**Hawking Women: Falconry, Gender, and Control in Medieval Literary Culture** (2023) by Sara Petrosillo is the latest publication on a topic of growing interest in academia: falconry, gender, and women. The book is divided into five chapters named after different aspects of falconry and the medieval literary text Petrosillo has studied them with, giving a clear overview of the book's content. For the introduction Petrosillo explains the understanding of poetic language and gender, as well as the power poetry has especially in relation to the admiration humans have for birds and their ability to fly. She focuses on the way medieval poetry uses references in its metaphor of falconry to show control and submission of women in the medieval age. Women held a double position, both being under control and in control of their own position.

In chapter 1, "Control: Aesthetics of Training in Frederick II's *De arte venandi cum avibus,*" she presents Frederick II, emperor and avid falconer, who wrote how falconry was an artform because of its combination of practical and theoretical skills. Petrosillo takes an aesthetic approach to the interaction between falconry training and medieval poetics and how it contributes to medieval reading practice because of the contradictions that compose it. The book of Frederick II is not about any sexual or misogynous comparisons as seen in later medieval literature through the chapters; his focus was purely on the art of hunting with birds of prey. Chapter 2, "Release: Sexual Dimorphism as Poetic Form in the Sonnet 'Tapina in Me'," takes a feminist approach to poetics in falconry imagery, including examples of material culture like seals and mirror cases. One aspect of falconry is the reversed sexual dimorphism: the females are the larger sex, making them more desired for hunting with as they take larger prey—a contrast to the patriarchy that Petrosillo presents as a way for women to use the image of the hawk to reclaim the symbol of subordination through medieval poetry and love. Further, in chapter 3, "Enclosure: Reading Marie de France's Yonci through the Harley 978 Hawking Treatise," Petrosillo compares the situation of leading character, Yonci, to...
the housing methods for a hawk from the hawking treatise. Yonec is kept in a tower by her husband where she is visited by a shapeshifting knight who turns into a hawk, while the hawking treatise focuses on how to capture and care for a young hawk in an enclosure, a mew. Through the reading of these texts Petrosillo links the past society and its understanding of falconry from the existing written medieval sources.

In chapter 4, "Seeling: Sir Orfeo’s Heurodis and Memory Training in the Auchinleck Lay," the focus is on the theory of memory training and control of embodied practice in the text and the old use of seeling. Heurodis is abducted by the fairy king into the brightness of the Otherworld, drawing connections to the processes of adjusting the raptor in falconry to new sights and surroundings. Heurodis herself is put under the process by the fairy king of what is warned is a bad seeling; he cannot control her. As a contrast she sets an example herself in the poem as a falconer able to train her own bird the right way. Chapter 5, "Mewing: Molting the Literary Trope of the Changeable Women in Adultery Narratives," explores the metaphor of a mewed hawk as an adulterous woman as displaying an anti-feminist agenda. Retraining a raptor after the molt is the base of the metaphor of the adulterous woman, an anxiety of how the falcon responds to coming back to the glove again after having no human contact during the molting. It is not the change itself, but the conflict of components, that below those new feathers is the question of a personal fidelity and renewing what was always there. Finally, in the conclusion, "Healing: Squire’s Tale, Metonymy, and Female Falconers," Petrosillo brings together feminist and critical animal studies and how these have been affected and represented by previous male authors. The final focus is the princess Canacee and her ability to heal a female peregrine falcon, emphasizing the relationship and care of a female falconer in a poetic space in the lament without any male dominance present.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is studying, researching, or very interested in medieval gender, falconry and literature, preferably in combination with additional medieval and modern falconry publications. Petrosillo is clear in her discussion of the specific, in-depth medieval literature she focuses on to draw a connection from falconry to poetry and gender and to make the practical knowledge of falconry visible in a literary context. As the practical knowledge of falconry takes years to learn, it is appreciable that Petrosillo does not bring a falconer’s understanding to some of the readings. I was pleased to read that she sought experience with falconers, but lacking deeper connections to the practical understanding of falconry, including raptor behavior, creates a small weakness. For instance, wild raptors hunt various-sized prey, all depending on the raptor species and the fitness of the prey, which plays a central role in the raptor-prey relationship in the ecosystem. Yet Petrosillo suggests that all wild hawks normally hunt small game like mice, small birds, and lizards (p.33). Falconry is a tangible and an intangible heritage, recognized by UNESCO, and it is essential in researching falconry to contact falconers for interdisciplinary discussions. Such has been the case with the omnibus publications Raptor and Human (2018) and Raptor on the Fist (2020), edited by falconer Karl-Heinz Gersmann and professor Oliver Grimm.[1]

The study of medieval literature is outside my area of expertise; however, I did notice the absence of the work of Vera Henkleman and any newer publications of Baudouin Van den Abeele, both writing about medieval falconry in courtly love and extensive medieval literature.[2] The latter’s work is the most advanced on medieval falconry regarding manuscripts and treatises in both Old French and Latin. Drawing on this research would have provided more substantial material for Hawking Woman. Van den Abeele emphasizes all the aspects one must consider and be aware of as missing in the context, such as that a hooded falcon has relations to Justice and Hope, which is
depicted at the end of the fifteenth century as a woman whose eyes are blinded/covered (p. 692). Further context for the poetry would have been established with reference to skaldic poetry, where falconry references were present, and the fact that Frederick II traded hawks from the North.[3] With respect to material culture, Petrosillo describes a medieval ivory French mirror case (p. 158) depicting a courtly love scene with a woman and a man holding a raptor.[4] She describes the woman as holding a hood, making her the true owner of the falcon; however, the woman is actually holding a piece of meat and not a hood, trying to lure the raptor to come to her. Henkleman describes the same scene with the falcon flapping its wings to illustrate the desire the man has for the woman. Henkleman shares that side of courtly love that appears to be missing in Hawk- ing Woman regarding a falcon’s flight. One’s own love is noticed by the other, who answers by giving their love back; in turn the falconer lets the falcon rise, but it comes back to him (p. 768). This could be an additional element in the case of the adulterous women and the element of control. Henkleman elaborates not only about the dynamics between the genders, but also how the woman herself can use the falcon as a symbol of self-control better than the man, as Petrosillo focuses on.

The conception of the chapters makes the book very organized; however, the structure of the presentation of each falconry focus could have been clearer as the majority of readers are not likely to be falconers. The combination of the reading and the reference to falconry would have been better if explained similarly in each chapter; the explanation is there but it is fragmented to present the readings. Petrosillo has added a glossary of falconry terms, which is good but basic. The book cover itself is eye-catching in image, color, and title. There are eleven images, all in black and white, with some lacking sharp resolution. As medieval art offers so much in style and color, the publication would have been nice with color images, as they illuminate the context and provide more detail regarding falconry and the birds themselves. To elaborate on control and seeling, falconry furniture is soft leather used on raptors, as when one trains a horse or a dog; for non-falconers this is visually a contrast to the poetics of “free as a bird.” Even though Petrosillo does state that the raptor-human relationship is special, the emphasis on control comes across in a stigmatic way, as the woman feeding her hawk with meat is full of anxiety, in fear of losing her bird to flight (p. 72). I do not agree with that feeling, as one holds the leather jesses perfectly secure on the glove. Instead, I would argue that the woman would feel empowered, knowing what to do to keep her bird content, which would be to fly it or feed it if it is hungry. A nervous person does not make a good falconer; Frederick II described the qualities one needs to have to be a good falconer.[5] Falconry standards today focus strongly on animal welfare; therefore a reference according to the old practice of seeling should have been mentioned. Animal welfare is a key area of focus for falconers, and the use of the falconry hood, as Petrosillo describes was introduced to Europe via Frederick II, is a welfare product used in modern nature conservation projects globally. In the conclusion Petrosillo presents princess Canacee and her care for the falcon as that of a female falconer, with no male presence. There is no reference to any female relationships, which could have opened another aspect to the reading as sexuality in medieval times was phallocentric. It would have been interesting to know if there are any same-sex relations hidden in medieval falconry texts.

Falconry, both in practice and in literature, is experiencing a new, golden age in the twenty-first century. Knowledge of this art, as Petrosillo shares the essence of Frederick II, is just as captivating now because of this extraordinary and intangible raptor-human relationship. Even though I have pointed out areas where I think the work is weaker, on balance, this book comes across solid and is
a welcome new work on the topic of medieval female falconry.

Notes


[2]. Vera Henkelman, "The Falcon and Its Significance in Depictions of Courtly Love on Late Medieval Mirror Cases (Fourteenth Century) from Western European Workshops," in *Raptor and Human*, 763-96; Baudouin Van den Abeele, "Themes Developed of Falconry Depictions in Medieval and Early Modern Iconography of Western Europe (Twelfth-Sixteenth Centuries): First Results Gained from FalconICON Database," in *Raptor and Human*, 685-714.

[3]. Lydia Carstens, "Land of the Hawk: Old Norse Literary Sources about the Knowledge and Practice of Falconry," in *Raptor and Human*, 799-826.


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