

Rick Campbell

Episcopal Church in Navajoland, Bluff, Utah

Tonight we take the chapel for poetry.
Long ago the Lord's imperialism, Spaniards,
Fray Somebody, missed this corner
that was ours before we were the land's
and the *Book of Common Prayer* came
to fill the Void. Not tonight, unless these poems,
this language too, is Manifest Destiny
and there's no escaping its long bloody
trail. Tonight, I'm raving, weak and cold,
recovering from cancer, wondering when my time
comes can I hold the pages steady and read
my words in this feeble light. Frost again,
shaking as Camelot is born. This chapel's
made for morning sunlight breaking
through high windows, streaming

across the altar.

Tonight, just one
recessed lamp above a podium, we begin
with Indian poets from Santa Fe.
Bitsui chants Diné, his introduction, his place
in the world. I sit up straight, forget cancer,
my worry and listen to this music I can't translate
but know without doubt. This is who I am

he says.

I do this too.

This is who I am; this is where I come from—my river,
my barges, my mill, my smokestacks, my town
full of soot. These are my people—workers, pasty,
fat and slow. These are their names—old world
Europe, too many syllables—consonants mingled,
mutilated, truncated by Ellis Island clerks.
I've melded them with loblolly
and palm; the Ohio carp now alligators.
The mother I mourned is the daughter

I love.

Navajo songs now.

My time will come; I will shake and flutter,
strain to see and give those gathered here

my names. Outside, in moonlight, graves.
Markers, Christian—many hung with cloth, beads,
feathers—make a bridge between worlds. Blue
coats, bullets, sin too, but tonight I confess
we are poets. Tonight, we are all priests.

