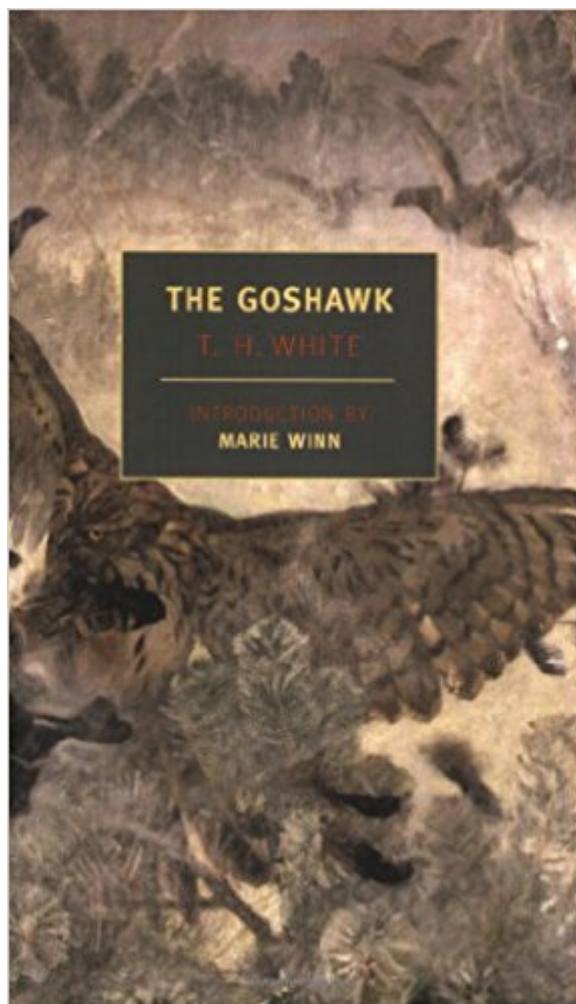


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# The Goshawk (New York Review Books Classics)



## Synopsis

The predecessor to Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk*, T. H. White's nature writing classic, *The Goshawk*, asks the age-old question: what is it that binds human beings to other animals? 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and Gos was free, and White had no idea how to break him in beyond the ancient (and, though he did not know it, long superseded) practice of depriving him of sleep, which meant that he, White, also went without rest.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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Reprinted, White's 1951 book on falconry details the battle of wills between the author and the hawk he is trying to train. Copyright 1996 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

"Sports such as ferreting and falconry show the extent to which people are prepared to risk pain and injury in order to enter the world of other species. The arduous experience of training a falcon to accept a person as a perch forms the character both of the bird and its keeper. The experience has been vividly described by TH White in *The Goshawk* and no reader of that book can doubt that country sports are as unlike human games as wine is unlike water. They do not satisfy some ordinary need for exercise and diversion, any more than wine quenches thirst. They answer to a deeper yearning and intoxicate us with the scent of other worlds. They open a door into the natural life of species: not the pretend life that is imposed on the domestic pet, but the real life that was ordained by nature. Hence the ritual and hence the joy. These sports are genuine rites of passage, which guide us into the world of other animals and help us to know it from within, as a world of instinct, awe and miracles." --The Observer  
"The book chronicles the ambivalent relationship between White, author of *The Once and Future King*, and the hawk he trained. Their battle of wills gives the book its peculiar charm." --The New York Times  
"It is comic; it is tragic; it is as primal and original as a great wind." --It must be ranked as a masterpiece." --Guy Ramsey, Daily Telegraph (UK)  
"A reader who cannot tell a hawk from a handsaw may be swept along by the storm of emotion which blows between the man and his bird, and by the freedom and richness of the romantic treatment of the variations." --Lord Kennet, Sunday Times (UK)  
"The arduous experience of training a falcon to accept a person as a perch forms the character both of the bird and its keeper. The experience has been vividly described by TH White in *The Goshawk*." --The Guardian  
(UK)  
"What one man discovered about hawks, and himself, when he set out to learn the medieval art of hawking." --Time Magazine, *Recent and Readable*  
"A wonderful, classic account of training a bird of prey." --The Daily Mail  
"It's a strange, eccentric book about [T. H. White] attempt to train his first goshawk. It displays an absolute love for the English countryside that I immediately recognized." --The Mail on Sunday (UK)  
"In his 1996 introduction, Stephen Bodio writes: 'This is a book about excruciatingly bad falconry. It is the best book on falconry, its feel, its emotions, and its flavor, ever written.' Those oddly juxtaposed statements are exactly on the mark. A classic." --The Buffalo News  
"This is a nature classic, conceived against the background of the second

World War II a warm and instructive story. • Sunday Times (UK)

An interesting artifact. It's really a day-book of White's first experience of falconry, which the author didn't want published, but was persuaded to many years later. As a diary, when things are going well, or at least aspirational, the writing is wonderful, deeply personal, but when things go bad - or simply dull, the writing sputters out to smelly smoke. I imagine the man's writerly ego lost inspiration with his hawking failures.

Did you read *The Once and Future King* way back when and love it dearly? I did. This book is a fascinating glimpse of a brief period in T.H. White's life when he strived to train a male goshawk named Gos. His adventures with Gos are fascinating and real, and heartbreakingly at times. Animal lovers beware: Despite that White could be quite sentimental about animals, and seemed to love and appreciate them on many levels, he is the type of animal lover who could still hunt with a clear conscience. Keeping this in mind, the work nonetheless contains great beauty, and expresses White's great passion for nature. Recommended.

I had no idea what a joy I was in for when I received this book. I excerpt here a bit of the author's description of his bird: "He was a Hittite, a worshipper of Moloch. He immolated victims, sacked cities, put virgins and children to the sword. He was never a shabby tiger." I read differently and look at birds differently since reading this. 100% five star endorsement - it's a treasure.

Excellent read. I have been falconing so it spoke to me. It is difficult to estimate the appeal to someone who has not knowledge of the sport. The explanations of references in Shakespeare were terrific. I will now read *"The Once and Future King"*.

I felt that something was missing from this book, although it was a great chance to get to know T.H. White a little better, and from a different vantage point. I did enjoy reading it alongside "H Is for Hawk", as she refers to White's book so frequently. I learned quite a lot about hawking and about these amazing birds, and I think I'll forever be perplexed by the phenom of "bating", something scared and frustrated hawks do without reservation.

This book is a classic but little read work to which Helen Macdonald refers frequently in her recent memoir, *H is for Hawk*. I loved reading it, and appreciated the fact that it was available at , since my

library system does not own a copy. I also appreciated the publication by New York Review of Books of this and other out-of-print classics in a very attractive paper back edition, with a wonderful introduction by Marie Winn, of red tail hawk fame.

The old classic on training the wild hawk as much as one can be trained. I discovered it by reading Helen McDonald's *H is for Hawk*. It was an instructive background.

This is one of the most memorable books that I have read in many, many years. She has captured the essence of loss of a loved one, and the connection to her hawk. I have passed the book around and we all loved it. A summary has been well established in the comments, so I won't repeat here. This is a must read for anyone. Couldn't put it down.

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