Three Poems about Galileo

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THREE POEMS ABOUT GALILEO

Now this tickling is all in us, and not in the feather, and if the animate and sensitive body be removed, it is nothing more than a mere name.

Galileo

1.

He puts the spiny feather against the statue’s kneecap and slides it up the thigh around toward the buttocks and over the soft skin made out of stone.

“The impassive flesh,”
our Galileo sighs— “the flesh that’s so exciting unless you’re made of stone; the flesh that’s so excited unless it’s made of stone; the flesh, what is the flesh? what is its corollary: the golden sense of touch?”

He puts the spiny feather up to his nose and twirls the tip inside his nostril. He puts

a flakey alka seltzer on the statue’s outstretched tongue which doesn’t salivate or tremble. The tablet doesn’t foam or bubble like an alka seltzer should.

It sits there: white, immobile.
“Remember,” says his inquisitioner,
“the feather didn’t tickle;
the alka seltzer
didn’t foam or bubble.

I didn’t see
the seven moons of Jupiter
revolve inside the tiny lens
of what you call your telescope.

I didn’t take
my golden opportunity
to flex my ancient knees
and shade my eyes from this room’s light.

I didn’t choose
to look into the chiarascuro future
which you had painted on the lens
of what you call your telescope.

It wasn’t as real as this room’s flesh.

(Though it was clever, I’ll admit,
to play with the illusion
of a world that proves your system . . .)”
3.

Then letting his unfinished thoughts
drop with a clatter from his crooked knees
the inquisitioner got up
and left the room
where Galileo was interred—the room
which he defined as “Galileo’s room, the room
where Galileo’s laws apply, the room
where Galileo will be endlessly detained”—

hoping to pull the wool of an idea
across the concrete world
while eyes as real as his looked on.