

### 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 spiney 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 spiney 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.

2.

“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.