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To Christopher Columbus - Your Fifth Voyage and Beyond

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To Christopher Columbus- Your Fifth Voyage and Beyond

David Beeching

You'd be surprised, Chris,
how many people now live
on this earth you concluded
is shaped like a pear,
astonished at cities
along coasts of islands
you thought Far Eastern.
But would you be surprised
at the fuss made over what remains
of your once red hair,
strong hands, adventurous self?

Chris, it seems your bones
were as restless in death as in life.
Valladolid could not hold you
for long. Diego took you back
over that four-hundred mile trek
you'd made by mule when you were old
and infirm, laid you down again
in Seville. It must have been too quiet
there in the monastery of Las Cuevas
de Triana for a wanderer like you,
too lacking in honors for one
whose demands had been so extravagant:
to receive a tithe of all transactions
with the Indies, to be Grand Admiral
and Viceroy and pass these titles
to your sons through all time to come.

Your fifth voyage across the sea -
three decades later - took your body
back to Hispaniola. Did you sleep well
as the ship rocked on those waves
you'd loved? Were you happy
to be stretched out in a lead tomb
on the Gospel side of the main chapel
in your new cathedral home
in Santo Domingo, Chris?

Did politics or your internal discontent
lead Archbishop Portillo to exhume you
- or part of you - once again,
send mold and bone to Havana?

Was it a final indignity, Chris, or a ploy
devised in your deteriorating brain
that caused your disintegrating remains
to be divided - some retrained
in Hispaniola when the rest were taken?

Almost a century later,
were your bones turning,
struggling to escape, suffering
from too long on one side of the ocean?
Did you haunt the Duke of Veragua,
give orders, 'til he arranged
to sail that box of bone and dust
back to old Seville, leaving
the world you wanted to govern?

Do you laugh when priests
and scholars argue
which is your real resting place?
Chris, are you forever restless,
awaiting your next stormy voyage?