Empire Burlesque

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Being as it was October on the Plains, the mammals gathered into their herds—elk, pronghorn, buffalo, and squirrel especially, and in such numbers they’d sound from a distance, like a sleek, chittering river moving through the overstory of oak and hickory until they reached the banks of the Missouri, where they’d pause, as Meriwether reports, “and with lusty abandon, plunge into the waters.” A flock of pigeons flew above us, blocking the sun. Making haste, I set up my espontoon & let loose with the blunderbus. The birds, en masse, shat upon us, and those I struck dropped by the dozen like tennis balls upon our decks.