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## The Peregrine

Jim Newcombe

I was one of the first to notice her.  
Like a masked cavalier,  
a buccaneer of subfusc mustachio,  
she glared with scorn upon creation  
as if nothing were so perfect as herself.  
Up there, a far cry from the coast  
in the cathedral that crowns my hometown from on high  
in the heart of England, I first saw her  
whose name means wanderer.  
Hunched on some jutty in arrogant pride  
she defies the world. Brawny raptor,  
robust as the granite crags from which she came;  
the preened vanes plumed,  
the stout breast whittled with shadow.

Flapping out from the sanctuary of her brooding, spooling  
on the arc of her wings in the vaulted overview.  
The pitching wait-on sees her risen again; then  
the dashing flukes  
like lightning come to life  
as down through the tunnel of the tangled winds  
out of the stark cerulean  
from the slips of air  
she bolts.

The altar of cloven vanes, the abattoir of guts and bowels,  
the crude butchery, the scraggs of carrion;  
steeple grimed with stalactites of turd,  
shat on in shard on shard. What sacrament  
grants this soaring of the will incarnate  
whose bread is flesh, whose claws excruciate?  
What does her streamlined body  
body forth? And where is the augur of the torn intestine  
who can divine from entrails, gobs of fowl,  
what these beak-slit tatters are foretelling  
in the splayed missal of her luckless prey?

High in the Gothic spires  
where the gargoyles flank the pulpit of the eyrie,  
in the *tabernaculum* of the nestled clutch  
a callow chick, coiled inside its egg,  
hacks its way clear of the wafer-thin shell,  
rapturous in its slop of yolk, whose ancient ecstasy for blood  
will soon rise up to make good her maiden flight.