

The Parliament of Foules

The popular customs associated with Saint Valentine's Day undoubtedly had their origin in a conventional belief generally received in England and France during the Middle Ages, that on 14 February, i.e. half way through the second month of the year, the birds began to pair.

Thus in Chaucer's Parliament of Foules we read:

*For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day
Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.*

The Anticipation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

In the beginning there was emptiness. An absence.
Before I was, you are, we were, anything was,
a bird flew down, and hovered.

That stationary beating,
Eyes piercing the dark below,
Wings pushing air down to keep this still body up
Waiting.
Anticipating the right moment to dive and feast.

That same eagle waits, hovering.
My chaos below.

[Silence is kept]

The Grace

[Noah] sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive branch.

Another bird hovers over chaotic waters, looking for a place to land.

There is none.

We wait.

Even oceans recede, and solidity breaks through.

The dove lands. A gift is returned.

God who hovers over us,

Find ground here.

There are good gifts before us.

Take them, wing them back to you.

Amen

[The people eat. Horrific Valentines stories are shared.]

The Wild Goose Chase

'A foolish and hopeless search for or pursuit of something unattainable'.

I've chased that damned Goose through sermons and prayers,
through communions and liturgies.
Tea lights, videos, songs, double choruses and triple diapasons,
the 'honk-honk' always just out of sight,
disappearing over the next house.

Sometimes I'd prefer an albatross, and me some ancient mariner;
sometimes I'd take curses and a becalmed life just to have the quest over,
to shoot and hang that bird around my neck.

Perhaps love is like this: the thrill of the chase.
But the thrill is confusion too, driving to distraction,
yearning for consummation, red hot with passion.
All chaos and flushes, when, I ask, when, when, when?

I stopped for a moment,
Exhausted from the chase.
And it was then,
from out of the cool Jordan water,
the holy fowl landed.

A voice: "My child, whom I love, with you I am well pleased"

[Dessert may be taken]

Feed the Birds

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or
about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and
the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not
sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Lord we have eaten well,
and we are thankful.
[A glass is raised to the hosts]

Lord, most of us are well dressed,
and we are thankful.

We have worried about trivial things,
and we are sorry.

Holy dove, wild goose, hovering Spirit,
Alight on us, prey on us, bear us up.

But be no ethereal Phoenix, hot with flames yet lacking substance.
Beside each of us, left and right, are two wings.

Without one another we will run, but never fly
This Valentine's we share these breadcrumbs,
this bird-food, as a sign of our love,
this wine, your blood, as a memory of yours.

Amen.