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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

COLM CLEARY ON THE BEAUTY OF IMPERFECTION, WRITING LESSON, SPECTATOR,

R. T. Smith

COLM CLEARY ON THE BEAUTY OF IMPERFECTION

"Now, your perfect egg
from the factory farm,"
he said, holding the two

poles by blunt thumb
and trigger finger before
the candle's unsteady

light, "has never the sweet
blemish of identity.
The shell won't hold

a shadow, you see, it's
so regular, a polished
thing some drugged hen

sent towards this world
on automatic pilot. It's
got the necessary gold

inside, the proper
white, but not the full
shilling, you understand,"

Squinting, he turned
the egg over, rolled
it across his lifeline.

"Me own Da sweated
and bent low under
the labor of keeping

fifty chickens, a milk
cow, bedded mushrooms
and spuds. I loved

when the hens were
permitted to sit, till
the shy eggtooth

in his wee casket was
a pocket watch ticking –
might live, might not.

Always a flawed thing,
unable to fly, but lovely
just the bloody same.”

He held the shell close
to the shimmery flame.
“The big money poulterers

crowded him out.
He never made it
in the city’s sooty light.

A stroke, a slow dying,
but I couldn’t vigil
with him, you know,

being already thick with
the Provies, underground.
I’m glad I worked on

incendiaries, makeshift,
homemade, catch-as-can.”
Here he closed his

scarred fingers to a fist.
“To the corporate eggers!”
almost a salute, then

the sharp click and yolk
slicking along his wrist.
“I loathe their smug money.”

Candlelight reddened
the skin of his clenching
hand. “I hate their life.”

WRITING LESSON

Long after the snow
has left, I recall
the cardinal's path,

tracks the color
of blueberry ink,
a Chinese

poem to praise
all summer
locked in a sunflower

seed, each print still
singing, across
cold silk, its simple

name. The bird
on the window
sill trembles

to flame.

SPECTATOR

In Joyce's "The Dead"
when the whole Epiphany party agrees
that some monks sleep in their coffins
to remind them of mortality
and do penance for our sins,

we all know the revelers are wrong,
embellishing hearsay, inviting
the grim medieval rumors into dying
Ireland, but by the time Mrs.
Malins insists that the monks are

holy men, I've already become
half Trappist, lost in the story, my
Gabriel regrets shoveled under
with Michael Furey. I'm wishing
myself south to Mount

Melleray, anticipating sanctuary,
the safety of matins and lauds,
long hours of Good Works
and Latria. I want to be free as
the pious brothers are free

of quarreling over the wishbone,
of blowing my own horn
till the ones I love suffer and fall.
Alone with a worn book, I want
to be scourged and shriven,

to lie still in the long house
of my coffin, while outside,
snow falls softly on the crooked
crosses. But then the sweets
and sherry are served,

hostesses beaming, Gabriel
fortified for his annual address,
and I am back at the table,
a veteran spectator knowing
how false he'll ring and already

thirsty for Gretta's big scene
after "The Lass of Aughrim". I am
blind again to candles
in the monastic chapel. I'm deaf
to glad Latin and still,

in spite of the legendary
beauty of Joyce's story,
self-tortured beyond the snow's
tenebrous *Ego te absolvo*,
spoken softly to the fallen world.