

## Janisse Browning / TWO POEMS

### RACE TO CULTURE

I see  
see this child swingin' in the playground  
jumpin' rope, singin'  
    "who stole the cookie from the cookie jar"  
light as a feather  
                                yeah  
but she always tensed up when they picked  
who'd go first to jump rope  
'cause they'd all put their fists in a circle and  
someone'd go  
    "eenie, meanie, miney, mo..."  
                                would they say "tiger"  
                                or... "tigger"...or...  
Even, even when she was in grade four  
Teacher walked in and said  
    "we're going to learn about multiculturalism today"  
and he printed three words at the top of the blackboard  
    Caucasoid...Mongoloid...Negroid  
(and this was the '70s when *Black* was Beautiful)  
and he asked everyone, starting at the front of the class  
                                (Teacher had curly, red hair)  
working his way to the back of each row, he asked  
    which word they belonged to  
    which category they fit into  
and she got real scared  
then remembered her mom said she was "a quarter Indian"  
    (they didn't know about *First Nations* people back then  
    ...still don't)



## SUNDAY MORNING JINGOISM

three sunday mornings  
    in  
    a  
    row  
going to the baptist church  
all us kids marching in step,  
    in time  
in a circle 'round the chairs  
where we sat for sunday school  
preparing for easter's pageantry  
    numbly chanting,  
    singing from the hymnal:

    "onward christian soldiers  
        marching off to war  
        with the cross of  
(blonde-haired, blue-eyed, his-picture's-on-the-wall-for-proof)  
        Jesus  
        going on before  
        christ the royal master..."

master...mmmmmm...massa?  
sunday school Teacher telling us                   "put some spirit into it!"  
so she had us march around  
instead of sitting straight, hands neatly folded in our  
(the Church's) chairs

all these little soldiers  
marching in step,  
in time,  
naive, little war machines  
ready to fight for whatever cause...  
and didn't I wonder  
"who are we going to war with," or  
"why?"  
but was too shy to ask out loud, so  
marched around the wooden chairs  
with my battalion  
anyway  
upholding the tradition  
yes, all we like sheep have gone astray