

Ponder the Puffin

By Erik O'Dowd

Ponder the puffin, standing strong upon his wind-torn cliff, steady as a soldier, the Scottish crag his home, however fiercely beats the sleet against his roost. Does he, if only in the bitterest blast, consider moving to Florida?

Speculate about the sandpiper, skittering in and out to beat the surf, as if his feet would burn if touched by sea, or were clad in Bruno Maglis.¹ Why doesn't he just hang out higher on the beach?

Deliberate upon the dove, speaking low across the fields in sorrowed calls, mellow echoes reaching him from unknown stands and rows. Why doesn't he just e-mail?

Contemplate the condor, soaring lonely in the thermals, drifting down upon the bleached floor, ever mateless in this refuge, his high desert? Doesn't he know about the personals in the *Independent*?²

Hearken to the hawk, scanning, still, 'til rodents stir, then swooping for a sometimes kill, **his** prey as quick as **he**. Doesn't he know Dominoes delivers?

Observe the owl, whose daytime scholar's mien belies the fury of **his** nights, **his** hawk-like strikes. He obviously needs therapy.

Cogitate about the crows, squawking, unloved creatures of the trees and town, numerous, obnoxious, ubiquitous. Would they stay in a shelter if we built one for them...in Ventura.³

Reflect upon the raven, perched and leering from Poe's sill, satin black and glinting evil. Who's doing his public relations?

Guess about the gull, waiting smartly at the docks, lifting seaward on the tide to snatch a discard meal. With all that skill and energy, why can't he get a job?

Behold the buzzard, blasted by the desert's glare, flattened carrion for its fare. Perhaps a time-share with the puffin?

Meditate about the mynah, hauled from Eden to be caged, when not calling out in human bytes, is **he** crying, "Why am I not free?"

Brood over boys and girls, perching, squawking, soaring beings who are—like mynahs—defined by us, confined by us. Can't birds just be birds?

Author's Notes

I wrote this little ditty for an anthology of local writers which was published in the Community of Voices 1997 annual journal, entitled *Winging It With Words*.

My submission, "Ponder the Puffin," which I intended as a critique of the prospect of local school boards' promulgation of dress codes for students, appeared on page 123. (Slight revisions, 9/12/08, shown in **boldface**.)

¹ An expensive brand of Italian shoe, made famous by having (allegedly) been worn by O.J. Simpson on that fateful evening.

² Santa Barbara's weekly newspaper of the arts and entertainment.

³ The next town east of Santa Barbara along the Pacific coast