

On The Matter of Bed

(after reading 'Science, A History', John Gribbin)

Of course, bed is sweet snuggery, swaddling and dreams, and yet
some of us feel,
(especially in winter), this cosy dozing is also driven by a sense
of duty –
to our creative urges, the public good etc. Here in the cot, basic
images

can breed sensational ideas e.g. prone one cold day, watching a fly
buzz round
a corner of his room, Descartes saw that, at any point in time, the
fly's position could
be depicted by just three numbers – the first recorded mating
of algebra

with geometry, giving birth to generations of very smart offspring,
with unusual names –
like quantum and relativity. (Later, forced to leave his bed at five
in the blasted Swedish castle,
to give lessons to a princess, Descartes caught a chilly cold, and
quickly died.)

Madame Curie didn't discover radium in bed, as far as I know, but
doubtless
she and Pierre – brilliant together – stretched under the covers,
aglow in each
other's arms – would sometimes whisper of recent experiments
and findings.

Of course, horizontalism is not essential. Some found inspiration
not in bed
but bad weather: take Franklin risking his kite in a storm, or Bacon
rushing out
to stuff the chicken with snow, (both dying, in bed, from the
consequences).

Derrida is different, seemed to write nowhere else but in bed;
tangling with sheets,
gaps in the text, scribbling, erasing, never sure what he means.
Coming upon signs
of leftover croissant (and traces of jam) – he defers, and defers, his
moment of rising.

Not many artworks have been made in bed, (due to turps, chisels
etc.), yet models
are often rendered on them. Michelangelo painted the high ceiling
with his head
leaning back, so technically the Creation and Fall can be viewed as
bed related.

Extreme sports are difficult in bed, though once I did watch one
shoot the rapids.
And while the ascent of Everest didn't actually occur in bed, surely
this very vertical
dream was conceived on the level – in a warm dry safe downy
cuddly place.

Poets, lately, don't spend enough time in bed: earn their crusts by
moving furniture not
hearts, answer phones not desires, change nappies, buy businesses,
run the world.
Day's end, pencil and paper by the pillow, they pray their muse
is in the mood.

More than a million wonders occur in bed, (apart from the
obvious, such as a hot
water bottle and a blissful night's sleep), and writing this poem –
that could never
be expressed by three numbers, (or even four) – is simply one
of them.

Sandy Fitts