

Dances the dance of stock and stone.

(I prefer Shane Leslie's "he was wooden in the one case and petrified in the other.") And the translator, so resourceful in poetic effects of his own, once or twice fails to transfer such effects from the original. Antiphilos of Byzantium has his Spartan speak *ad imitationem Laconismi*. The English is not pointedly laconic. Or in Asklepiades's poem about the *hetaira* whose cincture bore the golden letters, so dazzling in Fitts's upper-case,

LOVE ME
AND BE NOT ANGRY IF I
BELONG TO ANOTHER

doesn't "belong" sentimentalize the relationship? The Budé translation is franker: "*Aime-moi toute et ne sois pas affligé si quelque autre me possède.*" I fear that Palladas's "Meditation" is forced into righteousness by the sturdy morality of the translator:

Praise, of course, is best: plain
speech breeds hate.
But ah the Attic honey
Of telling a man exactly what you
think of him!

The original is not so meritorious, meaning something closer to: "Praise gets you further . . . but making nasty remarks is a lot more fun!"

Evviva! for Mr. Fitts abundant bay and laurel! But a crown of nettle and stinkweed to the inky-handed pixie who let various errors creep into this handsome, important book!

FRASER YOUNG'S

LITERARY CRYPT NO. 730

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 730 will be found in the next issue.

BLD CAEWO CSCBDP LWC HA

WHGNDBS WXAYB NBC

ODQYBWBNAH.

DPDOCAH

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 729

Abstinence is as easy to me as
temperance would be difficult.

—JOHNSON.



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ALFRED A. KNOPF, *Publisher*

Foes of Integrity

"The Birds," by Aristophanes, translated by Dudley Fitts (Harcourt, Brace, 181 pp. \$4), is a new rendering of an ancient drama that ranges from broad Rabelaisian gusto to biting political satire to Utopian fantasy.

By Paul H. Cubeta

ALTHOUGH written in 414 B.C., soon after a divided Athens had made a total commitment to the disastrous Sicilian Expedition, "The Birds" has an appeal beyond the topical, lashing only obliquely at the traitor, the enemy agent, and the professional informer. The greatness of the comedy lies in its mature and witty poise between reality and fantasy, in an ideal comic vision which can take itself seriously and laugh at itself for doing so.

For Dudley Fitts, as for Aristophanes, "The Birds" is fun. This modern, colloquial translation is, of course, aimed at introducing the comic literary and dramatic genius of Aristophanes to the general reader, but the apparatus of scholarly and critical notes and the index of proper names have a fresh exuberance that Aristophanes would surely have enjoyed. Fitts, moreover, has the imaginative insight to meet the Greek dramatist on his own literary grounds. If Aristophanes wants to play James Joyce and imbed parodies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Hesiod in his bird-jargon, then Fitts obliges with distorted and irreverent echoes of Shakespeare's *Pistol*, *Touchstone*, and *Macduff*, of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Robert Burns, Thomas Moore, and Wallace Stevens. And when it comes to Joycean puns, Dudley Fitts has Aristophanes stopped cold. The battle of Orneai is translated "Gettysbird" with a solemn note that "the Greek name makes the pun inevitable." Tame indeed, though, when compared with Fitts's explanation of how "Hyde Lark" got its name.

These literary games are not precocious mannerisms, for Fitts makes them an integral part of Aristophanes's dramatic and thematic structure. Instead of finding a unifying base in some dubiously allegorical Utopia, Fitts molds a play, not of ideas, but of dramatic voices—human and not so human, bird-like, and divine. The beauty and excitement of this version arise out of his ability to counterpoint a wide variety of voices—gentle, buoyant, crude, arrogant. Such ritualistic scenes as the dedication of Cloud-

cuckooland the Beautiful or the final marriage celebration reflect this uniting of an extraordinary multiplicity of tongues: the interplay of vaudeville comedian and straightman, the burlesque rhymes of the bird-celebrants who can't take the new liturgy too seriously—

Here let our piety devote
To the blest gods one skinny goat

"Words heighten concepts; words raise a man out of himself," the hero Pisthetairos observes. But the *personae non gratae* in "The Birds" are all professional misusers of language, cheapening it for selfish or materialistic ends: the wordmongering poet laureate with his jingoistic doggerel, the prophet peddling his cheap half-truths, the city planner spouting his technical mumbo-jumbo, and the professional informer dredging up his calculated insinuations. And even the gods lose their dignity and authority when they can do no better than "quiffing gamsel cockitty, gotta tweet tweet." Dudley Fitts's considerable achievement reminds us that Aristophanes, without losing his temper or his sense of humor, has exposed the enemies faced by every writer of integrity in every age:

And yet we need not roam
In search of tongues as versatile—
They twitch for us at home.



MAD WITH WORDS: The appearance of a new poet—the real, distinguished thing—is rarely unmistakable. Have you ever read Keats's first book? Even a great deal of that does not give one pause; except after the fact of what, unforgettably, followed. But I will take the rare risk and bet that America has a new and exciting poet in E. G. Burrows, whose *"The Arctic Tern and Other Poems"* (Grover Press; clothbound, \$3.50; paperbound, \$1), has lately been published. There may be touches of others in him (why

not?) including Yeats and Dylan Thomas, but they are not controlling touches. He is word-mad in his own right and most of the control of this, in stanza and rhyme and meaning, is his own. Love, lust, rebellion, praise, joy—he writes of these matters, but mostly so far he is writing his bundle of words. For them he rapes history, geography, the Bible, mythology, and of course the dictionary. So far he is probably over-dependent on this. He has begun with an embroidered coat. The only question—as to my risky bet—is when and how he will go naked. Auguring well for the future is his balance of sexual-sensual density with intellectual nimbleness. The excitement of a new voice is here, the energy, virility, art that are capable of lyric poetry. —W. T. Scott.

THE HUMAN RACE, PART 3: LeRoy Smith, Jr., in *"The Opulent Citizen"* (Macmillan, \$3.50) carries into a third generous-sized volume a scheme of interrelated poems begun in *"The Fourth King"* and continued in *"A Character Invented."* Mr. Smith is up to no less than a biography of the human race. Central to this third installment is the theme of the ultimate failure for man of materialistic standards and the necessity, if he is to be saved, of spiritual values. That is all right: we have been there before, many times. But unfortunately Mr. Smith has two strikes on him before he starts.

The first is that such forethoughtfulness seems fatal to poetry. The moment poetry avowedly has a Five Year Plan it loses the seeming inevitability necessary to poetry. The second strike is, that while he skillfully plays with unusual rhyme and stanza schemes, Mr. Smith's language tends to unidentifying rapidity, too much versified abstraction, and a general commonplace vacuity. It is unlikely—in poetry anyhow—that determined energy alone can avoid strike three. —W. T. S.

IMMACULATE WIT: In a style rather tame and too well-mannered Howard Moss's poems have as their best reward for the reader their wit, their play of the mind. Sometimes—rarely—this is overt, deliberately vulgar, and at least momentarily funny, as in the *"Modified Sonnets"* where he abridges into slang some famous poems.

Elsewhere in his new book *"A Swimmer in the Air"* (Scribner, \$3) the characteristic tone is a quiet subtlety: "All saviors of the city/Are lit by an unknown star;/Love, terror, pity/Walk where they are./The kings of our great ills/Are dead, yet come to mind/When we fall from small