

Matthew Hittinger

Mothers Eating Other Mothers' Young

Sometimes in Central Park a path appears—
you can't remember where or why it veers

so sharply to the left, and when you take
it and come suddenly upon the make-

shift crowd down beneath the boulders and trees,
you stop, raise your head, try to see, to see

what they all see. "Is that a hawk?" Auburn
streaked with silver points; I've seen her twin turn

in the shadow city, bifocal tilt
to gold-streaked auburn, black eyes, the red silt

triangle the feasting female reveals
as she turns her backside to eat her meal.

"Shit!" parka-clad man whispers, safari
telephoto aimed. Auburn turns. "Sorry?"

I want to say to her what I said back
then: They come to eat squirrel, but would tack-

on, this one's eating a pigeon. The red
rubbery ribbon stretched from the hawk's head

and maw to talon and claw looks the same
to my amateur eyes—it's the maimed

feathers floating to the brown earth that gives
the prey away. That other, past hawk sieved

clawfuls of nest, branches falling with grass.
Sift, scatter, rend: a feather, some fur cast

like rat carcasses on an upper East
Side street. “Thought it’d be too noisy, to feast

let alone nest.” I think, ma’am, that that is
another animal’s nest. The latticed

wrinkles around her mouth formed the slow ‘O’.
“Eating eggs?!” Purse readjusted, hair thrown

back, shoulder high. No, wait, it’s not— “How sick!”
She scurried, crossed Chew Street. But her twin licks

chapped lips, says nothing, strays down the park path,
and the male hawk, up high, lifts and flashes

to a branch just above the female. Caps
with tripods snap click click click; shutters slap

in time to the flap flap flap, the lenses
zoom, the crowd oohs—you forget—no tenses.