



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

J.A. Baker's The Peregrine and its Readers

Citation for published version:

Farrier, D 2016, 'J.A. Baker's The Peregrine and its Readers' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 22, no. 4, 22.4, pp. 742-759. DOI: 10.1093/isle/isv094

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1093/isle/isv094](https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isv094)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment

Publisher Rights Statement:

©Farrier, D. (2015). J.A. Baker's The Peregrine and its Readers. ISLE: *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine* and its readers

This article examines the popularity of J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine* among practitioners of contemporary British nature writing. I argue that readings of *The Peregrine* in Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* and Kathleen Jamie's *Findings* engage with a latent field of meanings in Baker's text that align it with what Bruno Latour has called political ecology, and with Deborah Bird Rose's emphasis on life as "gifted" not only through acts of procreation but through the sustaining deaths of coeval others. Macfarlane and Jamie's attentiveness to this gift sensibility illuminates what makes *The Peregrine* such an imperative text in the current era of mass extinctions.

Key words: Extinction studies; new nature writing; J.A. Baker; Robert Macfarlane; Kathleen Jamie

Environmental crises are also crises of meaning. (Raglon and Scholtmeijer, 2001 p.261) At the close of an argument which proposes that conservation success depends upon the preservation of "an entire field of meanings" within the concept of 'nature,' Simon James makes the following proposal:

I suspect that rational arguments would have little effect on the man [sic] who concedes that nature is becoming drained of meaning and yet sees no reason to do anything about it. Better, perhaps, to lend him a copy of [J.A. Baker's] *The Peregrine*." (James, 2013, pp.35, 39)

Having been out of print for many years, *The Peregrine* burst back in a New York Review of Books Classics imprint in 2005. Acknowledged as a vital precursor by such key figures in contemporary British nature writing as Kathleen Jamie, Tim Dee, Robert Macfarlane, Richard Mabey, and Mark Cocker, it has been valued for its precision of observation and description, and for its insistent decentering of perspective, as it strives to distil an animal vision. All of these authors have written of their engagement with Baker or produced introductions for new editions of his work. Cocker calls the book a search for an “authentic language” with which to speak of the non-human (Cocker, 2011, p.11); and Macfarlane has praised the book’s rare negative capability by which the reader “acquire[s] the vision of a hawk” (Macfarlane, 2005, p.xiv). Jamie rather archly observes that, “Barely a ‘nature book’ is published today without homage to J.A. Baker, or Gilbert White” (Jamie, 2013, p.40). Jamie’s circumspect inverted commas illustrate a recurring tension in the ‘New Nature Writing,’ under which heading the above named writers are frequently gathered. What links this loosely-assembled cohort is the combination of an appeal to the transcendent possibilities in encounters with the non-human world with scepticism about the implied promise of the availability of the non-human in such encounters. Jos Smith notes that the term ‘New Nature Writing’ elides the fact that “the desecration it is endeavouring to counter is as much cultural as it is natural” (Smith, 2013, p.6). Given these various ambivalences, what justifies James’s claim that reading *The Peregrine* can restore meaning to ‘nature’?

Despite its pervasive influence, *The Peregrine* is not perhaps the obvious choice of a text with which to motivate ecological engagement. Published in 1967, it describes the same period as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, when agro-chemical use was decimating bird populations throughout the Western world. A 50% decline in peregrine numbers was recorded between 1939 and 1962, the year when *Silent Spring* was published. Carson’s book led directly to the banning

of DDT, and is widely credited with inspiring the ecological movement as we know it today. Alex Lockwood has described how Carson's legacy is informed by her innovative fusion of scientific and literary discourses, and by her skillful manipulation of affect. Stating that, "it is now difficult to imagine environmental writing having political effect without affect, emotion or feelings being pivotal to its narrative," Lockwood traces this "template of affect" adopted by writers such as Bill McKibben back to Carson (Lockwood, 2012, p.124, 128). Carson's book is the consensus choice to redress the 'nature skepticism' that, as Greg Garrard has warned, risks subverting the "ethical and pedagogical *raison d'être*" of environmental literary studies (Garrard, 2012, p.497). What, then, does *The Peregrine* offer?

In what follows, I propose to examine *The Peregrine* in light of how it has been read by two key authors of contemporary nature writing, Kathleen Jamie and Robert Macfarlane. Baker's single-minded pursuit of the birds and evident antipathy to human society mean that his text seems, at least on first inspection, to present an instance of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming-animal, in which human mastery of the natural world is either declined or despised. The more connective affinities which Macfarlane and Jamie find in *The Peregrine* indicate, however, that this deterritorialization is not the limit of Baker's text; rather they each engage with a latent field of meanings in it, closer to what Bruno Latour has called political ecology ("the right way to compose a common world," Latour, 2004, p.7), and to the work of Deborah Bird Rose, Thomas van Dooren, and the extinction studies group. Much of the book's appeal lies in its status as an incipient-extinction narrative. Baker wrote *The Peregrine* fully anticipating the collapse of the regional falcon population. Throughout he is motivated by disdain for what human society was doing to the peregrine with its "filthy, insidious pollen of farm chemicals." "We are the killers," he says, "We stink of death" (Baker, 2005, pp.15, 121). It is, in effect, an account of what Roger

Bradbury has since called a “zombie ecosystem,” “neither dead nor truly alive in any functional sense, and on a trajectory to collapse within a human generation” (Bradbury, 2012, n.p.).

Macfarlane notes that “an atmosphere of requiem” pervades *The Peregrine* (Macfarlane, 2005, p.xi); I would go further, and read in Baker’s text what Rose has called “the howling of living beings in a time of death” (Rose, 2006, p.67). This howling not only gives voice to loss, however, but also expresses how, as van Dooren puts it, “all humans are bound up in ecological relationships inside a multispecies world” (Van Dooren, 2011, n.p.). Life is in the gift of death. The howl Rose describes also, therefore, offers “a voice that could pull us and others back into connectivity” (Rose, 2006, p.77). As readers whose engagement with Baker’s work has shaped its latter-day reception, Macfarlane and Jamie, I argue, trace a subtle line in the direction of this increased connectivity, poised between the need to expand and to qualify the ‘field of meanings’ within nature.

The Peregrine is a composite account of the ten years Baker spent stalking peregrines in his native Essex, told as a diary of a single migratory season (undated, but implicitly the exceptionally severe winter of 1962-3). Over this period his interest in natural history was, without given explanation, compounded so as to become an obsession:

Wherever he goes, this winter, I will follow him. I will share the fear, and the exaltation, and the boredom, of the hunting life. I will follow him until my predatory human shape no longer darkens in terror the shaken kaleidoscope of colour that stains the deep fovea of his brilliant eye. My pagan head shall sink into the winter land, and there be purified (Baker, 2005, p.41).

If, as Timothy Morton has observed, all ecological discourse is about desire (Morton, 2010, p.279), then in Baker's case, it is a desire possessed of a rare imaginative force. His apparently consuming urge to align his appetites and attention with those of the bird raises questions about the power relations encoded in this desire, particularly in his claims to 'become' the falcon and his efforts to approximate this in prose. The fervour of this desire for the peregrine of his imagination, on the one hand, invites the charge of anthropomorphic fallacy. Conversely, such intensity can also have an ethical charge, presenting the prospect of a conscious decentring of formerly anthropocentric attitudes to the non-human; as Matthew Chrulew has asked, "how should we love in a time of extinction?" (Chrulew, 2011, n.p.) The fanatical nature of Baker's obsession—he calls it "insatiable" (Baker, 2005, p.12)—suggests a resemblance with the very specific kind of relationship that Deleuze and Guattari call 'becoming-animal,' a refusal to accede to the hegemony of a subject-object dynamic: an "un-humaning of the human," as Steve Baker puts it (Baker, 2000, p.102). "A becoming is not a correspondence between relations," say Deleuze and Guattari, "neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification." It is not simply an imaginative projection ("neither dreams nor phantasies"); rather, it is "perfectly real," but without any pretence at literal transformation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp.237-238). Becoming-animal is antagonistic to 'Nature' "conceived as an enormous *mimesis*"; the lingering power-relations, in the form of anthropomorphism, which Deleuze and Guattari observe in metaphor, are anathema to the rigorous depletion of the subject which they say is the desire of becoming. They insist, "becoming produces nothing other than itself" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp.234, 238), which prompts the question of the object of Baker's imaginative projections. Baker's dedication is figured throughout as a sloughing off of his 'humanness,' "as the fox sloughs off his smell into the cold unworldiness of water" (Baker,

2005, p.10). Virtually everything beyond the animal world is extruded. He eschews specific place names (citing only generic terms such as ‘north wood’ or ‘south wood’ to orient the reader) or any personal details in favour of a precise rendering of human and bird traversing one another in the course of the pursuit. In one remarkable passage he appears to project himself into the bird’s *umwelt*:

Standing in the fields near the north orchard, I shut my eyes and tried to crystallize my will into the light-drenched prism of the hawk’s mind. Warm and firm-footed in long grass smelling of the sun, I sank into the skin and blood and bones of the hawk. The ground became a warm branch to my feet, the sun on my eyelids was heavy and warm. Like the hawk, I heard and hated the sound of man, that faceless horror of the stony places. I stifled in the same filthy sack of fear. I shared the same hunter’s longing for the wild home none can know, alone with the sight and smell of the quarry, under the indifferent sky. I felt the pull of the north, the mystery and fascination of the migrating gulls. I shared the same strange longing to be gone. I sank down and slept into the feather-light sleep of the hawk (Baker, 2005, pp.144-145).

Baker’s repeated ‘I’ in this passage is a reminder of the ineluctable fact that each animal is always and only the centre of its own experiential world. What is rendered here is less the bird’s experience than Baker’s *desire* for it: a “becoming [that] produces nothing but itself” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.238). It is, nonetheless, a powerful statement of his immersion in the (ultimately impossible) task of decentering his own perspective. In the book’s unstinting rendering of the elusiveness of the peregrines and the repetitiveness of the hunter’s life, in which each diary entry presents only a slight variation on the formula of pursuit and discovery, Baker

poses questions about what we consider an ‘event’ in relation to the nonhuman world. What emerges between bird and human is closer to what Deleuze and Guattari call an “alliance,” the production of a “block of becoming” in which the latter is enabled to think at the latter reaches of identity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.238).

Baker’s absolute deference to the peregrine (“Caliban to his Ariel,” Baker, 2005, p.176) could be said to represent an instance in which “*the animal proposes to the human* [...] ways-out or means of escape that the human *would never have thought of by himself*” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.35. My emphasis). This putative capacity to see otherwise is central to the bird’s appeal. As Baker imagines it, “the peregrine sees and remembers patterns we do not know exist: the neat squares of orchard and woodland, the endlessly varying quadrilateral shapes of fields. He finds his way across the land by a succession of remembered symmetries” (Baker, 2005, p.35). *The Peregrine* is fundamentally a text about perception, and the experience of observation as an ethical act. Jamie notes that “Baker writes like a falcon must see and so allows us to see, too” (Jamie, 2005, p.43), and his prose often achieves a luminous strangeness. For Richard Mabey, Baker “reinvents the language of natural metaphor” (Mabey, 2013). Yet this impression is at odds with Deleuze and Guattari, for whom metaphor is only redundant anthropomorphism; whereas for Baker metaphor *is* the place of becoming. Many of his most disarming metaphors have the surprise and torque of a peregrine’s stoop. Key images frequently invoke a kind of liquid sight: the peregrine, we are told, “lives in a pouring-away world of no attachment, of sinking planes of land and water”; just as, in watching the peregrine, “pouring away behind the moving bird, the land flows out from the eye in deltas of piercing colour” (Baker, 2005, pp.13, 35). The birds’ stoop is also likened to pouring liquid. Other images invoke the eye: “She stoops, dilates like the pupil of an eye as it passes from day’s brilliance into dusk”; “He was a small

speck now, like the pupil of a distant eye” (Baker, 2005, pp.113, 177). At times, the prose is so agile as to conjure the dilation and contraction of Baker’s eye exhilarating in a bird in flight:

Along the escarpments of the river air he rose with martial motion. Like a dolphin in green seas, like an otter in the startled water, he poured through deep lagoons of sky up to the high white reefs of cirrus. [...] Gradually, steadily, he grew larger. From thousands of feet above the valley he was diving back to the orchard, which he was not yet ready to leave completely. He grew from a speck, to a blur, to a bird, to a hawk, to a peregrine; a winged head shouldering down through the wind. With a rush, with a flash, with a whirr of wings, he came down to the hedge ten yards away from me (Baker, 2005, p.178).

His commitment to metaphor as the vehicle for a more decentered perspective is not the only thing that complicates a reading of *The Peregrine* as an account of becoming-animal. The usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept as a critique of anthropocentrism is limited by their lack of interest in animal subjectivities. Furthermore, their language of becoming--which plays on multiplicity and infection (“what interests us are modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling,” Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.239)--does not sit easily with an account of a poisoned landscape in which birds were dying, “on their backs, clutching insanely at the sky in their last convulsions” (Baker, 2005, pp.14-15).

To discover multiplicity in a narrative of ecocide it is necessary to go beyond the horizon of Deleuze and Guattari’s language of becoming, to the language of the *gift* employed by Rose and James Hatley. Drawing on Freya Matthews, Rose observes that life exhibits two characteristics: the desire for its own becoming, and for connectivity. Each desire, says Rose, is implicated in the

other: “life wants to live, and life wants to live (indeed, must live) with others” (Rose, 2011, p.118). Ecocide is a rupture in the outworking of this desire: “man-made mass ecological death impairs life’s desire: life desires that each living being (perhaps excepting some bacteria) live all three lives--the given, the lived and the bequeathed. This means that lives become gifts to others” (Rose, 2006, p.74). Elsewhere, following James Hatley’s assertion that an ethical appreciation of time requires us to “experience [our] time as a gift,” Rose proposes that life is gifted not only generationally through procreation, but also through the sustaining deaths of coeval others, entwined in “multispecies knots of ethical time” (Hatley, 2000, p.61; Rose, 2012, p.127). Death on such massive scale is a rupturing of the gift-relation; Baker’s cultish fascination with the bird of prey as harbinger of death must therefore be read in light of the wider context of incipient extinction, a culture of death (or a cultural acceptance of animal death he cannot condone) the scale of which robs death of the possibilities of the gift. It is this gift-sensibility which informs Macfarlane and Jamie’s readings of Baker, and which, I argue, ensures his enduring relevance as an author of interspecies connectivity to an era of mass species extinction.

The Peregrine is a cardinal instance of how greater attentiveness to nature’s resistance to narrative can, conversely, provide “moments when nature’s incandescent strangeness is made available to us again” (Raglon and Scholtmeijer, 2001, p.249). As such, contemporary readers such as Macfarlane, Jamie, and Cocker have approached it as a kind of model of right ecological thought and action. The book’s signal statement, “the hardest thing of all to see is what is really there” (Baker, 2005, p.19), certainly carries both a practical and ethical charge when read against the backdrop of anthropogenic climate change. Their respective readings also make available a perspective on Baker which eschews those aspects of *The Peregrine* which conform to a concept

of becoming-animal, moving from the “pouring-away world of no attachment” (Baker, 2005, p.35) to the “*risky attachments*” of Latour’s political ecology (Latour, 2004, p.20).

Robert Macfarlane is arguably the most prominent practitioner of contemporary nature writing in the UK. As the author of the introduction to the reissued edition of *The Peregrine* he has been active in its re-emergence, as well as framing its reception as a work chiefly valuable for its transcendent qualities.¹ In it, he writes, “the act of bird-watching becomes one of sacred ritual”; its effect is to “set the imagination aloft, and [to] keep it there for months and years afterwards” (Macfarlane, 2005, pp.viii, xii). In his *The Wild Places*, Macfarlane writes of recreating Baker’s Essex walks. His account is essentially divided into two parts, inhabiting first the woods and then the salt marshes where Baker stalked peregrines, and as Macfarlane shifts from one to the other, so, by implication, does his sense of the older writer, reflecting in microcosm the larger intellectual and affective journey--from ‘Wilderness’ to a more nuanced and localised sense of ‘the wild’--represented in *The Wild Places* as a whole.

In a move which, he has since conceded, consciously echoes Baker, *The Wild Places* begins by speculating whether it remains possible to experience the ‘wild’ as a “step outside human history” (Macfarlane, 2007, p.7; see Macfarlane, 2015, pp.160-1), Macfarlane at first appreciates Baker for his seeming unreason, his near-mindless fixation: “during the months of pursuit each year, he would go almost entirely feral,” remarks Macfarlane with some apparent approval

¹ Macfarlane was invited to write the introduction to the NYRB edition in 2004; along with Mark Cocker and John Fanshawe, whose introduction and notes to the 2011 Collins edition greatly filled in the gaps in Baker’s biography, the NYRB reissue created a focal point for renewed interest in British nature writing. Macfarlane later adapted his introduction for a series of essays on landscape and literature for the *Guardian* newspaper, under the series title *Common Ground*, in 2005 (Macfarlane, 24 November 2014; 27 November 2014).

(Macfarlane, 2007, p.274). What appeals is Baker's access to a "beyond-world," his deterritorialization as "part man, part hawk" (Macfarlane, 2007, p.274; Baker, 2005, p.162), which is in sharp contrast to the homogenised, artificial landscape through which Macfarlane passes on his way to discover Baker's former haunts:

I drove at first through the landscape of Essex--the poor mocked Essex of jokes and news items--passing chain pubs with pseudo-Tudor frontages, and business parks in 'Phase II of Construction': colonies of unfinished corrugated-steel hangars. [...] Once I passed a roadside shop selling garden ornaments. Its forecourt was filled with gnomes, and Bambi-like deer, lying at rest with their legs crooked up beneath them. In pride of place at the front of the display was a plaster falcon of indeterminate species, perched on a polka-dotted toadstool twice its size (Macfarlane, 2007, p.272).²

Garden decorations and plaster falcons represent the plastic nature Macfarlane is striving to see beyond, and by mimicking Baker's tropes he asserts the viability of reconnecting with the possibilities and encounters available in Baker's day: on setting out he immediately meets a dead woodpigeon, effectively re-staging Baker's recurring scenes of examining the remains of the peregrines' hunting; from which point he "pushes on into the wood" where, like, Baker he finds "bird corpses [...] everywhere" (Macfarlane, 2007, p.277, 278). He notes that *The Peregrine* is shadowed by a sense of threat from agribusiness to the "medieval patterns of the Essex countryside"; yet he also stresses that, based on a comparison of contemporary OS maps with

² This route resembles Baker's, who, according to Macfarlane, "would pass London's overspill factories and car dumps, heading for the inland fields and woods, or to the lonely sea wall and saltings of the shore" (Macfarlane, 2015, p.145).

maps from the 1950s, “thousands of acres of native woodland” are extant, and available (Macfarlane, 2007, pp.275, 276).

Initially, this stress on the continued availability of the wild is accompanied by a fascination with its possible resurgence. Prompted by a passage from Baker’s journal, “grass will master us all yet, and cover our shameful rubble in its equality” (Macfarlane, 2007, p.281), Macfarlane reflects on the formerly inhabited places encountered during his search for wilderness and contemplates their appeal; abandoned sites are, he says, not only “images of the past but also visions of the future”:

As the climate warms, and as human populations begin to fall, increasing numbers of settlements will be abandoned. Inland drought and rising sea-levels on the coast will force exoduses. And wilderness will return to these forsaken places. Vegetable and faunal life will reclaim them: the opportunistic pioneer species first--dog-rose, elder, fireweed, crows...Just such a reclamation has occurred in the so-called ‘zone of alienation’: the region of north Ukraine that was placed off-limits after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. In Pripjat, the town in which the Chernobyl workers were accommodated, silver birch now throng the empty streets and courtyards. Flower meadows of exceptional botanical diversity have grown up through the paving stones. Forests of pine and willow have populated the city’s outskirts, through which run wolf packs of up to 200 animals. Moose, deer, lynx and boar pad through the city’s suburbs. Black storks nest in its chimneys, bats in the empty houses, and kestrels in the unused window boxes. The cooling ponds of the Chernobyl plant itself are now filled with catfish up to six feet long (Macfarlane, 2007, pp.282-283).

This is a bravura passage of rewilding, and darkly salutary as a reminder of human vulnerabilities to environmental change. Macfarlane celebrates the potential for a resurgent biodiversity in the absence of the human, and Baker's austere landscapes, all but emptied of human presence, certainly shadow this account. Yet it also represents a momentary step away from Baker, whose book, for all the fullness of animal life in its pages, is essentially an account of species decline due to human forcing.

Macfarlane is far too humane a writer, too committed to the lived history of the landscapes he writes about, to adopt Baker's scornful misanthropy. There is a deliberate irony in the observation, "The Wilderness [the area's local name] was only half a mile from the road"; and the woodpigeon he discovers was killed by a fox, not a falcon (Macfarlane, 2007, p.277). In fact Macfarlane's landscape is far from Baker's thinly-peopled woods and fields, but rather one that is thick with the traces of past as well as current population: the wood contains the ruin of what Macfarlane supposes was once an Elizabethan big house, taken over by "an early Romantic landowner who, following the picturesque taste of the time, had created for his estate a 'Wilderness' [...] which could be excitingly strayed into by visitors" (Macfarlane, 2007, p.281). Later he finds a stone-age hand-axe, remains of a seventh-century East Saxon Celtic Abbey (a branch of early Christianity "distinguished by mysticism and nature-love"), and a child's rope swing, "a wild place for the kids, and must have been for decades" (Macfarlane, 2007, pp.286, 286). Each of these encounters renders a more densely *social* sense of 'the wild,' repopulating the empty landscapes of *The Peregrine* as an enduringly wild place filled successively with people rather than plastic fauna.

Macfarlane's attentiveness to the imbrication of human and non-human increases as he moves to the salt marsh. The sight of a flock of migrating common gulls draws his attention to "other lit bodies [...]: the blipping orbital paths of satellites" and "passenger planes coming into Stansted airport" (Macfarlane, 2007, p.290). The overlaying of flight paths here, human/mechanical and non-human, marks a shift to a greater openness to the inter-connectedness of the organic and inorganic in a political ecology. The present ecological crises allow us, Latour argues, to realize anew the depth and extent of our connectedness with all things and all times—moving from the "risk-free objects" of modernity to a political ecology in which we witness the radical "folding of humans and nonhumans into each other" (Latour, 1999, p.176). For Latour, agency is radically distributed among what he calls *actants*, which can be human or nonhuman and (because the composition of any object or action is such that it has folded within it all the actions and materials which made it possible) organic or inorganic. We daily experience multiple encounters with actions and processes which are the product of what Latour calls the "silent entities" of forces and orders of knowledge set in motion many years, and in the case of the raw material from which so much of contemporary life is fabricated, *hundreds of millions* of years ago. Latour's understanding of agency as an inter-generational (even, *inter-aeonic*) indebtedness can thus be linked to the gift-sensibility expressed by Rose, which invites an awareness of shared dependency between human and non-human; a mutuality which in turn entails vulnerability, and thus risk. As Latour says, "an action, long past, of an actor, long disappeared, is still active here, today, on me. I live in the midst of technical *delegates*; I am folded into nonhumans" (Latour, 2004, p.189). Having disparaged the plaster falcon on the outset of his journey, Macfarlane implicitly returns to it in his encounter with a real (captive) bird:

The feathers on his back lay tight and flat as chain-mail, and his sharp wings crossed like sword blades behind him. His eyeballs were the same shiny black as escalator handrails. [...] once he creaked open his beak to reveal a tongue *as hard and gleaming as plastic* (Macfarlane, 2007, p.296. My emphasis).

The maligned artificial bird of the journey's beginning is replaced, via a counter-intuitive metaphor worthy of Baker, with a sense of a more complex, untidy imbrication which belies the privileging of a 'pure' notion of the wild. Macfarlane's *eco-bildungsroman* (Smith, 2013, p.7) stages a growing alertness to the more nuanced field of meanings behind such charismatic concepts. This emphasis on social connections involves also a rethinking of what is entailed in the intensity of animal encounters; or, rather, a re-focalisation of intensity in terms of the *density of connections* instead of simply the concentration of desire. The vibrancy of the non-human encounter is located, not the interplay of mastery and domination, but in the acknowledgement of a reciprocal (albeit uneven) dependency which always carries with it the risk of vulnerability. At the end of his walk in Baker's footsteps, Macfarlane's encounter with the *captive* bird (whose own very particular enfolding is a marker of human responsibility) evokes a gift-sensibility of enfolded relations between human and nonhuman, of affective and material attachments; the perspective from which, Latour proposes, we are to build a common world (Latour, 2004, p.9; see also Latour, 2010, p.474).

This enfolding is by definition total: as Rose has observed, "there is no position outside of connection" (Rose, 2011, p.27). This same "principle of interconnectivity" (Lilley, 2013, p.16) is the hub from which Kathleen Jamie's work proceeds. In her first collection essays, *Findings*, Jamie describes the arrival of a breeding pair of peregrines on a cliff behind her house. She

begins to watch the breeding pair obsessively, and reads a second-hand copy of Baker's text for information about falcon behaviour. Whereas for Macfarlane the most engaging aspect of the text is Baker himself, for Jamie it is the bird, which "flickers at the edge of one's sense, at the edge of the sky, at the edge of existence itself" (Jamie, 2005, p.47). The more abstract or mystic resonances at play here need to be read against the way in which, for Jamie, the peregrine pair's presence is woven into the everyday. She encounters neighbours also keeping surreptitious, concerned watch over the birds; Jamie herself is often restricted to snatched glimpses while gathering laundry or preparing her children's breakfast. Deborah Lilley has suggested that what might seem like moments of escape in Jamie's prose, when encounters with the non-human permit her to transcend the quotidian, are in fact moments of connection that remain within the everyday: "both the laundry and the birds are resolutely of the same world, and the appearance of the birds 'at the edge of my life' connotes this simultaneity and the multiplicity of perception that is needed to acknowledge it" (Lilley, 2013, p.22). For all she appreciates the appeal of a world of no attachments, this is far from Jamie's own experience; but then neither in truth is it that of Baker's peregrine. While he excavates its potency as a symbol of solitude and freedom, Baker also depicts the peregrine as deeply absorbed in its world--reliant on other species as only a predator can be. Jamie's entangled encounter with Baker's text alerts us to the fact that, despite the near-absence of other people, the understanding of nature articulated in *The Peregrine* is far from the realm of no attachments which Baker promises at the outset.

As Baker stalks the bird across miles and days he builds a picture not of hermetic isolation but of a world of risky attachments. His genius for description often presents the reader with the bird imagined in very human terms, in the manner picked up by Macfarlane: we see its "dark crossbow shape"; its plumage "gleam[ing] like mail in glittering spray" and its "bunched toes

[...] ridged and knuckled like golden grenades”; or in flight, “cleaving the air as a human diver cleaves through air and water” (Baker, 2005, pp.47, 54, 84, 88). That so many of these images are of human violence is indicative both of the falcon’s own predatory potential and of the book’s constant undertow of violence being *done* by humans *to* the birds. In another example the bird is likened to the technology which allows Baker himself to pursue it: its eyes “dusk over with a faint purple bloom like the mineral film coating the lens of binoculars.” The ironic nature of this comparison is driven home a page later, when Baker regretfully envies the peregrine’s “boundless prospect of the sky” in contrast to “the grey flatness of our human vision” (Baker, 2005, pp.169, 170). Yet, this rhetorical strategy is not simply a means of reinforcing Baker’s sense of the peregrine’s exceptionalism. The bird is also, frequently, described in terms of its habitat--“drifting like a sycamore seed”; “changed to the colour of autumn leaf”--which, as the intensity of Baker’s focus increases, turns specifically to descriptions of the falcon in terms of its prey: “like a big nightjar [...] darting as a green sandpiper”; “beating its wings in a low shimmer like a steep-rising teal”; “lean, majestic, big as a curlew” (Baker, 2005, pp.130, 131, 171). Again, there is irony at work here, but also an increasing sense of the peregrine’s dependence on other species. Baker’s peregrine, as an apex predator, is thus arguably more entangled than most in Rose’s “multispecies knots of ethical time” (Rose, 2012, p.127), and the enfolding of action Latour describes. This becomes explicitly also a connection with the human and the technological:

A falcon flew low across the marsh, weaving through the wind with sudden dips and swerves, as though moving under invisible branches and twisting between invisible trees. She flew like a big, sleepy merlin. The sun shone on the splendid burnish of her back and

wings. They were a deep roan colour, the colour of a redpoll steer, *like the patches of red soil that stain the ploughlands to the north* (Baker, 2005, p.148. My emphasis).

The comparison with the ploughed earth folds the human into the action--again, 'stained red' invokes the lethal consequences of contemporary farming practices for bird populations; but it also calls to mind Baker's observation that the animal often perches near to where tractors are at work "because that is where birds are constantly on the move. There is always something to watch, or something to kill if the hawk should be hungry" (Baker, 2005, p.103). Its kills are thus enfolded within the actions of human and technological actants. Indeed, Baker begins to realise that the raptors tolerate him in part because he scares up other birds; thus the depth of attention he directs towards the peregrine, far from a straightforward rejection of the human, in fact indicates something of Baker's indelible difference set within a world of risky attachments.

Jamie's reading of Baker extends this sense of connectedness. While an obsession, the birds are only one strand in the fabric of daily life:

In the afternoon, when the mist had burned off and the day became hot, I took the book [*The Peregrine*] outside, intending to begin it. It was the school holidays, and our children and next door's were playing in the garden. I settled to read and at once learned that the peregrine's eyes are bigger and heavier than our own.

Suddenly a formation of fighter jets sheared overhead. I wanted to cover my ears, but made myself keep listening, to hear what birds did. My son came running up to me, then came another outrage of noise: three more jets tearing through the pale sky. My son is

seven, he wanted to jump in excitement, he wanted to run indoors and draw fighter-planes.

Later, the radio said that RAF Leuchars had ‘welcomed home’ its Tornados from Iraq. Those must have been the very planes that had screamed over our garden, in formation, home from the faraway war we had watched on TV. The jets’ terrible noise had obliterated all else, but the garden birds took up their twitterings at once, greenfinches in the plum trees.

I looked for the peregrines later, but they were not there. J.A. Baker writes, ‘The peregrine lives in a pouring-away world of no attachment, a world of wakes and tilting, of sinking planes of land and water.’ I could envy that, sometimes. Later still, my son asked if we were to be bombed. ‘No,’ I said, ‘We will not be bombed’ (Jamie, 2005, pp.35-36).

This passage has the rich but unforced associativeness of a lyric poem. The subtle intertwining of her reading of Baker with the returning Tornados draws in the heritage of bioengineering in aircraft design: the peregrine’s baffles, the cone-shaped bones in its nostrils which prevent the bird’s lungs from collapsing under the pressure of a stoop, influenced the solution to the same problem in jet engine design; a deeply Latourian enfolding of human and non-human, organic and inorganic actants. Furthermore, the passage of the aircraft expands Jamie’s perspective-- although located in the everyday domestic scene, her reading of Baker is also charged with a sense of global connectedness: of the falcon as a migratory bird (at least within Baker’s Essex) with a global distribution, which continues to suffer stress on breeding populations due to human

activity. In the ensuing matrix of connections are mingled multiple, overlaid (but not equalized) contexts of violence (the Iraq war and the peregrine's acuteness as a hunter; other birds' fear of the raptor and the civilians' fear of bombing), which echoes the way avian violence is always shadowed by the greater human violence described by Baker. Violence and death thus figure in Jamie's account according to the same gift sensibility described by Rose, as a call to a greater appreciation of connectivity.

In the midst of all this talk of death, it is worth noting that peregrine numbers did recover from the calamitous lows of Baker's day. The RSPB has recorded 1,500 breeding pairs in the UK in 2013. This should not lead us to assume that *The Peregrine's* value is as the story of averted catastrophe, a kind of ecological consolation. As Jamie shows, neither should the fact that the peregrine is one of the most charismatic animals deter a more universal application of the book as an anti-ecocide narrative. Rose and van Dooren have noted that the magnetism of animals like the peregrine *can* be to the detriment of those who are less appealing. "Our minds swim with Moby Dick and flare with tigers burning bright," they note. "What of the unloved others, the ones who are disregarded, or who may be lost through negligence? What of the disliked and actively vilified others, those who may be specifically targeted for death?" (Rose and Van Dooren, 2011, n.p.). James Hatley has observed a "zoomorphic bigotry" in the fact that not a single species of tick or mite was included in the 2009 International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species (Hatley, 2011, n.p.). In 'Pathologies' (from her second collection of essays, *Sightlines*, but originally published in Granta's *New Nature Writing* issue), Jamie shows how the unalluring and the charismatic can be folded together. Prompted by her mother's death to explore her own attitudes towards bodily entropy, Jamie visits a pathology laboratory where she views a biopsy slide under a microscope:

I was looking down from a great height upon a pink countryside, a landscape. There was an estuary, with a north bank and a south. In the estuary were wing-shaped river islands or sand banks, as if it were low tide. It was astonishing, a map of the familiar; it was our local river, *as seen by a hawk* (Jamie, 2012, p.30. My emphasis).

In a startling revisiting of Baker's recreation of the bird's vision at the outset of *The Peregrine*, Jamie describes the conflation of inner and outer worlds. Everything is implicitly connected in this passage: human and non-human, avian and bacterial (a Latourian reading would, furthermore, draw the material object of the microscope into the concatenation); in which the adoption of the bird's sightline is linked to a radical sense of "life's desire for its own becoming [...] actualised through interaction with other living and nonliving matter" (Rose, 2011, p.118). "If we are to be alive and available for joy and discovery," says Jamie, "then it's as an animal body, available for cancer and infection and pain" (Jamie, 2012, p.40). Death; the body's own "intimate, inner natural world" (Jamie, 2012, p.24); and the peregrine: all figure here as a gift, in that they lead to the realisation of a more profound, shared vulnerability.

The scenario described in *The Peregrine* and *Silent Spring* continues to play out around the world. Van Dooren has described how vultures are threatened with extinction in India by the use of an anti-inflammatory drug, Diclofenac, which is administered to cattle. Vultures are considerably less charismatic birds than peregrines; but van Dooren's admiration for their ability, as scavengers, "to *twist* death back into life" (Van Dooren, 2011, n.p.) has a bearing on what makes *The Peregrine* such an imperative text in the current era of mass extinctions. Macfarlane and Jamie's engagements with Baker look behind its charismatic, elegiac account of a human perspective willing itself lost in the falcon's strange, "dying world, like Mars, but glowing still"

(Baker, 2005, p.15), to illuminate another story in which the animal world yields an unlimited series of connections. In seeking to reveal the underlying connectedness of Baker's ostensibly solitary vision, Macfarlane and Jamie retain their admiration for his single-minded pursuit of his own decentring. Just as anthropomorphism is a necessary component in the realisation of animal otherness as, in the end, unreachable, Macfarlane and Jamie's privileging of Baker indicates their recognition of the necessary appeal of categories ('nature'; 'the wild') which they also acknowledge require careful qualification as well as celebration. Reading *The Peregrine* alerts us to the enduring meaningfulness of nature as a profound, intimate, and endless enfolding of worlds within worlds, an understanding which, in the current age of extinctions, has never had greater urgency.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank this article's reviewers for their helpful comments, Gavin Francis for his keen eye, and Robert Macfarlane for the gracious insights into his own journey with *The Peregrine*.

Works Cited

J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine* (New York: New York Review Books, 2005 [1967]).

Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion, 2000).

Roger Bradbury, 'A world without coral reefs', *New York Times* 13 July 2012.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/14/opinion/a-world-without-coral-reefs.html?_r=0 Accessed 13 December 2013.

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin, 2000 [1962]).

Matthew Chrulew, 'Managing Love and Death at the Zoo: The Biopolitics of Endangered Species Preservation' *Australian Humanities Review* 50, 2011. <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2011/vandooren.html> Accessed 15 December 2013.

Mark Cocker, 'Introduction' in J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine, The Hill of Summer & Diaries: The Complete Works of J.A. Baker* (London: HarperCollins, 2011), pp.4-15.

Jason Cowley (ed.) *Granta 102: The New Nature Writing* (London: Granta, 2008).

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. D. Polan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. B. Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988).

Greg Garrard, 'Nature cures? or How to police analogies of personal and ecological health', *ISLE* 19.3 (2012), 494-514.

James Hatley, *Suffering Witness: The Quandry of Responsibility After the Irreparable* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000).

James Hatley, 'Blood Intimacies and Biodicy: Keeping Faith with Ticks', *Australian Humanities Review* 50, 2011. <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2011/vandooren.html> Accessed 15 December 2013.

Kathleen Jamie, *Findings* (London: Sort Of Books, 2005).

Kathleen Jamie, *Sightlines* (London: Sort of Books, 2012).

Kathleen Jamie, 'The Exploding Harpoon.' *London Review of Books* 8 August 2012, p.40.

Simon P. James, 'Conserving Nature's Meanings', in *Human-Environment Relations* eds. Emily Brady and Pauline Phemister (Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer, 2012), pp.31-40.

Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass & London, England: Harvard UP, 1999).

Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass & London, England: Harvard UP, 2004).

Bruno Latour, 'An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto",' *New Literary History* 41 (2010), 471-490

Deborah Lilley, 'Kathleen Jamie: rethinking externality and the idealisation of nature,' *Green Letters* 17.1 (2013), 16-26.

Alex Lockwood, 'The affective legacy of Silent Spring', *Environmental Humanities* 1 (2012), 123-140.

Richard Mabey, 'In defence of nature writing', *Guardian* 18 July 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jul/18/richard-mabey-defence-nature-writing>. Accessed 3 November 2013.

Robert Macfarlane, 'Introduction' in J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine* (New York: New York Review Books, 2005 [1967]), pp.vii-xv.

Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta, 2007).

Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015).

Robert Macfarlane, Letter to the Author. 24 November 2014.

Robert Macfarlane, Letter to the Author. 27 November, 2014.

Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (London: Penguin, 1990).

Timothy Morton, 'Guest Column: Queer Ecologies', *PMLA* 125.2 (2010), 273-282.

Rebecca Raglon and Marion Schottmeijer, 'Heading off the trail: language, literature and nature's resistance to narrative', in *Beyond Nature: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* eds Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 2001), 248-262.

Deborah Rose, 'What if the angel of history were a dog?', *Cultural Studies Review* 12.1 (2006), 67-78.

Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

Deborah Bird Rose, 'Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time', *Environmental Philosophy* 9.1 (2012), 127-140.

Deborah Bird Rose and Thomas van Dooren, 'Guest Editors' Introduction' *Australian Humanities Review* 50, 2011 <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2011/vandooren.html> Accessed 15 December 2013.

Jos Smith, 'An Archipelagic Literature: Re-framing 'The New Nature Writing'', *Green Letters* 17.1 (2013), 5-15.

Thomas van Dooren, 'Vultures and their people in India: equity and entanglement in a time of extinctions', *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011) <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2011/vandooren.html> Accessed 12 December 2013.