

Essential Comedies of Aristophanes
for Modern American Readers

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The Birds

In bulrushes,
I call out other names
for the American bittern:
“Stake driver,
thunder pumper . . .
dunkadoo.”
No answer.

In deeper
bulrushes, I call to
the American woodcock:
“Timberdoodle,
peewee, night peck . . .
bog sucker,”
while I wonder
what bird
would answer
to bog sucker.

But one night
I heard the low,
pneumatic trill
of the nightjar,
exactly like
a holiday nutcracker
issuing a clicking,
guttural threat
to something
that would be king
scuttling across
the linoleum.

The Clouds

Some clouds fall, others fly away
from spoken words, instruments
of mystery and enchantment.

Some birds
trip over primeval winds
with unsteady gaits of mind,
halt and faultfully-ridden:

Is this the new world,
or, unfrocked,
just the sick old one?

Enchantment unfurls
a Parable of Time that cannot be furled—
the telling takes hold.

Mystery emits
a particle of time
that cannot be transmuted
or destroyed,

then looses
from a stream of occultation
in the clouds

the daily engagements of rain,
and the ecstasies of blood.

Gen Greatest decoded Joyce's masterworks
as baby talk.

After whole work lives of repression,

World War II came back toward the end
as the only thing that mattered,
long after Julius wooed Ethel with song:

*Don't sit under the mushroom cloud
with anyone else but me,
anyone else but me etc.*

Alone, Enola:

I am become death, destroyer of worlds,
paying for your educations and houses
in new developments,

and I will send into your streets
men of good humor,
tintinnabulators to tinkle in
the long summer ease.