

Bath Time

With our weak spirits we should grow old in eternity, if we were not kept young by death.
—G. K. Chesterton

At first, there's the accompaniment of white noise and frequent
fine tuning adjustments—
lefty loosey, tighty righty, a little more loosey—
until it is *just right*,

like Goldilocks
might like,
made easier, perhaps, with some precision instruments:
temperature gauges,
bathometers
and a release valve,
maybe. But all I've got for tools is a yellow duck
with a green dot and three letters that turn red
when the water's too hot.

Our frogman is ever on pins to dive in, if not for 6-month-old limbs and leaping,
to the scuttle
of boats and stacking cups in primary colors
immersed in soaring white wakes,

as if everything but the bathtub were an enormous outboard motor
and his vim and arms propellers—
knowing nothing of hydrodynamics
and evidently untroubled
by it, and the showerhead is rainwater—new—and all it takes for one lavish
smile and a pause which gathers eye-filled awe.

So quiet, you can feel a heartbeat in the optic nerve.

Apart from the dapple of spray and the mirth
of a water god—
festooned in finest beads,
mercurial eyes, themselves, cerulean
seas, bareback and stunt-riding an oarfish—
all there is, is cerulean to see—

before the cloudburst of laughter and a mouthy grin
that for a moment kills
all our talk of mildew
forming below the soap-rack or the crumble of wall plaster bits swelling paint bubbles
like sarcomas.

Starbucks

She presumes much. Including her right to order with an imperative. She says, “Frappuccino;” no please, like Slobodan Milosevic ordering a hit.

As nonchalant as that,
but with conditions: *Grande*, half-caf, Splenda, nonfat, double-blended, no whip. Baristas, taught not ever to cock a brow or roll an eye, are automatic with tact

even to a no-please-Slobodan-Milosevic ordering a hit. Grin back nonchalant as that, while pulling shots of espresso for mixing in artificial sugars,

cups of 1% and ice.

Whips it twice. Never so much as a cock of a brow or roll of an eye. Just automatic tact.

The *hiss*? The hiss is a byproduct of pistons, but the distillate of Baristas as far back in time

as Turin, who, even then when new, wearied of pulling shots for mixing in sugars, 1% and ice. And counter demarcations. And sidedness. And tact is all a disguise.

So, summoned a hiss.

The hiss! The hiss is a byproduct of pistons. The distillate of Baristas as far back in time as 1884 pouring forever since 6 AM, the depth of a double, now at the brim.

No time for a piss.

The counter-demarcations, sidedness, and tact, extracted before summoned back as a hiss.

Forget froth. Forget *crema*. Forget it’s little more than what can be emulsified from *the grind*.

It’s 1884 pouring forever, since 6 AM—the depth and breadth of a double disguises piss.

Frappuccino goggles are quite unlike beer-goggles, or rose-colored spectacles, she’ll find.

She forgets it’s little more than grind. Forgets the grind altogether. Then recalls only the grind when handed her *Grande*-half-caf-Splenda-nonfat-double-blended-no-whip-Frappuccino-goggles.

Everything’s tinged so dingy, quite unlike the view through rose-colored glasses, she finds.

With an exclamative, she says, “It’s not right!” Excluding the Barista, everyone assumes the Frappuccino.

In the Third Grade There Was No Slouching

or rat-tails or poor penmanship. Miss Moss-Ayad wouldn't stand for it.
A far cry from now in the backyard, cheeks on the ledge

of a seat. Shoulders slumped.
Sinking.

Watching a siskin on a Boxelder as upright as any siskin.
Same demeanor, same posture as every siskin I've ever seen.

And on a wire, a siskin, as upright as any siskin.
Same demeanor. Same posture.

Same as every other siskin ever on any Boxelder tree.
Neither bird with deference in display, nor

admiration of the other, nor appropriate inferiority
complex. Rather stood as equals.

As if neither siskin had ever read
Darwin's notes from the *H.M.S. Beagle*, nor considered their genetic favorability quotient.

Didn't know they were competitors, even.
For the early worm. For seed. For cloacal kisses.

Not a single siskin pointing an outstretched wing singing,
"Nanna nanna boo-boo," or cheering itself, "Rah rah sis boom bah."

Or giving one, or the other, the bird.
If so, the vantage from my lawn-chair might be something other than a backyard perch.

Might be the front-yard, where I got my ass kicked
the first time right before sprinting into the house all weepy-eyed

frantically rifling for something to level the odds—a baseball bat, perhaps.
Came out swinging an *Encyclopedia Britannica* before the wind

got knocked out of me. The slump.
The din of cackling cocks and hens disco dancing in a ring-around, a nosedive.

Voight-Kampff

They're just questions, Leon. Shall we continue?
—Blade Runner

What form does the interaction take? Is it local to spacetime? Does the soul respect gauge invariance or Lorentz invariance? Does the soul have a Hamiltonian?

Can you carry it like a seven from the one's to the ten's place,
or apply to it the rules of operation?
Like neurosurgery with a skull-punch and rongeur. An orbitoclast.
Retractors. Drill bits and bulldog forceps.
How grown convinced of the soul's whereabouts
in that globe-like sphere of calculation,
necessitates excavation
from frontal lobe through to medulla oblongata—
sifting sulci and squishing gray matter through fingers.

Say it's your birthday. Someone gives you a calfskin wallet. How do you react?

Do you think of Auschwitz-
Birkenau—its piles of children's shoes? If they might be calfskin, too.
If the wallet's a recycled or salvaged shoe.
Do you think of Josef Mengele? As he spliced together the Jew twins, stupefied
and deprived of painkillers—sewed them surgically
together at the intersection of their fetal embrace, one face stuck
staring at the other—the dead watching the dead like opposing
mirrors and the “Angel of Death”
in betwixt wearing wingtips, and looking so dapper
holding a *Gauloises* and a trifold pocketbook—
then smiling mawkishly at the stitch-work on his lovely, new specimen.

You've got a little boy; he shows you his butterfly collection plus the killing jar. What do you do?

Do you excuse the swastika as Jain dharma?
Do you tell him you are mad at him, but not enough to kill him?
Place your hand on top of his head. Tell him, “But it was a close call,
son.” Tell him to love one another, to love his brother *sans* soul
because you couldn't find it rooting around in his skull.
Or would you pulverize
the poor butterfly before your little boy's eyes?
Put it in a *molcajete* to make of it guacamole
Tell him it's energy,
tell him to look for the last wing-beat
flittering off into the immaterial.
Tell him to add some more lime juice. Then wipe the corners of his mouth,
his cheeks and chin.

Can you describe in single words, only the good things that come to mind about theoretical physics?

Like models. I hear it's much like playing with models
(though, don't you detest it when your fingertips get super-glued together)

except that the cosmos is trimmed down a bit—
just enough to put it on a chalkboard. Is that a lot?

Let's say, you're in a desert walking along in the sand when all of a sudden you look down...

Do you see spirit particles—iridescent and irrefutable?
If so, do you conceal them in a sand dune?
Or dust them beneath the carpet. Or turn them over like a turtle?
*The turtle laying on its back, its belly baking in the hot
sun beating its legs trying to turn itself over. But
it can't, not without your help.*

But you're not helping. Why is that?

You say it's to do with electrons minding their p's and q's.
You say it's to do with the Dirac equation. "It's complicated,"
you say, "Don't fret the details."
A bit too much like the Holy Roman Empire before that *bupkes*,
Luther, came along and spoiled
the whole ball of wax. Just gave it away for free, for anybody to grasp.
Perhaps it is puerile. Perhaps it doesn't require a PhD
the way a relativistic quantum mechanical wave equation does.
But can you imagine a child sitting on Dirac's lap?
Can you hear the lap saying, "Let them come to me like one of these";
hear it say, "I belong to such as these"?

In a magazine you come across a full-page photo of a nude soul.

It is emaciated.

You show the picture to your spouse who likes it and hangs it on the wall. The soul is lying on a bearskin rug.

On the wall because it's otherwise so natural and easy to neglect.
On a bearskin rug because, naked and malnourished, it's a tad chilly.

One last question. You're watching an old movie. It shows a banquet in progress, the guests are enjoying raw oysters. The entree consists of boiled dog stuffed with rice. The raw oysters are less appetizing to you than a dish of boiled dog.

Unfed, the soul is ravenous, and dog-hungry.

There Is No Poetry Fit

for Everett Scott Anderson (March 30, 2012 – May 27, 2012)

for a dead boy baby a dead baby boy & none
too old & not at all too old & not
for lack of material either not
for time the poetic moment needs no time
time is immaterial only stillness & a dis-
tillation for the boy distilled the boy whose
time has passed & passed away so still the boy now lies & still the boy
smiles the boy you say & laughs you say ten times his size /
& the soul melts away for his jowls
plump jowls so stuffed with *& the soul melts away*
for his smile & *you will weep & wail /*
for his joy so small & so counted by the hours
so tragic ours the hours & ours that pass away