

"Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

Ornithology Lesson by Jan Wallace

It's an act of desperation,
the rare mating ritual
of bald eagle pair.

They come together mid-air between
mountains, you can barely make
them out, you with your Audobon

binoculars, you in your birding
hat. The two of them bound beak
and feather, claw and wing,

having taken leave of every other
instinct; like survival, like hunger,
when they caught that scent floating

in thin air. Mostly what they
have forgotten is how to breathe, how
to fly. They drop their wings,

admit to the full weight of themselves
washed clean of the serendipitous
magic of everyday bald eagle flight

by the thick true wash of lust--
which brings every creature right down
out of the wild kingdom into the one

common, humble denominator. Aren't you glad,
Bird watchers, you're not a part
of that? Those eagles risk it all

for the free fall down the long swallow
of sex, speeding down the chimney of air
plummeting blindly toward earth, unaware

entranced, careening toward your keen
eyes riveted on the speeding bundle,
and just when you know this must

be a suicide pact, no birdheart promise,
but the real thing among a sacred breed,
just before they hit the earth and scatter

like burst pillows--they disengage slow
motion in a stunning, artful gesture.
And there you are, binoculars around

your ankles, as the eagles pick up

the next breeze, feathering, feathering and soar.

This page was last updated: January 8, 2000