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Philip Fried

A Few Simple Simons

Now, in your mind, place your hands on your head,
take three giant steps, hop twice,
jump forward, and posit—
no need to believe in—an ur-Simon
whose simple say-so
commanded in the Void the mutual
annihilation of particle and anti-particle,
with scarcely a fumble or hiccup and who,
though himself annihilated in the Big Bang,
somehow abides in the background radiation.

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A boy whose father's fragile ego
prompts him to slap and wallop
brings to this game an alert, jittery
need to obey commands double quick while not
getting off on the wrong foot
and, with his whole existence poised on tiptoe,
will hear encrypted
directives in a world that echoes with Simon,
hidden decrees in a mockingbird's song
or a cricket's stridulation.

*

We stand at attention, eyes on the screen, awaiting
the moves our Simon-in-Chief will order, while

in this intermission,
consulting with his heavily medaled band
of uniforms in a room besieged with maps,
he meditates, ponders, mulls, and reflects,
and the pundits purr with insightful commentary,
running scenarios, kicking the tires of options,
touting that boot-camp maneuver,
the side-straddle-hop.

*

Though universal and proverbial—
in Egypt, a General; in Italy, a Dance-Master—
he too had a childhood that seemed eternal.
It was then this folk hero devised the game,
first playing it solo,
lying back in a starlit meadow of speculation
concerning a twin in Alpha Centauri—
perfectly other, in perfect synch with him.
Yes, dreaming in light-years darkly was Simon's invention. . . .
Now, spin around twice to face yourself, wave good-bye.

Philip Fried's work has appeared in many publications, including *Tin House*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, and *Partisan Review*. He has published six books of poetry, the latest being *Interrogating Water* (Salmon, 2014) and has collaborated with photographer Lynn Saville on a book of poems and photographs, *Acquainted with the Night*. He is the editor of *The Manhattan Review*.