

Stop the pigeon

The pigeons are us, when we make do with the crumbs of existence, when we think «better than nothing» and bow to the power of the bigger, uglier birds.

Every pigeon is born a white, ethereal dove; the social contraption and the city environment turn it into a nestling pigeon, then a maternal, primary-school, middle-school, high-school, university pigeon, and at last a filthy adult city pigeon.

6000 years ago human beings regarded the elements of nature, and animals and insects in particular, as not unlike humans, but as manifestations of the ancestors: totems endowed with special and in some cases magical characteristics.

After the invention of agriculture and stock-rearing, man began to consider himself above other beings; over the following centuries and down to our own day, animals have been used, exploited, put to work for various purposes — from food (I even discover the existence of Carlo Giusti's pigeon ham) to company, from labour to war. See for example the story of the pigeon Cher Ami, employed by the 77th Infantry Division of the United States Signal Corps: an event that somehow justifies, for many people and even for city dwellers, the very existence of pigeons, and explains their coming to earth, their purpose as multidimensional creatures, incorporeal spectres impossible to grasp, aliens able to reproduce by means of a kamikaze self-explosion that leaves the old pigeon's body partly scattered and partly chewed on the road, and a new young pigeon's body gliding through the skies of the city.

Note that in the city nobody has ever seen baby pigeons, nobody would ever eat a city pigeon, whereas city pigeons eat everything they find.

Perhaps for one of these many reasons too, we have lately begun to see pigeons and other animals acting like humans, and the other way round.

A sort of inverted zoolatry is finding ever more adherents, in which mutation towards the inhuman animal would represent a return to nature.

Bureaucrat pigeons dressed as functionaries of our decomposing system, tidy conformists quoting articles they have just read, zealous gears unaware of the system, beings whose only purpose is to feed the system they have clung to in order to survive; they eat the crumbs of power and shit litanies of complaint.

They are a terrible mix of Douglas Adams's Vogons and Dostoevsky's bureaucrats, in triplicate, intent on constantly blocking everyone else's way.

They cheep, they bleat, they grunt, they snort and they shout, all together in unison, trying to defend the honour of the past of their deceased ancestors.

Meanwhile, because of them, shit rains from the sky.

Pigeons — in Piedmontese dialect «i picciu», in Lombard «i pirla», epithets that also describe

the stupid, the foolish and the male genital organ, as indeed birds do in general — are a metaphor of today's unthinking human race; but they are also magical animals that coo lovingly and look at us questioningly, perhaps simply our ancestors: silent flying observers.

A poem by Montale reads:

Prima di chiudere gli occhi mi hai detto pirla
una parola gergale
non traducibile
Da allora
me la porto addosso
come un marchio che resiste alla pomice
Ci sono anche altri pirla nel mondo
ma come riconoscerli?
I pirla non sanno di esserlo
Se pure ne fossero informati
tenterebbero di scollarsi
con le unghie
quello stimma.

Some men have transformed themselves, so that pigeon heads have invaded the great cities; others, like Giuseppe Belvedere (Monsieur Pigeon), take care of pigeons in order to embrace their own most human part.

In any case we are all unstoppable pigeons.

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