

EMBROIDERED IMAGE
(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)

Save the breathless cliches. Don't call it
proud, free, noble. This raptor inspiring
rhapsodized hyperbole needs no gilded pedestal--
only a less shaky natural perch.

Our nation's emblem isn't free nor is it bald.
Captive of our times, flight can't save it.
Our dregs seep in its food chain,
our wires electrocute it. Some people shoot it.

It doesn't lead bomber squadrons with lightning
clutched in claws; it never steals lambs, it eats
mostly fish--but it may steal them. It mates
in the air, a flurry of feathers and talons.

It masters up to seven feet of wings with grace,
builds enormous, stinking aeries of sticks
for a lifelong mate plus one or two eggs a year.
The first hatchling often kills its sibling.

Still, if you see a bald eagle, you'll feel high
as that silhouette sounding like wet sheets
on a March clothesline. You'll gaze at a bird
worth more than myths and worn-out words.