

We Exist

Janice Gould

You write to me: 'Indians must be
the loneliest people on Earth.

Loneliness

from our histories,
our losses,
even things we cannot name
which are inside us.

We write to counteract a history
that says we are a dead,

a conquered people.

It is like a shout in a blizzard.

We shout

to prove we exist.'

In snow that December

At Wounded Knee, Sioux people
lay dead, dying

their mouths frozen open.

Soldiers dug a ditch,

dumped the bodies in.

Soil crumbled over them, then
their hearts fed on roots and stones,
their mouths filled with dust.

It is dawn.

The daughter lies on her bed,
legs drawn up,
her fist in her mouth.

I am poisoned, she thinks,
beneath my heart, I feel it.

This is what it means

to be Indian.

My mother is not here.

They mined her

for her grief,

they followed each vein,
invading every space,
removing, they said, the last
vestige of pain.

At dawn,

this time of prayer,
the daughter
in a voice mined

from a sickness of soul,

tries to name,

to make words

which say

we exist.