

The Birds: a poem

written by Guest Contributor | May 25, 2021



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Leaving to Return

Back in ancient Greece,
Aristotle looked to the sky
wondering at the absence
of redstarts in the cold

and lo, there were robins –
suddenly aplenty all over
surely they're one and the same
– it's transmutation, he was sold

A different plumage for every season
redstart to robin in the winter
warbler to blackcap in the heat
he saw no other explanation

Others before him thought they hibernated
some others figured they turned into fish
Homer, in his Iliad, thought cranes
flew in the winter to fight the pygmy nation

Even more bizarre, and this much later
quite firmly modern, this hypothesis –
they fly to the moon, said a person of learning
and they spend the cold season there

For years, we've looked up, wondered as they left
these birds, most mobile of creatures
where do they go, we kept asking anew
as old theories fell into disrepair

And perhaps with some envy,
we looked at them fly along

Thinking how homing can only work
when you know where you belong

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Kartika Menon recently graduated with an MA in History from New Delhi, and is figuring out life. She recently took an interest in birding, and discovered that though she loves birds, she cannot for the life of her distinguish between their calls. She is not a good birder. But like with much else in life, poetry came to the rescue as a way of translating her love.

featured photo by Nandita Menon