

Corvid-19

Ma chère Durée,

It has been too long since I wrote last. My restless wanderings are partly to blame. But mostly it's the roadkill-such overabundance. A crow such as myself is spoiled for choice.

Do not think that my state of distraction in any way reflects upon my feelings for you. So often I am guided by instinct. Then, belatedly the reasoning part of my brain will make course corrections, usually too late to avert the spectacle of scavengers at work. I have however made some improvements to my usual procedures. For years I have been vexed by the need to wait on accidents or the carnage left by the larger predators (hominids, anyone?) to feed myself. I've got rid of the middleman or *middleperson*, so to speak. Squirrels, I've lately discovered, fear us. Even our shadows are enough to elicit irrational fear-based behaviour. With disarming predictably squirrels will run from our shadows (and occasional strafing) without paying attention to where they are running to. How easy it is to chase a fearful squirrel into traffic. Kersplat, to use an Americanism. Es ist kaputt. After which I need only to wait for the vehicular traffic to abate and, as my brother Corvids will often say: che abbondanza, Mama!

You undoubtedly catch my drift. My days have been taken up exploring the limits of empiricism. All for the purpose of ...

In my next letter, I will discuss, with your kind indulgence, my new mastery: rudimentary tool use.

Your dotting, *Corvus corone*

p.s. I have mapped out a plan for our divagations.

Carissimo Dérive, or might I even say ‘Yo! Lo Dérive’

In the time that has passed between our corvidspondence, I hesitate to say this given the body count in your letter, I have gone vegan. Don’t ask. Partly due to living further from the road, and partly due to a sudden weakness for squirrel cuteness. You can imagine it is nowhere near as easy to coax an aubergine into oncoming traffic.

But surprisingly not only am I not moulting, my feathers have taken on a new shine, which definitely could be down to the olive oil puddles I frequent in the nearby house.

So Dérive, what do you make of this change of diet? Meanwhile as radically I have joined a ‘cross-species conscious raising group (CSCR),’ Tesoro you have no idea. We have taken to discussing the concept of safe post what the two-legged hominids as you term them call the ‘pandemic.’ Because we are trying to build bridges, I resisted pointing out that our pandemic ‘walked in on two legs’ ahem. In any event, a crow’s idea of safe includes our infallible ability to exercise facial recognition. How shocked was I to find that the humans among us were aping [sorry, this is precisely the kind of language CSCR is trying to discourage. The gorilla at the table cut her, whoops, their eye at me ... our facial recognition gift through some form of rudimentary technology.

Anyway nobody’s perfect and certainly not this crow, more soon, sending my vegetable love,

Your Very Own Durée ...

Darling Durée,

In my mind's eye I see you trying to coax an aubergine into oncoming traffic. Pauvre aubergine. If only the sad aubergine were – how I detest this usage – ‘gifted’ with flight, they would then be able to escape the butchery that comes from being anywhere near an automobile. In my lately revised thinking a vegetable suffers a fate not too different from that of a squirrel. I know some of our more retardataire friends would find this notion objectionable, but I truly believe that most of what we have heretofore considered mere objects have the same claims on personhood as we do. This would tend to enlarge the circle of our acquaintance by several orders of magnitude. It does not mean of course that we must do without nutrition. If an aubergine (traffic-flattened or pristine plump) is to your taste, I say eat it. Just be mindful of your debt not only to a specific aubergine but to the entire vegetable kingdom. Express your gratitude openly and without embarrassment.

Meanwhile, I'll just snack on a little squirrel sushi.

And, my darling Durée, if you could tell me how I might find one of your cross-species consciousness raising groups, I will set aside some more silvery glittering *objets* for your vast trove.

Your devoted (place your favourite binomial classification here. Try *Guy debord*)

p.s. I was hoping we might return to the ontology of the promeneur/euse

Cher Durée's Roué,

Ah my roguish Dérive, which of course signals not only your wit and charm but your corvine habit of digression, at the moment the experimental form of Cross-species Consciousness Raising Groups means the meetings tend to be 'pop-up' – please excise visions of squirrels and aubergines here – in part because the very munching you allude to, and the pain involved, puts the CSCR at risk. Recently in a heated exchange about mammal supremacist systemic injustice, a wolf almost ended the dialogue mid-sentence (or what passes for sentences among the crustaceans).

Promeneur/euse, how good of you to remind me to return, dérivishly to this. Aren't these grammatical endings quaint? Hidden up under the language we adapt to our own uses in these missives is the endless boring hominid binary, girl/guy. Ughh, I must spend a moment scratching with a stick in order to a) find sustenance and b) still my annoyance.

Back to the matter at feet, ahem, so those wanderers, those deborderline personality disorderers amongst them mimic bipedally our glorious soaring. Plumage equips the lazy contemplator of all things below as well as the occasionally strolling crow. (Whoops, upstart crow effect on that last rhymed sentence--dear Dérive, forgive my rhyming ways.)

Observing the changes in the air these last months compels me to note that confinement drains the world we know of the vital aimlessness that gives rise to invention. Tool use on our part, music on theirs. You know how fond I am of the low crow crooning of that cross-species cat Barry White. Mon amour, amore mio, when shall we set off with no purpose in mind except ruffling some deserving feathers?

Ma très chère Durée,

We are animals meant to soar. But so often we are undone by our nostalgie de la boue. What tastes – you, ma chère, are not implicated – we have cultivated!! Corvids should aspire to elevation rather than debasement. Ever since reading your latest I have felt such shame and remorse. I've gone off roadkill. Scavenging itself has come to seem an evolutionary dead end, however much it recommends itself as a clever expedient. But as a culinary practice, trafficking in dead things is... like nowhere. Lately, in a very diverting sequence of poems, I encountered the epigraph:

‘degenerate necrophagistic appetites.’

Duke of Salaparuta

Those who eat dead things are degenerate. Even worse they are the source of multiform evils. Fixed pronouns – the *I*, the *we*, etc. – I have determined in the course of my researches proceed from the ugly practice of eating things that are dead and in a state of decomposition. This derivation calls for much explaining, but in order to do so I would need to use the word *I*. How very awkward. Explanations of evil require evil to explain themselves. Do you ken? (mother was Aberdonian, one of the Crowes of Aberdeen).

Can we ruffle some feathers without entering into meat-based subject/object relations? Help!

Your increasingly solemn Dérive

p.s. the only consolation I take from these thorny circumstances is that for our hominid (*sapiens*, don't make me laugh) friends, so much creatures of property relations and tiresome self-assertion, it is much, much worse.

Dearest Melancholic Dérive,

Perhaps you have been spending too much time with SDMML [Sapiens, don't make me laugh] because your incrowspection and self doubt sound mightily like a hominid homily, a la retro/neo liberal la la.

But I do so want to corvidspond about soaring; I have myself lately been pulled from the sky, not thankfully by a larger bird or a deadly projectile but by the forces of order who have banned crow flight for fear of pandemic spread. What cost the heart left without soaring? Your mother from Aberdeen, mine from Alabam who used to joke with us small fledglings when we would amuse her: 'my heart soars like the eagle.' We were a bit put off by the large bird reference but the glint in her eye [the one we could see turned towards us] always made us cawckle.

I think of fledglings now in this moment, the single pleasure the learning to glide, the possibility of exquisite freedom married as it always is to embraced risk. How will they know they can be courageous if they cannot risk, are trapped in flockdown? Cooped [you will pardon the expression] up in the nest, activity kept to a crowded minimum.

Soaring my dear dérive, do you remember how you taught me starboard and aft? How I learned to pivot on a wing, how you learned to swoop? Now I fear melancholy weights the feathers down worse and we cannot delight one another with lessons and seductive little corrections. Worse I fear the consequences of not soaring, that when freed the heart won't remember freedom ... ah carissimo Lo Dérive, your melancholy even in script [how do you hold that stick so long in your beak as to write Duke of Salaparuta?] finds its way into my now inky heart.

Have we lost our rebel souls, no crowtest left in us? Surely not! Xxooo [scratch, scratch, scratch] your very own Durée.

Ma chère Durée, my one and only,

My mind drifted back today to our variously unhappy childhoods. Do you remember when incontinent punning was met with *pumishment*, how we were told by one or the other of our stern parents that our places in the pecking order required us at all costs to uphold our dignity? When this austere and inflexible pedagogy turned--as it had to--into a source of endless merriment? It was always an elaborate joke, endlessly diverting to the very parents who while trying to maintain a convincing semblance of outward-turned gravitas could not contain eruptions of wordplay.

As I write my feathers are in wild disarray. I rehearse our childhoods in copious detail, now recalling nothing but the intricate preparations for a long withheld punchline. O, if we'd only known this – but then we would not have sought out each other's company. I would not have experienced your immediate sympathy for my lugubrious, painful-to-behold, dourness (Aberdeen, after all). And you would not have savoured my helpless laughter as I delighted in your every pun.

Ma chère Durée, during this moment of pandemic (I concur in your suggestion of a pandemic on two legs) I have been forced to frequent the purlieus of our intellectual history. And so, after much thought, I conclude that hominid/corvid interactions are not entirely without cultural benefit to the bipeds. Indeed, the hominids who have a good deal of corvid mixed into their characters are those mostly likely to achieve greatness. Think of Franz Schubert – at least thirty percent corvid by my conservative estimation.

Krähe, wunderliches Tier,
Willst mich nicht verlassen?

...

Krähe, laß mich endlich sehn
Treue bis zum Grabe.

(I know the words were written by Wilhelm Müller, but they only endure because Schubert set them to music)

In an equally mournful tone from that bird-brain, Friedrich Nietzsche. My god, they do lay it on with a trowel:

Die Krähen schrei'n
Und ziehen schwirren Flugs zur Stadt:
Bald wird es schnei'n –
Wohl dem, der jetzt noch – Heimat hat!

...

Die Krähen schrei'n
Und ziehen schwirren Flugs zur Stadt:
Bald wird es schnei'n –
Weh dem, der keine Heimat hat!

Even the Duke of Salaparuta, revealed covid-like tendencies in his more hysterical effusions. It needs only be said that his extensive vineyards produce wines called Corvo!!

I place this thought squarely before you: If our hominid 'friends' show corvid attributes, is it not possible that we have something trace-like, infinitesimally small, invisible to the naked eye, of the hominid in us? Of course our mastery of tool use puts theirs to shame. Also our social lives are better ordered and far richer. We do not contaminate the environment as they do. What's a little guano? It helps their gardens to grow.

Some years ago I read a novel in which hominids through death or misadventure are transformed into corvids. They should be so lucky, I thought at the time. The thought that they *might* be so lucky I find truly alarming.

In fear and trembling, your adoring Dérive

Carissimo Deliciously Disordered Dérive,

Che Bello, davvero your last missive – they should actually be called hit-tives as they justly *pun*-cture the too windy world with sharp asides! Is it any wonder that it is called *pun*-ishment or *pun*-itive and then there is *pun*-chline.

Would that in our feather formative years we had been able to suss out the slightly below the surface power of merriment in the harsh rebuke. Ah well what is crowing older for if not the satisfying recognition that cross species sympathy lies closer to our grasp, or in our case to our bonny beak, than we knew.

Yes I know the novel of which you speak – were you not ever on the Author's shoulder assisting him in the ways of transcrowification? I know you were ... Have you noticed how German looks like stick scratch on the page? Maybe it is a lost language of a lost tribe? Meanwhile you put me in mind of hominids who display their cross-corvid tendencies by ruffling the world's feathers. I am thinking of La Divine A. Davis, as she soars above many in her ability to never let drop any thread of the connection between the myriad injustices the hominid system has refined – an agile beak that one. Or La Zora [of course in crow pronounced 'Soara'] who sounds like us when she sings as a form of learning those folksongs that sound to our crow ears [now that's a whole other crownichle to tell] like a mix of cawing and crowsolidarity.

You know my lugubrious one, the Eeyore of the skies, I have been turning my beak wielded stick to sonnets in honor of that early crossover artist we love ... so I leave you with this:

Soaring Sonnet

O Hominids join us in punning joy!
Your spirits pressed down by pandemic's ploy.
Still you can rise in mind as well as soul.
A pun will always save you as it's droll.
But more than droll, buried in twisted note
Comes the explosion that floats the heart's boat
Like our feathered wheeling in summer's sky --
Getting the joke askance groaning but wry.
Practice as research punning we would say.
Follow your beak, while the sun shines make hay.
Instinct fosters anthrocrowmorpisists --
Who take injustice for their mill as grists.--
Soar Hominids let your freak feathers fly!
Fuck Gravity, come join us in the sky.

Perhaps to the marriage of true minds Dérive, we will admit hominids? [from time to time or Time
after Time] xo xo xo your crow.