

**DEAR JOHN WAYNE**

*Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa)*

August and the drive-in picture is packed.  
We lounge on the hood of the Pontiac  
surrounded by the slow-burning spirals they sell  
at the window, to vanquish the hordes of mosquitoes.  
Nothing works. They break through the smoke screen  
for blood.

Always the lookout spots the Indian first,  
spread north to south, barring progress.  
The Sioux or some other Plains bunch  
in spectacular columns, ICBM missiles,  
feathers bristling in the meaningful sunset.

The drum breaks. There will be no parlance.  
Only the arrows whining, a death-cloud of nerves  
swarming down on the settlers  
who die beautifully, tumbling like dust weeds  
into the history that brought us all here  
together: this wide screen beneath the sign of the bear.

The sky fills, acres of blue squint and eye  
that the crowd cheers. His face moves over us,  
a thick cloud of vengeance, pitted  
like the land that was once flesh. Each rut,  
each scar makes a promise: It is  
not over, this fight, not as long as you resist.

Everything we see belongs to us.

A few laughing Indians fall over the hood  
slipping in the hot spilled butter.  
The eye sees a lot, John, but the heart is so blind.  
Death makes us owners of nothing.  
He smiles, a horizon of teeth  
the credits reel over, and then the white fields

again blowing in the true-to-life dark.  
The dark films over everything.  
We get into the car  
scratching our mosquito bites, speechless and small  
as people are when the movie is done.  
We are back in our skins.

How can we help but keep hearing his voice,  
the flip side of the sound track, still playing:  
Come on, boys, we got them  
where we want them, drunk, running.  
They'll give us what we want, what we need.  
Even his disease was the idea of taking everything.  
Those cells, burning, doubling, splitting out of their  
skins.