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Billy Williams

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# Democritus' Onion

by Billy Williams

The story goes that Democritus sliced  
an onion and nailed his atoms to the great  
chopping board of truth, proving with a geometry  
of inside turned out that all's matter  
and void. A simple culinary chore defined  
the course of Western government and science.



The question, though, remains—why did Democritus  
slice his onion in the first place?

Perhaps, some beauty  
of Abdera twisted elder braids as her philosopher  
stirred the slices golden in olive oil  
and wore his linen chiton loose, belted with a buckle  
of ram's horn.

Perhaps he softened her with strains  
of his aulos, then revealed her Pythagorean beauty  
as he drew a tetractys of the decad  
across the soft arc of her dark belly.

“Your navel,”  
he whispered, “is the lead goose of this little delta,  
mirrors this other one with its firm  
uncuttable perfection.”

But more likely, he ate the onion raw  
alone with his equations for converging  
lines along a simple planar surface,  
then turned in early, dreaming of atoms,  
the wrestling invisibilities of his body,  
and the tiny, iron souls of magnets.

