only one chapter later, their fledgling relationship has already assumed more equality. As part of "manning" Genghis, or getting him used to being around people, animals, and the artifacts of people other than just the falconer, prey, and the shed or mews where he is first placed, Stevens places a hood on him and keeps him inside for a few days. He does wonder, when gazing into the falcon's eyes, "With the greatest respect I am trying to train him, but those eyes make me feel so abjectly separate...Indeed sometimes I wonder whether I really have more power over him than he has over me, for if I am putting him under restriction it is also true that he is imposing self-restraint on me" (43). The falconer must learn self-restraint, patience, and manners; training a falcon is also "[t]he education of the falconer [in] a chastening process during which you learn to be polite to an animal" (Bodio *Rage* 5). Eventually, those kinds of restraint balance out, as the falcon learns to return and the falconer learns what will offend, frighten, or enrage the raptor. Emma Ford, who with her husband founded the British School of Falconry, recalls sitting on the grass in front of Wally, the first eagle she was given to train, when at first "he had a hunted look. More than anything else I wanted to see that look replaced by one of trust. I felt I was privileged to be close to him and this feeling inspired endless patience. As I sat in the grass beside him, we stared at each other and, almost imperceptibly, a relationship started to form between us" (17). Here, the positioning is equal; "we stared at each other" inspires Wally to eventually return Ford's gaze without

fear, and Ford to learn the patience she needs. As well, Ford sits on the ground in front of Wally's perch, so that she does not loom over him, taking the upright stance that some see as emblematic of either humanity's position over other animals or our separation from the creatures of the earth. Rather than training a falcon as one trains a dog, which strives to achieve "compliance, the goal of all dog training" (Bradshaw 95), the training is reciprocal. And so must be the partnership.

What the falconer and the bird get out of the partnership, of course, is not identical even if it is equal. Nancy Cowan says in her memoir, *Peregrine Spring*, "The falconry partnership gives me the opportunity to prove myself worthy to my bird, and gives the bird what she exists on Earth for in the first place—hunting and catching game. Each partner derives a benefit from the partnership. The benefit spilling over to me is my bird and I continue, day after day, working together. This means doing many other activities with my bird besides hunting" (ch. 25). Here are shades of both Bodio's idea of the hawk as master and the ideas of other memoirs that convey greater equality. Cowan must "prove [herself] worthy" to her falcon, not the other way around. Yet the falcon and Cowan are both partners in the second sentence, not separated by their different goals, different bodily forms, or different ways of perceiving the world. Describing her own process of earning the trust of her goshawk, Mabel, in her memoir *H is For Hawk*, Helen Macdonald narrates differences from the way Stevens and Ford meet their birds' eyes; instead, she pretends "not to be there. You empty your mind and become very still. You think of exactly nothing at all" (65). But the end goal is still the same, although Macdonald in her memoir is training her goshawk in twenty-first-century England, Ford in hers is learning to give falconry exhibitions in the latter half of the twentieth century at Chilham Castle, and Stevens in his was living in Ireland in the 1950s, striving to bring the gyrfalcon back into an art that had come to depend almost exclusively on the peregrine. Macdonald voices this goal before entering into her description of how she achieved it: "You want the hawk to eat the food you hold—it's the first step in reclaiming her that will end with you being hunting partners" (64-65). Different as the methods may be, respect, trust, and partnership are always

necessary, and always impossible to achieve without that commitment to true partnership, not any degree of separation. “But the space between the fear and the food is a vast, vast gulf,” says Macdonald, “and you have to cross it together” (65).

Separation between the fates of animal and human, in direct opposition to the kind of partnership that falconers seek to foster, is one too-often-dominant component of Western thinking. This position, called “cornucopian” by the ecocritical theorist Greg Garrard for its conviction that the earth will yield ever more riches and the future always be better than the past despite the abundance of environmental threats, holds that “[s]carcity’ is therefore an economic, not an ecological, phenomenon, and will be remedied by capitalist entrepreneurs, not the reductions in consumption urged by environmentalists” (Garrard 17). This position leaves animals out entirely. Their own scarcities—threats to their population, their habitats, their breeding grounds, their food supplies, their health—are hardly likely to “be remedied by capitalist entrepreneurs,” who require enormous consumption of resources to create current economic conditions, let alone the ones that will apparently appear out of innovation’s thin air to save the human population in the future. And cornucopians are not committed to humans cutting back in other ways; when “[m]ore people on the planet means more resourceful brains, more productive hands, more consumption and therefore more economic growth” (Garrard 17), both human population and human use of common resources are obviously set to increase. Even outside entrepreneurial or capitalism-cheering circles, variations of this attitude tend to prevail. This is “the pervasive human-centeredness that now dominates much thinking” in many groups, including academic, philosophical, and political ones (Waldau ch. 1). Simply *questioning* this human-centeredness is difficult to do, since “others have long reacted against any suggestion of problems in the past and therefore resist calls for change. Such resistance is often anchored in the long-prevailing—and thus now socially and psychologically comfortable—dismissals that are the heartbeat of so many claims to human superiority” (Waldau ch. 1). Waldau, an animal studies theorist, is primarily concerned with ways to challenge human-centeredness, also called human

exceptionalism, in broad fields such as anthropology, law, and medicine. However, falconry memoirs are one small literary field where this challenge also plays out, and is in fact the dominant attitude, rather than the cornucopian one. While Waldau thinks humans should act in “more protective ways” with animals (ch. 1), falconers have stepped beyond this limitation already by taking protection as a given. Of *course* they labor to protect their falcons from the numerous threats, including disease and predators, that await them as they fly. This vigilance, and the desire for partnership with a bird that lies behind it, are the most important components protecting falconry from decay in these memoirs.

Fragility and Madness

One of my students, during a class that read Stephen Bodio’s *A Rage for Falcons*, earnestly expressed his belief that falconers were crazy. “You’d *have* to be crazy to do that with a bird,” was his wording. “That” was not clearly defined, but given that we had just read the part of the book’s introduction in which Bodio declares that “[t]he bird never gives an inch—you can coax it but never bully or even discipline it” (*Rage* 5), it may be easily imagined. This is not a partnership that could be sustained through harsh discipline, the way that training a dog might, or that can be brought back after years of abuse, the way a skilled trainer might rescue an abused dog or horse. Treating a raptor harshly makes it what is called a “mar-hawk,” marred beyond repair. “Go off in the wrong direction,” Nancy Cowan warns her reader, “and the falconer cannot back up to make a correction. One is left with what, in the historic language of falconry, is known as a “mar-hawk,” a falcon so ruined it will never work in partnership with a human” (ch. 15). Once again, the language of falconry enters the memoir to present the all-important lens of partnership. In this case, it also emphasizes the fragility of that relationship, and that the falconer’s vigilance and desire to nurture it can never be allowed to decay.

Part of that fragility comes from the physical fragility of the birds themselves. Montgomery comments that “A hawk’s wings, tail, feet, and eyes are so delicate they can be easily injured when you take

the bird out of the mews. Even an unexpected wind can lift, twist, and sprain a wing when a bird is tethered to your glove. You must be careful...not to fly a bird on a cold day. Even mild frostbite on the feet can kill...The list of hazards goes on and on” (130-131). Even a goshawk, among the most aggressive of the birds falconers fly, has that fragility; “they will break your soft human heart by dying in twenty-four hours of aspergillosis or in ten seconds of a summer fit” (Bodio *Rage* 27). Richard Hines, a teenager when he acquired his first nestling kestrel, recounts how “it seemed all right but a couple of mornings ago when [his brother Barry] had gone into the air raid shelter he’d found it dead in its box” (ch. Eight). Falconers in these memoirs who want to keep and care for hawks have to learn the full extent of their natural history, cut their food up for them in exactly the right size, guard their feathers carefully against any breakage, earn their trust, protect them from wild hawks who might try to eat them, and learn to fly them at exactly the right weight. Hines has to experiment with his trained kestrel, Kes, when she is uninterested in hunting, to figure out the precise amount of meat he should feed her so she will be interested but not starving. “If she refused to fly to [the lure], at her next meal I slightly reduced the amount I fed her, until I found the highest weight at which she would fly. I don’t recall the precise weight but it was only fractionally more than her previous flying weight” (ch. Twelve). Such slight adjustments do not respond well to impatience or to a simple desire to look glamorous. ““People see the bird as an ornament—they are thinking how cool they will look with one on their arm,”” Nancy Cowan tells Sy Montgomery as she defines the things falconry is not (117). This is absolutely the wrong attitude to take, not only because the bird is a partner rather than a pet or ornament, but because such interest decays and fades quickly before the endless attention falconry requires. Falconry is the opposite of regarding the animal as any kind of instrument: sharp, decorative, or blunt. And as citizens of a society swarming with different forms of instrumentalization for animals, modern Western humans find it harder than medieval ones, of a time period where falconry was more common, to conceptualize themselves into that mindset.

Yet falconry literature itself, let alone the partnership it depicts, cannot proceed without that endless focus, as “sharp-set” as the moment when the falcon readies itself to fly. That it provides endless rewards for the falconer in return for its endless demands is not in doubt, but it is still not everyone who is suited to it. Falconer Tim Gallagher reflects at the end of his memoir *Falcon Fever*, which covers his abusive childhood and his time in jail as well as his obsession with falconry,

I could focus all my energies on a sport—an art, really—that was all encompassing, that would take years to perfect. And I had the ideal temperament for it. I’ve always had the kind of voice, way of moving, and attitude that seems to be soothing to animals, which made it easier for me to work successfully with wild raptors...Without falconry, there’s no telling what direction my life would have taken or where I would’ve ended up, but I fear it would not have been good. Falconry really did save my life (Epilogue).

The epilogue of a memoir, often reserved for tying up or reflecting on the important events of the author’s lifetime, here serves as a place for Gallagher to recast those important events in the light of his own kind of literature. *Falcon Fever* does not cover his marriage or children, although both Gallagher’s wife and family are mentioned in several places in the book; instead, it jumps from his troubled childhood and adolescence when he first began to be fascinated with raptors straight to his “Frederick II year,” when Gallagher arranged to follow in the footsteps of Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor who wrote the first formal book on falconry. Gallagher acknowledges the strangeness of his setup in his introduction to Chapter 10, where he says that he “turned [his] life around and became a successful, productive member of society. But this narrative is not about that. It’s about my time as a falconry bum.” The very structure of the falconry memoir alters to flow about the birds and the partnership with the birds, the passion that Gallagher calls both an “addiction” and an “obsession” in his introduction. Here is a powerful resistance to decay, built on the foundations of a genre itself about resisting decay, preserving memories that would otherwise go untold and die when the last person remembering them dies. The human steps back, out of

the space at the center of the narrative. What most readers might consider the “center” of Gallagher’s narrative is literally a blank space between Gallagher’s release from prison at the end of his ninth chapter and his tenth, where he tells the life story of Frederick II to give the reader a background in necessary history—a page blank except for the capitalized title MY FREDERICK II YEAR (Part II). The human willingly stepping out of the center, rather than having to lie “huddled and trembling in a corner” (ch. 1), as Gallagher and his sisters are forced to do in his childhood by their abusive father, practically coercing him or her to gaze at the future, the past, and the present with fresh eyes. It is also a step away from the human-centeredness that Paul Waldau condemns. And yet the center is not a single bird, either, as nearly all falconry memoirs cover multiple birds, with falcons, hawks, and eagles frequently dying or becoming lost. The center is the partnership.

What that partnership looks like to those outside it is also a concern of the falconry memoir, and one reason that so many falconers spend time on trying to explain and justify their commitment to the art, as well as the things that falconry is not. Montgomery, who takes lessons with a falconer but decides in the end that she has too many other commitments—such as pet chickens—that prevent her from becoming one, states in wonder that “Nancy [Cowan] and her birds will show me a kind of relationship I had never known was possible with any living being” (121). Yet, although a sympathetic audience and not an actual falconer, Montgomery too notes some of the reasons that others consider falconers crazy or even reprehensible. “Oddly, bird-watchers often look down on falconry; some consider it a form of slavery. Others dislike the birds themselves, for raptors not infrequently attack and kill birds at feeders” (Montgomery 121). Bird-watching can be an addiction, a competitive sport, in its own right; Kenn Kaufman, an expert birder who has written several guides to different species, writes about the thrill of trying a “Big Year” to see as many species as possible in one year in North America in his own memoir *Kingbird Highway*. And he quotes one of his friends, after they find Black-Capped Gnatcatchers, a mainly Mexican species, nesting in Arizona, “If nonbirders had been watching us just now, they never would’ve

understood why we were so excited about those insignificant little birds. I mean, how would you go about explaining it to someone” (114-115)? Yet even so, birders look down on falconry and do not understand the passion it rouses in its practitioners that then flares in their memoirs. The “slavery” that bird-watchers may think of the relationship between falconer and bird as is the diametric opposite of the partnership that falconers aim for. Enslaving a bird to hunt for you may be seen as the craziness of cruelty, in contrast to the pure, inexplicable-to-outsiders excitement of Kaufman’s memoir.

Conservation concerns, too, come into play, particularly as an undefined belief seems to float in many people’s minds that falconers are having an enormous impact on the survival of wild raptors. Stephen Bodio recounts that, “I myself have been questioned by federal agents, and a couple of years ago I got a letter from the editor of a national scientific publication accusing me and people like me of causing the imminent extinction of all birds of prey” (*Rage* 7). *How* this would happen, or happens in the minds of believers, is not clear, but does seem to have to do with the practice of taking young birds from nests or capturing wild “passage” raptors on migration, practices less common now than before with the advent of successful captive breeding of many hawks and falcons. That captive breeding *is* a success and the impact by falconers on wild populations *is* reduced is due to falconers themselves. The return of the peregrine falcon from the brink of extinction, for example, is proudly claimed by both Bodio and another falconer, Rebecca K. O’Connor, as the result of the raptors’ partners intervening when other conservation activists’ efforts did not work. For example, Bodio says, “In the last twenty years, the peregrine first declined because of exposure to pesticides, then benefited from the most intense and successful restoration effort ever given any bird—an effort sparked and carried out almost *entirely by falconers*” (*Rage* 7, emphasis in original). O’Connor, whose book is more recent than the first edition of Bodio’s, is even blunter about the way that perceptions of falconers as detrimental to the birds lingered in others’ minds after peregrines and other wild raptors had begun to recover: “Scientists didn’t believe that falconers could be successful breeding falcons when others had failed. Surely, the falconers were laundering wild birds through fake

breeding projects that couldn't possibly be producing young...Federal agents, state authorities and worse, the public had tried the falconers in the media and proclaimed them wildlife criminals" (ch. Four). So not only are falconers practicing a discipline, an art, that requires dedication outsiders might see as crazy; they are supposedly doing it in such a way that it seriously harms the birds that others try to protect. And even if the peregrine falcon has returned and managed to flourish to the point that scientists no longer automatically suspect falconers of laundering wild ones, some restrictions on other birds, especially eagles, remain in the U.S. "Although federal regulations theoretically allow falconers to possess and fly eagles, individual bureaucrats have a well-documented history of foot-dragging on permits, of blocking access to eagles" (Bodio *Dreams* Part I). Eagles doubtless receive a greater protection due to their function as the symbolic bird of the United States, but part of it is also a legacy of that distrust that once persisted about other species until falconers proved it was possible to breed them in captivity.

That distrust places falconers somewhat on the defensive. The references to addiction and obsession show it, as do the titles of some of the memoirs, calling out the potential craziness or surreal nature of the art of falconry as seen from outside before the misunderstanding non-falconer can do so: *Falcon Fever*, *Eagle Dreams*, *A Rage for Falcons*. And yet, the notion of partnership affords falconers not only defensiveness but a stout defense to the idea that their bonds with falcons may decay into enslavement, dominion, or pet-keeping. From the viewpoint of animal studies, all of those ways of relating to animals are allied with "[d]omestication [as] a form of domination that can make these nonhuman animals conform to our lives in ways that hide what their lives apart from humans would be like" (Waldau ch. 11). Falconers demonstrate again and again in their narratives that their birds do *not* conform to a human way of life, that they remain wild, and force the falconer to conform to *them*. Thus Cowan's need to prove herself worthy of keeping a certain bird's company; thus Bodio's firm statement that

falconry is not pet-keeping. Most falconers cringe when some well-meaning acquaintance refers to their birds as pets. A falconer's bird, however tame and affectionate, is as close to a wild animal in condition and habit as an animal that lives with man can be. Above all, it hunts. A bird that is carried around on the fist and petted but never flown may be happy—I leave such issues to behaviorists and animal-rights advocates. But a wild animal that cannot engage in its natural behavior is barely an animal, and a pet bird is neither a falconer's bird nor even a real hawk (*Rage* 4-5).

Bodio specifically refuses to comment on the internal worlds of pet birds, hawks that cannot engage in their natural behavior and thus are treated cruelly by their keepers whether or not they mean to. It is only the partnership of a wild hawk that matters, and that he feels himself qualified to evaluate. The message is clear: not only is falconry the opposite of domestication and dominion, but without that partnership, falconry does not exist.

More openly than Bodio does here, Cowan also turns the notion of the supposed cruelty of falconry practice back on the art's critics, who do not trouble themselves to try to understand the partnership that falconers build with their birds. By imagining raptors as spiritual creatures who should have a purely spiritual relationship with humans, or as pets or ornaments for the falconer's fist, Cowan insists, they demean the bird far more than the falconer flying it. "I can't imagine anything crueller to do to a living being,' she says, 'than to try to make it into something it's not'" (Montgomery 121). Falconry thus encourages active resistance to the decay that can happen to human relationships with many wild animals who are caged in zoos or turned into pets, and which can happen even with domestic animals who become neglected or ignored when it suits their owner's will to do so. Because no falconer can truly own a hawk, falcon, or eagle without damaging its nature beyond repair, falconers have to constantly pay attention, reorient themselves to the bird, and ask themselves if what they are doing is true falconry or one of the host of decayed relationships possible, even encouraged, by the society they live in.

Those decayed relationships are everywhere, although many people who have them and suffer from them might not recognize them as such. Waldau, citing research on the cultivated indifference of some children in modern Western societies to animals, points out that “If a society does not teach its children to notice other animals (including unrealistic caricatures), then many of its children will not notice other animals—their feel for animal-related issues will be empty unless they break through to such issues in some other way” (ch. 11). Such indifference is what permits a varying spectrum of dismissive attitudes, from the horrific abuse of domestic species in factory farming to the inability to understand a bird-watcher’s excitement over a rare bird, to exist. But this indifference is matched by a spectrum of attitudes and activities in reorientation and resistance to decay, from becoming an advocate for animal rights to offering courses in animal law such as Waldau himself has taught. Falconry is one of those attitudes combined with activity, although one that admittedly has a somewhat esoteric reputation and small following, and chooses wild predatory birds as partners rather than dogs, livestock, or primates, which might be viewed as more “natural” choices. Describing the decisions he made that led him to become a falconer, Bodio locates his own longing for “intimacy” with animals among people as diverse as “backcountry New England trappers, field zoologists, pigeon flyers, falconers, horsemen, dog trainers, cowboys, Indians, and whoever else would teach me and talk to me...[They have] an unsentimental intimacy with, and a life lived among, animals...not a reduction of them to utilitarian automatons, but a kind of familiarity with them that acknowledged that they were not humans but that they were persons” (*Dreams* Part I). Bodio adds, “It is a way of life that northern Europeans are steadily leaving behind.” Falconry preserves part of that life, and resonates on both large and small levels for those who take to partnership with raptors; it resists both large trends in Western thinking about animals and the tendency of some individual human ties to animals to decay. There is Gallagher’s assertion that falconry saved him, and Hines’s subtitle for his *No Way But Gentleness: A Memoir of How Kes, My Kestrel, Changed My Life*. Emma Ford, likewise, recounts in *Fledgling Days* how she receives a call from the mother of John, a

boy she helped to train in falconry, whose parents had despaired that he would end activities that might put him in prison. John's mother tells Ford, "'When I 'phoned you to ask if you'd take him on the course, it was just a dream that this might be the one thing that would turn him round, but it has. He hasn't been in trouble since. This buzzard has made all the difference in the world to him'" (242-243). Although not always the description most prominent in the memoirs—which tend to concentrate more on the birds themselves, techniques of training, and experiences with individual partnerships—the effect on individual falconers can be as dramatic as on the birds who learn to work on the hunt with humans, pay attention to dogs (Montgomery 142), and return to the fist for food. Having to be on guard, always, against possible damage to the hawk, criticism from outside, and their own upbringing in a society that has subjected them to ingrained attitudes that animals simply do not matter as much as humans and that dominion over them is both no large problem and a desirable end goal, falconers do not and cannot decay in their interest, attention, curiosity, and fascination. Being lifted out of oneself into a demanding partnership and away from the constant temptation of growing lazy or indifferent to life is the story these memoirs tell.

Conclusion

Falconry memoirs showcase resistance to many temptations to let relationships with animals decay, not an immunity to them. Experienced falconers still sometimes make misguided assumptions about their birds and need to shake themselves out of such wrong modes of thinking. Helen Macdonald, whose memoir *H Is For Hawk* follows the twin paths of her training of her goshawk Mabel and her recovery from her father's death, relates how after a minor earthquake, she dashes into Mabel's room expecting to find her agitated. Instead, Mabel is sleeping on her perch. Macdonald realizes, "She's at home in the world. She's here" (274), and, confronted with the reality of the hawk's reaction, sheds her own assumptions about Mabel. This comes after she has already been training Mabel for several months and endless hours, working hard to cement their partnership so that they might successfully hunt together. Falconry is not

magic or a preservative against mistakes. It is the opposite, in fact, endless labor for a fragile reward, a reward that non-falconers might not only misunderstand but think poor return for as much as they get from the bird.

But when that reward is awareness, and partnership, it is enough for the falconer. They can accept that the art of falconry, at least when the hunts are successful, inevitably entails the deaths of other animals; when these animals are tame themselves, like the pigeons that many falconers use to reward and lure their raptors, the balance becomes particularly freighted and may be handled with grim humor. As one of Bodio's friends puts it to him, "If there's anything to reincarnation, I'd sure as shit hate to come back as a falconer's pigeon" (*Rage* 42). The relationship between falconer and raptor is constantly in need of balancing and readjustment, and prone to simple abandonment on the hawk's or falcon's part if the bird does not get enough out of the partnership. Raptors can vote with their wings at any moment, returning to the wild, and many of the falconers' memoirs recount stories of such losses, especially since the telemetry used to locate lost birds does not always work (O'Connor ch. Nine). Each time falconers loose the jesses, the leather leashes that bind the falcon's feet on the glove, they stand a chance of losing all they have invested in that partnership, save their memories; they must prove to their birds that they are worth returning to, because keeping them forever captive would likewise destroy the partnership permanently.

But that resistance to decay is enough for falconers to pursue the art, even to glory in it. Recounting how difficult it was for him to train his first goshawk, Gos, T. H. White muses that goshawks' "crazy and suspicious temperament had alienated [another falconer] from them, as it had most falconers. Perhaps for this reason, I had loved Gos. I always loved the unteachable, the untouchable, the underdog" (134). Falcons and hawks, with the goshawk as only an exemplar instead of an exception, *cannot* be made into pets or companion animals, and that is all the more reason to love them. In the unsentimental, apparently crazy, constantly tense, fragile relationship between falconers and hawks, both seek and will accept only the partnership of the hunt, and thus resist decay with everything that is in them.

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