You Never Could Have Known

You never could have known
That
We would know,
That we would grow into a writhing tide of tongues,
Forced to accept your brutal invitations to short-haired schools
With Black Robes pointing iron fingers through us like
The thorns of Jesus.
“It’s Good! It’s Good!” you said about your schools.
“Pray! Pray!” you said about your Cross.
But you never understood how good it was,
Or how hard we prayed—
Prayed for us, and preyed upon you.

Our preying has brought us the knowledge of language,
And it’s good... “It’s good!”
For you who were our Butchers, are now our bakers,
Our candlestick makers, no longer the takers of Land,
But the seekers.
You rock wearers and tree huggers,
You bird watchers and bear lovers.
You shoppers shopping for Indian bargains
In your microcosmic catalog of smudged fudge
And mints shaped like turtles wrapped in gold foil,
With flutes and ashen clamshells on the dashboard.
With empty dream catchers... You never stopped pointing fingers
Out of windows of your cars
As you collected trophies from your trip
To Santa Fe.
While the people knelt on blankets under the Portico
Of the Governor’s Palace,
Across the Plaza the adobe is illuminated with neon
And purple cowboy boots and golden idols and somewhere
On a balcony cafe, tourists flick cigarette ashes to the street below
While the old man holds up hands full of silver.
How could you know that we now know?
You never could have known.
It always was our own,
This waiting,
This patience and this time,
This good language of the school and the prayers.
Hear the sounds of words creeping in as you tip up your ears
With surprise . . . they pry apart your thoughts
Of Dartmouth, Yale, and Harvard,
As you shake your fists at our degrees.

"What have we done!"
"Why did we ever cut their hair?"
"Now . . . they know."
Doctors, Lawyers, Indian Chiefs,
Land claims, settlements, legal briefs . . .
"And now they have their own damn schools!"
"Not schools FOR them . . . But their own.
Before you know you know, they'll have their own damn stores
on the OTHER side of the plaza! And we'll be sitting on blankets!"
"God, why did we give them so much, when we had it all!"
"Now they talk about micro-business, incentive, profit . . . and
Worst of all . . . Co-operatives."
"After all we did."
"We could have killed them all,
Like Mr. Baum suggested before he
Dropped his house on the Witch."
(Wasn't that the same L. Frank Baum who wrote editorials exterminating human
feelings, who killed Indians with words, who provoked Wounded Knee with a pen?)

Still sitting in the cool shadows of the Portico,
knees turned sideways,
The eyes are looking up at the sunburned woman
With the baby stroller
"Yes, I make these earrings."
(So my children can fly to schools you never heard of!)
"How much?"
"$1.5"
"Will you take ten?"
"No."
News update: Today a consortium of Native American Investors locked the market on turquoise with a 10% overbid on Santa Fe retailers. Commercial property values decline. Native leaders say, "The only thing between us and them was the glass showcases, so we bought the glass showcases. They're our stores now."

You never could have known
That we would understand your demons more than you do.
Know more about your money and your God,
Know more about life and death without
The need to hug rocks.
How resentful you are to hear
A thousand years of laughter
When we show no smiles;
How bitter you must feel when the
Dog teaches the master,
Holding the slap-swollen hand
Between sharp tense jaws
— Not quite breaking the translucent skin;
How confused you must be sensing
Our Spirits snapping at your ankles,
Ungenerous rocks that won't hug back,
Grass that stands upright when the snow wind sleeps,
The gurgle of thunder against a green-bruised sky.

We know.
We know all about lightning and rain;
All about gnawing pain:
All about the sounds beneath sleeping lowered lids—
Dreams of children playing, women loving, men at war, dogs barking, birds screaming, kettles steaming, earth churning, beetles copulating, interest accruing, volcanoes lurking, trees blossoming, destruction, and the birth of cross-eyed babies.

We Know.
Uranium slag,
Children's sandboxes full of dead cactus,
Radioactive rainbows.
But counter-allegations
Justify your appropriations,
Your deceitful invitations,
And we hold back a smile . . . Knowing patience.
We never had clocks, but the heartbeat of Mother Earth Showed us the way,
Taught us about time.
You forgot to wind the clock.

JOEL MONTURE