

The Application of Birds

by Bill Yarrow

We read in the *Devotions* of John Donne, "Spirante columba supposita pedibus, revocantur ad ima vapores" meaning "They apply pigeons to his feet to draw the vapors from his head," but the word "columba" is ambiguous; it could also mean "doves." I like the idea of applying doves to the feet of a sick man better than I like the idea of applying filthy pigeons to a person's nether extremities but what does it even mean to "apply" pigeons or doves? And how does one apply a bird to a man? And how many birds would it take to draw out those baleful vapors, to effect a cure? I know someone in need of healing. I know a man to whom the application of doves could do a positive good, but he opposes, philosophically, letting doves into his soul. So I am offering him pigeons, a basket of preening fantails. Open all your windows! Surround yourself with wings!

