

Jefferson Street School

I came here to learn.
Kindergarten captive,
daily the unseen line redrawn,
chalked skin,
a toe dragged in red dust.

Repeat after me, Mrs. Lavoie said,
her talcum voice a soft drift in my ears.
Invader's language spilled from my lips.
In fourteen hundred ninety-two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

I am the constant witness.
Death, destruction,
every chapter an arrival:
Spanish, French, English.
My own tribe nameless,
discarded, the page blank.

Bruised, I acknowledge those
commemorative gifts; two books,
black on Sunday, blue on Monday.
Worn covers proclaimed reverent use,
recitation, *praise Him from whom all blessings flow.*
Centuries come and gone.
I memorize conquest,
recount murderous exploits,
tales of that one you call explorer.
Columbus, thief of human beings,
collector of nations,
whose name will never be forgotten.
Immortal now in stone and story,
a myth summoned year after year,
the calendar an invocation.

No longer a child, I greet this false idol.
Hand pressed to bronze flesh,
fingers trace polished granite, carved words,
language that was never my own,
yet all I've ever known.

I do this In Remembrance,
meus animus in incendia.
This soul's measure lost in
a chronology of symbols,
five times one hundred Beaver Moons,
all those pieces of Earth claimed,
flag waving under threat of war,
and more war.

Lesson number one, my body the geography,
altered terrain, an echo
resounding beneath the brilliant October moon,
fading in the morning sun that rises
on Columbus Day.

Lesson number two,
memory resides not in my head but in my veins,
more than the mind can describe.
A silken web of souls, a drum pulse,
a river of blood flooding the continent.

Must there always be
the wraith called Suffering,
the wolf called War?
This river of blood may one day
nourish the birth of a new story,
a history of peace, the soul of a people.

