

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 30

June 2006

Gravel Language

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Recommended Citation

Battiste, Michele (2006) "Gravel Language," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*. Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 30.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol6/iss1/30>

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Battiste: Gravel Language

GRAVEL LANGUAGE

Michele Battiste

Not all rocks. Sharp-edged
flats of shale that skid
across still water are notorious
for their one unintelligible syllable
as they sink. Boulders, too,
are mostly mute: resigned
to landscape instead of song, their glorious
vibratos hardened and choked.
And while cliffs and promontories, scarps
and reefs won't shut up, calling
like swallows across vast spaces, enraptured
with echo and wave, their language
is a privileged one, coded and closer
to God.

See that child squatting
the curb in front of the small brick house,
her jeans muddied red to the knees
in Georgia clay? She's speaking
with the gravel. She's in such deep
communion with the gravel she doesn't hear
her mama call from the front door.

The gravel says, "refugee."
The child answers, "yes."
The gravel begs, "rescue us."
The child shoves fistfuls in her pockets,
not doubting the seams will hold.
She never misunderstands the gravel. She
doesn't understand her mama's exasperation
at the door or at the hamper.
Gravel has been through so much, she thinks.
I can't be its only friend.