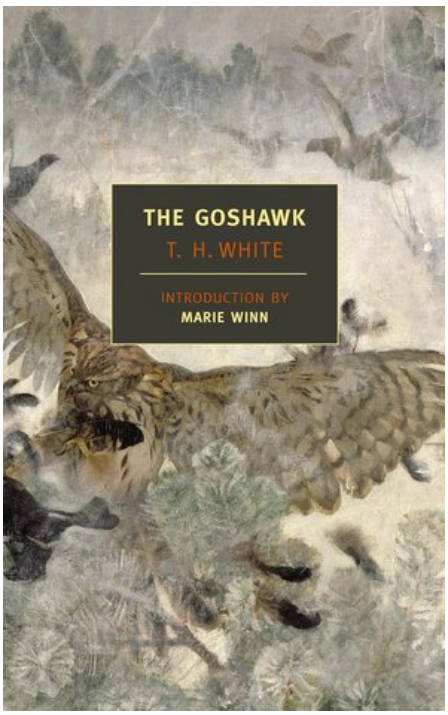

The Goshawk

T.H. White , Marie Winn (Introduction)

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The Goshawk T.H. White , Marie Winn (Introduction)
What is it that binds human beings to other animals? T.H. White, the author of *The Once and Future King* and *Mistress Masham's Repose*, was a young writer who found himself rifling through old handbooks of falconry. A particular sentence — "the bird reverted to a feral state" — seized his imagination, and, White later wrote, "A longing came to my mind that I should be able to do this myself. The word 'feral' has a kind of magical potency which allied itself to two other words, 'ferocious' and 'free.'" Immediately, White wrote to Germany to acquire a young goshawk. Gos, as White named the bird, was ferocious and Gos was free, and White had no idea how to break him in beyond the ancient (and, though he did not know it, long superseded) practice of depriving him of sleep, which meant that he, White, also went without rest. Slowly man and bird entered a state of delirium and intoxication, of attraction and repulsion that looks very much like love. White kept a daybook describing his volatile relationship with Gos — at once a tale of obsession, a comedy of errors, and a hymn to the hawk. It was this that became *The Goshawk*, one of modern literature's most memorable and surprising encounters with the wilderness — as it exists both within us and without.

The Goshawk Details

Date	:	Published October 2nd 2007 by NYRB (first published 1951)
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From Reader Review The Goshawk for online ebook

Karen Witzler says

Went there after reading H is for Hawk, stayed for the pure pleasure of T. H. White's writing, which totally outweighed Helen Macdonald's retelling of the entire story within her recent book.

Ettore1207 says

Fra i tantissimi libri che ho in lista, mai avrei deciso di aggiungere L'astore se non mi fossi imbattuto nelle splendide recensioni di Malacorda e Roberto. Grazie, cari amici!

Legarsi a un falco significa non potersi permettere sciatterie e smancerie. Nessun falco può essere un animale da compagnia; il sentimentalismo è escluso. In un certo senso, è l'arte dello psichiatra. Si mette in giuoco la propria mente contro un'altra mente con il massimo dell'impegno e della tensione intellettuale. Non c'è nessun desiderio di transfert affettivi, nessuna richiesta di disonorevoli atti d'omaggio o di riconoscenza. È un tonico per la meno schietta ferinità del cuore umano.
Colui che ha creato l'Agnello ha creato anche te? Ebbene, la risposta è sì.

Hadrian says

A wholly charming book with a sumptuous prose style, of a writer's attempts to train a goshawk to killl game. In many ways, this is a distant relative of the contemporary bestseller H is for Hawk.

The book's structure is a day-by-day account of the author's determination to train this bird, 'Gos', and convince it to trust him. He sympathizes with the 'feral' animal and yet they are often in combat with each other - both have stubborn personalities. The book can also be read as a study of the English countryside, or a glimpse into the author's philosophy of life, a struggle of human willpower against nature, or the ineffectiveness of 17th century falconry books.

Lance Greenfield says

This was one of the books that I had to read for O-Level English literature, and it was the only really interesting one out of the set. (These were the UK school exams for 16 year-olds back in the early '70s).

This is a role model for those who would practice the craft of writing great literature. The language is so descriptive and captivating and really pulls the reader in to experience the emotions of the author.

We were told that this is NOT the way to train a falcon, but it is a brilliant account of patience and the relationship between a man and a bird.

J.M. Hushour says

This is one of those incredible books that you pick up for no real, logical reason--more than a blind-buy, even--and become completely enamored with it. I can count these sorts of encounters with non-fiction on two hands.
The premise is simple: T.H. White, the guy who wrote "The Once and Future King", bought a goshawk and tried to train it to hunt himself, using books from the 17th century. He then wrote a book about it.
I'd be hard-pressed to elucidate what it exactly is about this book that endeared me to it so much. The answer might perhaps lie in White's own justification which has to do with wild things and men and feral states and the bliss of nature and ferocity and reversion. Certainly, White is a wonderful writer and he tells the story well, paralleling his training and frustrations with 'Gos' with his own musings on the absurdity of society and the up-ending of all kinds of assumptions that we take for granted about the efficacy and value of our 'modern world'.
I think it's best to say that its joy lies in both themes: showing us how clumsy we are in the world yet how joyful the labor to attempt to do so and bad-ass descriptions of training a bird of prey.

Richard says

I read The Sword in the Stone and The Once and Future King when I was much younger. This illuminates the things he writes in those books about raptors, and reveals the deep fascination he has for these magnificent birds. As he writes about his efforts to train a goshawk, it's not so much a matter, for him, of subjugating the bird as understanding the way it thinks and feels. The other thing I appreciated here was the bits of erudition scattered here and there in his allusions to history and literature.

Lizzie says

This is one of those marvelous books that is so small, yet written in a way so that each sentence carries the work of ten. Somehow, it tears your heart out with just a word. Just right out.

Because, this book is as much about what lies beneath T.H. White's words as what his words say. His words are telling us about a period when he trained a goshawk. (See that video for an incredibly gorgeous view of the creatures.) The rest of the story is in the underbelly, in what he is confessing about his point of view, of his little patch of the world. This is a book about war and pacifism, but told in a didactic code about falconry.*

*(It is not falconry. A goshawk is not technically a falcon, due to wingspan, and the term for the hawk's keeper is "austringer." Do you see what I mean about didactic, anyway?)

So this is 1937. White feels what the world is about to do, what it already is doing, and he can't really cope. The idea of violence hurts him deeply; he wants justice and peace, but admits more to cowardice: "I did not disapprove of war, but feared it much." He wants, most, to live in his cloistered cottage, to talk to hardly anyone, and — quite desperately, I believe — to belong to another time.

He isn't living a life the way his contemporaries are living life. He'll sit this one out. He's learned life from books, so far, and therefore why *not* buy a goshawk, captured in the wild — *in Germany!* — and train him

per the methods of three textbooks: a volume of The Sportsman's Library, one of The Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes, and the truly incredible Bert's *Treatise of Hawks and Hawking*, published 1619. That is his only help and perspective. He is, as he says, an amateur "four hundred years too late for guidance."

That last draws us directly into what White is really saying: he reminds us, often, that the last time falconry (and its relatives) was truly relevant was in the time of Shakespeare. During his long watches, training his hawk, named Gos, he recites him Shakespeare's verse. Even as "I was stroking a murderer, a savage," the bigger world around him is full of mounting violence, and of politics that pursue the kill; he concludes, "we still lived in the Middle Ages." So why not be there together.

A philosophical line is drawn directly between the training of the hawk and the practicing of pacifism. The training, primarily, consists of exerting an endless patience as you hold the hawk by its straps and wait until it no longer "bates" away, attempting to fly off your fist. *This takes days.* Sleepless days. And after it's happened, and the bird sits calmly upon you, you can expect to backslide again soon; a hawk is never tamed. The bird shows you hate, and you must show it kindness, or fail. "Nobody could be a master of hawks without benevolence." It's something between a Christian's cheek-turning and a Buddhist's enlightenment. Not every soul can do it, surely.

Part of this book is almost like the first half of a romantic comedy, the half where the players foil one another with petty fights and sardonic insults, yet are constantly drawn back together. Once he and Gos find their stride, we get so many wonderfully involved descriptions of the bird's personality. White uses the most sublime and funny language to describe him: Gos is both the hilarious "tetchy princeling" and the subject of tragic odes:

> "Unfortunate, dark, and immoral goshawk: I had myself been subjected to his brutality. In the beak he was not formidable, but in the talons there was death. … Once, when he thought I was going to take his food away from him, he had struck my bare forefinger. … I should only have hurt myself horribly by trying to get away, and was already being hurt."

There are many of these dark shades; it isn't a cruelty-free story. He is following his forebears and his 17th-century textbook, doing what's always been done. It may not always be right. How does that make him different from the rest of the world, about to descend into a massive war? Certainly not wiser. After all, the whole point of hawking is to hunt; it is a sport inherently disrespectful to life. And this is the twisted contradiction White offers us in his self: he is *an En-glish-man*, he rules his little land. This is a repugnant point of view, really, privileged and imperialist; he is the figure to whom all cultural arguments are aimed today. In his world there are still old ways to rest upon, and wild things to take at will.

Still I love him. He writes this book out of his compassion and his search for peace. He is the classic misanthrope, who loves animals more than people. There's a moment, when Gos is loose, that he lures him with a pigeon, as bait. But he stops: "I had known this pigeon: it had sat on my finger." It had sat on his finger! His friend! He buys two more pigeons, instead, so he won't have to use his friend for the death for which it was bred. His life is full of these tiny encounters, a "sentimental slaughterer," Snow White and the hunter both.

He doesn't flinch from these gruesome habits, or permit us to. He brings us deeper inside them. On a day when the gentry conducts a foxhunt outside his home, he watches a young sow badger emerge at the wrong time from the forest and encounter two well-made-up women who sit and stare at it. When she is killed,

later, White allegorically contemplates her body:

> "Brock: the last of the English bears: I had been proud that her race lived in the same wood with me. She had done nobody any harm. … Hob would be a good name for a badger. She dripped blood gently over the gate, while I held up her muzzle in the falconer's glove and looked into her small, opaque, ursine eyes. She was dead. What could I use her for? Surely, being killed, some definite good would ensue."

But there's no purpose to the death for anyone:

> "I did not want to remember a young, short-sighted, retiring, industrious, ultimately prolific female who had been turned back by two frightened ladies, cornered by lusty and unlettered puppies, knocked on the nose by a peer. … Never mind. I was a badger too, in my snug cottage that lay in the badger's wood: and when the war-world came to tear me apart with whoops and halloas, the young sow and myself would be quits."

Reading a passage like that, I'm just about quits myself.

Something to understand: this is actually a nonfiction book about falconry. Though I'd say it's written *like* a memoir, and contains allegory, it gets into detail about what to do with a goshawk. There are many diagrams. ("Hawk Furniture"!) It has dull stretches, and doesn't properly follow a story for a while. But its strong moments sung so brightly for me. The details carry such pain: a lesson ostensibly on repairing a broken feather explains the tragedy of the bird's "hunger-trace," a line of weakness in the feathers from growing when the baby had no food. This childhood suffering leaves a visible scar; his feathers will inevitably break there, one by one. His master must mend him. This makes me want to cry, everybody.

White's project moved me in the way that *Wild* did, the obstinacy of having no right to try this thing that they find they simply must, must do. Another author undertook this same spiritual legacy just last year in *H is for Hawk*, in which she copes with the death of a parent with this same project, examining T.H. White for his thematic dealings with grief. This piece by Macdonald explores something White mentions in his Postscript, the "top-secret falcon squadron" in the British Air Ministry of WWII, entrusted with capturing "enemy pigeons" (and their messages). She describes the birds' character as "naturalising the ideology of honourable combat. Falcons were a moral predator." Cool soldiers in the very conflict White feared so much.

> "It happened like this in the world. Old things lost their grip and dropped away; not always because they were bad things, but sometimes because the new things were more bad, and stronger."

Thanks to Shannon, as ever, for telling me so much about this.

Shannon says

Last spring I reread *The Once and Future King*, and ever since then I've been wishing there was more of it. Recently I went looking for other T. H. White books, which I had never done before, and came across this one. It chronicles White's efforts to apply the falconry methods of the Middle Ages and train a bird named Gos.

In some ways *The Goshawk* is a difficult book to read. A certain amount of failure seems inevitable, and there's cruelty in the sport of falconry that contrasts with White's deep love and respect for his hawk. There was a section near the middle of the book that was almost too sad for me to handle, and I had to quit reading it for a couple of weeks. The catastrophe took me by surprise, although White gives warning in a passage from the opening pages about Gos's capture and journey to England:

Imagine what his life had been till then. When he was an infant, still unable to fly and untidy with bits of fluff, still that kind of mottled, motive and gaping toad which confronts us when we look into birds' nests in May: when, moreover, he was a citizen of Germany, so far away: a glaring man had come to his mother's nest with a basket like this one, and had stuffed him in. He had never seen a human being, never been confined in such a box, which smelled of darkness and manufacture and the stink of man. It must have been like death-- the thing which we can never know beforehand--as, with clumsy talons groping for an unnatural foothold, his fledgeling consciousness was hunched and bundled in the oblong, alien surroundingness.

T. H. White understands original sin. His early description of Gos reminds me of the section in *The Once and Future King* when Merlyn and the newly-crowned Arthur discuss the problem of England's history with Scotland. You can't expect a project to go well when it begins with a great wrong committed against one of the participants.

The other thing that's clear from the beginning is that White himself is very sad in years 1936 and 1937, the period that he's writing about. On its surface *The Goshawk* is about falconry, but really it's about a 30-year-old man with pacifist instincts trying to figure out what to do with himself in the time between the two world wars. His friends have urged him to take up arms to fight the fascists, but he "would rather shoot rabbits than people". He's living alone in a cottage in rural England with his dog Brownie and a hawk. (view spoiler) It feels like the end of the world.

In other ways, though, the book made me very happy. It's a joy to hear a beloved author speaking as himself, in his own voice. White is working on the same problems in this book as the ones he gives Arthur, and he's doing his best to learn by thinking like his animals. It's with Gos that he encounters a border between two counties ("one saw in the mind's eye the imaginary lines all over England") and knows that borders aren't real--a hawk doesn't see them. And he recognizes through Gos the appeal of the rule of might--Gos the assassin "knew that might had always been right". (Pigeons, on the other hand, are peace-loving birds, good parents and citizens, and "the most susceptible to the principles of the League of Nations".) White loves Gos for his wildness and killer instinct, while also recognizing that humanity can never survive on those terms.

In a postscript written in 1951, White apologizes for attempting to give his readers "some sort of happy ending" by adding hopeful details that didn't exist in reality, but I think that impulse is what makes him so admirable as a thinker and a writer. He doesn't want to tell a story that's untrue to reality, but ultimately he refuses to tell a hopeless story. There's always a chance (view spoiler) that humanity can learn the lessons of wildness but still act and think as itself, and the world isn't ending after all.

Kevin says

If you've ever been to a Renaissance Faire you might have witnessed the fascinating hobby of Falconry, if you found it as interesting as I did and maybe even dreamed of owning a raptor of your own this book shows how one famous writer set about learning how to do it all on his own with just three books one written in the 1600's as his guide.

Roger Brunyate says

Brilliant, but a little boring

I would not have known about T. H. White's memoir of trying to train a goshawk were it not for Helen Macdonald's wonderful analysis in *H is for Hawk*, her recent account of training her own hawk. White, as he himself admits, does a lot of things wrong: feeding the bird far too much, for example. This horrifies Macdonald, and I expected it to horrify me too. But, because he is unaware of his mistakes at the time, what comes over has no cruelty in it whatsoever; frustration and occasional despair, yes, but otherwise just the very honest account of a lonely man's struggle to bond with this wild creature of the air.

And beautifully written! Which surprised me a little, but I should have realized that the author of *The Once and Future King* (the source for *Camelot* and an inspiration for *Harry Potter*) would have pretty strong chops. But again, the amazing quality of Helen Macdonald's writing—easily the best I had read all year—had made me assume that no one could equal her. Wrong again! In fact, I realized that by embracing the comparison with White, Macdonald was writing for her life. "Goshawks were Hamlet, were Ludwig of Bavaria," writes White. "Frantic heritors of frenetic sires, they were in full health more than half insane. When the red rhenish wine of their blood pulsed at full spate through their arteries, when the airy bird bones were gas-filled with little bubbles of unbiddable warm virility, no merely human being could bend them to his will." For both writers, the elemental wildness of their captor-captive stirs them to flights of verbal magnificence on virtually every page. White, a former schoolmaster, calls upon a huge vocabulary—words like banting, nasconded, silurian, circumbendibus, and perdue—in addition to the technical language of falconry used by both writers: austringer, jesses, creance, bate, stoop, yarak, and the like. A further subliminal interest in White's writing is that this is the late 1930s, dictators every bit as imperious as White's hawk are flexing their talons over in Europe, and the idea of aerial combat to the death is no longer confined to the world of birds.

The book is brilliant. But I have to say it is also a little boring. Good though White's writing is on the individual page, he is not nearly as good as Macdonald at giving the reader a sense of his progress overall. Perhaps because his mistakes are always sending him back towards the starting point, perhaps because of the journal format with day following day with little obvious pattern, I could never measure how far White had come towards his goal. And the last third or more of the book, which are mainly about White's efforts to trap birds of different sizes, lose momentum almost entirely. White is quite frank about his efforts as "a second-rate philosopher who lived alone in a wood, being tired of most humans in any case, to train a person who was not human," but of course the book is about the bird, not him. Macdonald's brilliance is to look into White's entire life, his homosexuality, his traumatic upbringing, and the sadistic tendencies he kept

rigorously in check, to produce a psychosexual analysis that would have delighted Freud. Come to think of it, Marie Winn does something rather similar in her ten-page introduction to this edition, perhaps the best preface in any NYRB book that I have read. Either way, it needs this wider perspective. Without it, we get merely an elusive man in an ultimately frustrating struggle with an even more elusive bird. But a great writer.

Peter says

Everyone is familiar with Mr. Whites' superb Arthurian fantasy epics and here we have the great wordsmith applying his talents to his experiences of falconry, with no other than a book of the subject from the sixteen hundreds.
This was an absorbing read that left me eager to learn more. If it was not for the deft skill of Mr. White and his mighty pen this would be an absolute faillier.

A collection of well rounded stories of a factual nature from an excellent writer who has beyond doubt mastered both fact and fiction and knows how to seperate them.
Other writers take note.

RECOMMENDED

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amapola says

Diario di un fallimento

“Uomo demoniaco e brillantissimo” diceva il necrologio di Terence Hanbury White. Erudito e letterato finissimo, calligrafo, artigiano squisito e naturalista affascinato dal ferino; personaggio scontroso, ritiratosi in solitudine in uno sperduto cottage nella campagna inglese, nel 1937 restò avvinto da un trattato secentesco di falconeria e ordinò dalla Germania un astore, il più coriaceo fra i rapaci, per dedicarsi, ignaro, al suo addestramento.
Quando lo vidi per la prima volta, era una cosa rotonda che assomigliava a un cestino per i panni sporchi coperto da una tela da sacco ... Il cestino pulsava come un grosso cuore che battesse all’impazzata. Ne uscivano agghiaccianti grida di protesta, isteriche, terrorizzate, ma furibonde e perentorie. Avrebbe mangiato vivo chiunque.

Il libro è la cronaca di quell’impresa temeraria: non un manuale, ma il racconto di un’esperienza profonda e lacerante, il tentativo di sottomettere all'uomo un assassino dai folli occhi di un forsennato arciduca bavarese.

Oh, lo strazio della pazienza, il continuo rimuginare, gli sforzi compiuti nel senso di una sovrumana benevolenza! Al millesimo salto della giornata, col braccio piegato a L, irrigidito e dolorante fino all'osso sotto il peso dell'uccello, limitarsi a dargli dei colpetti col guanto per farlo tornare al pugno, parlargli cortesemente ricorrendo al miagolio che nei miei tentativi di conversazione era la cosa che sembrava gradire di più, sorridere allo spazio ignorando la sua presenza, rassicurarlo col calma... quando bruciavo dalla voglia di schiacciarlo, e, mentre il sangue mi saliva furiosamente alla testa, di pestarlo, fracassarlo, smembrarlo, torcerlo, slogarlo, spennarlo, disperderlo ai quattro venti, picchiarlo, sbatterlo, trascinarlo e schiacciarlo sotto i piedi, punirlo senza pietà, e cancellarlo, farla finita con quell'odioso, imbecille, demente,

indomabile, inqualificabile, insopportabile Gos.

Tra White (lo schiavo) e Gos (il suo tiranno) intercorre un vero *"rapporto d'amore"*. Perché il primo falco tocca sempre il falconiere nel profondo, e la sua perdita gli causa *"uno smottamento del cuore"* che lascia senza respiro.
Un diario di sei settimane di addestramento, in cui lo scrittore-addestratore lotta, sbaglia, fallisce, si tormenta, e alla fine rimane chiuso fuori dal mondo del rapace.

Legarsi a un falco significa non potersi permettere sciatterie e smancerie. Nessun falco può essere un animale da compagnia; il sentimentalismo è escluso. In un certo senso, è l'arte dello psichiatra. Si mette in giuoco la propria mente con un'altra mente con il massimo dell'impegno e della tensione intellettuale. Non c'è nessun desiderio di transfert affettivi, nessuna richiesta di disonorevoli atti d'omaggio o di riconoscenza. E' un tonico per la meno schietta ferinità del cuore umano.
Colui che ha creato l'Agnello ha creato anche te? Ebbene, la risposta è sì.

Struggente, emozionante, coinvolgente. Forse cinque stelle sono troppe, ma Gos mi è entrato nel cuore. E il professor White pure.
Lo so, sarei un pessimo falconiere.

http://youtu.be/ldcp0LhaDAo

Tony says

In my reading life, I can go from being a shad fisherman one week (The Founding Fish) to being a falconer the next. Without being drowned or clawed. To say nothing of my fiction choices, with all the myriad chambers of the human heart exposed. Once again without being drowned or clawed.

One obstacle to learning about a new topic, though not insurmountable, is the beautiful strangeness of language. I speak here not of a country's or people's verbs, nouns and adjectives, but rather of the peculiar argot of a sport, hobby, or occupation. After reading about shad, for example, I wonder at my reaction the next time I meet someone named 'Milt'. Here, in this foray into falconry, I learned of the austringer, of imping, of jesses and creances; I stepped carefully around mutes and flinched at every bate. At times, my relative ignorance caused me to laugh:

In the afternoons there was shooting to be done, and on the Friday I had despaired of a pigeon and shot him a Frenchman -- out of season.

As if shooting a Frenchman is ever out of season.

This is T.H. White's story of his attempt to train a goshawk, to 'man' him. It is not a 'How To' instructional so much as a 'How Not To'. Learn as you go, once and future austringer. Falconry for Dummies. White even says, "It was like being handcuffed to a moron in a chain gang." The *moron* was not the bird.

This is White's journal of his very amateurish beginning in falconry. Rather transparently, he says that he is writing this because, well, he's a writer and he could use the cash. So, at times this has a forced quality, a 'this is what I did on Tuesday' feel.

Still, the writer exposes the savagery of the hawk, not just the soaring beauty. The exceptional nyrb cover shows a portion of this painting, which does the same:

And too, he exposes the man at the other end of the creance:

Blood-lust is a word which has got shop-soiled. They have rubbed the nap off it. But split it into its parts, and think of Lust. Real blood-lust is like that.

Perhaps. As I said at the beginning, I'm just a vicarious reader, with quieter hobbies.

But there is a red-tailed hawk which spends half the year soaring in the sky where I live. Some time this summer, as I'm staking gladioli or dead-heading coleus, I might see him again, black against the red-stained evening. I know he will have seen me before I see him. I'll stand, whatever cold thing in a glass in my right hand. And very slowly, remembering this, I'll lift my left arm, L-shaped, ninety-degrees. I'll whistle a tune, maybe a hymn. Maybe Cassandra Wilson singing 'You Don't Know What Love Is."

Malacorda says

La falconeria mi ha sempre affascinato. Qualche anno fa mi sono incantata ad osservare da vicino le manovre di un gruppo di falconieri con i loro volatili, alla festa di Campora, e mi è balenata in mente l'idea di iscrivermi anche io ad una scuola di falconeria. Avendo per marito un cacciatore impenitente che in parte si duole per il mio completo disinteresse verso l'attività venatoria, quando mi sono illuminata alla vista dei rapaci, poco c'è mancato che me ne procurasse uno - non certo per farmi un regalo ma piuttosto sperando in un futuro supporto e diversivo nella caccia alla lepre.

Questo è dunque il diario dell'esperienza di addestramento di un astore, e chissà se io con un poianone o un gallinaccio qualsiasi avrei saputo fare altrettanto. Non lo credo, né per quanto riguarda il diario, né a riguardo dell'addestramento.

Diario che è stato dichiaratamente scritto per poter essere pubblicato e consentire così all'autore di raggranellare qualche soldo, quel tanto che gli potesse consentire di mantenersi nella sua libertà e nella sua selvaticità nella campagna inglese, senza un vincolo o un padrone, libero di dedicare tutto il suo tempo e il suo impegno alla caccia e alla falconeria: dunque un libro dove, un po' come ne "La Storia infinita" di Ende, contenuto e contenitore si incrociano e si inseguono in un loop senza inizio e senza fine. A volergli attribuire un qualche significato aggiuntivo, lo si potrebbe affiancare a Thoreau, oppure anche a tanti altri libri pubblicati in questi ultimi anni in cui si raccontano le esperienze di chi si vuole distaccare, in tutto in parte, dalla civiltà moderna e caotica, per riscoprire un diverso spirito nel contatto con la natura e con i ritmi quotidiani. In questo, si può dire che White sia stato uno dei precursori, avendo egli raccontato la sua esperienza nel primo dopoguerra.

E' un diario, ma di quando in quando si porta sul racconto in terza persona, per meglio sottolineare l'intento ironico o polemico, a seconda del momento. White è ironico in maniera pungente (nei confronti di se stesso, degli altri uomini, del falco, della natura, della storia, della guerra), e impeccabile come etologo. C'è tutto il

sentimento del rapporto uomo-animale domestico: ognuno leggendo ritroverà qualcosa del rapporto con il proprio cane o gatto. Spassosissima la sfilza di appellativi ed epiteti con cui l'autore si rivolge al suo astore, pensavo di essere l'unica ad appioppare al proprio animale nomi e soprannomi a tale ritmo, e invece. Poi c'è anche tutta l'emozione e il mistero del rapporto con l'animale selvatico, l'intraducibile "call of the wild", che mi ha fatto ripensare al libro di Rong, Il totem del lupo, dove il protagonista si cimenta nell'addestramento di un lupetto per giungere alla conoscenza dell'animo profondo della prateria mongola. E in effetti anche l'astore si presta bene come simbolo di un mondo "sommerso" o scomparso, come totem delle teutoniche foreste e montagne, sia per l'immagine che per il suo carattere.

Sono in parte d'accordo con tutti coloro che hanno scritto che si tratta di una storia d'amore. Tra un uomo e un pennuto, ok, ma sempre sentimento è - per quanto l'autore si affanni a ribadire che nella falconeria il sentimento non conta, per lui è solo psicologia, ma dal suo stesso racconto emerge tutt'altro. Come in tutte le storie d'amore ci sono i momenti entusiasmanti e i momenti burrascosi. E in questo libro i sentimenti emergono bene, bisogna riconoscerlo: a volte contrastanti, magari non per tutti comprensibili e/o condivisibili, ma sentimenti veri e sinceri. E' un racconto tutto fatto di eventi minimi per non dire insignificanti, eppure riesce ad essere coinvolgente. I passaggi bucolicamente poetici si alternano a riflessioni filosofiche un po' spicciole e volte anche un po' noiosette. All'inizio ero letteralmente entusiasta, poi, procedendo con la lettura, l'euforia è andata un po' scemando. Non che le considerazioni sulla guerra e sull'umanità intera non siano interessanti, arrivo benissimo a comprendere e in parte anche a condividerne i punti di vista fortemente misantropici; ma con tutta la faccenda dell'astore, volendo essere un po' distaccati e obiettivi, c'entrano come i cavoli a merenda, e se collocate in altra sede tutte queste riflessioni potevano avere ben altro rilievo e approfondimento. D'altro canto, ora mi chiedo, senza qualche considerazione e condimento un po' fuori dal seminato, non sarebbe diventato allora un resoconto anche più noioso? Gli sbalzi di umore così come le divagazioni di ogni tipo sono perfettamente riconducibili alla categoria cui appartiene l'opera: un diario in tutto e per tutto, appunto.

Dunque, chi cerca la corposità e l'intreccio di un romanzo, dovrebbe rivolgersi altrove. Chi invece vuole gustarsi una lettura lieve, piacevole e rinfrescante, si deve accomodare perché è arrivato nel posto giusto. Farebbero meglio ad astenersi gli animalisti ipersensibili, gli iscritti a LAV, Enpa and so on: ne ricaverebbero solo una ulteriore irritazione rispetto a tutte quelle cose già grandemente irritanti che possono vedere ogni giorno.

Finale un po' forzato, l'autore sembra non sapere esattamente come chiudere il discorso. Sarà che di storie di cacciagione ne ho già sentite talmente tante da averne sopra la cima dei capelli… finisco per togliergli una mezza stellina.

Bfisher says

I had read Helen Macdonald’s “H is for Hawk”, and was fascinated by her discussion of T.H.White and of his book “The Goshawk”. I think that my response to The Goshawk was greatly influenced by Macdonald’s book.

As one reads The Goshawk, one becomes aware of the struggles within White, even as he struggled for mastery of the hawk Gos.

I suspect that White fled from the life of a schoolmaster because of the terrible temptations it offered, as when he speaks of the use of punishment in the management of schools “...because of the pleasures of

flagellation.” Perhaps he hoped for a new start, if he felt that ""

In any setback, he reverted to the language of domination and punishment: “...the authority established, the perserverance not now flouted lest it should be thought of as weak thereafter”, “Yet it was sometimes difficult to believe that he was not merely being naughty. Speak harshly to your little boy And beat him when he sneezes ...”, and when he tortures Gos for bating: “Now came the sin against the Holy Ghost. After half a dozen more bates - the flurry was almost continuous - I inclined my hand against his efforts to climb up the jess.”

He wished to love Gos, but did not know how to express that love; sadly for White and Gos, he could only express that love through domination: “I had loved Gos … He had hated and distrusted me … He had had guts to stand up against love for so long…”. He quoted a poem of William Blake’s:
"Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite."

That is the ending of the poem and the tragedy of White’s relationship with Gos, which must have started in hope of a better relationship:
"Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair."