

Eating the Egg¹

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with Annotations by Todd Sweeney

On a Saturday morning², gloomy with fog³, Seth⁴ Frell⁵ climbed out of bed and having nothing better to do decided he would eat an egg for breakfast. His small house, cold and damp though it was, still gave him a sense of comfort. This was due primarily to the interior walls which were painted pumpkin orange⁶, and this gave the illusion of warmth even when there was

¹ In the animistic religion of the Durdah who lived in the lower valley of the Swy River, the egg was the symbol of the cosmos; the cosmos existed in an egg in the mouth of Kar, their supreme deity. Thus, by eating the egg, one becomes a god. It should be noted that the title refers to *the* egg, not *an* egg. In the tradition of the Fuko, who lived in the highlands on the banks of the upper Swy, the egg is the symbol of life; the people have banned the eating of eggs as the Jews and Muslims have the eating of pork, and the Fukoan death-deity, Teeveess, is often shown devouring eggs by the handful. This equation of the divine with death is a recurring theme in the story.

² In the calendars of both the Durdah and the Fuko, Saturday is the last day of the week, and is known simply as "Ob Efer" or "The Day". It was common for people in both groups to spend the entire day engaged in meditation.

³ A reference to Werner Von Krell's Romantic epic, "Return of the Dragon":

"The fog comes, breath of history
And clothes the known in mystery
Confounding time, and lies abed
Where we whisper with the dead."

⁴ The god of evil in Egyptian mythology. Seth was jealous of fertility god Osiris's supremacy, so he killed Osiris and scattered the pieces of his body throughout Egypt. This heralded a time of great famine in Egypt which was ended only when Isis reassembled Osiris' body, resurrected him, and became pregnant with the sun god, Horus.

⁵ Frell, in contrast with the above, was the Ulmorian god of fertility. Another reference to the theme of death and religion. It is interesting to note that the character is referred to by both his first and last names throughout the story.

⁶ Reference to the well-known pop song, "Pumpkin Eater", by Jimmy Olson and the Supermen:

"I knew a girl named Mona tried to eat her treat her well
And I wound up just like Peter livin' in her pumpkin shell"

in which the pumpkin is a euphemism for female genitalia.

none.⁷ The result of this security was that Seth Frell almost always awoke feeling hungry. During the week, he was usually too busy to make his own breakfast and had to content himself with an orange and a cup of yogurt⁸ purchased at his office's cafeteria. Indeed, he often considered painting over the walls with a lighter, neutral non-color, but when he thought of facing the damp and cold unmasked, without even the illusory armor the orange walls provided, he always changed his mind and resolved to put up with the inconvenience of weekday morning hunger.

The sand of sleep wiped carefully from his eyes, Seth Frell climbed from his bed and donned his thick black robe⁹, a necessary bulwark against the cold, for the kitchen walls were painted white. That morning, a grey and watery light¹⁰ filled the kitchen, that, together with its white walls, made it seem much colder than the bedroom and hallway. Seth Frell measured out coffee ground into a fine Turkish powder¹¹ and started the pot brewing before removing a slice of bread and an egg from the refrigerator. He spread a thin layer of butter on the bottom of a frying pan and, with great care, cracked the egg and poured its viscous contents onto the pebbled teflon surface. Then he poured a cup of coffee from the still bubbling pot and stood at the counter

⁷ See above note. In Schwartzkopf's story, the comfort of sensuality/fertility is an illusion.

⁸ In the Insultakian folk tale "Emar Becomes a Giant", after being magically transformed into a giant, Emar becomes very hungry. A witch tricks him into eating an enchanted orange and a cup of yogurt that shrink him down even further than his normal size.

⁹ The Huron Native Americans of Canada called the Jesuit priests "Black Robe". Death is also often portrayed wearing a black robe.

¹⁰ In eighth century Byzantium, a monk named Efficius wrote an essay in which he claimed that fog was proof of God's existence, for it mixed light with water, and only by God's intervention could two such disparate elements be combined. Efficius's intricate theory of natural elements was determined by the patriarch to be rooted in the monophysite heresy, and he was executed shortly after his treatise was published.

¹¹ Reference to a popular English music hall song, "Can't Stand the Moguls":
"They drink no wine in Turkish towns
But dine on moistened coffee grounds."

watching the toast turn slowly brown and the egg turn from clear to opaque white.¹² Both toast and egg were finished at the same time. He removed the frying pan from the hot burner, took the toast out of the toaster-oven, spread butter on it, then carefully peeled the egg from the pan and laid it upon the center of the twice-cooked bread. He topped off his coffee and sat down to eat. The clock read eight forty-seven.

It was another eight forty-seven¹³, another Saturday morning blanketed in fog, in which the first decision was made that led to the end of his engagement to Sara¹⁴. This one was in October, a day begun unseasonably warm and laden, too, with sensual mist.¹⁵ Seth Frell and Sara left the house to have breakfast outside, a breakfast of melon¹⁶ and croissants, food which he had subsequently been unable to eat at all. They spread a blanket on the ground and placed a plate of croissants and a bowl of melons, cantalope and honeydew, and themselves upon it. An overwhelming enthusiasm for his bride to be suddenly overtook him--he fed her melons with his fingers and from his lips, then he untied her shoes, pulled them off and kissed her feet¹⁷, drawing each individual toe into his mouth and massaging it with his tongue. At first Sara giggled like a young girl, as if he were tickling her, but then more womanly feelings flooded her and she fell back on the blanket sighing. Seth Frell's lips began to travel up her legs, his head burrowed under her skirt, his hands reaching for her underpants. Her hips were rising with enthusiasm of her own

¹² Reference to the little known existentialist poet Basil Borikoff:

"God made the world

Then sat on the throne to contemplate his achievement

As he stared, recognition was lost

The world turned into a mystery like clear water turned to ice."

¹³ Jon Bliny of Yorkshire wrote, in 1847, "...all past is eternity. There is no real sequence, no true chronology, that is an illusion. What occurred yesterday is as irrevocably lost to us as that which occurred on the banks of the Nile four thousand years ago. Memory has no more standing than imagination." Thus, this short flashback is set in eternity, or a time out of time.

¹⁴ In the Durdah religion, Sara is the goddess of new life, but also the goddess of physical pain.

¹⁵ See note 10. The divine and the sensual are here equated.

¹⁶ In the Durdah culture, the melon is a complicated symbol representing, in different stories or rituals, one or more of the following: female genitalia, the womb, the ocean, childbirth, the moon, and, strangely enough, cannibalism.

¹⁷ A Durdah saying goes, "He who kisses Sara's feet shall be blessed with a fruitful household."

when Seth Frell felt something brush against his leg. He turned, looked up and saw a large crow¹⁸, wings outspread in a foolishly threatening pose, picking melons from the bowl which lay a short distance from Sara's recently abluted foot. Seized by a sudden mixture of rage and fear, Seth Frell picked up his fiance's left shoe¹⁹, swung around, and dealt the crow a fatal blow upon its bowed and open-beaked head.²⁰

"Don't!" yelled Sara.²¹

He admonished her from worrying and showed her he had dealt with the intruder. But it wasn't the crow's attendance at their breakfast that had shocked her, it was Seth Frell's violent act. A week later she broke off the engagement.

He'd have given up eating meat for her.²² But it was pointless to dwell on the incident. He glanced at the clock--eight forty-eight²³--no memory attached to that set of numbers.

His fork separated a piece of toast and egg from the main mass and carried it to his mouth. There was nothing quite like the flavor of an egg. He ate slowly; before he finished the morning sun began to burn away the fog, and as it vanished Seth Frell began to feel better. He looked

¹⁸ The crow, of course represents death. This is true in many parts of the world, but here the imagery is a reference to a Fukoan legend in which a mortal man, Ke, battles Teeveess to save the fertility goddess, Lok. The legend echoes both the Orpheus and the Proserpine myths. In Schwartzkopf's story, the battle with death is fruitless, for though death is defeated, the goddess still vanishes, thus continuing the theme of death and divinity inexorably linked.

¹⁹ See above note. This is almost a retelling of the Fukoan story. The left shoe represents Lok's favor.

²⁰ The crow's pose as described by Schwartzkopf is often pictured in Fukoan art. It is a direct imitation of the pose most often seen in Fukoan portrayals of the owl, which, like in Europe and America, represent for the Fukoans wisdom and patience. In other words, death mocks wisdom.

²¹ The only spoken word quoted in the story. This is obviously an inversion of the famous Nietzschean dragon, "Thou Shalt".

²² Reference to pop musician and animal rights activist Poi Zubee's anthemic song, "Meat Grinder":
"If you want to eat meat, then you won't be eating me."

²³ Reference to the comic book, *Limbo 2050*, which was published from 1976-1979. The main story follows a man with no memory who escapes from a mental institution and wanders over a desolate futuristic world. He is known only as 848, which was his patient number at the asylum.

down at his plate. Surrounded by damp crumbs sat a bulbous still unbroken yolk²⁴ atop a small round piece of bread. He slid his fork under them, took a slurp of coffee, lifted toast and yolk to his mouth, and swallowed them whole.²⁵

²⁴ Reference to a little-known children's story by Marcel Foulieu, who lived in France in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the story, a young boy named Jean receives a magical egg yolk which, if not broken, will stop him from growing. He has a lot of adventures, but eventually grows tired of life as a child. He breaks the yolk himself and begins to mature. The yolk, of course, in addition to other things, represents potential, which must be sacrificed in order to achieve anything meaningful.

²⁵ See above note. Seth Frell swallows his potential whole thus destroying it without fully realizing it. This image closes the story on a note of barrenness and crushing despair.