

Mary Newell

BROOD

NESTING

Run your finger around a nest
straw-scratchy but well-turned
or feathered up fine,
this one plumped with
hair of German Shepherds
bird-chasers with big teeth

Scout out a site
niche in tree hollow, earth dip,
nest bits collected:
laying in twigs and grass
rotational beak-weaving
nudging the curves
shaping a hollow
dropping in moss, mud,
spider web for glue -
an avian-factored eco-niche

I imagined a bird
running the tip of her feather around the brim
to confirm its provenance, a
nest smoothed cozy,
a delicate conductiong --
but that is not how the robin makes it ready

She leans in, breast, heart pump
down inside the nest,
her wings flipped up,
eyes bare dots above the brim
as she turns, tamping with spread toes
to smooth mud over the woven bowl

Nest readied,
the hollow a hope repository

EGGING

The swelling
the penetration
sperm stored up
for a week's worth of ova,
sperming the ovum
when it drops

Hens can lay an egg a day:
egg factory for the duration

Egg, pulsation container
shelled up, "bloom"
decked in color -
pigmented gloss,
buff, or patena,
paint-scatter or solid

Once bluebirds laid blue eggs;
now some are merely white.
careless, or stressed
to less adaptive tones?

BROODING, HUMAN AND BIRD

When the weather is good and no bills are due
it's hard to justify brooding
but Esmeralda - hell, why pretend, it's hard not to -
life gallops and the leash/ lease shrinks.
But a smile or invitation certainly helps.

Human brood A: to ponder, mull over,
masticate the gist
more pensive than doldrums,
sometimes productive:
a verse in the birth canal
a brood of poems
an essay nested, in brood

Human brood B: stuck on, revolving around
bordering on morose
don't bother her, she's brooding.
the song you never liked
circling without exit in your head.
a bitter feeling
breeding nothing but tension
a lockjaw problem
incising forehead creases:
a brood without breed.

*How long
will you sit there brooding
over some stray comment
some delusional comparison?*

Meanwhile the robin
circles with purpose,
smoothing the nest
in preparation.

Human brooding is erratic
not so the birds':
brood cycle tucks into weather cycle:
Hens lay on days long with sun.

thorough warmth, the key to hatching:
warmth from the sun, from the mother's body,
even from her intent, says the ancient text.

*The hen embraces the egg, always mentally
listening.*

a radiating hover:
wingspan parasol
puttering warmth

*Warm energy can only warm the shell
and cannot penetrate the inside,
so she mentally conducts the energy inward.*

Hen broods in focused attending
sun-warmth prised through shell

*That "listening" is single-minded con-
centration. ... with warm energy, the birth takes place.*

Caring attenuates without dilution:
even when she leaves the nest,
hen stays intent to catapult a future.

Brood emerge:
a scratch from inside
a crack widening
crumpled chicks scramble into air,
eyes still tight.
Brooding transmogrifies
to brood.

[quotes from *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Thomas Cleary translation]

FLEDGE, A RESPITE

Only a god could brood continuous
or a ghost who's learned to be holy,
like Hopkins's who "over the bent
World broods with warm breast..."

Did the creator of record rest from
brooding on the seventh day?
Was life unsponsored, then,
spun off to fend, like chicks,
flapping or bumbling aground?

In bird world, the rhythm
of breed / brood / fledge
balances gnawing needs
with respite

Humans name bird growth stages
from shell-peck to wing-spread:
[Do birds feel flow, or blips,
a strain toward the ease of flight?]

hatchling, air wash on shut lids
jaw wide for morsels air-borne
from a familial donor

nestling downy, cuddled,
enworlded: solar revolve
unfolds enormity beyond

fledgling jettisons to panorama
(no) hesitation at protective edge
tipping initiates wing flap, or flop...

Now just *bird*, subtitled
[Memory of egg-time vague,
a blank encumbrance]
as Dickinson implies:
"Can the Lark resume the Shell --
Easier -- for the Sky -" (Fr754)

Do mother birds
relinquish flying fledglings
or like some women, feel a tug
as of umbilicus stretched taut ?