

ARTS & LETTERS

the couple to "escape into happiness" by processes as wondrous as Houdini's escape from a straitjacket.

The reckless range of Sturges's films, including *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944) and *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948), exhausted the screwball comedy form. Sturges's great works, Garis observes, "made his career the [genre's] appropriate finale." Later directors, such as Peter Bogdanovich in *What's Up, Doc?* (1972) or Ted Kotcheff in *Switching Channels* (1988), attempted, but failed, to revive the genre.

Parlor Ideologies

"Infinite Riches in a Little Room: The Interior Scenes of Modernist Culture" by T. J. Jackson Lears, in *Modulus* (1987 Annual), Univ. of Va. School of Architecture, Campbell Hall, Charlottesville, Va. 22903.

In his fragmentary 1923 story "The Burrow," Czech novelist Franz Kafka (1883-1924) described a half-human creature whose aim in life is to create a secure room. His snug burrow, says Kafka's protagonist, encloses him "more peacefully and warmly than a bird is enclosed in its nest."

Kafka's story, writes Lears, a Rutgers University historian, is "a central text of modernist culture." The notions Kafka expressed were shared by many people of his time, and helped shape interior design.

The American and European tastemakers who lived between 1850 and 1900 considered the interiors of homes to be the domain of women. French Second Empire designers, for example, conveyed a "demurely concealed" femininity through floral designs on wallpaper and "sensuous curves on canopied beds." During the 1880s and '90s, houses became more intimate and personal. "Semi-private" window seats and cubbyholes appeared; sitting rooms became crammed with bric-a-brac, particularly reproductions of ancient Egyptian and Turkish relics. The bourgeois home was a cozy, cluttered nest.

American feminists of the 1890s rebelled against cluttered design, which they thought heightened women's hysteria and men's neurasthenia. Led by author Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the editors of *House Beautiful*, they called for "absolutely sanitized" interiors free of "Victorian social artifice." Technological advances, such as the introduction of large panes of glass, combined with the professionalization of interior decoration to speed a trend toward simplicity.

Early 20th-century European architects continued the rebellion against the untidy Victorian "closed box." The Bauhaus Germans, Le Corbusier (1887-1965), and others strove for interiors that were "devoid of any references to the past or to the individuality of the occupant." But American designers of the time did not propose living spaces as sterile as those their European counterparts advocated. Even the most starkly modern of the homes built by architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), for example, used wood and stone instead of metal, and were equipped with homey hearths and dining rooms.

Wright's reward: praise from commentators for "saving the family" from social chaos by preserving traditional designs.

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Translating Homer

"Winged Words: On Translating Homer" by Peter Jones, in *Encounter* (Jan. 1988), 44 Great Windmill St., London W1V 7PA, United Kingdom.

The Roman statesman Cato the Elder (234–149 B.C.) counseled young orators: *rem tene, verba sequentur*—"Keep a grip on the argument, and the words will follow." Jones, a senior lecturer in classics at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England, agrees with Cato's advice. Translators, he argues, should conserve each sentence in the original text.

A translation is a "historical statement," an interpretation shaped by both individual bias and contemporary fashion. When Alexander Pope (1688–1744) translated Homer's *Iliad* between 1713 and 1720, his heavily classicized poetry ("Gazing he spoke, and kindling at the view/His eager Arms around the Goddess threw") may have been well suited to the Miltonic ideals of 18th-century England, but it amounted to a reconceptualization more than a translation of Homer's Greek.

"Let us abandon once and for all the chimaera of 'the literal translation,'" urges Jones. Even "word-for-word" requires the translator to choose from among different shades of meaning from the original text. For example, one-third of the 27,000 lines of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are repetitions of the same phrases or passages. While "fixed, [Greek] hexametric ways of saying things" are necessary for accurate scansion (or poetic meter) of each verse in an epic poem, Jones views repetitions as "so much a part of the essence of Homer" that they must be retained.

Epithets such as "much-enduring Odysseus" are used in so many different contexts that it is hard to find an exact English equivalent. For example, the phrase *luto gownata kai philon etor* ("his knees and own heart were released") describes Homer's characters when they are, variously, in great danger, receiving tragic news, or recognizing a relative.

Unlike other contemporary translators, Jones believes that English prose captures Homer's "words and arguments" better than verse, which does more damage to Homer's text. Translators, he concludes, should use "clear, strong, idiomatic English" that captures "something of the poetry of the original."

OTHER NATIONS

Sovs on the Dole

"Glasnost and Unemployment: The Labour Pains of Perestroika" in *The Economist* (Dec. 26, 1987), 25 St. James's St., London SW1A 1HG, United Kingdom.

On October 9, 1930, Josef Stalin declared unemployment abolished in the Soviet Union. To this day, the Soviet Constitution makes work not only a right but an obligation. Even so, joblessness exists, and it is bound to increase regardless of how—and how far—Mikhail Gorbachev's economic *perestroika* ("restructuring") proceeds.