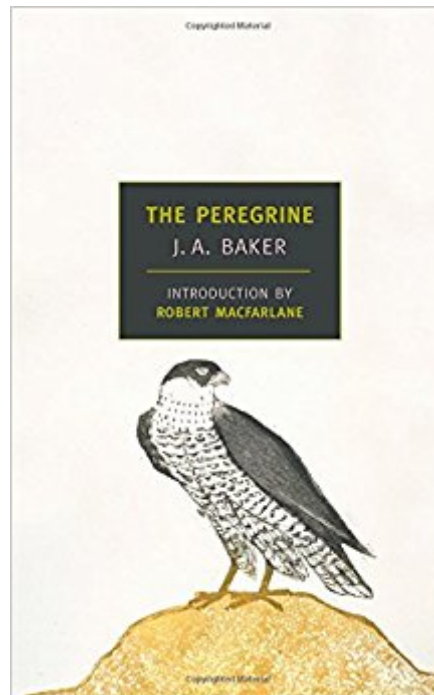




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The Peregrine (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

From fall to spring, J.A. Baker set out to track the daily comings and goings of a pair of peregrine falcons across the flat fen lands of eastern England. He followed the birds obsessively, observing them in the air and on the ground, in pursuit of their prey, making a kill, eating, and at rest, activities he describes with an extraordinary fusion of precision and poetry. And as he continued his mysterious private quest, his sense of human self slowly dissolved, to be replaced with the alien and implacable consciousness of a hawk. It is this extraordinary metamorphosis, magical and terrifying, that these beautifully written pages record.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"...the book is a work of tireless outward observation, with an astonishingly inventive and precise prose style....Baker's feet may be on the ground, but his gaze is skyward, toward the birds he envies." [Bookforum](#) "Remarkable...the lyrical prose hammers home the attraction of pitting predator against quarry." [Daily Telegraph \(London\)](#) "A powerful evocation of East Anglia's winter landscape, and an unforgettable portrait of a man's passionate engagement with the natural world." [London Review of Books](#) "The Peregrine should be known as one of the finest works on nature ever written. His words seem to have been selected as if their

author were under huge pressure, both from the depth of his feelings for the bird and the weight of experience he wished to impart. The only sadness about *The Peregrine* is that its author is no longer with us to be honoured afresh for his achievement." • BBC Wildlife Magazine "A nature study such as Mr. Baker has presented – not by any means restricted to the peregrine falcon – deserves warm praise for the remarkable perseverance and patience which has gone into its making, and when the observer is a gifted writer, as in the present instance, the result is even more gratifying." • Daniel A. Bannerman, *The New York Review of Books* "The *Peregrine* is one of the most beautifully written, carefully observed and evocative wildlife accounts I have ever read. Mr. Baker's patience, his discriminating and unsentimental eye, and his passionate deliberations are utterly captivating." • Barry Lopez "This book goes altogether outside the bird book into something less naïve, into literature, into a kind of universal rapport." • Geoffrey Grigson, *Sunday Times* (London) "One need not know a hawk from a handsaw to take pleasure and profit from the book. It is an account by a curious, complicated man of a curious, complicated phenomenon, that will involve, instruct and excite a reader who can never hope and may never want to share the writer's experience." • Bil Gilbert, *Washington Post Book World* "Mr. Baker is primarily a descriptive writer, and a good one, but his obsession has given him a kind of crazy empathy that lifts his book above mere observation." • *The New Yorker* "The *Peregrine* by J.A. Baker [is] A darkly poetic and episodic work about a man obsessively watching wild peregrine falcons in the British countryside. Written at a time when the extinction of the peregrine and nuclear apocalypse both seemed imminent, this is a book about the poetry of death and loss as much as it is about hawks." • Helen Macdonald, *The Week*

J. A. Baker is also the author of *The Hill of Summer*. He was a native of Essex, England. Robert Macfarlane's *Mountains of the Mind* (2003), about wilderness and the Western imagination, won the Somerset Maugham Award and the Guardian First Book Award, among other prizes.

Glorious observation of these avian wonders, over time and with respect. As a bonus the natural habitat and seasons of the peregrine's year are noted in sparse and vivid detail so rich it is more like a haiku poem than descriptive prose. I find myself re-reading sections of this book many times just to savor the beauty of the language. Amazing to realize that J.A. Baker observed these wild creatures at the border of Chelmsford, England and the North Sea ... like so many other birds and

animals living in the urban hinterland that we pass every day and do not see. I also find myself compelled to read this book outside just to be a little bit immersed in their world.

Purchased this after listening to an interview with director Werner Herzog, who stated that this is the only book that he *requires* all of his film students to take. He writes: "I don't read, from Werner Herzog, I don't read, from a filmmaker normally but I do read. The book I would really recommend is an obscure book published in 1967: *The Peregrine*, by J.A. Baker, who is somebody about whom we know nothing, literally nothing. He wrote in Great Britain when the last peregrines were dying out - now they have bounced back a little bit. He observes peregrines and it's a most incredible book. It has prose of the caliber that we have not seen since Joseph Conrad. And an ecstasy - a delirious sort of love for what he observes. The intensity and the ecstasy of observation is something that you have to have as a filmmaker or somebody who loves literature. Whoever really loves literature, whoever really loves movies, should read that book. In a way, it's almost like a transubstantiation, like in religion, where the observer becomes almost the object - in this case the falcon - he observes. He writes, for example, about the falcon soaring high up, and then higher and higher until the falcon is only a dot. Then he writes, "and then we swoop down, as if he had become a falcon himself. And there's a variety of moments where you can tell that he has completely entered into the existence of a falcon. And this is what I do when I make a film, I step outside of myself into an ekstasis in Greek, to step outside of your own body, a point outside. Baker steps into the fog and in an ecstasy of observing the world it is unprecedented."

I love this book because Werner Herzog said "I think it's an instrument of the cowards." Referring to Storyboards. I absolutely love to hear Werner Herzog speak. At work, my office mate and I are always saying, "it's the instrument of the cowards." Please excuse!

I can't believe I enjoyed reading an entire book about a bird I've never seen. J.A. Baker's prose border poetry. Dense, descriptive and nothing short of a visual buffet that envelopes your mind and takes it on a flight to an ever more pleasurable vantage point.

I bought this after being recommended it by Werner Herzog in his Rogue school of film making. I highly recommend this for a transcendental experience of how to become a falcon/ tiercel.

I am taking time reading this because it is dense and so descriptive of a bird I have no hands on knowledge and a country i've never been to. These birds and many other animals are facing extinction so books like this, written by people who know them and love them, give us a window to see what wonderous creatures they are. Very good read.

The peregrine is probably the best book I ever read or will read. It is the diary of a man obsessed with peregrines, but also with nature in general, a man who longs to be away from civilization, yet his descriptions of both the birds he observes as well as their surroundings are highly civilized, very poetic and what is more: every word sounds true and utterly convincing. The peregrine took me by surprise: a diary recording the killings of a few falcons and the landscape in which the killing took place does seem all that fascinating, however, every swoop J.A. Baker describes is dramatic and different from the preceding one, a rainy day becomes a festival of glittering drops, shiny feathers, wet soil. In the Summerhill the author takes it one step further, describing a landscape as he sees it, as it changes with the setting sun, with a storm approaching, a landscape observed from a abandoned barn; without the drama of the swoops all that remains is pure poetry.

Book is nice. But the printed text in book and in introduction is in different quality.

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