

Five Poems

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In the Land of “Let Me Roll It To You”

In the history of physics, it was clear by 1907 that the atom
was substantially empty space.

I call my teenage son, who is in New York. “I’ve been playing Lake Street Dive’s
cover, *Let Me Roll It*, since you’re not here,” I tell him.

“*Someone’s* got to,” he says.

Every morning, he used to play *Let Me Roll It* and *I Don’t Mind*

by James Brown, live at the Apollo in 1962, as loud
as his speakers could take the sound.

This morning, I woke to the absence of his music, my dreaming
substantially empty space.

I had been wondering fiercely about the voice within—how
to follow it at all costs no matter where it takes me?

In the wake of empty space, I walk streets through morning light,
end up in a dry river bed, sand deep, the street merging into river

sand, arroyo past low slung houses, ragged cottonwoods.

When I look up the street sign says *Griffin Street*.

I lean into a wall, glance over, and there, on someone’s mailbox:

Au Griffon, a little sculpture, like the one beside the doorway

to the Chette Shop in Paris, 1901. My theory on the empty space
in an atom—that’s what the Griffins were supposed to be guarding.

The secrets got by them, each slow discovery added up.

“I’m in Strand Book Store,” my son says, “what Hume should I buy?”

My encounter with Hume was brief, that military expedition
to Brittany in 1747, during which he was working on his thoughts

on Events—they are either *caused* or not and sometimes we can figure out which.

History begins as empty space, either written or not written,

created or not created, and in that arena the physicists watched
the atoms in all their spatial glory and too witnessed

the electrons jumping their orbit. According to Hume, the moral evil allowed
by God on earth is “beyond reason” and therefore beyond philosophy.

At the unknown interview in the foyer, Griffins guarding, they were playing
Let Me Roll It—even though the song wasn’t written yet, even though

my son wasn’t born yet. If your son went to war and died for his country.
If Rutherford disintegrated a nitrogen atom into an oxygen atom

in 1918, and by 1932 had accessed forces not mechanical, by splitting an atom.
We used to ask, “Are you worthy of the music you listen to?”

a challenge we welcomed, the answer usually “no,” as music opens questions
of *sublime mystery* akin to Hume explaining the snake in the garden.

Really, *What isn’t beyond reason?* in the end.

In Answer To The Question

I once saw several horses dawning white
at dawn and I once saw

the terrace of the lions, time receding
so quickly heaven and earth were joined

together at the altar in the corner of the city park
sunlight cathexis

it had been holy

all of it, sacred

every time
I looked at you

all of time, all arrived

as an *auto-de-fé*—an *act of faith*
to be burned at the stake
to give yourself to love

Invisibles

Alone with the shaft of light
 from the hallway, smoky
haze of cigarette smoke
 as figures walk by, the voice
of Walter Cronkite in the background.

Alone and invisible, a clear visage walking
 through walls.

say: illusion
say: body and blood
say: born of a woman
say: you see me

 but did I ever argue to be seen?

Alone with moontime, luna, selene, lua, lune,
 mirror of all peoples,
mirror of light,
 turn around and fight for your life.

Night Tone

I parachute in
memorize the map

descend the garden path
in the dancing shadows of the willow

infiltrate

the old military base still live with mines
trees growing out of the interstate

what seemed solid, the brick building we lived in,
the street corner I waited on to hold my child's hand—
vanished in a breath

night all around, rain falling, I hear a crack—
a tree plummets to the road right before me

but I'm still standing as though
all of space-time is exquisitely

balanced
between existing or not

The Last Thing

If this is the last thing
you write?

What world?

Only a feeling,
not language.

A bowing down.

