

## GUIDE

164

All Summer we could feel the pressure building  
as the contagion stalled in Siskiyou,  
against the High Cascades, and out of fear  
we draped the cages with mosquito netting,  
so even on the sharpest days our birds  
lived in a dull half-light that hid their wounds  
and blurred their distinctive markings. So carrying in  
a defrosted rat with a smear of vitamins  
like mold on its wet, white belly, I thought  
the shadow the approaching virus cast  
a kind of willed obscurity, as if a brush  
had been dragged across the wet, pigment-  
loaded surface of a photorealist landscape.  
Outside, the studious children pressed close  
to the fence in their matching day-camp T-shirts,  
each one holding a small handful of shade  
over their eyes or squinting through the mask  
brilliantly applied to their morning faces.  
With a kinked, self-entangled hose spitting  
at the joints and a clipboard of my tasks, I led  
the little yellow-shirted mob up and down  
the Center's steep-pitched precincts, giving each cage  
a plaque of description as I dragged in  
the coils and washed away the chalky mutes,  
returning to the mild reproach of their silence  
and sun-shocked stares with a swatch of rodent pelt  
or leathery viscera in my latexed hand.  
How strange I must have seemed to them! a bald man  
inside a veiled box talking about  
the Silent Spring and loss of habitat,  
and how the kestrel's ultraviolet vision  
can see the trail of vole urine but not  
the power line that interrupts its flight,

THE IOWA REVIEW

as he fed an injured shadow with a voice  
like a rusted hinge and a rending appetite.  
From Kestrel to Kite they followed me, Goshawk,  
Osprey and Vulture, Pygmy to Spotted Owl,  
until we reached the gravel turnaround  
where by the minivans their parents waited,  
knotted in tight social clusters, and where  
as a form of farewell, to give these brilliant kids  
a less approximate sense of what their strained sight  
had guessed toward, I brought one of our display birds,  
Taka, a Swainson's Hawk, out of its cage.  
Released from the necessary constrictions  
of its mesh-covered enclosure into the open  
extremities of summer air, the dark  
morph male had a conniption fit, yo-yoing  
against his jesses toward and away from  
the closing-in circle of day-campers,  
who were also scared and excited. Children,  
that fluttering you feel in the muscles outside the ribs  
over your heart as the bird I hold out to you  
opens his wings, which are dark grey and brown  
like dry, weather-worn shingles, and with the sound  
of a dishrag shaken clean threatens to break  
his splintery pinions on the air between us,  
is how your bodies would redress a wound  
older than you, by taking off my hand  
that portion of his weight that is the fear  
he has instead of marrow in his bones.  
To soothe the hawk I sang the lullaby  
we use at feeding times to call our birds  
to glove. The song is archaic but it works  
as a point of contact between us and allows  
an allotment of freedom like the length  
of jess between swivel and anklet Taka tests  
as he treads along the forefinger of my

165

ANDREW FELD

double-thick goatskin glove, eyeing the children  
with a look of fiercely prim skepticism  
as they disperse into their parents' cars  
to be belted into their booster seats.