

Voices From Inland Island

*An Elegy of the Black Hills
and the Little Bighorn*

Gary David

 Inland
Hills
Books

Voices From Inland Island:

An Elegy of the Black Hills and the Little Bighorn

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This book is dedicated in memory of Erling Duus (1940 – 2000)
—teacher, writer, mentor, friend—



“The Great Bear Sleeps at the Edge of the World”
Cover art by Dawn Senior-Trask, 2009

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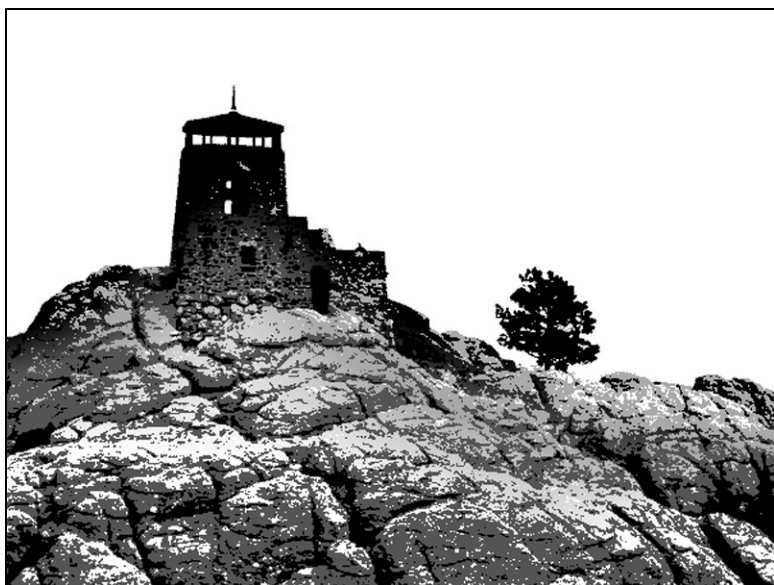
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Part One:

Voices Of the Black Hills



Preface

The Black Hills have been described as “an island of pine in a sea of prairie grass.” Only 125 miles long and 65 miles wide, this range nonetheless tends to exert a strange, mystical magnetism. An ineffable yet ineluctable force once drew both animal and human tribes from the surrounding parched plains—inward and upward. There they could breathe freely the bracing mountain air and pungent scent of pine or spruce. The Black Hills essentially served as a vast medicine wheel where diverse creatures seeking either refuge or visions communicated with spirits of earth and sky.

No longer are these gentle uplifts seen as a wilderness temple, however. Worship of the natural world, except to the radical environmentalist or self-avowed regionalist, seems completely out of step with the cosmopolitan commodifications of modern life. Billboards, gambling casinos, motorcycle rallies, and the overall playground atmosphere compete economically with logging trucks and strip mines. The clichéd tableau of Mount Rushmore has become *the* obligatory tourist stop in South Dakota.

The American Indians who most forcefully claimed this erstwhile holy oasis are called the Lakota. These people came from the Ohio Valley and lived for a period in the woodland area of Minnesota. In the early 18th century, the Ojibway and other indigenous groups pushed them out to the shortgrass prairies west of the Missouri River. At least, that’s the academic version of history.

Lakota oral tradition, on the other hand, tells a different story. The tribe's origin was instead *Paha Sapa*, literally "hills that are black." About this the Lakota are adamant. Various clans certainly made distant migrations during their long development. Still, this ecstatic warrior culture kept its central home-place alive through legends and ancient lore.

The granite and evergreen heart of what was known as the Great Sioux Reservation was guaranteed in perpetuity by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. A mere six years later, however, placer gold "in paying quantities" was discovered, and the treaty was summarily abrogated. This injustice ultimately triggered the last American gold rush.

Until closing in 2002, Homestake was the biggest, deepest gold mine in North America. Only 150 miles away is the tribe's current home—a veritable Third World nation inside the U.S. Over 85% of its members are unemployed and nearly 65% live below the poverty level. Despite this, in 1980 the Lakota unanimously rejected a multimillion-dollar settlement by the Supreme Court for purchase of the Black Hills. The tribe's efforts to regain the remaining federal land continue.

Voices From Inland Island focuses mainly on the 18th and 19th centuries. The book sprouted over twenty-five years ago during the summer of 1983, when I was just thirty. A resident of the region for a mere five years, I was the proverbial greenhorn. Nevertheless, making sense of this transformative landscape became my calling. Over the next dozen years the historical, mythological, and meditative dimensions of the work continued to grow.

My specific strategy was to search and research as extensively and deliberately as possible the territory I had chosen for my home. (The fact that anybody can "choose" a locale is both the blessing of our so-called freedom of opportunity and the curse of our rootless lifestyle.) Absorbing the topography, ecology, geology, and frontier history of the High Plains, I allowed the material to be shaped by both subconscious accretion and crafted revision. This series of poems evolved into primarily an exploration of place, but in the process they also became an explanation of race. In order to fully understand the Black Hills, I also had to try to re-create the way their first people perceived them.

Over 75 years ago D.H. Lawrence observed that America was haunted by the unappeased spirits of the Indian. Others have said that all native religion springs from the land. If these notions are true, then any regional writer is obliged to acknowledge the aboriginal spirit. Purveyors of political correctness might question my authority to construct a narrative that uses both the European American's chronicle and the Native American's circle. On the contrary, the antiphonal shifts from objective historical documentation to myths, chants, and lyric vision seek a dialectic that unites the two cultures in another spirit—that of reconciliation.

Today both Indian and non-Indian share legacies of the land. Regardless of ethnic background, we are imprinted with our particular geography and era. The Lakota were the first to assemble a medicine bundle filled with myths, memes, legends, and personal memories of the Black Hills—what French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called a *bricolage*. Anyone who genuinely recognizes their distinctive character, though, can be profoundly and permanently affected. Anyone who has ever climbed their highest peak to stand “at the Center of the World” and gaze upon their primordial beauty knows beyond a doubt that the land has spoken personally to him or her. Underlying the massive ruggedness of these mountains is an architectonic elegance. As soon as you grasp it, the geo-morphology of the Island Hills overwhelms you.

A sacred hoop rises in the eye of the mind and the eye of the heart, and within the still sea of the soul concentric ripples expand beyond the boundaries of knowledge or love. The Inland Island has spoken. It is the oldest voice on the continent. Consider yourself blessed if you have ever heard it.

Lines On The Medicine Wheel

“A medicine man has to be
of the earth, somebody who
reads nature as white men
read a book.”

Lame Deer

*The poem is a white path
the Earth makes
East to West
singing.*

*The Earth is a red poem
the feet make
North to South
dancing.*

*The 4 directions
the Flowering Tree makes
one: medicine
sweet to all
tongues.*

Citing The Island

“The American Indians hold their –places– as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind. Immigrants review the movements of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences, thereby placing history –time– in the best possible light.... Western European peoples have never learned to consider the nature of the world discerned from a spatial point of view. And a singular difficulty faces peoples of Western European heritage in making a transition from thinking in terms of time to thinking in terms of space. The very essence of Western European identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion; further it assumes that at a particular point in the unraveling of this sequence, the peoples of Western Europe became the guardians of mankind.” ¹

–Vine Deloria, Jr

“Just at the stone thrown into the water becomes the centre and cause of various circles, and the sound made in the air spreads itself out in circles, so every body placed within the luminous air spreads itself out in circles and fills the surrounding parts with an infinite number of images of itself, and appears all in all and all in each *smallest* part.” ²

–Leonardo Da Vinci

“The eye is the first circle; the horizon which forms it is the second; and throughout nature this primary picture is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world... The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outward to new larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force of the truth of the individual soul.” ³

–Ralph Waldo Emerson

“One of the paradigmatic images of creation is the island that suddenly manifests itself in the midst of the waves.... North American myths reveal how things happened in the beginning, *in illo tempore*. The first men lived for a certain time in the breast of their mother, that is, in the depths of the earth. There in the tellur abyss they led a half-human life; in some sense they were still imperfectly formed embryos.” 4.

—Mircea Eliade

“At the Center of the circle, uniting with a point the cross of the four directions of space and all the other quarternities of the Universe, is man. Without the awareness that he bears within himself this sacred center a man is in fact less than man.” 5.

—Joseph Epes Brown

“Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nest in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun goes forth and does down in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nations’ hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.” 6.

—Black Elk

“For tribal peoples of this region, the Hills are not important simply because of their great beauty. Harney Peak... is not the heart and focus of the Center merely because it is the highest peak and dominates the rest of the range when seen from the plains. The Center of the Earth is not an appellation which can be derived simply from an outward manifestation, demonstrable and articulate to the rational consciousness. Rather, the source of this belief lies in

a deep umbilical relationship whereby the body and soul of the people are attached in the very identity to the mountains, to the underground of Wind Cave from whence the people came, scaling upward to the granite peaks to look upon the new earth of creation. The Great Spirit, Wakantanka, and along with him the spirit of the ancestors are centered there more powerfully than at other places.” 7.

—Erling Duus

“The Black Hills area is in many respects one of the most fascinating in North America from the biological, particularly bio-geographic and taxonomic, standpoints. Several factors have contributed toward making the Hills unique biologically. The climatic variability; their geographic location, near the center of the continent; their isolation as a mountainous upthrust surrounded on all sides by the High Plains; and variable topography, have combined in this relatively restricted area to produce an extremely interesting and diverse flora and fauna. Here several biomes meet and overlap... a [western] Cordilleran element, the [southern] Great Plains element, the northern Coniferous element, and the eastern Deciduous Forest element. This overlapping of ranges of organisms belonging to several different geographic elements has resulted in the creation of a ‘whirlpool effect’ of distributions involving many taxonomic groups, both plant and animal.” 8.

—Sven Froiland

“The Black Hills is experienced by nearby Plains tribes as a natural altar, as space chosen by the universe to be a sacred place—that is, a place where the invisible and nonmaterial primal energy of the cosmos plunging into this material world does so from the four directions as elemental forces: thus, fire from the East, earth from the South, water from the West, and air from the North. These elementals meet within the crucible of the Black Hills and continue to form certain shapes, certain living structures on the mineral, vegetable, animal and human levels.” 9.

—Ron Goodman

“We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life: the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same. As Luther Standing Bear has said of his Lakota people, ‘We are the soil and the soil is of us’. The earth is the source and the being of the people, and we are equally the being of the earth.”¹⁰

—Paula Gunn Allen

*“Walled round with rocks as an inland island,
The ghost of a garden fronts the sea.”*¹¹

—Algernon Charles Swinburne

Prolog

Lakota Creation Legend

*Long long ago
(the story begins)
before there was fire
or light
or any other thing
or any idea
of time
there was Inyan.
His spirit
was Wakan Tanka
(the Great Mystery).
Hanhepi
(Sister Night
who later became
Grandmother Moon)
was there as well
but she was
nothing.
She was but
a dark echo
of darkness.
Inyan was soft
& shapeless
but he had all the powers
All the powers
were in his blood
& his blood was blue.
Still*

*Inyan was sad.
He wanted
someone else
to know
his Stone Dreamer songs
but he was alone.
Thus he decided
to divide himself
& sacrifice
a part of all his powers
to make
someone else.
Out of himself
he took
a part of all his blood &
a part of all his spirit
& spread it
over & around himself
in the form of a great disk.
He named the disk
Maka (Grandmother Earth)—
the sacred circle ¹.
of the world.
To make her
he had to take
so much of his blood &
so much of his spirit
out of himself
that he shrank
& got hard
& no longer had
all the powers.
Still
Inyan was glad.*

*His body turned
to stone.
His head turned
to see
someone else.
His heart knew
he would no longer be
alone. 2.*

*Out of Maka &
out of Inyan (now known
as Grandfather Rock)—
out of the blue
waters of life &
out of himself
Skan (Grandfather Sky) took
a part of the spirit
& made it
in the form of a great disk.
He named the disk
Wi (Grandfather Sun)—
who warmed Maka
& gave all things
their shadow spirits
& gave his maker
the red-gold Day
Grandmother Moon mirrors
in silver silence.*

*At the Center
Grandmother Earth rises
with Grandfather Rock
to see
the first sunrise again*

*& again. Spreading
her fingers to catch the warm sap
of life seed
her body is reborn
every morning.
Dew gathers
cool & milky
bead by bead
as sweat upon her.
The air flows clear
as a meadowlark's song.
Upon her arms
every hair vibrates
pale & fur-like
with life breath.
The flesh of her throat
is frail & tender
as lavender petals
of the pasqueflower.
At the Center
sweet upon her tongue
is a bright echo
of Grandfather Sun.
Out of herself
blossoms golden
the Creation.
Out of her heart
the Heart of Everything
That Is (the Island Hills)
will sing
again & again
that long
long ago
song.*

**These Were The First They Ever Saw
(Headwaters Of The Mississippi, Early 18th Century)**

From the Land Where the Sun Comes Up
hand to hand a dead-weight flesh
began to appear: black
as the greatest fear of the deepest
water, harder than the house
a turtle carries—heavy & thick
as a river rock. Cold
as fish skin, this flesh
shaped to cook in—
or the Thunder Stick which struck
lightning in the heart
of winter. How the years (which swoop 3.
with the arc of the spotted eagle)
began to appear—one
in front of the other, to begin
the undoing of the Sacred Hoop
of the People, no one knows
for sure. Why this dark flood
of odd goods was chain-linked
to impure river water, even
the elders fail to remember.

*The first Hairy Ones come
rushing upon the waters
of the East, the waters
where evil spirits live.
Cheeks blushing like rosehips,
their faces are covered
—& even their chests!—
with the stiff & curly hair
we know only between our legs—*

*hair the color of grass
 when the snow geese fly
 south. Eyes clear
 as lakes when the Cloud People
 leave. Legs white
 as the soft bellies
 of the Fish People. Smell
 sweet as the sizzle
 of bison lard. Their speech
 sounds sharp & hard
 like broken rocks
 while our tongue is smoke
 on the South Wind.
 They bring many wonderful things
 & great medicine
 that makes us afraid.
 They are Wakan
 & tell us our thoughts
 come from inside our heads
 instead of deep within the heart
 of everything
 we see & hear. . . . We will
 think about this.*

Over the long winters
 they began to keep a count:

1707-'08—Many-Kettle-winter

“A man –1 man– named Corn, killed
 his wife, 1 woman, and ran off.
 He remained away for a year and
 then came back, bringing
 three guns

with him. He told the People
that the English
who had given him these guns
(which were the first known
to the Dakotas)
wanted him to bring friends
to see them.
Fifteen of the People
went with him and
when they returned
brought home lots
of kettles and pots.
These were the first
they ever saw.”⁴

More medicine would follow: flint & fire
steel, ax heads, lance blades, knives, brass
pails & bells, silver buckles, peace medals
stamped with the pale simulacra
of heads of state staring back
the fashion—sober & defiant.

After counting every winter
for seven years, the Allies⁵
went with the Sun toward “the place
you always face,” the land of the Omahas.⁶
Around a spring in a small ravine, they found
tracks never seen before. Then
out of the underbrush stepped
a wondrous Four-Leggèd One!
Swishing its tail & long hair
flashing on its noble neck
like fire, the whole world stopped
in one breathless hush
to look. With lashes hovering
over moist brown globes, she stared

at the Two-Leggèd Ones
what seemed centuries, trying
to sense the meaning
of this moment. She neighed
gently, nuzzled the bole
of a nearby willow, & lowered
her head to graze new grass.
The Two-Leggèd Ones lifted
a deer hide lariat
over her muzzle, & a great
equestrian nation was born. 7.

In lands to the West
water seemed a god—much loved
but little seen. Gunfire
was another power, spreading
from the East in the hands
of red & white alike.
Whoever held the gun,
it was the other's
turn to move. Two made a war.
The Sioux (who ranged as far
east as the Great Lakes,
some say) took flight
from the Ojibway near
Mille Lacs in what is now
Minnesota. They had to leave
their timber game, wild
rice & elderberries, fish. Trade
canoes for travois & horses, houses
of earth & bark for light
buffalo hide tipis. Sage
replaced sassafras. Shortgrass
thinned out the dark
forest from their memories. Rain
that used to brood all day

would flash-flood with the lightning
eye of the Thunder Bird—then run

dry. Looking out
across the High Plains (as once
the Old World gazed
toward the New), the Sioux
could not have guessed
the immensities, nor the time
so quick it would take
their sea of light
to be fished out—the buffalo
reduced to a freak show. In the wake
of their journeys, visions
of origins surface:
Didn't we once pass this place
on the Red Road ages ago? In the way
of the dying Sun, the holy
Island Hills rise
again –midnight blue in a mist
of gold & maroon, silver & violet—
float in the air: a dream
so old the blood can barely remember
this paradise, this eye of the heart
of time, this timeless Center
we've come all this distance to
call our home.

Book I

1.

**The Ring Being Broken
(Verendryes' Expedition, 1742–3)**

Out! Leave the Missouri
behind, the sun & the night
before. You blink
at something black &
double-take to shake out
of your head the mirage.
The mind could foresee nothing
to break the prairie's gently
swelling presence you became
over the miles one
breath with: the opening
of the telescope
out. The drive
west confirms your eyes'
insight as they pick the Black Hills
out of the haze & place
them on the map—as once
they were hard put
to do at first gaze, confusing
“The Dreary Black Hills” (the song)
of the Laramie Range with what

you see now. The brothers Verendrye out
to find the western sea
might have been the first
white men to see this sleight
of mind near the Belle Fourche
(or “Foosh” we’ll come to say
in a century or so) New Year's Day,
1743. The order of things

of the mind would reign
over the eyes, since their red guides
(the Gen de l'Arc) led them no farther
than Bear Butte off the eastern shores
of Wita Paha. The Island Hills
would remain
secretly green for years
of the fires in the blood to come.

“...we found ourselves in sight
of the mountains. The number of warriors
passed two thousand, which with their families made
a considerable company moving steadily
over the great prairies where the wild game is
in abundance. Every night there were only songs
and yells, for no other reason
than to persuade us to accompany them
to the war. I resisted
always by saying that we were there
to pacify the country
and not to stir it up.”¹

On his return the voyageur Verendrye stood
on a bluff looking down on the spot
where the Bad merges with the Missouri &
claiming the whole territory for his own crown
“...said to the savages, who did not
know of the tablet of lead
that I had placed in the earth,
that I was placing these stones
as a memorial of those who had come to
their country. I had very much wished to take
the altitude of this place, but our astrolabe
had been out of service since the beginning
of our journey, the ring
being broken.”²

The Great Hoop Of Lakota Land

Without the Circle:

*Space is merely areal.
Square miles & straight lines
to traverse posthaste.
The High Plains a gross mass
of sagebrush & buffalo grass.
A dull ache of endless acres where
a human life fades
into the backdrop of a greater drama.
Upon the horizon storm clouds loom large
while the human heart runs scared
as a jackrabbit on blacktop.*

Without the Circle

The word is chaos.

Within the Circle:

*The Word is Cosmos.
The temenos of the temple.
The consecration of Nature.
The place all relations begin
& return to: how close
to the Center of the Great Lodge
are you? How vast
the heart of the Great Spirit!*

Within the Circle:

Space is surely real.

*As holy as Mecca or Jerusalem
the Bo Tree Mount Meru or the Vatican
so Wita Paha had been
the Center
of the Great Hoop
of the Sioux Nation.
The revelation
of the Island Hills as
a Circle within
the Circle
of the High Plains makes
the Creation
of space
sacred:*

*to the West the Bighorn Mountains
& their formidable barrier*

*to the North the Yellowstone River
& its colder border*

*to the East the Missouri River
(down through Nebraska's Sand Hills)
& the trees' increased encroachment*

*to the South the North Platte River
& the other horse tribes
of the High Plains.**

*All the Gods
living within
the Great Lodge—*

[*See map, p. 32.]

*all the People
living within
the Great Lodge—
all the Spirits
living within
the Great Lodge
are one
living within
the Great Spirit.*

2.

**A Great Noise Is Heard Frequently
(Lewis & Clark, 1804–5)**

Gliding along the glitter-rich rim
of paradise, the Corps of Discovery
made the ascension of the Missouri
an essential assay for the soul
of the new American territory.

“The black mountains he Says
is verry high, and Some parts of it has Snow
on it in the Summer great quantities
of Pine Grow on the Mountains, a great Noise
is heard frequently
on those Mountains. No beever
on Dog river, on the Mountains
great numbers of goat, and a kind
of animale with large circular horns,
this animale is nearly the size
of an Elk. White bears
is also plenty” ³.

A great Noise is heard frequently
in the heart, in the shaking valley of
the shadow, says he
(the voyageur Jean Valle) & we
call it

History
in the making.

Aye, back then on the verge
of Romantic feats of imagination, out
to where black mountains’ thunder

pierces clear air, unbound
wonder unrolled west
of the wide river—the sacred
mist to merge in the mind
with the pure dew of Nature.
On the port side the lay
of the land grew wild: with rising swells
of breath the hills heaved
red breasts of a virgin beneath
evening sky pastel & still
as dry paint upon the canvas
tent of the soul. With darkness coming
a Ferris wheel of stars forever
moving turned upon the sole, unmoving
point of no return to vanish
without dimension, weightless
fulcrum of evolution, an Axis
of the Unknown, eternal
spark singing at the heart
of the flint-hard Island rising
unseen from the inland sea
of dreams—lighthouse beams
amid wind-combed waves
of buffalo grass & brome.

“... into a fine leavel plain extending
as far as the eye can reach....
this scenery already rich
pleasing and beautiful
was still farther heightened
by immense herds of Buffaloe,
deer, Elk and Antelopes
which we saw in every direction
feeding on the hills and plains.
I do not think I exagurate
when I estimate the number of Buffaloe

which could be comprehended
at one view to amount to 3000.”

Bewildering menageries
of carnivalesque species grotesque
& sirenic by turns assailed
these sailors of the sage: “barking
squirrel” & mule deer, the back bone
of a leviathanic fossil (nearly
long as their boat), grizzly
bear tracks thrice man-sized, bald
eagles coyotes beavers wild goats magpies &
antelopes— “(it appeared rather the rapid flight
of birds than the notion of quadrupeds.)”

Unbeknownst to those who floated past: ghost ruins
of daub & wattle houses a thousand years old, dry
moats & palisades, paddle-shaped/cord-roughened/clay-fired
pots, chipped or pressure-flaked
flint points, pecked & ground axes of granite or
diorite, celts & adzes, diamond-shaped
knives with beveled edges, drills & mauls, snub-nosed
bison bone hoes & scoops, deer antler rakes & jawbone
sickles, tilling picks & quill flatteners, unbarbed
fish hooks, bone awls, punches, bodkins, L-shaped
elk horn scrapers with quartzite blades, squash
knives, eyed needles, bird bone whistles, clay
& stone pipes for rituals, & for adornment
disk beads, whelks, shell pendants or conchs
pink as pudenda.

In addition to spirit mounds
& medicine stones, the expedition encountered
disturbing customs which stirred up
(like turbid eddies of the Big Muddy’s
undertow) a red-blooded lust

to know:

“a curious custom with the Souix
as well as the rickeres is to give
handsom squars to those whome they wish
to Show some acknowlegments to. The Seaux
we got clare of without taking
their squars, they followed us
with Squars two days. The Rickores
we put off dureing the time
we were at the Towns but
2 handsom young Squars were Sent
by a man to follow us, they came
up this evening, and persisted
in their civilities.”

Flushed with desire for red flesh, or dark
scents of musk & blood, the white men
forgot themselves, forgot their lives, forgot
sweethearts or dear wives’
frail wrists fading into the lace work
back home—so alluring were these
wilderness “civilities.”

“Their womin verry fond
of carressing our men & c”

On the other hand, the “little snakes” would strike
these strangers as bad, as Meriwether Lewis
in his report to Congress
attacks the Sioux:

“These are the vilest miscreants
of the savage race, and must ever remain
the pirates of the Missouri
until such measures are persued
by our government as will make them feel
a dependence on its will

for their supply of merchandise.
Unless these people are reduced
to order by coercive measures, I am ready
to pronounce that the citizens of the United States
can never enjoy, but partially, the advantages
which the Missouri presents.”⁵

At the mouth of the Bad
near Verendrye’s buried plate
of preemption, a grand council & feast
was had by more than 70 warriors
sitting in a circle dressed in full
regalia of fur & feathers. Stirred
by firelight, the white explorers were lost
in a land of swirling sweetgrass
incense or dog meat chants.

“an old man rose & Spoke
aproveing what we had done &
informing us of their situation
requesting us to take pity on them
which was answered. The great Chief
then rose with great State
speaking to the Same purpote
as far as we Could learn
& then with Great Solemnity
took up the pipe of Peace &
after pointing it to the heavins
the 4 quarters of the Globe
& the earth, he made Some
disertation (then made a Speech)
lit it and presented the Stem
to us to Smoke, when
the Principal Chief Spoke
with the Pipe of Peace
he took in the one hand some

of the most Delicate parts
of the Dog which was prepared
for the fiest & made a Sacrefise
to the flag.”

The onus of the Red, White & Blue:

*Take pity on us
O Great White Father
of thunder sticks & fire stones
sky-blue beads & eyes
cold as bones.
Take pity on us
O Grandfather.*

“(I gave this Cheaf a Dollar
of the American coin as a Meadel
with which he was much pleased) In Councel
we prosentet him with a certificate
of his sincerrity and good Conduct & c....
after the Council we gave the presents
with much serimoney, and put the meadels
of the Chiefs we intended to make
viz. one for each Town
to whome we gave meadels
with the presidents likeness”

On the rim of the dark wheel
of wilderness, Captain Clark would offer
his “fatherly protection” like a torch.
Already rich with tradition & wonder
beyond measure, the red men turned
dark eyes toward the Great Lake
of the East to ponder *wakan* power
of a white tide rising
like Grandfather Sun

to kiss & bless each day
his “pore & Durtey” but
“Dutifull Children” of paradise.

“Children

I take you all
by the hand as the children
of your Great father
the President of the U. States
of America who is
the great chief of all
the white people towards the rising sun.

Children

The Great Chief who is
Benevolent, just, wise & bountifull
intends to build a house and fill it
with such goods as you may want
and exchange with
for your skins & furs
at a very low price.

Children

The people in my country
is like grass in your plains
nourished they are
also rich and bountifull. and love
their red brethren who inhabit
the waters of the Missoure

Children

I have been out from my country
two winters, I am pore
necked and nothing
to keep off the rain.
When I set out
from my country I had plenty
but have given it all
to my red children

whome I have seen on my way
to the great Lake of the west.
and have now nothing.” 6.

The onus of the Red (Teton Sioux):

*Take pity on us
O Great White Father
of fire sticks & thunder bones
sky-blue eyes & gods
cold as stones.
Take pity on us
O Grandfather.*

The Coming Of The Buffalo

*Deep beneath the earth
of the Grandmother
drops of water
patter into patient pools
of shadows floating
beyond light or time.
Deep beneath the bones
of the Grandmother
spurts of quartz
begin (like sperm)
to vibrate like mad
a wire-thin pitch.
Stretched out at the mouth
of Wind Cave 7.
Coyote keeps
right on sleeping.
Deep beneath the earth
a thunder of hooves
heard echoing within
the jeweled bowels
of the Grandmother
at last wakes him up.
Bellows & snorts
heard echoing within
the rooted tunnels
of the Grandmother
at last fill her up.
Deep beneath the bones
the buffalo are coming
to greet Grandfather Sun.*

*(One by one
he pulls them out
of the lap
of Wind Cave
with the red heat
pulsing within
his golden sap.)
The buffalo are coming
to the surface of the earth
of the Grandmother.
Out of her birth orifice
the buffalo are coming
to live upon the clean breath
of the Four Winds.
With the strong power
pulsing within
a thunder of hearts
the buffalo are coming
to life upon the green earth
of the Grandmother. Now*

*the buffalo are running
in one vast movement
across Minnekahta Plains.
The buffalo are running
in one massive herd—
sweetgrass sage & sunflowers
wreathed around their horns.
The buffalo are rumbling,
in one dust cloud storm
toward Red Valley's Sacred Hoop.
The buffalo are making
a thunder of hooves*

*on the sandstone Hogback Ridge
to wear down a gap. Now*

*the buffalo are waiting
in one dark island
out on the High Plains
grazing the wide horizon.
The buffalo are waiting
in one dark island
east of the Black Hills
for the first red men to come.
The buffalo are waiting
in one dark island
with the strong power
of sacramental blood.
The buffalo are waiting
in one dark island as
deep beneath the earth
the first red men are waking.*

3.

The Paradise Of Hunters Or The Great American Desert? (Astorians Upriver & Overland, 1811)

As black clouds of mosquitoes blanketed
bloated carcasses of backwater
buffaloes, keelboats got poled or pulled
upstream with ropes in hopes
of spotting the New American Dream
in the flow's reflection.

"I have called the region watered
by the Missouri and its tributaries
THE PARADISE OF HUNTERS....
I have been acquainted with
several, who, on returning
to the settlements, became in a very short time
dissatisfied, and wandered away
to these regions, as delightful
to them as are the regions of fancy
to the poet." 8.

Taken by surprise, chanticleer eyes
were given to know illusions
as well as the liquid flux
of language art in heaven.

"Encamped a few miles above the Chienne
river, in a beautiful bottom. No art
can surpass the beauty of this spot....
we were hardly ever out of sight
of herds of buffaloes, feeding on the hills

and in the plains, and in the course
of the day saw elk and antelopes
in abundance.... Late in the evening we saw
an immense herd of buffaloe in motion
along the sides of the hill, at full
speed: their appearance had something in it
which, without incurring ridicule, I might call
sublime—the sound
of their footsteps, even
at a distance
of two miles, resembled the rumbling
of distant thunder.”

A great Noise is heard in the heartland.

“A vast country inhabited
only by buffaloes, deer, and wolves
has more resemblance to the fictions
of the ‘Arabian Nights Entertainments’
than to reality.”

Yet within the forge
of blazing trails where
pale mirages sway
heat waves in the air
of deserts surrounding
sunset mountains of ice
far beyond the Missouri, a new specter
of space began to rise in time
like the full-blooded moon
in the mind’s eye: man-made wings
would soar to see
a purgatory, a place to temper
the American soul—its steel
beaten upon the dark anvil

of plains into the shape
of things to come, awesome
with omens of ungodly ordeal.

“...the great American desert. It spreads forth
into undulating and treeless plains, and desolate
sandy wastes, wearisome to the eye...” 9.

Overland from the mouth
of the Grand, three score Astorians (as historians
call the country’s first monopoly
of fur) struck a path to the heart
of wilderness—a will
hard as steel against flint.
Black mountains rose with shadows
of fear or hair on the backs
of their necks, stiff & static-still.

“Occasionally the monotony
of this vast wilderness is interrupted
by mountainous belts of sand
and limestone, broken
into confused masses; with precipitous
cliffs and yawning ravines, looking
like the ruins of a world... The Black Hills
are chiefly composed of sandstone, and
in some places are broken into
savage cliffs and precipices, and present
the most singular and fantastic
forms; sometimes resembling
towns and castellated fortresses.”

Led on the sun’s road,
the American Fur Company’s
daring caravan failing
to pierce to the hilt

these gold-bearing Black Hills
stayed back to dream them up.
Had Wilson Price Hunt
(its head Nimrod) indeed
rapier-ed his white way
into that round & red
sandstone buttress, he'd 've found
instead: towering spires
of granite, evergreen (not black) &
the glittering seed
of his own desires
within. But no town or even forts
were ever seen on his odyssey
of beaver plunder.

“...among these mountains, the travelers
found their physical difficulties
hard to cope with. They made repeated attempts
to find a passage through
or over the chain, but were as often
turned back by impassible barriers.
Sometimes a defile seemed to open
a practicable path, but it would terminate
in some wild chaos
of rocks and cliffs
which it was
impossible to climb.”

The wild chaos of space within.
Even the most practicable of mountains
could not save men defiled
by this wilderness of wonder balanced by
terror. Shadows of dead stone fall forever
into the mind's eye as the hat's brim
broadly echoes the brimstone horizon

of this desert. This so-called
Great American Desert destitute
of all beauty or
destiny in the end
desires to transcend
the truth of dust. Standing
on the rim of the soul
of the new American territory, gazing inward:
the terror—the mirror of the terror
within.

“...it is to be feared
that a great part of it will form
a lawless interval between
the abodes of civilized man, like the wastes
of the oceans or deserts
of Arabia; and, like them, be subject
to the depredations of the marauder.
Here may spring up new and
mongrel races, like new formations
in geology, races, civilized
and savage; the remains
of broken and almost extinguished
tribes; the descendants of wandering hunters
and trappers; of fugitives
from the Spanish and American frontiers;
of adventurers and desperadoes
of every class and country, yearly
ejected from the bosom
of society into the wilderness.”

With paradise in one hand, purgatory
in the other, go west,
long man, & watch your years
scatter like a hoary blizzard
of sand.

The Coming Of The Red Man

*How the first great Buffalo
became sacred
goes like this: Coyote
& Buffalo were debating the way
Man should be brought up
into the world
for at that time (outside
the place of thoughts) Man lived
deep within the womb
of the Grandmother
upon roots & grubs.
Coyote agreed to steal fire
from the Thunderbeings
if Buffalo would give up
the meat of his shoulders
to be roasted as bait
to lure the first red men
to their land.
This was done
& Coyote went down
the life breath of Wind Cave
upon a ladder of backbones
to the lower world.
He saw the first red man
called Tokahe
come crawling by &
waved
the warm flesh of Buffalo's shoulders
in his face saying: "There's more
where this came from.*

*But first you must learn
how to hunt.”
So Coyote taught the first red men
how to make bows & arrows.
He led them
to believe his ways
were good.
Rising like prayers
they followed the scent
of Buffalo (Coyote carried) up
into the world
where Grandfather Sun beats
down upon the heart
of the green earth
of the Grandmother.
And then
for the first time ever
the first red men
were happy.
But soon they began to grow
hungry—very very
hungry. Coyote pointed
to the distant prairie
& said: “Go
use your new knowledge
to ease your needs.”
Before the hunters went away
(instead of raising their arms
the way they do today)
they got down on their knees
to pray
to Coyote who
for some reason busted*

*out laughing right
in their faces.*

*Out under the heavy sunlight
the first great Buffalo
was too weak to ruminate
for being so long
without his shoulders. He raised
(with what will left) his head
& saw a distant cloud
of dust advancing: "At last!"
he said. "At last
my brothers come!"*

*And the first red men
moved in
to make their first kill.*

4.

**The Means And Troubles Of Traveling
(Jedediah Smith, 1823)**

Jed Smith, first white man known
to have harrowed the Black Hills, said:
“God holds no man accountable
after he crosses the Missouri.” ¹⁰

Enter the sacred circle & you’re on your own.
There’s no counting the number of gods
or daemons you might encounter there.
Act as if you were their
equal.

Unlike the Ree, who once
“...even threw into the river robes
which had been dyed, and dressed
skins decorated with feathers, as a sacrifice
to the White Man.”—who Trudeau (first school master
of St. Louis upriver in 1794) found
most generous “...in gentleness
and kindness toward us.”—who then ¹¹
were forced to move upstream in the same year
after the “ordinary misfortunes”
of imported smallpox came—who now
as a whole culture are, as they say,
history—very unlike the Ree
were the Sioux, who knew no subordination, & are
to this day, still, of all the conquered
native nations, the most fierce & free.
In the aftermath of a blood-mad battle between
the Sioux & the Ree, along the Missouri

the same year James Clyman would write:

“The night was Quiet
but the two previous we had a lively picture
of pandimonium the wailing of squaws
and children the Screams and yelling
of men the firing of guns the awful
howling of dogs the neighing and braying
of hosses and mules with the hooting
of owls of which they were a number all
intermingled with the stench
of dead men and horses made the place
the most (most) disagreeable
that immaginnation could fix
Short of the bottomless pit”¹².

What rings of hell
they were to hear, here
when first they found themselves within
the sacred circle of the High Plains.
“We having to hunt
for our living...” Ashley’s
“enterprising young men” were sent out
to track down beaver wherever
its tail smacked water.
With a pinch of luck & a pound
of pluck, in gut-smeared buckskins
& knee-high moccasins, rain-soaked
capotes & wolf’s fur caps, toting muzzle-
loading rifles & powder horns of buffalo,
bullet pouches, butcher knives & tomahawks
plus tiny phials of elk horn filled
with the musky “medicine” castor
to lure their catch,
these mountain men
were just the stuff! Dreams are made of

this frontier myth of *terra mysterium*.

“a small stream running thick
with white sediment and resembling cream
in appearance but of a sweetish pungent taste...”

Out from Ft. Kiowa at the mouth
of the White, not by any stretch a land flowing
with milk & honey, bound up inside
endless concentric circles across
alkali plains which “caused
excessive costiveness,” the sky
a cobalt blue so intense
the eye would ache, the air
palpably pure & rarefied
with each step west, the fur men made
a dazed & thirst-dizzy ascent
into the Badlands:

“where no vegetation of any kind existed
being worn into knobs and gullies and extremely
uneven a loose grayish coloured soil very
soluble in water running thick as it could
move of a pale whitish colour and remarkably
adhesive there came on a misty rain
while we were in this pile of ashes
and it loded down our horses
feet (feet) in great lumps it looked a little
remarkable that not a foot of level land
could be found the narrow revines going
in all manner of directions and the cobble
mounds of a regular taper from top to bottom
all them of the percise same angle
and the tops share the whole
of this region is moveing
to the Misourie River as fast

as rain and the thawing of Snow
can carry it”

Getting carried away, the heart
of the North American continent
(bit by bit) washes itself down
the main arteries of travel:

the Platte the Niobrara the White
the Bad the Cheyenne the Moreau
the Grand the Cannonball the Heart
the Knife the Little Missouri &
the mighty Yellowstone all
lose themselves & their watery souls
forever in the Big Muddy flowing onward
toward unknown regions
of the Great Spirit.

“I have been thus particular
in describing the means and troubles
of traveling in a barren
and unknown region.”

Inward toward the dark heart
of the New World, toward the sacred rim
of blood-stone that rings
the Island Hills, they walked
a Black Road in the way
of the falling sun—the way that blinds us
& binds us till death (& time) do us
in: the marriage of heaven & earth
ever green & golden beyond
any notion of original sin.

“at length we arrived at the foot
of the black Hills which rises
in verry slight elevation about
the common plain we entered

a pleasant undulating pine Region
cool and refreshing so different
from the hot dusty planes we have been so long
passing over and here we found
hazelnuts and ripe plumbs a luxury
not expected... we were still on the waters
of the shiann river where it enters
the Black hill rang through a narrow Kenyon
in apparently the highest and most abrupt part
of the mountain enclosed in immense cliffs
of the most pure and Beautiful
black smooth and shining and perhaps
five hundred to one thousand feet high how far
this slate extends I cannot tell
We passed through this slate Quarry about 2
miles and one of my men observed here
or at some such place Mosses
must have obtained the plates or tables
on which the declogue was inscribed”

At the core of the Plains, the cool & refreshing fruit
of the white labors down the Black Road
looms. Warp & weft, mortal history crosses
winter counts & summer coups
on the Red Road to the Great Mystery.
At some such place, pleasant
& undulating, pure & beautiful, smooth
& shining, the common race of Man
so different was made
sacred by the Word
from the Mountain
at the Center
of the red world brought down
& written
with fire in the stones
or the leaves or the grass

or the wind or the bones
of the Four Leggèd Ones who
sacrifice their flesh
that we may
continue
to sing & pray
& love & sow
the igneous seed of paradise
in each new day.

Animal Chant



*in the land of East Wind**
Horned Owl Is flying
in the Moon of Snowblind
flying the first septennium ^{13.}

to the Chief Lodge of Yellow Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for sensation of fire in her head
walking the rim the Grandmother lives ^{14.}

in the land of Generosity
Bighorn Sheep circles
in the land of East Wind
Porcupine circles



in the land of East Wind
Wild Turkey is flying
in the Moon of Greening Grass
flying the second septennium

to the Turquoise Lodge of Yellow Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for sensation of fire in her neck
walking the rim the Grandmother lives

in the land of Generosity
Gopher circles
in the land of East Wind
Bullfrog circles

[*See Totem Wheel, p. 71.]



*in the land of East Wind
Sandhill Crane is flying
in the Moon of Greening Trees
flying the third septennium*

*to the Light-green Lodge of Yellow Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for sensation of fire in her shoulders
walking the rim the Grandmother lives*

*in the land of Generosity
Wapiti circles
in the land of East Wind
Deer circles*



*in the land of South Wind
Meadowlark is flying
in the Moon of Making Fat
flying the fourth septennium*

*to the Chief Lodge of Red Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for thinking of air in her breast
walking the rim the Grandmother lives*

*in the land of Wisdom
Buffalo circles
in the land of South Wind
Turtle circles*



in the land of South Wind
Turkey Vulture is flying
in the Moon of Red Chokecherries
flying the fifth septennium

to the Purple Lodge of Red Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for thinking of air in her solar plexus
walking the rim the Grandmother lives

in the land of Wisdom
Mountain Lion circles
in the land of South Wind
Wildcat circles



in the land of South Wind
Red-tail Hawk is flying
in the Moon of Black Chokecherries
flying the sixth septennium

to the Tan Lodge of Red Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for thinking of air in her navel
walking the rim the Grandmother lives

in the land of Wisdom
Pronghorn circles
in the land of South Wind
Prairie Dog circles



*in the land of West Wind
Swallow is flying
in the Moon of Scarlet Plums
flying the seventh septennium*

*to the Chief Lodge of Black Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for intuition of water in her pelvis
walking the rim the Grandmother lives*

*in the land of Bravery
Moose circles
in the land of West Wind
Raccoon circles*



*in the land of West Wind
Pheasant is flying
in the Moon of Changing Leaves
flying the eighth septennium*

*to the Orange Lodge of Black Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for intuition of water in her genitals
walking the rim the Grandmother lives*

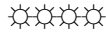
*in the land of Bravery
Coyote circles
in the land of West Wind
Spider circles*



*in the land of Bravery
Canada Goose is flying
in the Moon of Falling Leaves
flying the ninth septennium*

*to the Brown Lodge of Black Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for intuition of water in her thighs
walking the rim the Grandmother lives*

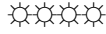
*in the land of Bravery
Wolf circles
in the land of West Wind
Badger circles*



*in the land of North Wind
Crow is flying
in the Moon of Popping Trees
flying the tenth septennium*

*to the Chief Lodge of White Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for feeling of earth in her knees
walking the rim the Grandmother lives*

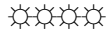
*in the land of Fortitude
Grizzly Bear circles
in the land of North Wind
Mountain Goat circles*



in the land of North Wind
Sparrow is flying
in the Moon of Frost in the Tipi
flying the eleventh septennium

to the Silver-gray Lodge of White Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for feeling of earth in her calves
walking the rim the Grandmother lives

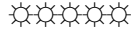
in the land of Fortitude
Jackrabbit circles
in the land of North Wind
Woodchuck circles



in the land of North Wind
Mallard is flying
in the Moon of Deep Sleep
flying the twelfth septennium

to the Blue Lodge of White Humor
Four Brothers are walking
for feeling of earth in her feet
walking the rim the Grandmother lives

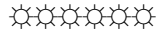
in the land of Fortitude
Beaver circles
in the land of North Wind
Fish circles



*in the land of Great Wind
Golden Eagle is flying
in the Sky-blue Lodge at the Center
flying circles*

*to the beginning & ending
Four Brothers are returning
for a dream of ether in her eye
returning to the heart the Grandmother loves*

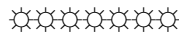
*in the land of Reverence
Green Snake coils
in the Deep-green Lodge of the Great Hoop
Mole toils*



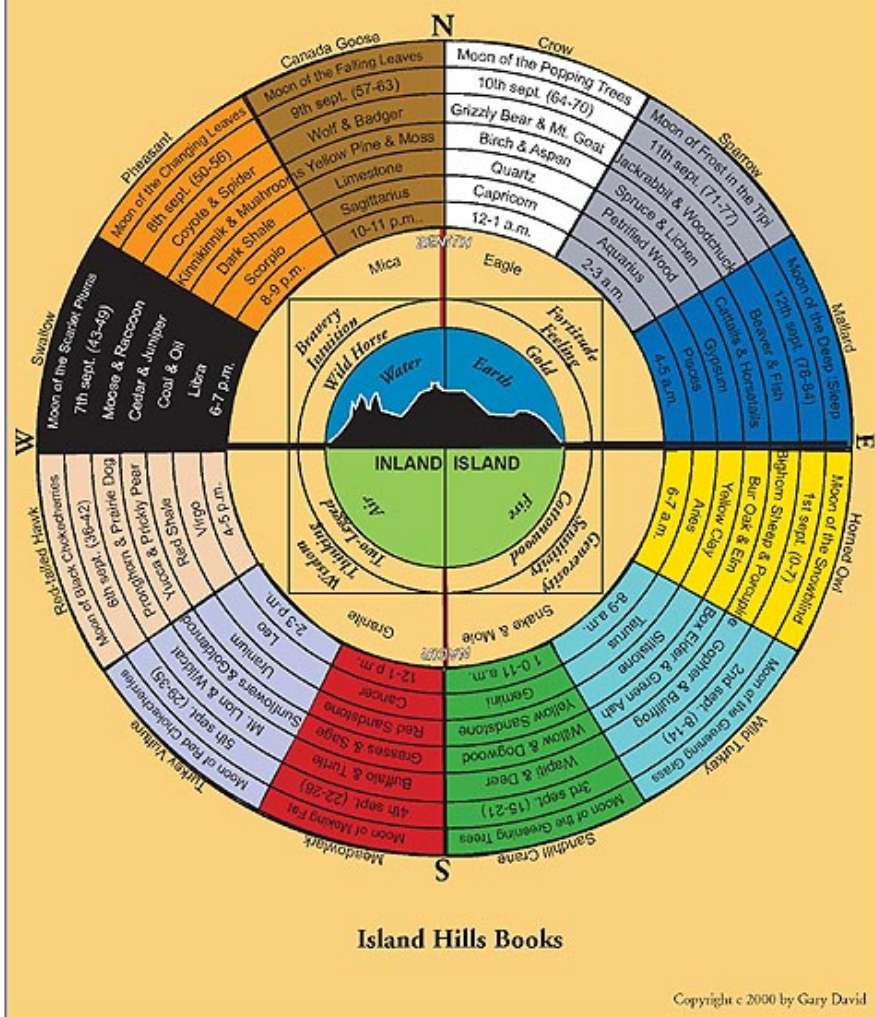
*in the land of Great Wind
Daughter of Sky is shining
in the Rainbow Lodge at the Center
shining circles*

*before the beginning or after the ending
Four Brothers are standing
over the turning of younger brother Whirlwind
standing for games & returning love*

*to the land of Reverence
Horse is dancing
for the land of the Great Hoop in prayer
Two-Leggèd is dancing*



Totem Wheel



On the outer ring, the Moon of the Snowblind in the east refers to March, and the following months are represented clockwise.

Each month has a corresponding septennium (seven-year cycle), as well as an animal, plant, mineral, astrological sign, and time of day.

Outside the circle, the corresponding color and bird appear.

Inside the square, the four virtues and the four types are identified.

On the inner ring, an animal, mineral, and plant join the human (Two-Legged).

Inside the circle, the four elements make up the "Center of the World."

Book II

1.

**A Little, Harmless Carouse
(From Catlin On The Missouri
To Kind In The Black Hills, 1832–4)**

“If anything did literally and completely
‘astonish (and astound) the natives,’
it was the appearance of our steamer, puffing
and blowing, and paddling and rushing
by their villages...”¹

Steaming upstream to Ft. Pierre (“pier”
in the local patois), the “Fire Boat
that walks on water,” that “big thunder
canoe” the *Yellow Stone* (1832)
would sidewheel a blowhard show
of force—its “medicine guns”
blasting a shore (A great Noise...)
just for fun.

“...they were all discharged several times
in rapid succession, which threw the inhabitants
into utter confusion and amazement—some of them
threw their faces to the ground, and cried
to the Great Spirit—some shot
their horses and dogs... and ran
to the tops of bluffs some
miles distant; and others... were instantly
thrown necks and heels over
each other’s heads and shoulders—
men, women and children, and dogs—
sage, sachem, old and young—all
in a mass at the frightful discharge
of the steam from the escape-pipe, which

the captain of the boat let loose
upon them for his own fun
and amusement.”

More in the spirit of profit
its holds were filled with buffalo
robes, luxuriant furs, peltries &
10,000 lb. of smoked tongue
to take back to the delicate palates
of St. Louis. Already the fashion
of beaver fur was becoming
old hat. New & improved means
to kill the buffalo
& the Eagle People with one stone
proved the stratagem
of minimum strife.

“(when an immense herd
of buffaloes had showed themselves
on the opposite side of the river, almost
blackening the plains for a great distance,) a party
of five or six hundred Sioux
Indians on horseback, forded
the river about mid-day, and spending
a few hours amongst them, recrossed
the river at sun-down and came
into the Fort with *fourteen hundred
fresh buffalo tongues*, which were
thrown down in a mass, and for which
they required but a few
gallons of whiskey, which was soon
demolished, indulging them
in a little, harmless carouse.”

The “Medicine Painter” Catlin captured
on canvas & paper this wilderness
of “sacred water” crossed with that fire

power of the sacred pipe.

“Some few days after
the steamer arrived, it was announced
that a grand feast was to be given
to the *great white chiefs*, who
were visitors among them... In the centre
of the semi-circle was erected
a flag-staff, on which was waving
a white flag, and to which was tied
the calumet, both expressive
of their friendly feelings toward us.”

Catlinite Min. [Named by C.T. Jackson, 1839,
after Geo. Catlin, the famous delineator
of the American Indians.] The sacred
pipe-stone of the American Indians,
a kind of indurated red
clay occurring in a bed
of considerable extent in the region
of the upper Missouri.

The same year: “Ties His Penis
in a Knot Dies,” trader Tom 2.
Sarpy (Red Lake
to the Sioux) blew his butt

(A great Noise is...)

from the mouth of Rapid Creek halfway
to the Black Hills—dealing
gunpowder by candlelight. Old-timers say
it rained bear traps & flasks of whisky
for a week. While winter counts 3.
for 1833–4 all record “The Storm
of Stars” (meteors in the fall

of the former year), Lakota say
the holy “Hill of Thunder” began

(A great Noise is heard...)

to smoke, sending up thick black breath
of the Big White Man, trapped & groaning beneath
its rocks—the Great Spirit’s
sentence to the first greedy intruder
in the sacred circle.

(A great Noise is heard frequently...)

Thunder turned upside down under
the sun blazing a deep blue
over the Black Hills. A clear sky
cut by these blasts the Sioux would leave
in wonder what they valued most
on rocks & yellow pine to appease.
These blood brothers to the Thunder Bird
would be heard no more after
1834. (Sensing a new empire, maybe
they went the way of the buffalo.)
Their mysterious existence ever
since has been empirically explained
away by the direct escape
of hydrogen from burning coal

buried below. The first prospector, one
Ezra Kind (“You can pan it outta my talk...”)
the same year engraved in sandstone
on Lookout Mountain his last will &
only epitaph:

“Got all
of the gold we could

carry our ponys all got
by the Indians Have lost
my gun and nothing to eat and
Indians hunting me.”⁴

(A great Noise is heard frequently
on those Mountains.)

A Sacred Pipe Prayer

*The voice of the Pipe-carrier
is the fire
of the Living Word
at the Center of the world:*

*“Inside the Circle
of the Sacred Pipe
I place a pinch of red willow
for the Wingèd Ones.
To the West
I offer the heart
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may see
all my relations.
To the West
I offer the blood
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may know
all my relations.*

*“Inside the Circle
of the Sacred Pipe
I place a pinch of red willow
for the Crawling Ones.
To the North
I offer the heart
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may see
all my relations.
To the North*

*I offer the blood
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may know
all my relations.*

*“Inside the Circle
of the Sacred Pipe
I place a pinch of red willow
for the Swimming Ones.*

*To the East
I offer the heart
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may see
all my relations.*

*To the East
I offer the blood
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may know
all my relations.*

*“Inside the Circle
of the Sacred Pipe
I place a pinch of red willow
for the Rooted Ones.*

*To the South
I offer the heart
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may see
all my relations.*

*To the South
I offer the blood
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may know
all my relations.*

*“Inside the Circle
of the Sacred Pipe
I place a pinch of red willow
for the Four Legged Ones.
To Grandfather Rock
I offer the heart
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may see
all my relations.
To Grandmother Earth
I offer the blood
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may know
all my relations.*

*“Inside the Circle
of the Sacred Pipe
I place a pinch of red willow
for the Great Grandfathers.
To Grandfather Sky
I offer the heart
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may see
all my relations.
To the Golden Eagle
I offer the blood
of the Sacred Pipe
that I may know
all my relations.*

*“Inside the Circle
of the Sacred Pipe
I place the living coal*

*of Grandfather Sun
for the Great Mystery.*

To the West

*I offer the breath
of the Sacred Pipe
for all my relations.*

To the North

*I offer the breath
of the Sacred Pipe
for all my relations.*

To the East

*I offer the breath
of the Sacred Pipe
for all my relations.*

To the South

*I offer the breath
of the Sacred Pipe
for all my relations.*

To the deep earth

*I offer the breath
of the Sacred Pipe
for all my relations.*

To the far stars

*I offer the breath
of the Sacred Pipe
for all my relations.*

“For all our relations

I offer the spirit

of the Sacred Pipe

that we may speak

to the Powers of the Six Directions. 5.

Upon the altar

*of the Sacred Pipe
I've placed the seeing heart
of Grandfather Sun.
Inside the Sacred Circle
of the Black Hills
our souls are blood
dancing.*

*Upon the pyre
of the Sacred Pipe
I've place the living coal
of Grandfather Sun.
Inside the Sacred Circle
of the Black Hills
our souls are smoke
rising.*

*From the Powers of the Six Directions
we offer the love
of the Sacred Pipe
that we may pray
through Tunkashila ⁶.
for all our relations
to be as One.*

*From the Powers of the Six Directions
we offer the life
of the Sacred Pipe
that we may pray
to Wakan Tanka ⁷.
for all our relations
to be as One.*

"Mitakuye oyasin!" ⁸.

2.

**The Day Of Retribution Had Come
(Harney On The Platte, 1855)**

“met a trader coming in
from Brulee camp who told such a doleful tale
that my guide became scared
and would go no further with me....
Perhaps I shall have to give it up
until the Government sends troops
up here and wipes out
two or three hundred of them.” 9.

It is his research
on the natural history of the Badlands.
They are the boulders
in his way: the Lakota Sioux.
He is “the-man-who-picks-up
stones-running”—not Harney but
Dr. Ferdinand Hayden:

“On the 9th of March, 1855, I ascended
[not Harney Peak but]
Bear Butte, and on the south side,
six hundred feet above the level prairie,
I found a beautiful plant, (*Anemone Patens*),
just putting forth its blossom. The Indians
call it the navel flower, for they say
that when it blooms young spring
is born. At that time the grass
was springing up quite green, and herds
of antelopes were quietly reposing
upon the sunny sides of streams, like flocks
of sheep. This is a portion of the country

similar to White river valley, well
adapted for grazing purposes, and capable
of sustaining a tolerably dense
population. The Black Hills which appear
in the distance, and derive their name
from their dark and gloomy appearance,
contain an inexhaustible quantity
of the finest timber, mostly
pine, which will doubtless remain
for many years to come.
I will, however, propose a plan
for obtaining this timber, and
render it useful to future settlers, though
I do it with some hesitation, lest
it may seem visionary.”¹⁰

The gloomy year was born
from this lavender-throated flower
blooming near the blood ring
surrounding the dark heart
of Inland Island. At the Center
upon the tongue is an echo
of the sun: a visionary eye for an eye
of the innocent Indians
—their own hearts dyed
with hawk’s blood— soon
shot down like flocks
of sheep. As carefree
Doc Hayden atop Bear Butte
—his plan to float
logs down the north fork
of the Cheyenne the upshot
of his vision quest— plucked
a pasqueflower, the cord
of Grandmother Earth
was cut. For the myth

-dreaming Red & the future
-scheming White, the growth spurt
of this crossbred year turned
into a common point
of no return.

Also born that same Moon
of the Snowblind: *The Song*
of *Hiawatha*:

“Very fierce are the Dacotahs,
Often is there war between us,
There are feuds yet unforgotten,
Wounds that ache and still may open!” 11.

1855–’56: “A war party of Oglalas
killed one Pawnee –his scalp
is on the pole– and
on their way home
froze their feet.” 12.

“Behavior lawless as snowflakes, words simple as grass...” 13.

In the afterbirth Moon
of the Red Chokecherries, the first *Leaves*
of *Grass* would heave
summer spears to impale
rime-encrusted workers
of surgically precise verse.

“I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the
far west, the bride was a red girl...
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse
straight locks descended upon her voluptuous limbs
and reach’d to her feet.”

“In the land of the Dacotahs,
In the land of handsome women.”

As swollen cherries
blackened, General Harney
(known to the Indians as either
“White Beard” or
“the Hornet”) marched west
from Ft. Leavenworth with 1200 men
“...eager from the first
for a fray with the butchers
of their comrades of Lieut. Grattan’s party.” ¹⁴

To avenge the killing
of Conquering Bear the year before
by that hothead greenhorn
graduate of West Point, who demanded
High Forehead (a Miniconjou
beyond the chief’s jurisdiction) be turned over
for the slaughter of a sore-foot Mormon cow
on the Oregon Trail, the Brule ¹⁵.
Spotted Tail sought his own retribution, killing
three white men on the Overland
Mail coach. He’d then filch
ten grand in gold booty
to boot, bury it unmapped in the heart
of the Grandmother’s land.
For a long time he’d seen the tide
of emigrants rising, rising
with each new sun until
he knew he had a flood
on his hands—blood raging
against the white wrath
of a people who had indeed
slain their God, & nevermore
could keep their word.

“Of the lovely Laughing Water
In the land of the Dacotahs.”

“The Indian...
never would have murdered
the Son of the Great Spirit.
Instead he would have loved Him
better than his own life—
would have given Him anything
and all he had, and for Him
would have gone upon the warpath
and conquered the world. For a long time
after I first heard
about Jesus Christ, I did not understand
how the white man could have killed Him.
But when I got better
acquainted with the whites, when
I realized they had no respect
for the rights of the Indian—
would take away his home
and his children, rape
his women, and rob him
of his winter’s food, I then
very easily understood
how they would even kill the Son
of the Great Spirit, as they did.”¹⁶

“Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of
doubtful news, the fitful events...”

“From the land of the Dacotahs,
From the mountains, moors, and fen-lands...”

Harney taught his “..useful lesson, which
they will not soon forget.”¹⁷
September 3rd at Ash Hollow
across from the shallow mouth
of Blue Water Creek—then called
Wanagi Wakpa, “Ghost Creek,”

for the 5 lodges struck
with cholera the '49-ers left.
After an evening welcome
to Spotted Tail, Red Leaf & Iron Shell,
Little Thunder's camp rising
with Grandfather Sun began
shaking dreams of angry steel
hornets from drowsy heads. ¹⁸.
“...his people had depredated
upon and insulted our citizens
whilst moving quietly through
our country [italics inserted]; that they
had massacred our troops
under the most aggravated circumstances,
and now the day
of retribution had come...” ¹⁹.

Harney parleyed for time
to secretly position his troops
of cavalry & infantry, then attacked
through smoke & ire from two directions
at once —“Savages must be crushed
before they can be completely
conquered.”— killing in the crossfire ²⁰.
over one hundred & thirty
men, women & children born within
the Grandmother's former splendor.
They didn't have a chance even
for unconditional surrender.

“The sight on the top of the hill
was heart rending—wounded
women & children crying & moaning, horribly
mangled by the bullets. ...these creatures
taking refuge in holes in the rocks... Two
Indian men were killed in the hole &

3 children, 2 of them
in their mother's arms. One
young woman was wounded in the left shoulder
the ball going in above and coming out
below her arm. I put her on my horse.
Another handsome squaw was badly wounded
just above her left knee and the same bullet
wounded her baby in the right knee.
Her case interested me much
she cried so much, and was continually turning
to her babe and singing
in the most distressing tones
tu-kee-e-e-e-e Chick-a-see-e-e-e
with sobs and sighs. Her words mean
O god my poor child." 21.

Two summers later the Sacred Center
of the whole Sioux world
was profaned by the name
of the "Squaw Killer."
Today, standing on this peak
[not Bear Butte but..] we seek
atonement not by blood
but by word.
From this high place, we depose &
banish forever the vain glory
of this man. In future times
may the sacred Mountain
At the Center Where He Comes
be known by the name
of another: one
who suffered in blind pain &
visionary prayer, here
where the good Red Road crosses
the Black Road of strife, one
who sought to make the Sacred Hoop

whole again, & cried to the Six Powers
of the world one last time
before he died: to make the Tree
of Life flower
again. At the Sacred Center
today, standing on this peak, we speak
the name

Hehaka Sapa,
Black Elk,
forever.

The Great Flood

*Burning
deep within
the oldest blood
pooled beneath
the Sacred Peak
(the "Fat Takers" have all
come
to call "Harney"—
highest point
east of the Bighorns &
west of the Pyrenees)
is the heart
of the eye
of the heart—
dead center of
the oldest seed—
buffalo bullseye
the gold bullets
of Grandfather Sky
enter
(molten)
from Grandfather Sun.
But if one
takes the other
way (under
Grandmother Earth)
then the muscle
of love
& the blind spot
melt*

*(deep within
the birth of spirit
breath) to become
one
with the sacred myth
of the Great Flood:*

*Many many winters ago
when the descendants
of the first red men were living
on the other side
of the cloudy river
in the land of the rising
of Grandfather Sun
& Grandmother Moon
a great snow fell
for days & days
& nights & nights
upon the Plains.
It buried the People
all the way to the top
of their tipi poles. At last
Grandfather Sun returned
from the place you always face.
His eye of fire looked down
upon the snows
until they retreated
into little trickling creeks
upon the Plains.
Creek after creek swelled
higher than ever before.
A great flood rose
for days & days*

*& nights & nights
upon the Plains.
It drowned the People
& turned their flesh & blood
into a great sea of red.
At last the sea grew solid
& turned to sacred stone.*

*Of all the People only one
was saved from this fate:
the great flood rose
round the little feet
of a young virgin.
With a round face
graceful as the light
of a falling star
she began to pray
to the Grandfathers
above. Out of a cloud
of mist filled
with fiery streaks
a Bald Eagle swooped down
swift as an arrow of sight
& snatched her up in his claws.
He carried her off
to the land of the falling
of Grandfather Sun
& Grandmother Moon.
The Bald Eagle flew
higher than ever before
through the pure blue eye
of Grandfather Sky.
The two hovered
as one ball*

*of fused flesh & feathers—
a wheeling blur
tumbling & grappling & turning
over & over
& over in free fall. At last
the Bald Eagle spread
his powerful wings.
He carried her down
all the way to the top
of Mato Paha (Bear Butte)
near the Center of the earth.
There she gave birth
to twins—brother & sister—
the very wakan who are called
the Double Ones.
These are the sacred ones
who had been here before
at the Center of the earth
where the first red men were living
many many winters ago. 22.*

*The first red men
had come up out of the lap
of Wind Cave.
Very slowly
they dispersed their blood
tribe after tribe
upon the Plains.
Very slowly
they dismissed the myth
of the Center of the earth.
For this reason
the great flood rose*

*for days & days
& nights & nights
upon the Plains.
Now these Double Ones
are remembered
as the first ancestors
of the People who've come (back
here) to call themselves
Lakota: the People
of the Bald Eagle father
stand at the Center
in prayer. The People
of the Bald Eagle feather
stand at the Center
in prayer. The People
of the Great Hoop
send up their voices
in prayer. The People
of the Great Hoop
the Great Spirit hears
send up their voices
on powerful wings
the Bald Eagle spreads
in prayer. At last
the Bald Eagle spreads
his powerful wings
within the hearts of the People
of the Great Hoop
in prayer.*

3.

The Proper Routes By Which To Invade (Warren's Expedition, 1857, & Raynolds' Expedition, 1859)

As the frontier edged its way west
across the prairie with the pristine light
of day, barriers to whites of passage
rose: red men with hearts strong
as arrowheads of stone chose
to make a stand. Staked
by a black cloth to the earth dark
with their own blood, they'd fight
to the death for the land
of their ancestors' bones.

“With good commanders, and forces sufficient
to sustain them in the measures
they may take for chastising or restraining
the Indians, and protecting them
from the injustice of the whites, peace
can be maintained without exterminating
the red man, whose manliness has much
to admire, and whose fate
deserves our sympathy.”²³

From Ft. Laramie toward Inyan Kara
the army marched up to map out
new roads & military posts
supposedly to defend the Lakota
from civilian incivilities.
A western sentinel which echoes
Bear Butte to the east, the peak rose
majestic & basaltic to the north.
They trekked the red Race Track

till a herd of Sioux cowboys riding down
a band of buffalo stopped
them dead.

“...the Indians were, it may be said, actually
herding the animals.”

Faced with eagle-feathered fury
& buckskin hunger, Warren wisely
weighed the matter with the better part
of valor, & opted not to invade.

“Their feelings toward us, under
the circumstances, were not unlike
what we should feel toward a person
who should insist upon setting fire
to our barns.”

As sleet needles darkened
the full Moon of the Scarlet Plums,
into camp the strong hearts
of Hunkapapa & Blackfoot Sioux struggled
against the storm. Around the council fire
Chief Four Horns & his nephew
sat in silence. Squat
as a buffalo bull, the latter rose—
a single eagle feather thrust
toward the skies. His words would reverberate
thunder drums in the distance:

“Friends, the Black Hills
belong to me! Now
look at me, and look at the earth.
Which do you think is the oldest?
The earth, of course, and I
was born on it. I grew up on it.
How old is it? I don't know.

I'll tell you what I think:
it's far older than we are.
It doesn't belong to us alone:
it was our fathers' and should be
our children's after us.
When I received it, it was all
in one piece, and so I will hold it.
If the white men take my country, where
can I go? I have nowhere to go.
No, I cannot spare it. I love it
too much. So let us alone. That is what
they promised in their treaty—²⁴
to let us alone!
What is this white soldier doing
here? What did he come for?
What did he *come* for?!

I'll tell you what: it was
to spy out the land, and find
a good place for a fort
and a road, and to dig out
the gold....
I, Sitting Bull, have spoken.”²⁵

Still more pale, Warren turned
tail like a jackrabbit to run
counter-sunwise across the Black Hills'
lower rim, thence up again
toward Bear Butte. They heard
en route a needling hymn
of pine unfold, which led
their odyssey of gold
onward. *Gold!*
—that sun-centered word of self-
interest gone west. *Gold!*
—that mother lodestone that set
in motion the chain reaction

of iron men. *Gold!*
—that rock of ages refrain
of “great Noise” within
this lost paradise. Auriferous
with glorious auras (or
so they thought), soldiers sought
the western seed soon to grow
weed-like in the last vestige
of the New World’s fallen Garden.

“In these mountain formations, which border
the great plains on the west, are to be found
beautiful flowing streams, and small rich valleys covered
over with fine grass for hay, and susceptible
of civilization by means of irrigation.
Fine timber for fuel and lumber, limestone
and good stone for building purposes are here
abundant. Gold has been found in places
in valuable quantities, and without a doubt
the more common and useful minerals
will be discovered when more
minute examinations are made.”

A practical warrior, Warren warned
of unwarranted warfare
the single-minded sound of *gold*
would bring. One round after another, clockwise
as the sun, white men would run
head-long to take their turn
at the great Wheel of Black Hills fortune.
The eyes of civilization would turn
as well to this dark heart
it would break with what it saw
as the hard march of fate.

“The advance of the settlements
is universally acknowledged to be
a necessity of our national development,
and is justifiable in displacing
the native races on that ground alone....
There are so many inevitable causes
at work to produce a war
with the Dakotas before many years, that I
regard the greatest fruit
of the explorations I have conducted
to be the knowledge of the proper routes
by which to invade their country
and conquer them.... Many of them
view the extinction of their race
as an inevitable result of the operation
of present causes, and do so with all
the feelings of despair with which we should
contemplate the extinction
of our nationality.”

The first official assay
of the Black Hills area, Warren’s report
was buried away from the public eye
in a mountain of government documents.
The glittering facts would have to wait
for their heyday in the sun.

A mere two years later, leading
a geological foray from Ft. Pierre west
to the Yellowstone, on the seventh day
of each week, the reverent Captain
Raynolds would rest: “...believing
this to be my duty
to my Maker, my country and the party.”

More troubled by the unmilitary morality
that gold-mugged his summer soldiers
at the red heart of America
than any solemn obligation
to the Harney treaty, Raynolds burned
his own brand of Christian charity
into the lowly lost tribes:

“...I was unquestionably entitled to the right
of transit through their country, and if attacked
the President would send soldiers and wipe
the entire nation from existence.” ²⁶.

Eye Of The Heartland

*The nature of Sacred Circles within
Nature: the eye echoes
the Great Hoop
the wide horizon makes.*

*Its blue-green iris
is a great sea
of prairie grass.*

*Wave upon wave
pounds a shore
of the dark heart within.
(The Heart of Everything That Is
is the same
as the heart of one.)*

*The dark heart within
this eye of the heartland
is a pupil
seeking a vision.*

*This evergreen Island
feeds
the oldest fire
the Sacred Mountain makes.*

*The eye of the heart
of this Island inland
turns
into a round song
of the new life.*

*Ring within ring
round Grandfather Rock's
solar plexus*

*turns
the eternal wheel
of deep earth sound
on its axis
the Sacred Mountain makes
real.*

*The eternal wheel
the first red men call
Wita Paba
turns
sunwise within
the wide hoop
the bright horizon makes.
Slowly within
a greater hoop
of the High Plains
turns*

*the eternal wheel
of deep earth sound.
Ring within ring
the eternal wheel
turns*

*ever so
slowly within
a round song
of the new life.
At the Center
Grandfather Sun
stands still.
At the Center
Grandfather Sun
stands straight
& tall over*

*an immense Medicine Wheel
the first red men call
the Island Hills.*

*Ring within ring within
this vast up-domed mass
of rock creek
after creek burns
molten gold flowing
flashing spokes
of lapsed time.
On the High Plains
creek after creek
turns
into the red hoop
the Cheyenne & Belle Fourche make.
The oldest blood
of headwaters flashing
flowing spokes
from the hub
of the immense Medicine Wheel
feeds
sweetgrass sage & sunflowers
of the sea
-blue prairie.*

*From the opening heart
of this evergreen isle
of stone—the round stone
dropped in the still waters
of life—the new life
of the ripples' swell
is all*

*at once petrified
for all
time.*

*Ring within ring
the oldest strata
at the Center
sing
the heartwood
of the flowering
Cottonwood.*

*At the Center
this New World Tree stands
as the first human planted
in the bright mist
of the first morning
sings.*

*At the Center
this New World Tree stands
over
two billion (bullion)
rings old &
will unfold
its first spring
seeds
over & over.*

*From the flowering heart
lift
mothering limbs
of the Great Mystery.
Over & over
the Great Mystery
echoes within
widening rings*

*of a round song
of the new life.
With the growing
of Grandfather Sun
golden sap
of the flowing
Cottonwood burns
eternally
the oldest breath.
At the Center
Grandfather Sun stands
still
seeking a vision.*

*At the granite core
of this evergreen isle
the bright ore holds
the oldest fire
a cold-blooded (reptile)
brain would
grasp.*

*At the new heart
is a lighthouse
looking outward.*

*At the Center
is a dark eye
looking inward.*

*Shattering
the silence of the deep
time-lapse night
is a torch
singing
upon the empty sea*

eternally. . .

*“In the beginning
was the Word
and the Word
was with God
and the Word
was God.”*

Singing!

*Upon the Sacred Peak
of the Great Mystery rings
the golden Cottonwood
in a round song
of the new life.
From the beginning
the new life
of the Sacred Tree rings
expands
“in a flame of fire” ²⁷.
the force of their truth within
the nature of Sacred Circles
within.*

4.

**The Glorious Work Of Annihilating Savages
(Powder River Campaign, 1865)**

Following stage coach & pony express
lines, *wakan* wires stretched
whispers east to west.
Up & down the black road
the Platte River made, hourglass widows
glistened in afternoon sunlight.
Expeditions to the Hills deflected
by civil war, gold lust (doom
or dust) burst out
further west: cold flecks
of flame flooded the Bozeman Trail
with white-blooded nugget hunters headed
up toward Montana Territory.

That terrible swift sword cutting South
from North now still, troops mustered
to kill Rebels instead of reds cursed
their way to the Far West:

“... they had not enlisted
to fight Indians—had not lost any
red devils and were not disposed
to hunt for any.” ²⁸

The balance of barbarity
swinging back & forth, the pendulum
of war was the only way then
to measure time. And a hard time it is when
one must cipher & decipher
atrocities on both sides

plus suffer the equal signs
of unaccountable ferocities. 29.
General Dodge to General Connor (the latter
the expedition's leader), March 29:

“With the force at your disposal
you can make vigorous war
upon the Indians and punish them
so they will be forced
to keep the peace.”

General Pope to General Dodge, June 3:

“It is absolutely essential, for reasons
that will suggest themselves to you,
that this Indian force in the Black Hills
be routed as soon as possible.”

General Connor to Colonel Cole, July 4:

“You will not receive overtures of peace
or submission from Indians, but will attack
and kill every male Indian
over twelve years of age.”

Though Pope later countermanded
this “atrocious” order, Connor bequeathed
to Quartermaster Palmer the honor
to slaughter *Lo, the poor Indian!*:

“I had never been baptised
with Indian blood, had never taken a scalp, and now
to see the glorious opportunity pass
was too much. So, with tears in my eyes, I begged
the general to allow Lieut. Brewer, who I knew
had just reported to me as very sick, to remain
with the train, and that I be allowed

to accompany him in the glorious work
of annihilating savages.
The general granted my request.”

What rings of hell bent: heat waves
to ice storms, scurvy to skirmishes.
Barefoot, thirsty, ragged & thin
Col. Cole’s column of dusty Indian hunters stole
across the prairie, fearful
of their awful prey. Hear
what Lt. Springer saw, day by day: ³⁰.

July 26 “nothing is here to be seen
but the naked ground. ...a bunch
of prickly pears, or a cluster
of the Spanish bayonett sticking
its sharp and horny leaves out...
...some wild sage or buffalo
grass... ...the bleached bones
of the antelope and elk. ... as far as the eye can reach
nothing but sand hills and sand
plains; it is weary and tiresome
marching.... There is no doubt
in my mind, that some redskins
are prowling around and gathering
up the horses we lost
in the stampede.... We took a long rest
on the road; I used it and slept
awhile. I dreamed: I saw my Katie dressed
in mourning...”

*Oh Katie in black, way back
in the States & me here
scalped naked on the nightmare
ground, with horny pears
& weary bones in a wild
stampede of sand...*

August 29 “It was something terrible grand
and wild romantic, it appeared
as if nature in a terrible rage
and madness had thrown these big steep
hills and huge rocks immense
boulders with a gigantic hand
into such confusion... ...far off
we could see a strip of cotton wood
in a serpentine line winding
its way through the monster
hills, there rested our eyes upon, there
must be water, everybody stared
at it, and wished himself
there, but to descend was utterly
impossible, the column struck off
in a nearly east direction, a tornado
broke loose in all its fury, but
only a few drops of rain fell, and only
lasted about 15 minutes. We encamped
on a dry creek, not a drop of water
to be had for man nor beast some
layed down without anything
to eat and slept soundly.”

*And dreamed of an oasis far away
from the tornado of war, where Katie comes
naked & serpentine to my tent
terrible grand & wild romantic
with pomegranates
& sweet grape wine
on her lips, & fingers
my plumed shaft.*

Sept. 1 “... some of our men
were out hunting who had quite a tussel
with the Indians. 5 of our men

were killed by arrow shots
from the Indians, and one of them
scalped, two were wounded, one of them
severe, as he had an arrow shot through
the breast and the attempt was made
to scalp him, but the fiends had no time
to fulfill their hellish designs. Some of our men
run upon them and killed two, and
in the heat and excitement (also thirst
for revenge) scalped the Indians.”

Sept. 5 “We had a good deal of fun
with the Indians, or, as the men call them
the Idaho Militia; how they dodged
when they saw the smoke
of the artillery at the muzzle
of the piece, and what excellent
horsemanship they displayed; the one I killed
was not over 7 feet from me, hanging
on the side of the pony.”

For dear life
of the Sacred Hoop—the People’s
paradise & the ancestors’
undisturbed rest, every good warrior
was proud to sacrifice
his own blood. Alone
his heart cried out
for a red horse of north wind.
He longed to ride around the world
of spirits & men—his death
defending his way
of life.

Coasting the eastern run-off
of Evergreen Isle, “several” tenderfoot men
from Col. Walker’s column crossed

the bar by drinking brackish water.
Then at the Belle Fourche... ³¹.

“...we found very good grass and water and
what could be made a very good road
through the Black Hills... this at one time
had been a great harbor
for indians but the game has long left
this part of the country and the indians
have apparently left with it.” ³².

Plant Chant

*from the West**
 the Plant People are coming
from the West
 coming at Sunset
from the West
 the Rooted Ones are coming
from the West
 coming to live at the Center
from the West
 the People of Cedar & Juniper are coming
from the West
 the People of Kinnikinnik & Mushrooms are coming
from the West
 the People of Ponderosa Pine & Tree Moss are coming
from the West
 coming to live at the Center
from the West
 the Rooted Ones are coming
from the West
 coming at Sunset
from the West
 the Plant People are coming
from the West
 coming to live in the Sacred Hoop

from the North
 the Plant People are coming
from the North
 coming at Midnight

[*See Totem Wheel, p. 71.]

from the North
 the Rooted Ones are coming
from the North
 coming to live at the Center
from the North
 the People of Birch & Aspen are coming
from the North
 the People of Spruce & Old Man's Beard are coming
from the North
 the people of Cattails & Horsetails are coming
from the North
 coming to live at the Center
from the North
 the Rooted Ones are coming
from the North
 coming at Midnight
from the North
 the Plant People are coming
from the North
 coming to live in the Sacred Hoop

from the East
 the Plant People are coming
from the East
 coming at Sunrise
from the East
 the Rooted Ones are coming
from the East
 coming to live at the Center
from the East
 the People of Bur Oak & Elm are coming
from the East
 the People of Box Elder & Green Ash are coming

from the East
the People of Willow & Dogwood are coming
from the East
coming to live at the Center
from the East
the Rooted Ones are coming
from the East
coming at Sunrise
from the East
the Plant People are coming
from the East
coming to live in the Sacred Hoop

from the South
the Plant People are coming
from the South
coming at Mid-day
from the South
the Rooted Ones are coming
from the South
coming to live at the Center
from the South
the People of Grasses & Sage are coming
from the South
the People of Sunflowers & Goldenrod are coming
from the South
the People of Prickly Pear & Yucca are coming
from the South
coming to live at the Center
from the South
the Rooted Ones are coming
from the South
coming at Mid-day

from the South
the Plant People are coming
from the South
coming to live in the Sacred Hoop

at the Center
the Plant People are standing
at the Center
standing for all time

at the Center
the Rooted Ones are standing
at the Center
standing in the Sacred Hoop

at the Center
the People of the Cottonwood are standing
at the Center
the People of the Sacred Pole are standing

at the Center
the People of the New World Tree are standing
at the Center
living in the Sacred Hoop

at the Center
the Rooted Ones are standing
at the Center
living for all time

at the Center
the Plant People are standing
at the Center
living for the Sacred Hoop

at the Center
standing for the Sacred Hoop
at the Center
the Plant People are living

Book III

1.

**This Dangerous Snake In Our Midst
(Fetterman At Ft. Phil Kearney, 1866)**

Still another treaty was tried
if not true. Tribes gathered in the Moon
of Making Fat at Ft. Laramie
would decide what to do
about that Powder River Road.
But the War Department was at odds
with the Peace Commission, & Red Cloud's faction
(upon the arrival of Col. Carrington
& his troops) broke off the talks
after letting go this arrow
of ire:

“The Great Father sends us presents
and wants us to sell him the road
but the White Chief goes with soldiers
to *steal* the road before the Indians
say yes or no.”¹

Nonetheless three strongholds got built
along this guilt-ridden Bozeman Trail
to Montana gold: Reno (old Ft. Connor),
C.F. Smith on the north end
of the Bighorns, & the biggest—
Phil Kearney on Little Piney Creek.
Blood rising in the veins
of summer like mercury
in the White Man's thermometer,
Red Cloud would thunder:

“Lakota, listen to me!
When the Great Father
at Washington sent us his chief
soldier, General Harney, to ask for a path
through our hunting grounds, a way
for his iron road to the mountains
and the western sea, we were told
that they wished merely to pass
through our country, not to tarry
among us, but to look for gold
in the far west. Our old chiefs thought
to show their friendship and good will
when they allowed this dangerous snake
in our midst. They promised to protect
the wayfarers. Yet before the ashes
of the council fire are cold, the Great Father is
building forts among us. You have heard
the sound of the white soldier’s ax
upon the Little Piney. His presence here
is an insult, and a threat. It is
an insult to the spirits
of our ancestors. Are we then to give up
their sacred graves to be plowed
for corn? Lakota, I am for war!” 2.

After a cloudy season cloaked
eagle-swoop attacks, bushwhacks
of wood wagons & livestock
stampedes, the last day
of autumn rose clear over
Ft. Phil Kearney. To the west the lofty
snow fields of the Shining Mountains
etched a blinding whiteness
into the still sharp eyes
of old Jim Bridger.
From the observation tower, he looked out

at the empty Lodge Trail Ridge &
fired the remark:

“When you don’t see no Injuns,
they’re sartin t’ be th’ thickest.”

Hidden out of earshot
in the hills were to rise
the great chiefs of history: Red Cloud
& Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse
& Gall, Black Moon & Man Afraid
of His Horses. At the fort
just then, the one known
to have said: “Give me 80 men
and I will ride through
the whole Sioux nation!”
was given by chance
just that. Capt. Fetterman
with four score of troops
marched out that morning in order
to rescue the wood wagons once again
besieged by Sioux warriors. Why
the twice-given order
to advance no farther than the ridge
was disregarded, the scalp-craving captain
would never have to answer.
His whole detachment
led into a trap well set
by the Sioux was as good as....

Red darkness
fell at noon. A desperate barrage
of gunshots thudded
against the wind as trespassers’
shadows stained the dust
of their last trail. A silence

deep as a mass grave
reigned. Down from the Bighorns
a deafening void spread
over the plains like the sound
of the Thunderbeing's wing:
81 now lay dead—naked &
hatchet-hacked.

“Eyes
torn out and
laid on the rocks; noses
cut off, ears cut off; chins
hewn off; teeth chopped
out, joints of fingers; brains
taken out and placed
on rocks with other members
of the body; entrails taken
out and exposed; hands cut
off; feet cut off; arms
taken out from sockets; private
parts severed and indecently
placed on the persons; eyes,
ears, mouth and arms
penetrated
with spearheads, sticks, and arrows; ribs
slashed to separation
with knives; skulls severed
in every form, from
chin to crown; muscles of
calves, thighs, stomach, breast, back, arms, and cheek
taken out. Punctures
upon every sensitive part
of the body, even
to the soles
of the feet and the palms
of the hands....” 3.

And of course
the scalp-lock
missing
from each bloody head.
One hapless soul had
a hundred & five arrows stuck
like porcupine quills
in his unclad body. No time
for last wills or testaments,
Captains Fetterman & Brown, in order
not to be taken alive
by the Indians, faced off
at point blank &
blew each other
to oblivion.
A powder-burned bullet hole
was found in each skull.
That night a blizzard threw
its cold shroud over
the glowering moon, & the scene
drifted shut.

One week later, an echo
of the slow torture
of the Sioux culture
resounded down the long white halls
of the War Department.

General Sherman to General Grant:

“Just arrived in time
to attend the funeral
of my adjutant general, Sawyer.
I have given personal
instructions to General Cooke
about the Sioux.

I do not yet understand
how the massacre
of Colonel Fetterman's party
could have been so complete.
We must act
with vindictive earnestness
against the Sioux, even
to their extermination,
men, women, and children.
Nothing less
will reach the root
of this case." 4.

The Black Road & The Red Road

*"I am building
a road
beside storm clouds.
Behold it!
This sacred thing
I am building."* ⁵.

*The Black Road is an interstate
between a cold white
American Standard
Time –punch clock wasted or scattered
like shredded Goodyears–
& Sacred Space
stretching
the way out
west: a blue dome
of cloud scud
in the head.
The setting sun
is the Third Eye.
It rests on the lip
of the Bighorns.
In a blink
of mountain time
silence fills
the breath withheld
& then
the blaze
gone.*

*The way back
under the earth
the son makes
the place of his birth. Groping
through blind tunnels running
under the I
-90 (the construction under
way back then)
he comes out
bloody & squinting
in the open air
of a narrow sky.
In the gloomy Land
of the Broken Hoop
(Cuyahoga & Grand—the former
fire clockwise flowing—
the latter counter-
past Fairport Harbor)
on the “North Coast”
the son would rise
half-eclipsed
by the times: the place
he comes / the place
he comes to / the place
he comes to know
year by year by year
as lakewood’s Mentor.*

*To document the olden days’
path sunward
the buckeye son
as sire to makar
hath the advantage*

*of a vantage more akin
the voyageur & scout
Jim Bridger (or even deader
center—Jedediah Smith)
than all those native sons
of the heartland who
out of the womb
first opened
blue eyes to discover
the world around them going
on forever. The horizon
before him / for him
grows (as he grows) out
of the logical progression
west. To go
the Black Road is to know
thyself
to be the mind's own
measure of time.*

*His first journey (working
westward through a third
septennium) first
snapshot summer
he comes to see
himself as poet
at the foot
of Black Elk Peak
the domed skies break
apart like a sparkling geode.
All the stars streetlights
back home blinded now
tumble headlong into hemispheres*

*of his brain. Glistening wet
like the swollen fruit
of paradise
these globes of fire
bend low & heavy
the boughs of heaven. Within
his eyes' blue flames
a sylvan lake
wavers
god-sized granite fingers
across its looking glass
surface. In moon-silver swirls
the crack between worlds
of topos & tempus
melts. . . .*

*With the following
rising of the sun
the son follows
his eyes setting
upon the rise
of the western horizon.
They graze the razor
slice through time (igneous
& ice) in a torn gray line
of Bighorn Mountains. Shining
from a distant epoch
a new ghost dance frozen
in the cradled masses
of rock spans
the Black Road: a presence
of ancients
(of Grandfathers) around
when the Sacred Hoop was in*

*the making.
They are now
here & still
nowhere.*

*The Black Road is a temporal span
born in the red Morning
Star but dead-ending
in the darkness
of illusion & dissolution.
It evaporates
like water (or a mirage
of it) on asphalt.
Nothing
but sun & wind
upon a high plain where
the life breath of anyone
who's ever walked this earth or
will turns to whispers
in the grass—words
in the air: a name.
Like all
those buffalo herds—
gone
or still
to be born:
all the same.*

*The Red Road passes on
from the Star Which Never Moves
toward the Blooming Tree.
It rises within
the blood of the People*

*along eternal life
lines. One generation
after another the People
of a strong spirit nation
tread the ghost trail
of the Milky Way softly
blowing on coals they carry
in vision quest hearts.*

*“And as the long line climbed all
the old men and women
raised their hands
palms forward
to the far sky
yonder and began
to croon a song
together
and the sky ahead
was filled with clouds
of baby faces.” 6.*

*A song together:
a Sacred Hoop
of voices making
(love) their way
on the Red Road.*

*“I am standing
in the sacred way
at the Center
of the world.
I am standing
in the sacred way*

*by the People
now beheld.
I am standing
in the sacred way
at the Center
of the spirit nation.
See the People*

*gather around me
standing
in the sacred way.”⁷.*

*. . .sings the Sacred Tree
on the Mountain at the Center
Where He Comes
a long way to hear
their sacred song.*

2.

Nothing But An Island (Ft. Laramie Treaty Of 1868)

Recalling the bloody song
arrows sung when Fetterman fell
the winter before, Red Cloud's warriors flying
feather-proud at the Wagon Box Battle
now got routed to the leaden edge
of technology: bar anvil bullets from the new
Springfield repeating rifles
mowed them down faster
than whirlwind circles
of horses could fire.

“...if Powell's men had been armed
with muzzle loaders instead
of breech-loaders, his party
would have been massacred...”⁸

Still the spoils of war stank
in Washington like a gamy kill.
One cost-effective trade-off
was truce by treaty: stop sniping
gandy dancers spiking rail lines down
on the Platte River, & soldiers will abandon
the three forts on the Bozeman Trail.
(Later the latter were torched
in a blaze of hatred.) What the Fat Takers wanted
instead was cultural extermination
via assimilation: to make a farmer
out of a buffalo hunter & nomad flower
from the Great American Desert would take
the powerful hand of the Almighty

Mystery—or at least more rainfall
than the High Plains ever saw. And so
the Great Sioux Reservation was born ⁹.
from the alkali dust of lies.

The red children were to learn
how to build square houses, how to weave
& read straight lines, how to reason
right & think of the soil: not
as their sacred Grandmother but
just another word to rhyme
with *toil*. This reservation
plus the unceded Indian
territory (according to the Treaty
of '68) is still to this day
(in the letter of the law
if not the spirit) Lakota Land

for *as long as the rivers run*
and the grasses grow
and the trees bear leaves—or so

it says: “Article XVI. The United States hereby agrees
and stipulates that the country north
of the North Platte River and east
of the summits of the Big Horn mountains
shall be held and considered to be unceded
Indian territory, and also stipulates
and agrees that no white person
or persons shall be permitted to settle
upon or occupy any portion
of the same; or without the consent
of the Indians first had
and obtained, to pass through
the same.” ¹⁰.

But the Indians were the ones who were first
bad. Without their consent
General Sheridan (a man-made
lake in the Black Hills now named
after him, the one who said:
“The only good Indians I ever saw
were dead.”) had the gall to add
to the treaty in Chicago *ex post facto*
(*déjà vu* of 1851) to Article XI:
“...they will not in the future object
to the construction of railroads,
wagon roads, mail-stations, or any other works
of utility or necessity, which may be ordered
or permitted by the laws of the United States.”

—which goes on to say
the government will of course pay
for the “damage” done
—which paved the way
for the “*thieves’ road*”
of gold one General Custer would make
straight through the heart
of the Sacred Hoop
of the Island Hills.

The year after the great solar eclipse
obscured the Missouri, & the first Texas Longhorns
were driven north, Red Cloud & Spotted Tail
made the journey east to see
the thieftom—the power & the glory
of Washington. Red Cloud’s reaction
was clear:

“The white children have surrounded me
and left me nothing
but an island.

When we first had this land
we were strong. Now we are melting
like snow on a hillside
while you are grown like spring grass.
Yet I have come a long distance
to my Great Father's house.
See if I have left any blood
in this land when I go.
When the white man comes
in my country he leaves a trail
of blood behind him.
Tell the Great Father
to move Fort Fetterman away
and we will have no more trouble.
I have two mountains in that country:
the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountains.
I want the Father to make no roads
through them.... Look at me, I am
poor and naked. I do not want war.
The railroad is passing through my country
now. I have received no pay
for the land, not even a brass ring.” 11.

“...since the beginning
of our journey, the ring
being broken.”

Shackling Indian lands
with straight iron bands, the Iron Horse
would cut in half the last herds
of buffalo. Grandmother Earth
began to show signs of aging, signs
of the times. The movement west
would put a halt to the sacred way
north & south, cut across all rings
of paradise, purgatory, or hell. The path
of history cut a cross: the ancient Red Road

of mystery now is welded
to the Black Road's destiny made
manifest by the white desire:
not to go back, in time or place,
but onward, to face the mountains
of the Great Divide, as fire from the dying sun
reaches out across the sky, with tongues
of gold & blood, to utter
& everlasting grace
in its last goodbye.

The Old World Man & The New

*Far down a long dark road
paved with thunder & blood
across the tenebrous sea
of sunken gold & dreams
heavy as the last harvest
of Atlantis:*

an Old World

man sits

one

*with nothing at all—
nothing that is except
the thought of his art
(recorded in backward script) as
the art of his thought is
reflected in the round
time-wrought face pausing
at some window sill in Milan.
Melancholically he sets
down his quill to observe
the sunset. The eye of
his curious mind contracts
with the last pulse*

*of light. Synchronistically
two continents echo
the Great Mystery: a man
with skin the shade of pipestone stands
(as “the Sun stands
still” overhead) ¹².
on the Mountain*

*at the Center
of the Island
inland—Island
of old urges & savage evergreens
rooted in rushing
gold at the Center
of this new continent. Spreading
out below his feet
each hill thrusts
high & rough
as the dusty humpbacks
of the Buffalo Clan
(the Whales-of-the-Plains).
Great gray leviathans forged
of primordial granite leap
& plunge between pointed waves
of spruce & pine.
Hypnotically slow
his coup-strong heartbeats
echo
like a throbbing red drum
lost down long canyons
of summer. Rivers whisper
secret wisdom in his ears
like medicine rattles
a Bear Shaman shakes.
The Two-Legged one
is standing at the Center
of the world as a spirit brother
South Wind plays like a gentle child
with golden eagle feathers tied
in his flowing hair.*

The New World

man stands

where

the Great Mystery placed him.

*At the Center living
as close as possible
to the Gods stands*

*Man: an echo
of the god's-eye within
the Center-ring
the centering makes.*

*His feet rest
firmly on the earth
of the Grandmother's lap.*

*His hands rise
(like limbs of the Cottonwood—its blood
burning in praise
of life) in prayer. Spreading
his fingers to catch the warm sap
of the rays of Grandfather Sun
he invokes in song
the Powers of the Six Directions. Around
him*

*(like a stone dropped in the still waters
of life) concentric rings expand:
his family / his clan / his band / his tribe / his nation &
(foremost) all
the Two- & Four-Leggèd Creatures together
with the Crawling & Swimming Ones—
the Wingèd & Rooted (people as well)
all living as one within
the Great Lodge of the Cosmos.*

*For a time the Shadow People
all burrow into the earth
between the breasts of the Grandmother.*

*High & full
the New World
man sings
over & over
the words beginning
& ending all
sacred rituals.
The words
beginning & ending
all sacred
rituals
form circles
within.*

“All my relations!”

3.

A Dog In The Manger (Custer's Expedition, Summer Of 1874)

“...we have reached the Hills, the great unknown
theater of our future
quests. We have coiled
a long trail around
their feet; and thus binding
our victim, we are now prepared
to strike at its heart.”¹³

From a bluff above the lush meadow
along Castle Creek, Custer's
covered wagons (noted
by photographer Illingworth)
were a “string of pearls”
instead of a prairie rattler. This richness
was prelude to the gold
Yellow Hair would have to pay for
with his own blood. (On the scales
the glory assays
its gory details.)
Still the tale's told
how his wagons somehow
somewhere in the last El Dorado
left the trail of tall
sunflowers blooming & blinding
with his passing.

“In much of the country
we visited, Indians
had not been for years, and in no portion
of the interior of this rich region

did we find indications of their recent presence
in any large numbers. Their policy
regarding the Black Hills
is somewhat similar to that of a dog
in the manger—they neither
occupy nor make use of
the Black Hills, nor are they willing
that others should.”¹⁴

But even a dog loves to bathe
in beauty as it dives in a pool
of diamond-cool water, droplets of fire
shook from its fur. Surely
the “indolent Indian dog” would prefer
to lap the liquor of the Great Spirit, pure
& clear from white water creeks
of the Black Hills, over sipping
ad nauseam some turbid burn that reeks
alkali & ashes on the hellish plains
of summer.

“...nature oft times seems to have gone further
and placed beautiful shrubbery and evergreens
in the most desirable locations
for building sites, while
on Harney’s Peak I could contrast
the bright green verdure
of these lovely parks
with the sunburned and dried
yellow herbiage to be seen
on the outer plains.
Everything indicates an abundance
of moisture with in the space
inclosed by the Black Hills. The soil
is that of a rich garden, and composed
of a dark mold

of exceedingly fine grain.
We have found the country
in many places covered with wild
raspberries, both black and red
varieties. Yesterday and today
I have feasted on the latter.”¹⁵

Plucking the forbidden fruit
from the rotten tree
of treaties, on the eve
of his downfall, he thought himself
a daring & comely sort
of discoverer. In the course
of this incursion, Custer
& his cur-faced soldiers
would file straight across
Paradise Isle:

“The whole valley was a nosegay, and so rich
was the soil that everything grew
with the greatest of luxuriance. Our eyes
were opened then to the beauties
of the Black Hills. Twenty days in a purgatory
of bare plains, saline water, and alkali dust
made us appreciate a paradise, and every man
in the expedition stood silently
to enjoy and admire.”¹⁶

If only they could’ve seen
behind the next ridge: young Black Elk’s band
cutting lodgepole pines was camped
far up Rapid Creek in the heart
of the Hills. Given to visions¹⁷
& voices of Nature, Hehaka Sapa
out hunting red squirrels heard
a disembodied whisper: “Go home!

Go home now!” Upon returning he found
the medicine man (& mentor to Crazy Horse)
Chips had seen spirits burning
in the sweat lodge—meaning something
bad would soon to occur.

As the Sioux fled through the night
toward Ft. Robinson, cocksure Custer led
a hundred wagons to cut a swath
of white wrath across
the crestfallen head
of Grandmother Earth.

“I found the gray wolf
one of the most common animals
in the Black Hills, and hardly a day passes
without my seeing several individuals
of the species.... Their howlings
were often heard at night; and
on one occasion I heard that doleful sound
at midday—a bad omen, if
we may trust the Indians.”¹⁸

Over gypsum-studded fields
of blood toward the Center
where every step gleaned “color”
in the eye of the beholder
instead of a prayer, the betrayal
of the sacred Black Hills
was offered up as the singular example
of secular sacrifice.

“The miners report
that they found gold among the roots
of the grass, and
from that point to the lowest point

reached, gold was found
in paying quantities.
It has not required an expert
to find gold
in the Black Hills, as men
without former experience in mining
have discovered it at an expense
of but little time or labor.”¹⁹
With heart racing
like his favorite greyhound chasing after
a jackrabbit, George Armstrong Custer
(father of the all-American boy
wonder buster) looked to the future
with snake eyes & glitter scales that mirrored
his fools gold B.S. crap shoot:

“On the return trip, soon after crossing
the Little Missouri river, the abandoned camp
was found of a great body
of Indians. In conversation that evening
in front of general Custer’s tent, Luther North
remarked that perhaps it was just as well
the Indians had gone before the expedition
got there, as there were a great many
of them. Custer then commented: ‘I could whip
all the Indians in the northwest
with the Seventh cavalry.’”²⁰

The Great Race

*Driving the interstate west
& north from Rapid City
(counterclockwise—
that is to say
against the way
of the sun)
you see
another Great Hoop
the Lakota call
“the Racetrack.”
This basin-like valley
of deep red earth wholly
encircles
the Island Hills. For its origin
there is the legend
of the Big Race. Listen:*

*A long long time ago
there was only a vast prairie
where animals spirits & men
wandered
as one.
That was the time
when all
spoke the same language.
Animals & men
could turn into each other
& spirits
were their constant
companions.*

*Then came the idea
that Man would divide
himself
from the animals.
He thought deeply &
then came the answer:
a Big Race could decide
the different clans
of the animals
& who would be master
over all
the creatures on Grandmother Earth.
To the Four Directions
messengers were sent out
to all
to announce the Big Race.
A Great Circle
was marked out
upon the vast prairie.
At last came the day
the Big Race was to begin.
The great mass
of the Two-Leggèd Ones
& the Four-Leggèd Ones
all stood
at the starting line.
(Instead of running
himself
some say Man would talk
the Magpie
with the Rainbow Hoop
on its tail
into flying
for him.)*

*At last howled a voice
"Hokane!"
& the Big Race was on.
A stampede of bodies
squealing & wailing
sunwise rushed
round & round
the Big Racetrack.
Some ran so hard
their hearts burst—
their blood
spilling & staining
the sacred earth
of the Grandmother
forever.
Hooves & claws
trampled & crushed
the fallen bodies
of the Two-Leggèd Ones
& the Four-Leggèd Ones.
Froth from their mouths
dropped & turned
to soft white stone.
Clouds of dust
skeward soared
choking the horde
of circling birds.
Day after day
the Race went on.
The din & smell
was enough to make one
dizzy. Like a rattlesnake
swallowing its tail*

*the frantic racers fell
into a frenzied hoop dance
pounding & stomping
round & round.
Grandmother Earth
rumbled.
Grandfather Sky
thundered.
Half-dead from hunger
& half-mad from fatigue
the Two-Leggèd Ones
& the Four-Leggèd Ones
sped on.
But the Race was not permitted
to go on
forever.
At the Center
the Great Spirit made
Grandfather Rock appear.
He began to rise
higher & higher.
Grandmother Earth
quivered & bellowed
like the dying
buffalo cow.
Lower & lower
the Racetrack sank
with the great weight
of the Two-Leggèd Ones
& the Four-Leggèd Ones.
Faster & faster
Grandfather Rock grew.
He threw up*

*fire & stone & spit
ashes & dust
that rained down
upon the frightened racers.
With the Magpie ahead
at last came the hour
the great mass
of the Two-Leggèd Ones
& the Four-Leggèd Ones
upon the Racetrack
of the vast prairie
all lay
dead.*

*The Great Race
round the rim
of the Black Hills ended
in a Wakipa (a curse inflicted
by the Great Spirit).
So say
the Lakota
legends. 21.*

*Today
toward the heart
of Wita Paha
you see
the curse has turned
into a blessing
of the Great Mystery:
the Sacred Mountain
at the Center
stands*

*for all
the ages to come.*

*Driving farther past
the national cemetery
out through a gap
in the Hogback Ridge
you look.*

*Your double-take
revises your initial vision
you call an illusion:*

“The sea!”

*turns into a vast prairie
again. Stop the truck
upon the Racetrack. Listen
to the wind in the yellow pines.*

*You hear it
again: “The sea!” The blue
stems of grass & sage
in the Four Winds
remember
a long long time ago—
manured as they were
by the dark
sea of buffalo.*

*You look
inward
toward the heart
& outward
toward the horizon.
At the same time
you stand*

*upon the shore
of Inland Island.
The revelation
of this place
you make
sacred within
hits you
like a wave
so strong it
knocks you
right down.
And you almost drown
in all
that open feeling.*

4.

**At The Footstool Of The Great Unseen
(Gordon's Party, Late 1874)**

"...we were soon to become trespassers
and outlaws without the pale
of civilization." 22.

The puissant pale-faces' push west
pushed all the white pickets & pews
in their path away to slash
at bloody horizons
of the Great Wheel.
Hair-raising (the real
scalp-taking) tales were told
to goose some greenhorn's flesh
huddled close to the campfire.
Whole mountains of gold
drifted in the frosty air—
prairie reveries within a wreath
of pipe smoke. Dreams of the hearth
far back on the trail would go
black with the waking
to a coyote's wail waxing
half-human as the red moon
rose.

The first pioneers soon
scoffed at the law to bivouac
their hopes & fears
up on French Creek. Proud to defy
the wishy-washy ways
of Washington, these twenty-six men plus
Annie Tallent & her young son

(the Black Hills' first
white woman/school teacher) would try
their luck to pluck nuggets
from the unsung destiny
of the poem they were making
manifest. With pick & pan, epic
heroes of the West rose
every morning in yellow prose
Pollyannas to greet the milquetoast
Easterner coughing over eggs easy
phrases of armchair pilgrims'
praises to Progress—& *hosannas*
to the highest
bidder in civilization's auction
of Paha Sapa, the Last Sacred Ground
of the Lakota.

“As our route was taken
through some of the wildest portions
of the Hills, the journey through them proved
a delightful revelation—one continuous poem, replete
with all that is grand, sublime and beautiful....
The entire landscape was one well
calculated to impress the beholder
with awe, and incline him, if aught
earthly could, to fall
prostrate at the footstool
of the Great Unseen behind all
its wonderful majesty and beauty; and to make
the scene still
more impressive, an awful silence—a silence
which only primeval forests know—
hung over all. No sound
was heard amid the solitude, save
our own voices, which sounded strange
and unnatural...”

Echoes of civilization, here
their voices were an odd commodity, unnatural
against the vast grandeur
of Nature's breast. Hushed like babes
in the piney woods, they saw
this land of awe as a lush veil
the eye of God shone behind. Or always beyond
the next vale would lie the Father's
"footstool"—His condescension in absentia
made plain. Yet the Red Man was seen
a vain & puerile fool to think
the Great Mystery *really* whispered
in the grasses, or thundered
its powers against evergreen pillars
& granite towers. This sort of fancy
was mere metaphor, & the poet's license
(in lieu of their legal presence)
would make do here.

Pitching camp in the dark pit
of December, Gordon's Party
toughed out a numb-knuckled winter
in seven stone & rough-hewn huts encircled
by a stark stockade. With a placer rocker
made from a wagon box, they sluiced
frozen sludge for a few precious flecks
of "color." Hunkered against blizzards wicked
as rusty razor blades, they read
a dog-eared *Paradise Lost* long
into the night as winds roared & sliced
through the pines like Pandaemonium's horde.
Led by Mammon lusting after
the treasure of the ransacked Center
of the Black Hills, these first
"civilized" syllables were pebbles
tumbling downward in the rumbling landslide

of the last gold rush.

“Soon had his crew
Op’n’d into the Hill a spacious wound
And digg’d out ribs of Gold. Let none admire
That riches grow in Hell; that soil may best
Deserve the precious bane.” ²³.

Rock Chant

“O Grandfather
at the Center
I stand
at the Center
I send
a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
to the West
I send a voice
to the People
of Coal
I send a voice
Hear me!
O Grandfather
to the West
I send a voice
to the People
of Dark Shale
I send a voice
Hear me!
O Grandfather
to the West
I send a voice
to the People
of Limestone
I send a voice
Hear me!*

[*See Totem Wheel, p. 71.]

*“O Grandfather
at the Center
I stand
at the Center
I send
a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
to the North
I send a voice
to the People
of Quartz
I send a voice
Hear me!
O Grandfather
to the North
I send a voice
to the People
of Petrified Wood
I send a voice
Hear me!
O Grandfather
to the North
I send a voice
to the People
of Gypsum
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
at the Center
I stand*

*at the Center
I send
a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
to the East
I send a voice
to the People
of Yellow Clay
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*O Grandfather
to the East
I send a voice
to the People
of Siltstone
I send a voice
Hear me!
O Grandfather
to the East
I send a voice
to the People
of Yellow Sandstone
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
at the Center
I stand
at the Center
I send
a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
to the South
I send a voice
to the People
of Red Sandstone
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*O Grandfather
to the South
I send a voice
to the People
of Uranium
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*O Grandfather
to the South
I send a voice
to the People
of Red Shale
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
at the Center
I stand
at the Center
I send
a voice
to the Stone Nation
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
to the Earth*

*I send a voice
to the People
of Granite
I send a voice
Hear me!
O Grandfather
to the Sky
I send a voice
to the People
of Mica
I send a voice
Hear me!*

*“O Grandfather
at the Center
I stand
at the Center
I have sent a voice
to the Stone Nation
I have sent a voice
You have heard!
I have sent a voice
It is enough
I have sent a voice
You have heard!
O great Stone Nation
You have heard!
O Grandfather
You have heard!
It is enough
I have sent a voice
You have heard!
O Grandfather!”*



**Landsat image of the Black Hills,
looking toward sunset.
North is on the right-hand side of the picture;
the Badlands are on the lower-left.**

Book IV

1.

**The Island Now Called The Black Hills
(Newton-Jenney Expedition, Summer, 1875)**

Thunder drums sped the pulse
in the dead wood Moon
of the Greening Trees. Up 1.
from Ft. Laramie white wagons rattled
toward the key Black Hills.
With 400 armed men (plus one
Calamity Jane in cunning drag
for fun), Col. “Richard
the First” Dodge commanded
the attention of a country come to covet
any material miracle. On red shores
landed the golden means
of turning the Sacred Circle
into black & white scenes—
faired-haired & square. At the base
of a bi-millennial destination, Viking-like
soldiers stood & wondered
what hidden plunder lay in store inside
that forbidden prayer garden
of the last warrior nation, whose pride
guarded its Center.

“From the north bank [of Stockade Creek] stretches
a barren plain, bounded at a distance
of two to four miles by a line
of abrupt and rugged hills, four to six hundred
feet high, the ‘outer rampart’
of the Black Hills. Over
the tops of these, rise

ridge after ridge and mountain upon mountain until
the grand mass blends
with the blue of the skies.”²
Or did they somehow hear the oars
of dragon-prowed longboats long ago
creaking, crashing waves & salt-spray
thrashing & thumping
fear in the heart
of their fated foe?

“...the ‘outer rampart,’ must, at some time
in earth’s history, have been a reef
around the island
now called the Black Hills.”³

Red as a buffalo heart, the coral rim
of the Great Wheel coasted like a carousel
to a dead stop. The Lakota myth
of the Great Race retreated
into the smoldering pith
of Paha Sapa—there to await the oldest song
of rebirth. Again soldiers would defile
Grandmother Earth in defiance of the treaty
made untrustworthy by transgressions
in both camps: white trespassers triggered
the taking of golden scalp locks which fired
guns of the red-blooded
American lust for making *good*
all Sioux *savages* which stood
in their way.

White-washed by the guise
of science, this truly military might
like a drill toward the heartwood
of the Black Hills bored. Passing
ring after annular ring, epoch

after epoch of ancient rock, backward
through time they climbed
toward the igneous seed:
the Sacred Center

in the beginning....

sings.

“...we were soon crawling
up a narrow backbone; cañons
of Spaulding’s Creek on our right, those
of some unknown stream on our left.
After a mile of climbing we reached
the summit, seven thousand feet above
tide water, and were rewarded
with an indescribably magnificent view,
the whole country being spread out
like a map at our feet.
The Black Hills were open to us.” 4.

Inward & upward the army marched—
not for the sake of seeking
a vision, nor to pray or praise
the Great Spirit, but to make
a bloody map, & conquer on paper
the Center. Surmounting one barrier
after another, the summit seemingly ever
a bit further, at last the topographer
McGillicuddy & a few others gasped &
grasped the top—the actual
apex, the axial acme for all time
vanquished. It was as if the flame
of this instant were frozen
in the ashes of the People’s
solitary wish to worship. On the Mountain
At the Center Where He Comes, Tunkashila
issued three Washichu climbers

a lightning warning: 5.

“Each person had been struck
on the cheek bone, just
under the eye. The fluid passed
down the person of each, going
out at the ball
of the foot, boring a hole
in the shoe-sole as clean and round
as if made by a bullet, and
raising a large blood-blister
on the bottom of the foot.” 6.

Still the White Man looked (like an overseer
surveying his estate) with great pride
upon this Island. Overlooking
its real owner, he forged a grand metaphor
of power:

“In the vicinity of the Harney group, the appearance
of the rocks is varied, fanciful, and
striking in the extreme.
If a huge caldron, miles
in extent, had been filled
with molten granite, more and more
heat applied until the whole
was seething, bubbling, and flying
up in the most violent commotion, and then
at a word suddenly cooled in the very act
of ebullition, no more irregular
or extraordinary forms
could have been assumed.” 7.

Unseen at the heart
of the New World Tree, unfelt at the Hub &
unheard at the Center sung the fire

of the Living Word, the seed-syllables
in concentric circles echoed
down lode-rife canyons
of time before
life, life beyond
time.

“This granite core of the Black Hills
is an irregular Ellipse
about forty miles on its longest by twenty miles
on its shortest diameter. Its surface
is very broken. The mountain mass
which culminates in Harney’s Peak, was
undoubtedly at the center
of force of the great upheaval
to which the formation is due.
From its huge arms
of mountain ranges radiate
in every direction, crossing
the granite area and losing
themselves in the great
limestone rim, Every principle stream
in the Black Hills...”⁸

Lost in the rocky chaos
of his own syntax, Col. Dodge
turned unwitting spokesman
for the golden spokes of one
great Medicine Wheel—glistening
creeks burned by flecks fleeced
from the heart of Grandfather Sun:

Inyan Kara, Cold Springs, Spearfish, & Whitewood
Bear Butte, Elk, Box Elder, & Rapid
Spring, Battle, French, & Beaver
Fall River, Hell Canyon, Red Canyon, & Stockade

all flow as one into both
the Cheyenne's open arms soon
to hold up for the world to invade
the Black Hills' bullseye's
holy cow of gold.

"This afternoon, some one of Mr Jenny's party
found in the sand of the brook
on which we are encamped, *the first gold*, pure
and unmistakable, and its discovery
has created a great sensation." ⁹
Instead of a golden golconda, the geologist
Jenney's two-pennies-worth report
read like a cattleman's bonanza:

"It was truly said
of this region that there was gold
in the very roots of the grass, but
it is not the gold of the gravel
bars or quartz ledges, not the gold
of the miner or geologist but the future
solid wealth of the Black Hills
that is to be sought in the luxuriant
growth of fine grasses
that everywhere spreads over
this beautiful country." ¹⁰

Hundreds of fortune-seekers thronged
the great Wheel, & wronged the rights
of the Sioux Nation. The 1868 Treaty
was deemed an "obnoxious law"
by Dodge, & Crook (who seemed
to think it soon would be repealed)
evicted a mass of miners with a wink
& a nod—but not before a group
of grassroots gold piners platted

the first Black Hills burgh to kill
the fatted calf for Custer.
Others dug still further back, wriggling away
to the safety of dark caves
like white slugs or maggots
under an overturned rock.

Col. Dodge would lodge
his complaint against
the Great Sioux
Reservation, & taint in the eyes
of God & country all
the blond & comely prodigal sons
yet to rise. To this day
the hot seed of conquest promiscuously
spills on western hills
of Grandmother Earth—her jimmied thighs
bloody & thick with flies.

“The ‘Black Hills’ country is a true oasis
in a wide and dreary desert....
Every step toward the heart
of these ‘sacred fastnesses’
is beset with innumerable difficulties.
These overcome, the venturesome explorer
is amply repaid for all his hardship
and privations. Almost
any moderately good country would seem
a ‘Paradise’ after passing
the ‘Purgatory’ of such approaches
to it; but... I express
my fair and candid opinion
when I pronounce the Black Hills,
in many respects, to be
the finest country I have ever seen.” ¹¹

Heart Of The Eye-land

*That day we climb
hour by fire
step by breath
to take the heart
of the Hoop we make
our own
infinity within
Harney Peak stone
(or any point
for that matter
we turn into
the Center)
—a burnt-out lighthouse
or abandoned castle
on top.
The wind rips
words right
out of your mouth
you write. Syllables
scatter
to the Four Winds the birds
soaring below us take
to make their circles
out of pure air
perfect—nests
of notes
whole. The mouth:
one circle in
awe of it all.*

*The place
in the heart's eye
we seek
to climb
where no shadows are
cast (like black stones)
at the heart: the focus
of a wider world
at noontide
on summer solstice.
The sun stands still
within
an upright man
still standing
on the still mountain
the world turns
around—the Mountain
At the Center
Where He Comes.
He remembers the dawn
of fog & rose light
stone rising
from the red horizon:
his own shadow
flew like a swallow
of fire right
into the halo
of the Rainbow
Hoop hovering
on top the first time
he stood up.
The last time
will be the same:
love.*

*The place in the heart's eye
we climb to seek
—you & I— that place
that speaks to us through
the Center
of our whirlwind of days of
that which is most us.
That which is most still
is most moving. That place
like the face of a long-lost lover
or the grace of your father
moving
in your mother's eye moving
her heart to him
not long before
you were born—turning
you (within her) on to
all the delights life has*

*to offer. Circle Powers:
the Power of the world
the light blood of the Tree
the flower of the Heart
the Island of the sea
inland works
in circles within
circles without
the play of the elements'
beginning ever*

*to be
done—their ending being
everywhere never*

begun.

2.

**The Human Gore Has Not Yet Coagulated
(Around The Little Bighorn, Late 1875
Through The Summer Of '76)**

Two days after his return
to glory from the summer foray
of '74, tooting his golden horn
of plenty, Custer himself would stress
to the yellow press the prospects
reported were actually *less*
than what lay out there
on the Great Sioux Reservation.

“The country possesses every character
and quality calculated to fit it
for the home of a dense population.
The title of the Indian
should be extinguished
as soon as possible.” ¹²

From the White House, U.S. Grant's
words rang out as well
like hammer on anvil.
Disgusted with both sides
for failure to forge a sale
of the Black Hills that fall
of '75, his sense of justice ¹³
rusted away. Treaty annuities
agencies began to grant just
seven years before now
were seen as mere gratuities.
The Sioux must pick between two fates
on the scales: sell or starve.

“...the time has come
when Indians must chose
between an industrial life and
starvation with extermination.” 14.

As Commander-in-Chief, the Great Hammerer
could no longer uphold the law
& thwart by military means
hordes of gold miners gone
crazy (*witko*) with *maza skaze*.
To show his mettle, he sought
an iron-handed policy whereby
Sioux “hostiles” might be taught
the machinational mechanics
of proto-superpower politics.

"The true policy, in my judgment, is
to send troops against them
in the winter, the sooner the better, and *whip* them
into subjection.” 15.

A few snow moons would have to pass
before the wide eyes of the world
knew the place the Sioux called
Greasy Grass. Another horn –the Little Bighorn–
would sound & resound the charge
across the pages of every morning paper
in the nation:

MASSACRED
Gen. Custer And 261 Men
The Victims. 16.

“...a great disaster...” (Gen. Terry) 17.
“...a most terrific engagement...” (Maj. Reno)

“...like a thunderbolt...” (Low Dog)
“...like a hurricane...” (Kill Eagle) ¹⁸.
“...like humming bees...” (Sitting Bull)
“...like hundreds of blackbirds after a hawk...”
(Rain In the Face)

As a swallowtail guidon drooped
in the noon air of late June, the golden
hotspur son Yellow Hair swooped
down on wings of fire to try &
snatch up providential prey
with iron claws—blinded by the luster
of presidential desire.

“His trail...comes down to the bank
of the river but at once diverges from it
as if he had unsuccessfully attempted
to cross; then turns upon itself, almost
completes a circle, and ceases. It is marked
by the remains of his officers and men
and the bodies of his horses, some of them
dotted along the path, others heaped
in ravines and upon knolls, where
halts appear to have been made.
There is abundant evidence
that a gallant resistance was offered
by the troops, but they were beset
on all sides by overpowering numbers.” (Terry) ¹⁹.

“...warriors plenty as the leaves on the trees...”
(Crow King) ²⁰.

“The plain seemed to be alive with them.”
(Capt. Benteen) ²¹.

“...as thick as grass on the hillside.”
(Left Hand) ²².

“...the very earth seemed to grow Indians...
They had sufficient numbers to completely
encircle us, and the men were fighting all
the Sioux Nation, and also all the desperadoes,
renegades, half-breeds, and squawmen
between the Missouri and the Arkansas
and east of the Rocky Mountains, and
they must have numbered at least
twenty-five hundred warriors.” (Reno)

The Sioux Nation, for the first time
ever, were one, & fought
to kill (white-style) instead
of counting coup for the singular honor
of an eagle feather.

After an offering of a hundred pieces
of flesh poured a blanket of blood
down each arm while gazing at the sun
dancing across the red arc
of his brow, Sitting Bull, refractory
tactician & medicine man, was given
a sacred vision: many bluecoats falling
headlong into camp.

Hoka hey! It *was* a good day
to die. Even before the horrible story
of Custer’s debacle had trickled
its “warm gushing gore”
across the continent, a debate
in Congress began to heat up
summer rhetoric. Delegate
to Dacotah Territory, Judge Jefferson Kidder
took to the floor with a blast
of furnace breath—just four days after
the martyr’s death:

“Today Sitting Bull and his associate chiefs... shake
their bloody girdles of white men’s
scalps, on some of which the human gore
has not yet coagulated, in the faces
of your officers, and bid defiance
to your laws and military authority....
Remove this dusky cloud
title from a portion of the reservation, and
thousands of emigrants will flock there
annually, not simply as gold hunters, but
as farmers and tillers of the soil....
Men and women will earn their daily bread
in quiet, and after the labors of the day
lay down to sleep without fear
of being awakened by the yell
of the bloodthirsty savage or the glare
of midnight conflagration.” ²³

In far Dakota’s cañons, the Black Hills grew
one great evergreen funereal wreath
round the hundredth celebration of the 4th.
Afternoon thunderheads heaped high
& bruise-blue above the range brooded
on that ego-swollen “hero” fallen
at the Little Bighorn. A hush...
eaten on its deep green leaf edge
by the *cheep-cheep* of crickets & still
the storm failed to break. A heavy heart
remembered this mourning the same
as over a decade ago that gray-beard poet wrote:

“*Come lovely and soothing death...*” Now
“...with erect head, pressing ever
in front, bearing
a bright sword in thy hand...” ²⁴

With red extermination
on the brain, a great White Giant walked
across Lakota Land. The Moon
of the Black Chokecherries ²⁵
melted like a hailstone. The tribal federation
scattered & fled before his power
faster than hoppers in dry grass. As Crazy Horse
bolted toward the Big Horns &
Sitting Bull's people thundered north, far
east, Capitol Hill passed the bill easily
as a slip of paper or the tongue.
The white hand grasped what the red
had long felt: the Sacred Hoop
now became a broken drum.
"The treaty was broken, but not by the savage.
If the savage resists, civilization,
with the Ten Commandments in one hand
and the sword in the other, demands
his immediate extermination." ²⁶

Gold buttons bristling
like fire ants in the naked light
of a sweltering sun, sweat stench
of fear & gore hung in the dust
of stunned air. As they lay beyond
God's earshot on the sin-drenched plain, blind
with pain, a shade this side
of death, troopers who'd been there before
would recall & retreat, retreat
to that ever-cool Eden
of evergreen. Down sweetgrass &
granite canyons like echoes or dreams
exiled from the flesh, a cadre
of lonesome souls now wanders
what seems forever, seeking
scattered shards of the sun. In the distance

something shimmers. Suddenly
one lost soldier's flooded
with yearning. He knows
nothing, nothing but
the first river burning
toward the Last Judgment. Around him
the Sacred Hoop of Grandmother Earth
expands. Oblivious to this, he dips
his pan into Lethe's water, lifts it
to look. Like an old man
holding a mirror, he asks himself:
"Where did all those golden years go?"

Above the dreary Black Hills
the air is dead-still &
heavy as lead.

Sweatlodge Of The Cosmos

*The Wind of Spring
in the new-born morning
of the year rises
in the East.*

*The Wind of Summer
breaks to rest
in the South—his solstice
repast at noon.*

*To the West
the Wind of Fall
takes his leave
in the gray-haired evening
of the year.*

*The Wind of Winter
makes at last
his dark transit back.
Through all the snowy houses
of night buried deep
in the North
the breath still rife
with fire flowers
in a round song of life &*

flows

*back to the beginning
& forth
returning—again
the Medicine Wheels
of vision turning
eternally.*

*The Sacred Mystery circles
the Great Lodge. 27.
Resting on the rim
of the wide horizon
(upside down) a bowl of blue
Buffalo hide stretches
across the Sky
the Sun & the Moon
are balanced through.
“As above, so below.”
From the Two
plus the Four Directions
(that miraculously make one)
toward the Wind Center
the People of the Great Hoop
look within
at the worn & wrinkled body
of Grandfather Rock.*

*“at the Center
of the Earth
I stand.
at the Wind Center
I stand
(where the winds
blow at me
from every direction)
behold me
a root of an herb
therefore
(of the Bear Clan
with great medicine)
I stand*

*at the Wind Center
I stand” 28.*

*Like the Grizzly Bear
the Two Legged Ones
lift their hands
& touch
in prayer
the Falling Star.
In the twilight
the Mystery Mountain glows
at the Center
like dying embers
of the seven sacred fires
of the Sioux. 29.*

*“Grandfather
a voice
I am going to send
hear me
all over the universe
a voice
I am going to send
hear me
Grandfather
I will live
I have said it”*

*Rising
in whispers
soft as ashes
from drowsy flames
of campfires*

*the voices
of Ancestors
flicker & flow
in the twilight.
To the West
in Whirlwind circles
'Thunderbeings beat
jointed wings & flash
beaks full of wolves' teeth.
Loud as the rumbling stomach
of the starving White Giant
trapped under
the Sacred Mountain
at the Center
an avalanche
of thunder echoes
down the black hillsides
of storm clouds.*

*The waters of life
return.
The waters of life
at last begin
to sizzle & hiss
like a rattlesnake pit
against the red-hot
blistering skin
of Grandfather Rock. The past
returns.
The waters of life
at last begin
to speak.
Like the open hand*

of the oldest woman alive
Grandmother Earth
trembles beneath. Above
the round house
of the Great Lodge
of the Cosmos
is battered & torn
like a cottonwood leaf
in a bad storm.
The Ancient Ones
return.
The ancient fires
will burn
again “because of the breath
they make”—the breath
of Grandfather Rock.
Over the inland sea
sage floats.
Steam clouds
& clears
one Spirit
(that miraculously makes four)
the People are breathing.
The People are breathing!
The People are alive!
The People are the life
breath of the Grandmother’s
womb-waters—sweat
of the earth.

O Wakan Tanka!
Make this breath
pure as the spirit
of the waters

*of life.
O Wakan Tanka!
Within this sacred space
of the Ancient Mountain making
the Center
of the world one
with all
make the People
as well
pure
as the new-born skin
of the Rainbow Hoop.*

3.

**The Blood On This Country Makes Me Cry
(Slim Buttes Battle & The Treaty Commission,
Fall, 1876)**

As a steel blade seared
its dudgeon to the bone, Sioux faces
blank as stone watched
squirming gold bugs dank
as Old World kingdoms come
squander, defile or try to kill
the Grandmother—come take
her beaten heart: the sacred Hills.
Call it blackmail
to withhold rations now
the red buffalo cow
had nearly disappeared
under the earth. The threat
of imminent deportation
to Indian territory (that *nyrd* land
of enemies to the South)
in order to learn
“civilized” life was just
another wicked twist
of the knife.

“‘Ute John,’ the solitary
friendly Indian who did not desert
the column, scalped the dead, unknown
to the General or any of the officers, and
I regret to be compelled
to state a few –a very few– brutalized
soldiers followed his savage

example. Each took only a portion
of the scalp, but the exhibition
of human depravity
was nauseating. The unfortunates
should have been respected, even
in the coldness and nothingness
of death. In that affair, surely, the army
were the assailants, and the savages
acted purely
in self-defense.”³⁰

Gray Fox Crook made his “horsemeat march”
on a muddy trail which led
from the North to Deadwood gold fields. Midway
at Slim Buttes a bloody struggle would claim
a brave, three “squaws,” & one papoose.³¹
Caught in a cave of a shrub-covered gully
for a dreadful eight-hour eternity,
four red men fought off
more than a hundred-&-fifty white.
The Lakota still call this “The Fight
Where We Lost the Black Hills.”³²

“The women and pappooses, covered with dirt
and blood, were screaming in an agony
of terror; behind and above us
were the oaths and yells
of the surging soldiers; back
of the women lay what seemed, as near
as we could make out, to be four
dead bodies still weltering
in their gore. Altogether, the scene,
as far as it went, was decidedly
infernal.”³³

As the buttes' turrets were shrouded
in swirling fog, recruits'
bullets fell in the rifle pit
like hail in hell. Despite
the half-starved state
of the white men, "boys
will be boys."

"General Crook had arrived
on the scene, and, while we were waiting
for 'Lo' to resume the offensive, some
few scouts and packers started
in to have a little fun
'rousting out them Injun.' Half a dozen
soldiers got permission
to go over and join in
while the rest of us were hungrily
hunting about for something to eat." ³⁴

Among plunder the soldiers captured
over 200 Indian ponies, several tons
of jerky & pemmican, sundry supplies
& ammunition, cavalry saddles, the glove of one
Capt. Keogh, an officer's overcoat, a private's
bloody blouse, a swallowtail guidon torn
from its staff, plus a few horses
bearing the brand of the 7th Cavalry.
But as the human toll was taken, lust
curdled in red puddles, & paper sales soared
back at the hog butcher of the world:

"The skull of the poor squaw
was blown, literally, to atoms, revealing
the ridge of the palate and presenting
a most ghastly and revolting
spectacle. Another of the dead females

—a middle-aged woman— was so riddled
by bullets that there appeared to be
no unwounded part of her person
left. The third victim
was young, plump, and
comparatively speaking, light
of color. She had a magnificent
physique, and, for an Indian, a most attractive
set of features. She had been shot through
the left breast just over the heart
and was not in the least
disfigured.”³⁵

Mortally wounded with buckshot
in his gut, Chief American Horse was forced³⁶
to surrender—the blood-stained gloves
(his hands were) trying in vain to stuff
knotted entrails back inside
himself.

If this were not
enough, the Black Hills were
now dying, slowly dyeing
under the blood-bloated Moon
of the Scarlet Plums
white lies black.
Disregarding Article 12
of the Laramie Treaty (the required
signatures of three-quarters
of all warriors, chiefs & elders),
from one reservation to another (divide
& conquer), duplicitous commissioners
made the rounds to square the deal
to the steal the Heart
of Everything That Is.

Running Antelope, Hunkpapa, Standing Rock Agency:

“The land known as the Black Hills
is considered by the Indians as the center
of their land. The ten nations
of the Sioux are looking toward that
as the center of their land.” ³⁷.

Little Wound, Oglala, Red Cloud Agency:

“The country upon which I am standing
is the country upon which I was born, and
upon which I heard that it was the wish
of the Great Father and the Great Council
that I should be like a man without
a country. I shed tears.”

John Grass, Blackfoot (Sioux), Standing Rock Agency:

“The Great Spirit made this earth
for me and He raised me on it...
You come here from the Great Father
to inquire of me about my land.
I will never find another land better
than the one I have.”

Battiste Good, Brule, Spotted Tail Agency:

“This country is not called
the country of the Indians, but
the country of the Great Spirit.
He is the one who gave it
to the Indians.... In giving up
this country, I hope to receive
such things as will make me rich
and make me glad; but the blood

on this country makes me cry.”

Swan, Miniconjou, Cheyenne River Agency:

“Some of the Great Father’s people
came into this country, and they have left
the bones of both white and red people
lying on the prairies. I do not believe
the Great Spirit is satisfied with that...”

Rev. H.B. Wipple, Commissioner:

“The white man once lived on an island,
and that island had a great many tribes
and they were always at war with each other,
and from one end to the other that island
was an island of blood.
There came men from the far south
and brought a message of the Great Spirit.
Some of the people listened, a very few
at first, afterward more, and by and by
they became a great and powerful people.
There is not to-day a single spot
on the face of the earth where you cannot
find these white men. They have multiplied
and increased because of the blessings
of Almighty God.”

‘Surrounded’ (Medicine Bull’s head-soldier),
Lower Brule, Lower Brule Agency:

“When the prairie is on fire
you see animals surrounded
by the fire; you see them run
and try to hide themselves

so they will not burn.
'That is the way we are here.'

H.C. Bulis, Commissioner:

"...if you reject this treaty
your rations will be cut off
from this issue.

Long Mandan, Two Kettle, Cheyenne River Agency:

"My friends, when I went to Washington
I went into your money-house
and I had some young men with me, but
none of them took any money out
of that house. At the same time,
when your Great Father's people come
into my country, they go into my money-house
and take money out. Now
I wish you to provide for us."

White Bear, Lower Yancetonai, Crow Creek Agency:

"Ever since the first treaty was made, even
to-day when you are making the last treaty,
I have lived so my hands are not bloody.
I know everything that my hands have done,
and I want to shake hands with you
with an honest hand... My father,
I want to have you look at me
in the face; your hair is already white,
mine, also, is white. Look at these hairs
of mine. I am an old man.
I am about to die, not knowing
what they mean when they talk
about money."

Wolf Necklace, Upper Yanktonai, Standing Rock Agency:

“I never want to leave
this country; all my relatives
are lying here
in the ground, and when
I fall
to pieces I am going
to fall to pieces
here.”

Grandmother Earth & The Last Buffalo

*The great sea of unturned sod
is food for the buffalo
in turn
is food for the Indian
in turn
is food for the Great Spirit:
the Great Hoop of grass-turned-God.*

*The Grandmother is weaving
wild sage & sweet matchbrush. 38.
The young lovers are coming
together under blankets.*

*The Grandmother is bringing
braids of sweetgrass & white sage. 39.
The young green ones are burning
(together) to make incense.*

*The Grandmother is weaving
her water / earth / fire / air.
The good spirits are coming
together—West / North / East / South.*

*The evil ones are leaving
her hues—black / white / yellow / red.
Together to make (one) love
the Grandmother is weaving.*

*Under the milk-full moon's light
the Grandmother weaves & weaves*

*her spell. With love a new life
grows in her quill work. She leaves*

*to stir her kettle of herbs
boiling. Stalking round & round
meddlesome Coyote disturbs
her godeye's birth from the ground.*

*Unwinding one green season
after another the sun
will die to sense & reason
if ever her spell is done.*

*Tall & black
against the setting sun
at the Western Gate stands
the last great Buffalo.
He holds back
the sea.*

*He breathes out
& the wind blows
for days
across the desert.
He bellows
& Grandmother Earth quakes.
With the passing
of each fourth time
one more hair
falls from his hide.
Already he's lost
three of his legs
& totters like a top. 40.
Nearly bare*

*he watches the Grandmother weaving
weaving weaving.
He awaits the completion
of her gods-eye woven
of herb & arbor
season after season.
But cunning Coyote
with the breath of a blizzard
always seems to unravel
her green Mystery
& she
must begin again
in the spring
of each fourth time.*

*The Buffalo cannot stand
much longer.
Waves break
against his right flank. The sea
of sweetgrass sage & sunflowers
remembers
spindrift & humpbacks.
Season after season
roots pass on
to new green leaves
the undertow
of a salt sea lost
so long ago.
Again sea & plain
long to be
one. The Buffalo
raises his head &
gazes inland.*

*The Grandmother is weaving
still. The ripe smell
of the end
is in the wind.*

4.

**They Were Only Dead Indians
(Ghost Dance To Wounded Knee, 1890)**

“The buffalo were gone and all the Indians were hungry. I sat with my father in his tipi when a message came and told us that a Savior for the Indians had appeared to an Indian in a far land of the setting sun, and promised to come and bring again the buffalo and antelope and send the white man from all the land where the Indians hunted in old times.”⁴¹

*Now they are going
to hunt the buffalo.
Now they are going
to hunt the buffalo.
O Grandmother!
Give me back me bow.
O Grandmother!
Give me back my bow.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.*⁴²

“This messenger was holy and told us that if we would dance and pray to the Savior he would appear and show us things that were sacred.”⁴³

*It is I who make
these sacred things.
It is I who make
the sacred shirt.*

The Father says so.
The Father says so.
It is I who made
the sacred pipe.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.

“At Standing Rock, Pine Ridge and the Rosebud agencies I found certain bands almost crazy with the fever. The devotees of this idea are dressed in their exercises in a special garb made up of a calico shirt and worn like a blouse called by them a ‘holy’ or ‘mysterious’ shirt and amid harangues from their leaders and songs in which they cry ‘The buffalo are coming,’ the people form rings by joining hands and whirling around in wild dances until they fall to the ground unconscious. This craze will take care of itself and run its course. It will indeed be an unfortunate thing if troops are sent among them. It will precipitate war with absolute certainty.” 44.

The whole earth is coming.
A nation is coming.
A nation is coming.
The eagle has returned
with a message to the tribe.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.
The whole earth over
they are coming.
The buffalo are coming.
The buffalo are coming.

*The crow has returned
with a message to the tribe.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.*

“The jovial face of Frederic Remington, the famous artist, shone with delight as he started with the troops this morning from Rapid City saying, ‘We will smell powder and Indians by Wednesday...’ The followers of Big Foot have started east to join their friends near Cherry Creek and go to the Badlands.”⁴⁵

*You shall see your relatives.
E’yayo’!
You shall see your relatives.
E’yayo’!
The Father says so.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.*

“Then the medicine man stopped singing and began to cry to the Great Spirit, and gathered up a handful of dust and threw it at the sky and waved his blanket under the dust, as they did in the ghost dance when they call for the Messiah. Just then the officer came out of a tipi with my gun in his hand, and I heard a soldier cry out, ‘Look out! Look out! Run back!’ And someone cried out in Indian, ‘Stop! Don’t shoot!’”⁴⁶

*The Father says so.
E’yayo’!*

The Father says so.
E'yayo'!

"... all the soldiers began to shoot
and I saw Indians falling all around.
I was not expecting anything like this.
It was like when a wagon wheel
breaks in the road." 47.

"...the soldiers' shots sounded like firecrackers
and hail in a storm..." 48.
 "...like a lightning crash..." 49.
 "...like the sound of tearing canvas..." 50.
"We tried to run but they shot us
like we were buffalo." 51.
 "...shot down like wolves..." 52.

"It was now in the ravine
just like a prairie fire
when it reaches brush and tall grass and
rages with new power..." 53.

"...there was soon so much smoke
covering the scene that nobody
could be seen. There was no wind
to clear it away. It hung
like a pall over the field.
Through rifts in the smoke, heads and feet
could be seen. Women were killed
in the fight, just the same as men
were killed. Women who were wounded and
had babies, placed the little things
in there for safety. Some women
made places for themselves and
crawled into them for protection.
One mother lay dead, her breast covered

with blood from her wound and her little child
was standing by her and nursing.” 54.

O Mother!
Come home!
O Mother!
Come home!
My little brother goes around
always crying.
My little brother goes around
always crying.
O Mother!
Come home!
O Mother!
Come home!

“Now when I saw all those little infants lying
dead in their blood, my feeling was
that even if I ate one of the soldiers,
it would not appease my anger.” 55.

My child!
Come back!
My child!
Come back!
You will take home
a good country.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.

“I passed right on
from my dead mother and
met a man coming down
the ravine who was wounded
in the knee.” 56.

“I was very much frightened and
started to run. I saw
some soldiers running, and I ran
that way. I ran into smoke
so thick I could not see
anything. While I was running
I took my knife out. The first thing
I saw in the smoke
was the brass buttons
on a soldier’s coat. A gun
was thrust towards me and
fired, and it was so close
it burnt my hair. I grabbed
the gun and stabbed
at the soldier with my knife.
I stabbed him
three times and he let go
the gun. I tripped and fell and when
I got up I found that I
was among soldiers, and
I started to run back
towards the ditch. I saw
some soldiers aiming at me and
I felt something
hit me in the shoulder and
I fell down.
I began to breathe
very hard and every breath
hurt me very much.
I got up and tried to
run but could not, so
I walked. I was
strangling with something
warm in my throat and mouth.
I spit it out and looked
at it, and it

was blood, so I knew
I was shot.
When I started
for the ditch again I thought
I stepped into a prairie dog hole
for I fell, but when
I tried to get up I could not
do so, and I found
I was shot
through the leg.
Just as I got to the top
of the bank, an Indian
pulled me back, and as I fell
back he was shot
through the head.
I crawled up the ditch as fast
as I could and I came
to White Lance, my brother.
He was sitting against the bank
and another brother, Persued,
was lying by him.
They were both wounded and
Persued was almost dead.
He said, 'My brothers,
we will all be dead
soon. But you must kill
as many as you can
before you die.'
White Lance and I
lay down close behind
the knoll and the dirt
and gravel scattered
over us, thrown up
by the Hotchkiss cannon.
I got very sick and weak and thirsty and
could shoot no more.

I could hear soldiers coming
close by me, and I saw
a soldier peep over
the bank. I fired at him, but
I was too weak
to take aim. The soldiers
ran back and they fired
the Hotchkiss again, and
a shot from it cut
Hawk Feather almost
in two. I felt
very sick and wanted to
die as I crawled
to the top of the bank
and shot at some soldiers, but
I was too weak
to stand up. They fired
the Hotchkiss gun at me again and
the balls passed very close
so I could almost feel
the wind from the balls lift
me from the ground. But
I was too sick
to stand up, so I lay
very still. After a long time
all the firing
stopped.”⁵⁷

“When the smoke cleared away
from in front of the tent where it began
there were forty-five Indians
with their impregnable shirts on
lying dead...”⁵⁸

*Thus I give you my strength.
The Father says so.*

*The Father says so.
With this shirt you shall live.
The Father says so.
The Father says so.*

“I counted eighty bodies of men
who had been in the council and
who were almost as helpless as the women
and babes when the deadly firing began,
for nearly all their guns
had been taken from them.” ⁵⁹.

“I have my old cloak
has nine bullet holes in it.
I am shot all through my body
and I may die anytime
from the effects of those wounds.
I want my good friends
to tell the good white people
what they did to us here
at Wounded Knee.” ⁶⁰.

“We glory in the revenge
of the Seventh, although they sustained
a heavy loss... We predict
that the killing of Big Foot
and his warriors will have a telling effect
on the messiah craze, and will civilize
more reds who are yet alive
than all the power of God
and education that has been pumped into them
for the past 16 years.” ⁶¹.

“A long trench was dug and into it were thrown
all the bodies, piled one upon another
like so much cordwood, until the pit

was full, when the earth was heaped
over them and the funeral was complete.
Many of the bodies were stripped by the whites,
who went out in order to get the 'ghost shirts,' and
the frozen bodies were thrown into the trench
stiff and naked. They were only dead Indians." 62.

"The dealers of trinkets are selling all
of the Indians goods they can secure,
and at prices that are fabulous...
Tenderfeet have already purchased
at least a carload of ghost shirts
that Big Foot was supposed to have had on
at the time he was killed." 63.

Ghost Dance Shirt

The shirt is made from tanned hide,
has brass bells and a turkey feather
on the back, and is hung
on a willow hanger. Open on the sides
with leather ties, it fits
almost anyone. About 30"
from the neck opening to the bottom
of the fringe and 21" across
the shoulder.

\$395

Ghost Dance Shield

The shield has brass bells,
turkey tail feathers and
imitation eagle feathers.
Approximately 21"
in diameter.

\$310

Ghost Dance Drum

\$125

Ghost Dance Knife & Sheath

\$90

Ghost Dance Pouch

\$50

Ghost Dance Drum Beater

\$40

64.

“We don't have hate in our hearts for the white people, but the soldiers tried to murder us and we want the Government to find out the truth, not like the picture show that came here and had Indians to act just like they wanted but not the truth.” 65.

“The last of the great Indian fighters are the leading players in this most realistic film of the age. Nothing more picturesque, more thrillingly entertaining was ever staged. Nothing to equal it will, perhaps, ever be done again. No boy, girl or grown-up should be allowed to miss this picture.” 66.

“I have never said anything about this. I didn't like to on account of my mother who was shot right with me and it appears that it just happened this morning; it makes me feel sad.” 67.

“The Indians have their own peculiar methods of estimating time.

For them, years are not
so many revolutions
of the Earth around the Sun, but
so many winters, to be remembered
for their cold and suffering.
Days are not so many
sunrises, but sleeps.” 68.

be still
sleep
be still
sleep
be still
sleep
be still
sleep 69.

Stone Dreamer & A Last Buffalo Song

*Now all but a few
of the buffalo have gone
deep beneath the earth
of the Grandmother
again. She is sleeping.
Half-buried in her belly
a sacred skull is a rare find.
The last century has turned
most of the bones over
to priceless fine china.
Most of the hides
have gone back to
buffalo grass—all but a few
winter counts in museums
of frozen dust & destiny.
The Sioux: the last “conquered” nation
now displays on dark islands
of reservation cut apart
by iron rails & barb wire
the Great Misery wrought
by the spirits’ departure.⁷⁰
They’ve all gone south
down the Ghost Road
of the Milky Way
to the Spirit World
the buffalo are singing. Again*

*long long ago
the spirits lived in this world—
in every spear of grass*

*in the eye of the buffalo
& the heart of the Cottonwood—
quivering
with strong power
pulsing within
the Great Mystery.
The first red men knew
how to make the journey
to the Spirit World through
rooted tunnels
at the Center
of the Grandmother
in the flesh. Now
only Stone Dreamer
goes there in spirit
only. Yuvipi man:
“they bind him up”
in the darkness
of a star quilt
with rawhide thongs
knotted seven times.
He listens within
to the fierce piercing pitch
of the sacred songs.
He listens within
to the hot throbbing pulse
of the sacred drum.
He listens within
to whispering spirits
of the sacred stones.
He listens within.
The clear rock spheres
are the four-hundred-and-five*

*little gifts
put into red gourd rattles
along with bits of flesh.
The sacred stones
are the four-hundred-and-five
little gifts
that sing with the offering
cut from the arm—
the only true sacrifice
one can give (himself / herself)
to whispering spirits
of the sacred stones.*

*“all these
move with a purpose
all these
move with a purpose
a sacred-stone nation
moves with a purpose
all these
move with a purpose”* 71.

*In darkness
the medicine rattles
fly around the room.
In darkness
little flashes of light
fly around the room.
In darkness
little feathers of breath
fly around the room.
They brush against the blind
faces of the People*

*who wear sprigs of sage
behind each right ear.
They brush against the blind
faces of the People
who listen with fear
to whispering spirits
of the sacred stones
in darkness.*

*“some one
somewhere
is speaking
from the north
a sacred-stone nation
is speaking
you will hear
some one
somewhere
speaking” 72.*

*Yuwipi man’s spirit
(like the incense
of burning sweetgrass)
begins to climb
the Sacred Tree
at the Center.
Or the other way (under
the Grandmother) he clings to
its green snake roots.
Along the way
he longs to see
lost things
or causes of diseases*

*or herbs to cure them
or what shall be.
Along the way
in one dark island
he sees
the buffalo are waiting
to live again.
Along the way
listen (with red ears
of Stone Dreamer)
to the Ghost Dance song
the buffalo are singing:*

*“Deep beneath the earth
our red winds
Ghost Dance.
With sacred visions & chants
our red winds
advance
in buffalo clans
out of the lap
of Wind Cave.
To live within
the Great Hoop
our red winds
have come together
to gather
the strong power
the muscles of Grandmother Earth
ripple with.
Our red winds
listen
to the Cottonwood*

*at the Center. The leaves
of the Cottonwood
at the Center
glisten
under Grandfather Sun.
Through laughing leaves
of the Cottonwood
at the Center
our red winds
are chanting
a round song
in a rainbow ring.”*

*(All the while
their iron snakes
of railroad cars haul
coal dust east
like tons of dark silence
out of the heart
of the Grandmother.)*

*“In a rainbow ring
our red winds
are dancing
a vision of thunder
within
the Great Hoop.
In a rainbow ring
our red winds
are chanting
a round song of lightning
within
the Great Hoop.*

In a rainbow ring
We shall live again!
within
our red words:

“We shall live again!
We shall live again!
We shall live again!
We shall live again!”

Epilog

Glowing Coal Died (Winter Counts After Wounded Knee)

- 1891 Someone stole funds at the agency.
(The agent did it.)
- 1892 Big Crow killed his brother.
- 1893 First boarding school at Pine Ridge
burned down.
- 1894 Falling stars.
- 1895 Thunder Hawk killed a woman.
- 1896 Yellow Thunder froze to death.
(His son would give him no clothing.)
- 1897 The agent confiscated the Sacred Pipe.
- 1898 First time many babies were born
without a father.
- 1899 Glowing Coal died during the winter.
- 1900 Burning Breast drank himself to death. 1.

Burning Breast drank himself to death
just yesterday. Read all about it
in Lakota Times. Was walking the road
from Pine Ridge to Whiteclay (south)
past midnight—a near-spent pint

of Everclear jammed in his jeans.
Ghost plumes of breath
rimed the toothless zero
of the bottle's mouth.

*“With visible breath
I am walking.
To the People
of the Great Hoop
a voice
I am sending.
In the sacred way
I am walking.
With this bundle
a voice
I am sending.
With visible breath
I am walking.”* 2.

As White Buffalo Woman
blew upon the glowing coal
of his flesh, the red spirit
of Burning Breast rose like smoke
from the Sacred Pipe. Together
they are walking
the Ghost Road forever.

By the time the glass eye
of Grandmother Moon had fallen —smashed
against the asphalt & concrete
dinosaurs of the Black Hills—
he was gone. “Hypothermia” (the term
the mackled sheet of high-proof
history used) lies
upon an oceanic plain

of ice: a chilblains cipher
at the center of the heartless
Wasichu paper world.

The Rainbow Hoop Clan

*A calling
to the heart
of the life of one
from the Heart
of Everything That Is:
we the People
of the Rainbow Hoop Clan
sing.*

*As we enter
the temple
one by one
by one to make
our way
to the Center
each step is
a prayer
for the People.
To the heart
each step is
a calling
for a round song.*

*To the eye
each step is
a crying
for a vision. 3.*

*A vision
of a land enchanted
as love—the deepest love
that takes a chance
to the heart—the truest heart
that makes one dance*

*the first time
round.
This eye-land
lured
the first men
& women to enter
the Sacred Hoop
of Wita Paba.
To the Center
the heart
of their round dance
still chants:*

*Chante Ishta!
Chante Ishta!!
Chante Ishta!!!
Chante Ishta!!!! 4.*

*The first dawn
lights the way
to the cool air
of mountains where
we the People
of the Rainbow Hoop Clan
still seek
Sacred Circles
of vision.*

*With Medicine Wheels
the People return
to the Circle temple.
The People are healed
by the Circle temple.*

*The People are one
through the Circle temple.
The People have all
come to call this spiritual homeland
Wita Paha: the Island Hills.*

*“something sacred
wears me
all
see me
coming*

*“a Rainbow Hoop
wears me
all
see me
coming” 5.*

*The People
are the raiment
of the Rainbow Hoop
singing!
The Rainbow Hoop
is the spectral flesh
of the spirits
singing!
The spirits
are the weavers
of the waves of light
singing*

*as one! Evermore united
in reverent love*

*for the land the People
of the Rainbow Hoop Clan embrace
the four races of Man.
The People of the Rainbow Hoop Clan
are standing at the Center
of the Mystery Circles
of the Island Hills—hands linked
around the New World Tree.
The People of the Rainbow Hoop Clan
are moving sunwise—hearts linked
around the Great Mystery.
The People of the Rainbow Hoop Clan
are moving at the Center
of the Great Hoop
of the High Plains—spirits linked*

*as one. Evermore united
in a round song of life
the People are singing
upon the Sacred Mountain
the fire of the Living Word.
Upon the Sacred Mountain
in a round song of life
flowers the heart
of the Cottonwood temple within
the fire of the Living Word.
The People are chanting
upon the Sacred Mountain
in a round dance of life
this spiritual homeland within
the fire of the Living Word.
Upon the Sacred Mountain
the People of the Rainbow Hoop Clan*

*are singing at the Center
in a round dance of life.
The fire of the Living Word
is the many tongues
of the People the spirits make
one for all
space & time—united
evermore.*

Endnotes and Sources

Lines On the Medicine Wheel

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Citing the Island

1. Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red*, Dell Publishing Co., New York, 1973.
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3. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson Essays*, Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., Inc., New York, 1951.
4. Joseph Epes Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*, Pendle Hill Publications, Pamphlet Number 135, Wallingford, Pennsylvania, 1964.
5. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1959.
6. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1961.
7. Erling Duus, *The Tragic, Sacred Ground*, Pine Hill Press, Freeman, South Dakota, 1989.
8. Sven G. Froiland, *Natural History of the Black Hills*, The Center For Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 1978.
9. Ron Goodman, "The Hoop and Pole Game in the Rock Art of the Black Hills," unpublished manuscript.
10. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1986.
11. Algernon Charles Swinburne, "The Forsaken Garden."

Prolog

1. "The preeminent tangible symbol of traditional Lakota religion was the circle. The Lakotas perceived everything in the natural world as circular (except rock), for roundness was indicative of life itself. For this reason the circle was held to be sacred (*wakan*). Sun, sky, earth, moon, a human body, a tree trunk, day, night, a year, a man's life—all these were sacred circles. In respect for this natural order, the Lakotas made circular tipis, pitching them in camp circles, and sat in circles for ceremonial occasions. The wholeness of the circle, without beginning or end, represented the wholeness and oneness of the universe." *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given To John G. Neihardt*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie, forward by Hilda Neihardt Petri, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1984.

2. Just as a child's earliest experiences are the most impressionable, long-lasting, and essential (at least according to Freudian psychology), so it is with a culture and the myths of its initial experiences. The first act in Lakota cosmogony (its first story) was the creation of *Maka* (Earth), a great disk, out of the blood of *Inyan* (Rock), primordial chaos; i.e. the creation of space. This is in contradistinction to the account of the Hebrew cosmogony found in the Book of Genesis. Here the first act is the creation of primordial light, which is subsequently divided into day and night; i.e. the creation of time. In the former the first act is primarily sacrificial in nature and evokes a sense of pathos that is acutely anthropomorphic. (This concept of *sacrifice* is a major tenet of Lakota theology and is exemplified most powerfully in the Sun Dance ritual, where the blood of the individual is offered to the Great Spirit so that others of the tribe may live.) In the latter the first act is peremptorily patriarchal and stresses the omnipotence and remoteness of Yahweh. Furthermore, in the former the Spirit is moving *within* the chaos of matter and is already immanent, whereas in the latter the Spirit is moving *upon* "the face of the deep" (chaos) but is separated and distinct from this primordial matter.

3. "...the word translated 'iron,' or 'metal,' is connected with the color blue, the object called iron being always painted blue when colors are used, and that color is mystically connected with the water powers of the Dakotan mythology." Garrick Mallery, *Picture Writing of the American Indian*, Vol. I, Dover Publications, Inc. 1972 (Original

10th Annual Report of B.A.E., 1888–9.) In Lakota the evil water spirit *Unk* rules over reptiles and fish. In Lakota culture the color dark blue is usually interchangeable with black.

4. From Battiste Good's Winter Count, Mallery, *op. cit.* High Hawk's Winter Count (Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, Vol. 3, Johnson Reprint, New York, 1970) cites 1666 as the year when the Sioux encountered eight white men on the shore of a great lake. They were given the name *Mini-Washichu*, "Water Mystery." Curtis believes this was the party of Father Claude Jean Allouez, who had skirted the southern shore of Lake Superior in that year. But Curtis goes on to say that the Sioux had already seen white men during the winter of 1661–2 when two French men, Radisson and Groseilliers (who "discovered" Mille Lacs), were the guests of honor.

5. The Dakotas, otherwise known as the Sioux. Battiste Good's annual Winter Count began with the year 1700–1.

6. "the place you always face," i.e. the south

7. High-Hawk's Winter Count (Curtis, *op. cit.*) cites 1624 as the year a horse was found among a buffalo herd, 1680 as the year horses were first used in riding, and 1687 as the year horses were first used in buffalo hunting. These dates are possible, since Coronado introduced the horse to this continent on his expedition of 1541–2. However, High Hawk does corroborate Battiste Good's event of the year 1709, i.e. the stealing of Omaha horses.

Book I

1.

1. *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Doane Robinson, ed., "Journal of the trip made by Chevalier de la Verendrye with one of his brothers, to reach the West Sea, addressed to M. le Marquis de Beauharnois," trans. from Margry by C.S. Stevenson, Vol. VII, 1914.

2. *ibid.*, On February 16, 1913, a group of school children on a hill in Ft. Pierre, South Dakota, found a lead plate that had laid claim to the entire region. It was incised in Latin with the following: "in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of the illustrious king and prelate Louis XV. and while the Marquis of Beauharnois was viceroy, this was placed by Pierre Gaultier de la Verendrye." On the back of this prepared tablet was scratched in French: "placed here by Chevalier

Verendrye, witnessed by La Londette, Amiotte, the 30th of March, 1743.”

2.

3. This and the following quotations, with one exception, are from Reuben G. Thwaites, *Lewis and Clark Journals*, 8 volumes, Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1904.

4. The average size of these rectangular houses was about 35 feet by 20 feet, but some found to be about 60 feet in length may have been used for ceremonial purposes. The average village size was about 200-300 people, living in 20-30 rooms situated on a north-south axis. The following list of artifacts is a composite of those made by the Plains Indian culture which flourished in the Missouri River Valley of South Dakota c. A.D. 800-1750. The round earth lodges which came into existence c. 1500 were built by the forerunners of the Arickara (the Ree), the Mandans, and the Hidatsa of the historical period.

5. Lewis cited by John Bradbury in "Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809-1811," Reuben G. Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, Vol. V, Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1904.

6. This is a portion of the undelivered speech Clark prepared for the Yellowstone River Indians, which he never encountered.

7. Wind Cave National Park in the southern Black Hills.

3.

8. This and the following two quotations are from Thwaites, *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, "Journal of a Voyage Up the Missouri River," (Brackenridge's Journal), Vol. VI, Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1904.

9. This and the following quotations are from Washington Irving, *The Works of Washington Irving*, "Astoria," The Cooperated Publication Society, Inc., New York, no publication date.

4.

10. Maurice S. Sullivan, *The Travels of Jedediah Smith*, Fine Arts Press, Santa Ana, California, 1934.

11. *South Dakota Historical Collections*, "Trudeau's Journal," Vol. VII, 1914.

12. This and the following quotations are from James Clyman, *Journal of a Mountain Man*, ed. Linda M. Hasselstrom, Mountain Press Publishing Co., Missoula, Montana, 1984.

13. All the months here are figured according to the early Roman calendar that began with the month of March. A synopsis of the Lakota myth of the Founding of the Four Directions is as follows: "Tate [Wind] placed his lodge at the center of the world and his sons went forth to do the task assigned to them. They traveled around on the edge of the world and on it established four directions so as to divide the circle into four equal parts.... When the four brothers had completed their task, Skan [Sky] gave to each one of the directions they had established and made a season for each direction. He commanded them to bring his season upon the world and during it control the weather. He bestowed upon them God-like attributes so that the four are one God and his name is *Wani* (Vigor) and he made them messengers of the Gods. *Wohpe* [Falling Star and lover of the brother in the South] showed her father that the four brothers were absent from their father's lodge twelve moon times, so Skan decreed that twelve moons should constitute one *Wani-yetu*, the fourth of the four times, a year time." James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Blaine A. Jahner, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1980.

14. The second quatrain of each of the twelve directions is admittedly a synthesis of the Old World and the New. For a discussion of the four psychological types (sensation, thinking, intuition, and feeling), see *The Collected Works of Carl G. Jung*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX, Princeton University Press, Vol. 6, *Psychological Types*, 1921. The progression of the natural elements of the wheel was influenced by Heraclitus, frag. 34: "The life of fire comes from the death of earth. The life of air comes from the death of fire. The life of water comes from the death of air. The life of earth comes from the death of water." *Herakleitos And Diogenes*, trans. Guy Davenport, Grey Fox Press, San Francisco, 1983. The

references to the parts of the human body and the four humors (which correspond to the four universal colors of the Lakota) are from medieval astrology and psychology respectively.

Book II

1.

1. George Catlin, *North American Indians, Being Letters and Notes On Their Manners, Customs, and Conditions, Written During Eight Years' Travel Amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America 1832–39*, first issued 1841, reprint by Ross & Haines, Inc. Minneapolis, 1965.
2. Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life & Customs of A Warrior Society*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1964.
3. Watson Parker, *Gold in the Black Hills*, Bison Books, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1982.
4. The “Thoen Stone” is currently exhibited at the Adams Museum in Deadwood, South Dakota.
5. the Six Directions, i.e. the four cardinal directions plus the nadir and the zenith.
6. *Tunkashila*, the Lakota word meaning “Great Father,” i.e. God.
7. *Wakan Tanka*, a term referring to “the Great Spirit” or the “Great Mystery.”
8. *Mitakuye oyasin*, the phrase meaning “all my relations” or “all my relatives.” These words begin and end all sacred ceremonies.

2.

9. F. V. Hayden cited by James D. McLaird and Lesta V. Turchen, “The Scientist in Western Explorations: Ferdinand Vandiveer Hayden,” *South Dakota History*, Vol. 4 No. 1, Spring 1974.
10. Hayden cited in *Explorations in the Dakota Country in the Year 1855 by Lieut. G.K. Warren*, Ex. Doc. No. 76 (34th Congress, 1st Session), Washington, 1856. Dr. Hayden also suggests that the timber could be hauled to the river (presently named the Belle Fourche) and floated down to the Missouri. This plan seems dubious now; at that time, however, there was more water flowing in the river than at present.
11. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha*, Frederick

Remington Illustrated Edition, Bounty Books, New York, 1968.

12. Corbusier Winter Count, *Bureau of American Ethnology, 4th Annual Report 1882–83*, J.W. Powell, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1886.

13. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Bradley & Blodgett, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1973.

14. Letter of Bvt. Brig. Gen. Wm. S. Harney, “Report of the Secretary of War,” Senate Exec. Doc., U.S. Congress, 34th Congress, 1st & 2nd Sess., Government Printing Office, Washington, 1855–56.

15. In August of 1854 near Ft. Laramie, Lt. Grattan set out to punish the Brule Chief Conquering Bear for the slaughter of a Mormon emigrant's cow by High Forehead, a Miniconjou visiting the camp. Surrounded by about 1,000 Sioux, the whole detachment of the 32 soldiers were killed, along with the chief and an undetermined number of Sioux.

16. Spotted Tail cited by George V. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago, 1915.

17. Harney, *op. cit.*

18. George E. Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk: A History of the Brule Sioux*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1961.

19. Harney, *op. cit.*

20. Letter from General Harney dated June 2, 1855, St. Louis, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. I, State Historical Society, News Printing, Aberdeen, 1902.

21. a. Lieut. G.K. Warren cited by James D. McLaird and Lesta V. Turchen, “The Dakota Explorations of Lieutenant Gouverneur Kemble Warren, 1855–1856–1857,” *South Dakota History*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Fall 1973.

b. Doane Robinson, South Dakota State Historian, calls the Massacre at Ash Hollow a “...shameful affair, unworthy of American arms and a disgrace to the officer who planned and executed it.” *A History of the Dakota Sioux Indians*, Ross & Haines, Inc., Minneapolis, 1967, reprint of *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. II.

22. a. the cloudy river, i.e. the Missouri.

b. “There are many legends of Bear Butte, but one has a special and tender meaning in the hearts of Lakota women. It is the tale of *Chekpá Oyate* (young children who make their home within the mountain.) The Lakota have always believed that twins alone hold the secret to the process of reincarnation. The Lakota women

believed it was sacred to be blessed with twins. Legend says there were special rituals for women who desired twins, because such children must come from Mato Paha. It was commonly believed that twins did not live long, blessing a marriage for only a little while and then, through death, returning to Bear Butte to reappear in another family at another time.” James LaPointe, *Legends of the Lakota*, The Indian Historian Press, San Francisco, 1976.

3.

23. Lieut. G.K. Warren, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. XI, Pierre, 1922.

24. a. In 1856 General Harney negotiated a treaty with the Sioux at Ft. Pierre as a result of his “chastisement” of them in Nebraska the preceding year. Although Congress never ratified this treaty, the Indians thought it was still valid. The treaty stated in part that white travel would be restricted to the Platte and Missouri Rivers, as well as to the White River from Ft. Pierre to Ft. Laramie.

b. Five years earlier in the fall of 1851, the first treaty with the Sioux and other tribes had been signed at the mouth of Horse Creek near Ft. Laramie. Annuities were passed out, and each chief received an Army uniform and a sword.

c. “During the eighteen days we remained in council, the conduct of the Indians excited the admiration and surprise of everyone. Nothing occurred to disturb the harmony and good feelings in the slightest degree, and the various tribes separated on the same day for their respective homes, highly gratified with all they had witnessed and all that had been done; they all acted in good faith.” Supt. of Indian Affairs D.D. Mitchell cited by Don C. Clowser, *Dakota Indian Treaties: The Dakota Indians From Nomad To Reservation*, Deadwood, 1974.

d. Congress clandestinely amended the treaty *ex post facto*, reducing the length of the \$50,000 per annum in goods to be paid to the Indians from 50 to 10 years.

25. Sitting Bull quoted in Stanley Vestal, *Warpath and Council Fire: The Plains Indians’ Struggle For Survival In War & Diplomacy*, Random House, New York, 1948.

26. W. F. Reynolds, *Report on the Exploration of the Yellowstone River by Bvt. Brig. Gen. W.F. Reynolds*, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 77 (40th

Congress, 1st Sess.), Government Printing Office, Washington, 1868.

27. a. “In the beginning was the Word...” John 1:1; “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed.” Exodus 3:2.

b. “the force of their truth...”, cf. to the Emerson quotation in “Citing the Island, “ p. 19.

4.

28. Leroy R. Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns and Sanyer's Expedition of 1865*, Arthur H. Clark Co., Glendale, 1961.

29. a. In August of 1862, Chief Little Crow and his band of Santee Sioux went up the Minnesota River, killing, raping, and mutilating up to 800 white men, women, and children. Because of the Civil War, attention had not been focused upon Indian affairs, and Congress had consequently failed to authorize annuity money. While waiting at the agency for the money to arrive, the Indians could not hunt due to a lack of game, as well as the fact that their homes were over 100 miles away, and their buffalo hunting grounds even farther. Thus a condition of starvation was the result. The climate of war, however, had already been established for over a decade. On July 21, 1852, the treaty of Traverse des Sioux was signed, guaranteeing a certain sum of money and establishment of a reservation in exchange for Indian lands. The Indians signed two documents, which they thought were duplicates. However, the second document was, in reality, what afterwards became known as the “traders’ papers,” which forced the Indians to pay off debts owed to a number of traders. Many of the debts were illegal and many of the debtors were dead, but the traders held the tribe responsible for all debts. The Indians only received \$25,000 of the original \$275,000 sum, the balance going to the traders. The traders’ lawyer was paid \$55,000 for his services.

b. During General Sully’s campaign against the Sioux in retaliation for the Minnesota Rebellion of 1862, the Battle of White Stone Hill occurred on September 3, 1863, west of the present Ellendale, North Dakota. Although only eastern Sioux (Dakota) had participated in the 1862 uprising, all the Sioux, including the western

Sioux (Teton, or Lakota) were held responsible. An estimated 300 Indians were killed.

c. With 2,200 cavalry and artillery volunteers, Sully engaged Inkpaduta and about 1,600 Santee and Teton warriors on July 28, 1864, on Killdeer Mt. in Dunn Co., North Dakota. There were conflicting reports on Indian casualties. Sully reported up to 150 dead, but the Indians reported 31 dead. During the expedition the accompanying naturalist named Fielner was killed in Potter Co., South Dakota. On June 26 the two Indians responsible were pursued, captured, killed, and decapitated. "Nothing that had yet occurred since the beginning of the outbreak had made so powerful an impression upon the Indian mind as this act of barbarity upon the part of General Sully. The Dakotas now came to the conclusion that they were doomed. That nothing short of the total extinction of the race would satisfy the vengeance of the white men, and that their only safety lay in flight to those places which were totally inaccessible to the soldiers. The story of the beheading of the warriors at the Little Cheyenne flew as upon wings of the wind to every Dakota camp from the Oglalas on the Platte to those in farthest Canada." Robinson, *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, *op. cit.*

d. Col. J.M. Chivington and his regiment of Colorado volunteer soldiers attacked Black Kettle and his band of southern Cheyenne in eastern Colorado on Nov. 29, 1864. The chief had previously assured authorities of his peaceful intentions and was flying the American flag along with a white flag above his tipi when attacked. Over two-thirds of the 300 Indians killed were women and children. "The worst I have ever seen. All manner of depredations were inflicted on their persons; they were scalped, their brains knocked out; the men used their knives, ripped open women, clubbed little children, knocked them in the head with their guns, beat their brains out, mutilated their bodies in every sense of the word.... I saw some men unjointing fingers to get rings off, and cutting off ears to get silver ornaments.... I heard that the privates of White Antelope had been cut off to make a tobacco bag out of. I heard some men say that the privates of one of the squaws had been cut out and put on a stick.... I also heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females and stretched them over the saddle-bows, and wore them over their hats while riding in the ranks." Stan

Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1961.

e. After Sand Creek the Sioux, the Cheyenne, and the Arapaho banded together to fight the common enemy, the White Man.

30. The journal quotations are from Charles H. Springer, *Soldiering In Sioux Country: 1865*, ed. B.F. Cooling III, Frontier Heritage Press, San Diego, 1971.

31. There were over 400 Indians killed on the expedition. Only 25 whites died, yet it was deemed a failure. General Conner (who commanded the entire expedition and led the left or western column of the three-pronged attack) was subsequently relieved of his command.

32. Hafen, *op. cit.*

Book III

1.

1. David Miller, "Fort Laramie Treaty Focus of Indians' Battle," *Rapid City Journal*, January 24, 1982.

2. Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains*, Little Brown, Boston, 1918.

3. Henry B. Carrington, "Indian Operations on the Plains," Senate Exec. Doc., U.S. Congress, 50th Congress, 1st Sess., Doc. 33, p. 40–1.

4. David R. Wrone, Russell S. Nelson, *Who's the Savage?: A Documentary of the Mistreatment of the Native North Americans*, Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut, 1973.

5. William K. Powers, *Yuwipi: Vision and Experience In Oglala Ritual*, University of Nebraska Press (Bison Books), Lincoln, 1980.

6. Black Elk (Neihardt), *op. cit.*

7. Densmore, *op. cit.*

2.

8. Major Smith referring to Capt. James Powell, cited in *The Wagon Box Fight*, Jerry Keenan, Lightning Tree Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1992.

9. This includes all the land in the present state of South Dakota west of the Missouri River.

10. Miller, *Rapid City Journal*, *op. cit.*

11. a. In this speech made in June of 1870, Red Cloud refers to the surveying of the Northern Pacific rail line along the south bank of the Yellowstone. Although the 1868 Treaty did not designate the northern boundary of Indian territory, by rights of historical occupation the Sioux claimed all the land as far north as that river.

b. Robinson, *The History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, *op. cit.*

12. The literal meaning of the term "solstice."

3.

13. Samuel J. Barrows, *New York Tribune*, August 24th, 1874, published in Herbert Krause & Gary D. Olson, *Prelude To Glory: A Newspaper Accounting of Custer's 1874 Expedition to the Black Hills*, Brevet Press, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 1974.

14. George Armstrong Custer, cited by Cleophas C. O'Harra, "Custer's Black Hills Expedition of 1874," *Black Hills Engineer*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, Rapid City, November 1929.

15. Custer, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. VII, Pierre, South Dakota, 1914.

16. William E. Curtis, *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, August 18th, cited by Krause, *op. cit.*

17. More specifically, they might have been located north of the present hamlet of Nahant on Buskala Creek near where it empties into the north fork of Rapid Creek. This area now contains about 150 acres of lodgepole pines (*Pinus contorta* rather than the more predominant ponderosa pine). If so, they must have known the Black Hills exceedingly well to find this relatively small pocket of pine species especially suited to making tipi poles. Black Elk remarks: "There were lots of slim poles, for no one at this time had bothered them at all." Cited by Raymond J. DeMallie, *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given To John G. Neihardt*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1984.

18. John F. Reiger, ed., *The Passing of the Great West: Selected Papers of George Bird Grinnell*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1985.

19. Custer, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. VII, *op. cit.*

20. George Bird Grinnell, *Two Great Scouts And Their Pawnee Battalion:*

The Experiences of Frank J. North & Luther H. North, The Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1928.

21. adapted from LaPointe, *op. cit.*

4.

22. Annie D. Tallent, *The Black Hills, or The Lost Hunting Ground of the Dakotahs*, Brevet Press, Sioux Falls, 1974, reprint of an 1899 publication.

23. John Milton, "Paradise Lost," *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, The Odyssey Press, Indianapolis, 1957.

Book IV

1.

1. i.e. May

2. Col. Richard I. Dodge cited by Lesta V. Turchen & James D. McLaird, *The Black Hills Expedition of 1875*, Pine Hill Press, Freeman, South Dakota, 1975.

3. Richard I. Dodge, *The Black Hills*, Ross Haines, Inc., Minneapolis, 1965, reprint.

4. Dodge cited by Turchen, *op. cit.*

5. *Tunkashila*, the Grandfather or Great Spirit; *Washichu*, phonetic spelling of *wasicu*, "white man," literally "fat taker" or "big talker."

6. Dodge cited in "The Scientists' Search for Gold, 1875: Walter P. Jenney and Henry Newton," *South Dakota History*, Vol. 4 No. 4, Fall 1974.

7. Dodge, *op. cit.*

8. Dodge cited by Turchen, *op. cit.*

9. Dodge cited by Turchen, *op. cit.*

10. Walter P. Jenney cited by Turchen, *op. cit.*

11. Dodge, *op. cit.*

2.

12. Custer cited by O'Harra, *op. cit.*

13. "After an unsuccessful attempt to make a treaty with the Sioux [at Treaty Tree near Ft. Robinson in Nebraska, September 1875] by which they would relinquish the Hills, the troops were withdrawn and the lands were thrown open to gold-seekers. Unquestionably public opinion in favor of the move was almost irresistible; but, also unquestionably, it was a brutal and shameless violation of Indian rights. Upon the withdrawal of the troops, white prospectors by the thousands swept into the peaceful domain of the Sioux and made of it a scarred and unlovely countryside, barren of game and inhospitable to its rightful owners. In the cool fashion of the Anglo-Saxon, the miners who were occupying the Indians' land made up purses and offered two hundred dollars for each Sioux scalp delivered to them. Slowly but inexorably the Sioux were driven back, disillusioned and embittered, many of them to join the sullen Sitting Bull, who sulked in majestic silence on the rolling plains to the west. They were learning, in hardship and hunger, the worth of the conqueror's word." Bruce Nelson, *Land of the Dacotahs*, Bison Books (University of Nebraska Press), Lincoln, 1981.

14. Grant cited by Kingsbury, *op. cit.*

15. E. C. Watkins, 44th Congress, 1st Sess., House Exec. Doc. 184, pp. 8–9, Government Office, Washington, 1876.

16. Headline from *Bismarck Tribune*, July 6, 1876 issue (extra) cited in Clowser, *op. cit.*

17. This and the next two quotations from Lloyd J. Overfield II, *The Little Bighorn: The Official Communications, Documents and Reports*, University of Nebraska Press (Bison Books), Lincoln, 1990.

18. This and the next two quotations from Colonel W.A. Graham, *The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custeriana*, University of Nebraska Press (Bison Books), Lincoln, 1986.

19. Overfield, *op. cit.*

20. Graham, *op. cit.*

21. Overfield, *op. cit.*

22. Graham, *op. cit.*

23. Kingsbury, *op. cit.*

24. Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs Last In the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "From Far Dakota's Cañons (June 25, 1876)."

25. i.e. August

26. Quote from "Commissioners Report," George W. Manypenny, Chairman, 44th Congress, 2nd Sess., Senate Exec. Doc # 9, Vol. 26, Sept. 1876, Serial 1718.

27. "*Wakan Tanka* is above everything and he governs everything... The shamans address *Wakan Tanka* as *Tobto Kin*. This is the speech that only shamans know. The shamans speak this speech in all their ceremonies and songs so that the people may not learn those things that only shamans should know... *Tobto Kin* are Four-times-Four Gods while *Tob Kin* is only the Four Winds. The Four Winds is a God and the *akicita* (messenger) of all the other Gods. The Four-times-Four are *Wikan* [Sun] and *Hanwikan* [Moon]; *Takuskanskan* [That which moves (Sky)] and *Tatekan* [Wind]; *Tobkin* [the Four Winds] and *Yumnikan* [Whirlwind]; *Makakan* [Earth] and *Wohpe* [the Beautiful Woman (Falling Star)]; *Inyan* [Rock] and *Wakinyan* [Thunderbeing]; *Tatankakan* [Buffalo Bull] and *Hunonpakan* [Two-Legged (Grizzly Bear)]; *Wanagi* [Human Spirit Power] and *Woniya* [Human Life Breath]; and *Nagila* [Non-human Spirit] and *Wasicunpi* [Guardian Spirits]. These are the names of the Good Gods as they are known to the People." George Sword quoted in James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J DeMallie and Elaine A Jahner, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1980.

28. The two Sioux songs are adapted from Francis Densmore, *Teton Sioux Music*, De Cap Press, New York, 1972, reprint of *Bureau of American Ethnology*, Bulletin 61, Washington D.C., 1918.

29. The seven divisions of the Teton (Western or Lakota) Sioux: Oglala, Brule, Sans Arc, Blackfeet, Miniconjou, Two Kettle, and Hunkpapa.

3.

30. John F. Finerty, reporter for the *Chicago Times*, cited in *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, *op. cit.*

31. The Battle of Slim Buttes occurred in Harding County, South Dakota, on Sept. 9, 1876. "...nothing in all the history of border warfare compares with the heroic, persistent, and continued defense of one of the most unique strongholds nature ever furnished, occupied by American Horse as part of the movement of the Indians in retiring from their village nearby and who, with three

other braves, accompanied by 15 squaws and 9 papooses, held off Mill's attack and attempt to oust or annihilate them, for several hours after the village proper had been carried, and continued to hold it for over two hours, against the whole force after Crook had arrived about 11:30 A.M...." Charles Edmund Deland, "The Sioux Wars," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, State Historical Society, Pierre, 1934.

32. "The Fight..." Eleanor H. Hinman interview with Short Buffalo, "Oglala Sources on the Life of Crazy Horse," reprint of *Nebraska History*, Vol. 57, # 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Spring 1976.

33. From Lt. Bourke's diary cited in J. W. Vaughn, *The Reynold Campaign On Powder River*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1961.

34. Gen. Charles King cited in *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, *op. cit.*

35. Finerty, *op. cit.*

36. Known to the Indians as Iron Plume, American Horse (Senior) was the father of the man with the same name who would play a part in the death of Crazy Horse in September, 1877.

37. This and the following quotations cited in Manypenny, "Commissioners Report," Senate Exec. Doc., *op. cit.*

38. In *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press, 1966, Claude Lévi-Strauss states that most North American Indians, in terms of nomenclature and pharmacopoeia, perceive *Artemisia* (sage) as representing the feminine aspect, whereas they see *Solidago* (goldenrod), *Chrysothamnus* (rabbitbrush), and *Gutierrezia* (matchbrush) —i.e. those with yellow flowers— as representing the male aspect.

39. In Lakota culture *Savastana* (sweetgrass) is believed to attract good spirits, while *Artemisia* (sage) wards off evil spirits.

40. The Lakota recognize four temporal spans: (1) day-time (2) night-time (3) moon-time and (4) year-time. Some Lakota shamans believe the four legs of this mythic buffalo represent the four periods or ages of the world, and that we are living in the last of these.

4.

41. a. Dewey Beard cited by James R. Walker, *Lakota Society*, ed.

Raymond J. DeMallie, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1982. (All quotations from Walker are by Dewey Beard.)

b. On New Year's Day of 1889 (the same day a solar eclipse occurred across North America) a Paiute Indian named Wovoka, known to the whites as Jack Wilson, had a vision of the Second Coming of a distinctly Native American Christ. Thereafter he began to preach the messianic Ghost Dance religion to a great number of tribes on the continent, including the Sioux.

42. This and the following Ghost Dance songs are adaptations from James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, abridged by Anthony F.C. Wallace (originally Part 2 of the 14th Annual Report of the B.A.E., 1896), The University of Chicago Press, 1970.

43. Walker, *op. cit.*

44. Bishop Hare, November 21, 1890, cited by *The Winter of 1890 (What Happened At Wounded Knee)*, compiled and published by Don Huls, former publisher of *The Chadron Daily Record*, 1988.

45. Gilbert Bailey, correspondent for the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* and the *Rocky Mountain News*, December 20, 1890, cited by George R. Kolbenschlag, *A Whirlwind Passes: News Correspondents and the Disturbances of 1890-1891*, University of South Dakota Press, Vermillion, 1990.

46. Walker, *op. cit.*

47. Walker, *op. cit.*

48. Dewey Beard transcribed by *The Wounded Knee Interviews of Eli S. Ricker*, ed. Donald F. Danker, reprint from *Nebraska History*, Vol. 62 No. 2, Summer 1981.

49. Afraid of the Enemy cited by James H. McGregor, *The Wounded Knee Massacre From the Viewpoint of the Sioux*, Fenwyn Press Books, Rapid City, 1984.

50. Rough Feather cited by McGregor, *op. cit.*

51. Louise Weasel Bear cited by McGregor, *op. cit.*

52. Walker, *op. cit.*

53. Dewey Beard transcribed by *The Wounded Knee Interviews of Eli S. Ricker*, *op. cit.*

54. Joseph Horn Cloud transcribed by *The Wounded Knee Interviews...*, *op. cit.*

55. Dewey Beard transcribed by *The Wounded Knee Interviews...*, *op. cit.*

56. Dewey Beard transcribed by *The Wounded Knee Interviews...*, *op. cit.*

57. Walker, *op. cit.*

58. C. W. Allen, correspondent and editor of *The Chadron Democrat*, December 30, 1890, Huls, *op. cit.*

59. Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*, Fenwinn Press Books, Rapid City, 1972.

60. Afraid of the Enemy cited by McGregor, *op. cit.*

61. a. C. W. Allen editorial, Huls, *op. cit.*

b. Over fourteen years after the Little Bighorn Battle, four battalions of Custer's famous Seventh Cavalry were sent to intercept the Miniconjou named Big Foot (Si Tanka) and his band along with some of Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa Sioux. (The latter fled after the murder of their chief by Indian police on Grand River.) The "hostiles" were trying to make their way to safety at the Pine Ridge Agency but were met by the Army at Wounded Knee Creek, about a dozen miles from their destination.

62. a. Mooney, *op. cit.*

b. 146 Sioux were buried at the battle site: 84 men and boys, 44 women, and 18 children. At least 7 more died of wounds at the hospital in Pine Ridge Village, making a total of 153 dead. However, this is a conservative estimate, since an undetermined number of casualties were taken from the battlefield by relatives or crawled off to die on their own. Sioux estimates range as much as 400 dead. 25 soldiers died in the battle, most of them killed in their own crossfire or by Hotchkiss cannons.

63. Alfred H. Burkholder, correspondent for the *New York Herald*, Kolbensschlag, *op.cit.*

64. From the catalogue of Prairie Edge, a retailer that specializes in crafting facsimiles of Indian artifacts, Rapid City, South Dakota.

65. Afraid of the Enemy cited by McGregor, *op. cit.*

66. a. Nellie Snyder Yost, *Buffalo Bill*, The Swallow Press (Sage Books), Chicago, 1979.

b. The quotation comes from a publicity poster of the Col. Wm. F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) Historical Pictures Company. Made in the fall of 1913, this film "OF MORE THAN ORDINARY INTEREST TO THE PUBLIC" and using "One Thousand Indians, Many Famous Chiefs and 1000 U.S. Troops" in its production attempted to realistically portray the Wounded Knee massacre. It was never a commercial success.

67. Harry Kills White Man (Henry Jackson) cited by McGregor, *op. cit.*

68. Gilbert Bailey, December 27, 1890, cited by Kolbenschlag, *op. cit.*
69. lullaby from Densmore, *op. cit.*
70. “A long time ago the Indians talked with the spirits. When they wanted to do something of importance they asked the spirits about it. If the spirits said it was good then it was done. If the spirits said it was bad then it was not done. They sought a vision and the spirits came and talked with them. Now the spirits will not come. This is because the white men have offended the spirits.” Ringing Shield, cited by Walker, *Lakota Belief and Religion*, *op. cit.*
71. Densmore, *op. cit.*
72. Densmore, *op. cit.*

Epilog

1.
 - a. Curtis, *op. cit.*
 - b. *The Warrior Who Killed Custer: The Personal Narrative of Chief Joseph White Bull*, trans., & ed. by James R. Howard, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1968.
 - c. *Red Horse Owner's Winter Count: The Oglala Sioux, 1786-1968*, ed. by Joseph S. Karol, Booster Pub. Co., Martin, South Dakota.
2. Densmore, *op. cit.*
3. The Lakota term *wacekiya* means ‘to pray’, but it also has the connotation of ‘to cry for, to entreat’, as well as ‘to speak to one’s relative’.
4. A variant spelling of *cante ista*, which literally means ‘eye of the heart’.
5. Densmore, *op. cit.*

Part Two:

Voices On the Little Bighorn



Note On The Custer Collage

Journalists and poets: two perspectives by which most Americans first learned of and then grappled with the death of their hero, George Armstrong Custer. “Voices On the Little Bighorn” is a word-collage constructed from eyewitness accounts of newspapermen, soldiers, scouts, and Native Americans before, during, and after the battle of June 25th, 1876. These disparate passages alternate with fragments of poetry penned by contemporaries of the famous military engagement.

Though sometimes laced with grammatical errors or misspellings, the journalists’ record is frequently more vivid and moving than the poets’ rhetoric—the latter being distant from the immediate scene. In addition to Whitman, Longfellow, and Whittier, many lesser-known writers were compelled to elegize this pivotal point in U.S. history. Literary quality, however, was not considered in selecting lines for the current piece. In fact, some of the cited verses verge upon doggerel, highlighting glorious or idealized aspects of the event rather than actual tribulations of frontier warfare.

The narrative is roughly chronological, although Custer aficionados will not find it absolutely so. Thematic progression takes precedence over precise details of the battle. Always more poignant than analyses of tactics is the human tragedy itself. Along with the ultimate passing of the indigenous way of life, the agony of those who died there – red and white alike– echoes forever among these mournful voices.

Caveat lector: Some descriptions of mutilations are especially graphic.

Book I

Lt. Col. George A. Custer: “The Indians have a strong attachment for the lands containing the bones of their ancestors and dislike to leave it [sic]. Love country is almost a religion with them. It is not the value of the land that they consider, but their strong local attachment that the white man does not feel, and consequently does not respect. He [the Indian] keenly feels the injustice that has been done him, and being of a proud and haughty nature, he resents it.” ¹

*From far Dakota’s cañons,
Lands of the wild ravine, the dusky Sioux... ²*

Beautiful White Cow, Hunkpapa Sioux: “Our people were roaming through the country that had been given them before the coming of the whites. The country was good; there was rich grass for ponies, and sweet water; the fields glowed with prairie flowers of yellow and red and blue; there were buffaloes in the valleys and Indian turnips on the hill for digging. We were rich in provisions, and no man had the right to put out his hand and tell us that we should not roam. The village by the Greasy Grass was but a stopping place for a day or two, and we had no thought of a fight with the white man.” ³

*In ambush the Sitting Bull
Lay with three thousand braves
Crouched in the clefts and caves
Savage, unmerciful!*

*Into the fatal snare
The White Chief with yellow hair
And his three hundred men
Dashed headlong...⁴*

Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Sioux: “We did not go out there to fight. We took along women and children, and went to meet all the tribes of this region, to make laws and treaties and to visit each other, and to make our young men and maidens acquainted with each other, so

they could marry, as our fathers have done for many generations. So, when we found the white soldiers were following us, we marched back into the hills a long way, still being pursued by the army in direct violation of the treaty of 1868, which article first pledges the honor of the United States to keep peace. We resolved to camp and wait the will of the Great Spirit, at the same time praying to the Great Spirit to save us from the hands our enemies, now near, and coming without provocation to complete our extermination.”⁵

*...the lonesome stretch, the silence...*⁶

Arickara scout: “We marched up on a hill overlooking the Elk River and then down the mouth of the Tongue River. Right at this point was an abandoned Dakota camp. Here lay the body of a soldier, and all about him were clubs and sticks though he had been beaten to death, only the bones were left. Custer stood still for some time and looked down at the remains of the soldier.”⁷

*‘Revenge!’ cried Rain-in-the-Face,
Revenge upon all the race
Of the White Chief with yellow hair!’
And the mountains dark and high
From their crags reëchoed the cry
Of his anger and despair.*⁸

Arickara scout: “They found a burial scaffold with the uprights colored alternately black and red. This was the mark of a brave man buried there. Custer had the scaffold taken down and the negro, Isaiah, was told to take the clothing and wrappings off the body. As they turned the body about they saw a wound partly healed just below the right shoulder. On the scaffold were little rawhide bags with horn spoons in them, partly made moccasins, etc. Isaiah threw the body into the river, and as he was fishing there later, they suppose he used this for bait.”⁹

*The Indian village stood;
All was silent as a dream,
Save the rushing of the stream
And the blue-jay in the wood.*¹⁰

Lt. Godfrey: “June 22 I walked back with Wallace who said he believed Genl Custer would be killed as he had never heard him talk as he did, or his manner so subdued.” ¹¹

*As sitting in dark days,
Lone, sulky, through the time's thick murk looking in vain
for light, for hope... ¹²*

Soldier, Arickara scout: “On way to Little Bighorn we camp third night on abandoned Indian camp and found a stone with two bulls drawn on it. On one bull was drawn a bullet and on the other a lance. Custer asked Bloody Knife to translate it, and Bloody Knife said it meant a hard battle would occur if an enemy came that way.” ¹³

*No hope of victory, no ray of light
Shot through that terrible black cloud... ¹⁴*

Arickara scout: “In one of the sweat lodges was a long heap or ridge of sand. On this Red Bear, Red Star, and Soldier saw figures drawn indicating by hoof prints—Custer's men on one side and the Dakota on the other. Between them dead men were drawn lying with their heads toward the Dakotas. The Arickara scouts understood this to mean that the Dakota medicine was too strong for them and that they would be defeated by the Dakotas... Young Hawk saw in one of the sweat lodges, where they had camped, opposite the entrance, three stones near the middle, all in a row and painted red. This meant in Dakota sign language that the Great Spirit had given them victory, and that if the whites did not come they would seek them.” ¹⁵

*Two thousand and more
Painted and feathered, thirsting for gore... ¹⁶*

Mark Kellogg, reporter: “We leave the Rosebud tomorrow and by the time this reaches you we will have met the red devils, with what results remains to be seen. I go with Custer and will be at the death.”

¹⁷

*Down the Little Big Horn
(O troop forlorn!)
Right into the camp of the Sioux
(What was the muster?)
Two hundred and sixty-two...* ¹⁸.

Pvt. Pickard: “When Boyer came back and reported to General Custer I heard him say: ‘General, there are too many Indians for you to attack.’ Custer said, ‘There are not too many Indians on the whole North American continent me to attack with the 7th Cavalry.’” ¹⁹.

*Down in the valleys the ages had hollowed,
There lay the Sitting Bull’s camp for a prey!
Numbers! What recked he? What recked those who followed—
Men who had fought ten to one ere that day?* ²⁰.

Lt. Godfrey: “June 24 We passed a very large camp about 7:30 and officers call was sounded. The poles of the Lodge for the ‘Sun Dance’ was standing. they evidently had a big time—also was found a whiteman’s scalp not quite dry” ²¹.

*The brave white soul leap boldly out
The door of wounds, and up the stair
Of heaven to God’s open door
While yet the knees were bent in prayer.* ²².

Sgt. Ryan: “Lieutenant Varnum, a very brave young officer in command of the scouts, rode ahead of Reno’s battalion. He swung his hat around in the air, and sung to the men, “Thirty days furlough to the man who gets the first scalp.”” ²³.

*Whose was the right and the wrong?
Sing it, O funeral song,
With a voice that is full of tears...* ²⁴.

Bloody Knife, Arickara scout: “Well, tomorrow we are going to have a big fight, a losing fight. Myself, I know what is to happen to me; my sacred helper has given me warning that I am not to see the set of tomorrow’s sun.” ²⁵.

Book II

*Three Hundred to Three Thousand
They had bravely fought and bled;
For such is the will of Congress
When the White meets the Red.* ^{26.}

Pvt. Thompson: "...the cavalry men fighting for \$13 a month. Indians for their families, property, and glory. It seemed the desire of each to utterly exterminate the other." ^{27.}

Beautiful White Cow, Hunkpapa Sioux: "...the Great Spirit was watching over his red children. He allowed the white chief (Reno) to strike too soon, and the braves of the Sioux ran over his soldiers and beat them down as corn before the hail." ^{28.}

Gall, Hunkpapa Sioux: "When Reno made his attack at the upper end he killed my two squaws and three children, which made my heart bad. I then fought with the hatchet (mutilating the soldiers). The soldiers ran out of ammunition early in the day. Their supplies of cartridges were in the saddle pockets of their stampeded horses. The Indians then ran up to the soldiers and butchered them with hatchets." ^{29.}

George Herendeen, scout: "On the way up the bluff we came upon a dead Sioux, whose gun lay beside him with a cartridge stuck fast in it. We did not stop, but as we neared the top of the bluff I met Billy Cross coming down. I told him that if he wanted a scalp he would find a dead Sioux farther down." ^{30.}

*Nothin' to see but the sky an, the plain,
Nothin' to see but the drivin' rain,
Nothin' to see but the painted Sioux...* ^{31.}

Maj. Reno: "I could not see Custer or any other support, and at the same time the very earth seemed to grow Indians." ^{32.}

Capt. Benteen: “Another mile and a half brought me in sight of the stream and plain in which were some of our dismounted men fighting, and Indians charging and recharging them in great numbers. The plain seemed alive with them.” ³³

Arickara scout: “We went up a little dip and came in view of the Sioux camp in the valley, and soon came up to another soldier whose horse was down, overcome by the heat, and he could not get him up. He was kicking the horse and swearing and calling the horse a son of a b----.” ³⁴

Pvt. Thompson: “As two men were taking Nelson away, a loud voice from behind the bluff called to me in good English, ‘Come down here you white xxx xxxxxx and I will cut your heart out and drink your blood’. The loud bleat of a sheep was the only answer I gave him.” ³⁵

Pvt. Pickard: “The Indians rode among our men like butchers in a flock of sheep. Our men seemed to be completely demoralized by the surprise of meeting such a determined resistance. I could see the Indians riding after our men, shooting them in the back or clubbing them over the head. The boys told me afterwards that someone had given the order for retreat just as they hit the woods, another officer had countermanded it, and in the confusion that ensued, it was a case of every man for himself.” ³⁶

Fred Gerard, interpreter: “As Major Reno left the line and passed into the timber, I saw him put a bottle of whisky to his mouth and drink the whole contents. The men ran into the timber pell mell, and all resistance to the Sioux had ceased.” ³⁷

Pvt. Petring: “I immediately went under a stump and later into the thick willows and thought my situation most desperate and wondered if, after all, the best thing I could do would not be to shoot myself.” ³⁸

*And there through the passage
Of battle-torn spaces,
From dark lurking-places,
With blood-curdling cry
And their knives held on high
Rushed Amazon women with wild, painted faces.* ^{39.}

Lt. DeRudio: “I had not been in this hiding place more than 10 minutes when I heard several pistol shots fired in my immediate vicinity, and shortly thereafter came the silvery, but to me diabolical voices of several squaws. I raised my head with great caution to see what the women were at and to discover their exact location. I found the women at the revolting work of scalping a soldier who was perhaps not yet dead. Two of the ladies were cutting away, while the other two performed a sort of war dance around the body and its mutilators. I will not attempt to describe to you my feelings at witnessing the disgusting performance.” ^{40.}

Black Elk, Oglala Sioux: “As we turned from the river we saw a kicking soldier and a man came up and said: ‘Boy, get off and scalp him.’ So I got off and began to take my knife. Of course the soldier had short hair so I started to cut it off. Probably it hurt him because he began to grind his teeth. After I did this I took my pistol out and shot him in the forehead.” ^{41.}

Pvt. Pickard: “A big Sioux warrior swung his club at a sergeant. The sergeant dodged the blow, caught the Indian by the leg, pulled him off his horse and, grabbing him by the scalplock, bent the Indian’s head back and then sank his teeth in the Indian’s throat. They rolled over and over, but the sergeant never let go his hold till he had bitten through the Indian’s neck, severing one of the large arteries. With all his strength the soldier, with his hands under the Indian’s chin, forced his head back till he had broken his neck.” ^{42.}

*The soldiers descended
And madly were blended
The red man and white
In a hand-to-hand fight...* ^{43.}

Two Moon, Cheyenne: “They began to drive the soldiers all mixed up—Sioux, then soldiers, then more Sioux, and all shooting. The air was full of smoke and dust. I saw the soldiers fall back and drop into the river-bed like buffalo fleeing.” ⁴⁴

Frederick Whittaker, writer: “...a few Indians who had sneaked clear around the column during the lull in the action, suddenly fired, killing Custer’s favorite scout ‘Bloody Knife,’ who on that day was attending Reno. The scout’s brains were spattered over Reno, who immediately yelled out, ‘Dismount!’ and then ‘Mount!’ At the same moment a soldier shouted: ‘My God, boys, I’ve got it.’ and then Major Reno struck spurs to his horse, and led a wild stampede of all the men into the prairie, running for dear life to the river. He lost his hat, carbine, and one pistol in the wild race; but came in first. The Indians did not attempt to stop the column, but galloped after it, slaughtering twenty-seven men as surely as so many buffaloes.” ⁴⁵

Rain In The Face, Hunkpapa Sioux: “Presently some of the soldiers remounted and fled along the right ridge toward Reno’s position; but they were followed by our warriors, like hundreds of blackbirds after a hawk. A larger body remained together at the upper end of the ravine, and fought bravely until they were cut to pieces.” ⁴⁶

Pvt. Thompson: “And then who can conjecture the fate of the few that remained of that devoted band, slowly murdered at the leisure of the noble savages of the plains...” ⁴⁷

*While nearer an’ nearer an’ plainer in view
Galloped an’ galloped the murderin’ Sioux.* ⁴⁸

Interview with Red Bear, Arickara scout: “As he rode up to the end of the ridge, he saw many soldiers retreating. Then at their head he saw Reno, with a white handkerchief tied about his head, his mouth and beard white with foam, which dripped down, and his eyes were wild and rolling.” ⁴⁹

Pvt. Wilber: It was a wild rush for the river with the Indians on all sides, yelling like devils, shooting into our ranks and even trying to drag men from their horses. One big Sioux rode along side of men as we went at full gallops, and tried to pull me from the saddle. He had

been shot in the shoulder, and with every jerk he made at me the blood gushed from the wound and stained my shirt and trousers.”⁵⁰.

Maj. Reno: “Into this mass of men and horses, the Indians poured a continuous and deadly fire and under its leaden hail, the loss of life was frightful and the Little Big Horn was transferred into a seeming river of human blood.”⁵¹.

Pvt. Martin: “When Benteen met Reno on the hill, Reno requested him to halt his command, etc. Benteen pulled out Cooke’s note and showed it to Reno. Reno was bareheaded and much excited and exclaimed: ‘Well I have lost about half of my men, and I could do no better than I have done’.”⁵².

Book III

*Proud for his fame that last day that he met them!
All night long he had been on their track,
Scorning their traps and the men that had set them,
Wild for a charge that should never give back.* ^{53.}

Lt. Bradley: "...it is understood that if Custer arrives first he is at liberty to attack at once if he deems prudent. We have little hope of being in at the death, as Custer will undoubtedly exert himself to the utmost to get there first and win all the laurels for himself and his regiment." ^{54.}

Pvt. Thompson: "Custer was mounted on his sorrel horse and it being a very hot day he was in his shirt sleeves; his buckskin pants tucked into his boots; his buckskin shirt fastened to the rear of his saddle; and a broad brimmed cream colored hat on his head, the brim of which was turned up on the right side and fastened by a small hook and eye to the crown. This gave him the opportunity to sight his rifle while riding. His rifle lay horizontally in front of him; when riding he leaned slightly forward. This was the appearance of Custer on the day he entered his last battle, and just one half-hour before the fight commenced between him and the Sioux." ^{55.}

Haply to-day a mournful wail, haply a trumpet-note for heroes. ^{56.}

Interview with Curley, Crow scout: "...the column moved steadily on until it rounded the hill and came in sight of the village lying in the valley below them. Custer appeared very much elated, and ordered the bugles to sound a charge, and moved on at the head of his column, waving his hat to encourage his men." ^{57.}

*O gallant charge, too bold!
O fierce, imperious greed
To pierce the clouds that in their darkness hold
Slaughter of man and steed!* ^{58.}

Lt. DeRudio: “Everything being as ordered, we started on a gallop and for two miles pursued on the verge of an immense and blinding cloud of dust raised by the madly flying savages ahead of us.” ⁵⁹.

Sgt. Windolph: “He turned in the saddle and took off his hat and waved it so the men of the command, who were halted at the base of the hill, could see him and he shouted to them, ‘Hurah, boys, we’ve got them. We’ll finish them up and then go home to our station.’” ⁶⁰.

*Out swept the squadrons, the fated three hundred
Into the battle-line steady and full;
Then down the hillside exultingly thundered,
Into the hordes of the old Sitting Bull!* ⁶¹.

Pvt. Thompson: “Half Yellow Face only shook his head and said: ‘Heap Sioux! Heap Sioux! Heap shoot! Heap shoot!’” ⁶².

Pvt. Brininstool: “Soon commenced the rattle of rifle fire, and bullets began to whistle about us. I remember that I ducked my head and tried to dodge bullets which were whizzing through the air.” ⁶³.

Interview with Curley, Crow scout: “Curley says the firing was more rapid than anything he had ever conceived of, being a continuous roll, like (as he expressed it), ‘The snapping of the threads in the tearing of a blanket.’” ⁶⁴.

Lt. Godfrey: “The bullets struck the ground all about us; but the ‘ping-ping’ of the bullets overhead seemed to have a more terrifying influence than the ‘swish-thud’ of the bullets that struck the ground immediately about us.” ⁶⁵.

Pvt. Brininstool: “This was my first experience under fire. I knew that for a time I was frightened, and far more so when I got my first glimpse of the Indians riding about in all directions, firing at us and yelling and whooping like incarnate fiends, all seemingly as naked as the day they were born, and painted from head to foot in the most hideous manner imaginable.” ⁶⁶.

*Thicker and thicker the bullets came singing
Down go the horses and riders and all;
Swiftly the warriors round them were ringing,
Circling like buzzards awaiting their fall.* ^{67.}

Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Sioux: “The squaws were like flying birds; the bullets were like humming bees.” ^{68.}

Pvt. Thompson: “...they were beginning to be like a swarm of bees. They were coming from every direction...” ^{69.}

Crow King, Hunkpapa Sioux: “All the Sioux were there from everywhere. We had warriors plenty as the leaves on the trees.” ^{70.}

Left Hand, Arapaho: “...the Sioux and Cheyenne were as thick as the grass on the hillside. I do not know how many there were, but I have never seen so many Indians together at one time.” ^{71.}

*From unsuspected parts a fierce momentary proof,
(The sun there at the centre though conceal'd,
Electric life forever at the centre,)
Breaks forth a lightning flash.* ^{72.}

Low Dog, Ogiala Sioux: “They came on us like a thunderbolt. I never before nor since saw men so brave and fearless as those white warriors.” ^{73.}

Kill Eagle, Blackfoot Sioux: “...it was like a hurricane; and swept everything before it.” ^{74.}

Interview with Crazy Horse, Oglala Sioux (Horned Horse interpreting): “Horned Horse represented this hell of fire and smoke and death by intertwining his fingers and saying: ‘Just like this, Indians and white men.’” ^{75.}

Standing Bear, Miniconjou Sioux: “Then I could see soldiers and Indians all mixed up and there were so many guns going off that I couldn’t hear them. The voices seemed to be on top of the cloud.” ^{76.}

*Red was the circle of fire around them...*⁷⁷.

Pvt. Thompson: “Round and round rode the savages in a seemingly tireless circle. When one fell either dead or wounded he was carried from the field...”⁷⁸.

Two Moon, Cheyenne: “The smoke was like a great cloud, and everywhere the Sioux went the dust rose like smoke. We circled all round them—swirling like water round a stone. We shoot, we ride fast, we shoot again. Soldiers drop, and horses fall on them.”⁷⁹.

*In that fiery scorpion ring...*⁸⁰.

Gall, Hunkpapa Sioux: “They were fighting good. The men were loading and firing, but they could not hit the warriors in the gully and the ravine. The dust and smoke was black as evening.”⁸¹.

*The sudden darkness of death
Overwhelmed them like the breath
And smoke of a furnace fire...*⁸².

Red Horse, Sioux: “The soldiers became panic-stricken, many of them throwing down their arms and throwing up their hands. No prisoners were taken. All were killed; none left alive even for a few minutes.”⁸³.

George Herendeen, scout: “I saw Reynolds come out of the timber and said: ‘Charley, don’t try to ride out. We can’t get away from this timber.’ Reynolds was then trying to mount his horse. He finally mounted and got about 150 yds. when he was shot, and Isaiah fell near him, and while I was in the timber, I saw Indians shooting at Isaiah and squaws pounding him with stone hammers. His legs below the knees were shot full of bullets only an inch or two apart. Most of the men with me in the timber were a badly scared lot of fellows, and they were already as good as whipped.”⁸⁴.

*They gather and swoop,
They come like a flood
Maddened with blood,
They shriek, plying the knife
(Was there one begged for his life?)* ^{85.}

Iron Hawk, Hunkpapa Sioux: “The woman stripped the soldiers. The women and all were hollering in fun and I rode over there and there was a dead soldier (pretending). They were stripping him and found out he was alive. The white man was naked and he got up and fought with the Indian women. Behind this man there was another woman who was trying to stab him. The man was swinging the two women around while they were trying to stab him. Another woman stabbed this man and killed him.” ^{86.}

*Thou of the tawny flowing hair in battle,
I erewhile saw, with erect head, pressing ever in front, bearing
a bright sword in thy hand,
Now ending well in death the splendid fever of thy deeds...* ^{87.}

Waterman, Arapaho: “When I reached the top of the hill I saw Custer. He was dressed in buckskin, coat and pants, and was on his hands and knees. He had been shot through the side and there was blood coming from his mouth. He seemed to be watching the Indians moving around him. Four soldiers were sitting up around him, but they were all badly wounded. All the other soldiers were down. Then the Indians closed in around him, and I did not see him anymore.” ^{88.}

*Closer and closer the death circle growing
Ever the leader’s voice, clarion—clear,
Rang out his words of encouragement glowing,
‘We can but die once, boys, —we’ll sell our lives dear!’* ^{89.}

White Bull, Miniconjou Sioux: “He stood pointing his carbine at me and I was afraid but I charged him and ran him down. He fired at me but missed. It was lucky for me. This was a hard fight, the hardest I ever fought, but finally I overpowered him.... I counted first coup.

He hit me with his fists and hurt me and then he grabbed my braids. I grabbed his carbine and killed him with it. I was scared but I finally succeeded. The soldier was Long Hair.”⁹⁰.

Young Lion of the plain
*Thou of the tawny mane!*⁹¹.

Interview with Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Sioux: “Well, I have understood that there was a great many brave men in that fight, and that from time to time, while it was going on, they were shot down like pigs. They could not help themselves.... Any way it was said that up there where the last fight took place, where the last stand was made, the Long Hair stood like a sheaf of corn with all the ears fallen around him.... He killed a man when he fell. He laughed.”—“You mean he cried out.”— “No, he laughed; he had fired his last shot.”⁹².

Book IV

*There to the northward far
Shines a new star
And from it blazes down
The light of thy renown!* ^{93.}

Sgt. Windolph: “The sun went down that night like a ball of fire. Pretty soon the quick Montana twilight settled down on us, and then came the chill of the high plains. There was no moon and no one welcomed the darkness more than we did. The firing had gradually died out. Now and again you’d hear the ping of a rifle bullet, but by 10 o’clock even that had stopped. But welcome as the darkness was, it brought a penetrating feeling of fear and uncertainty of what tomorrow might bring. We felt terribly alone on that dangerous hilltop. We were a million miles from nowhere. And death was all around us.” ^{94.}

*On the bluff of the Little Big Horn,
At the close of a woeful day,
Custer and his Three Hundred
In death and silence lay.* ^{95.}

Pvt. Thompson: “There was a noise in the village which increased as night advanced. The deep voices of the braves, the howling of the squaws, the piping of the children and the barking of the dogs made night hideous but they appeared to enjoy it amazingly.” ^{96.}

*So Custer and all his fighting men
Lay under the evening skies,
Staring up at the tranquil heaven
With wide, accusing eyes.* ^{97.}

Lt. Godfrey: “Their camp was a veritable pandemonium. All night long they continued their frantic revels: beating tom-toms, dancing, whooping, yelling with demoniacal screams, and discharging firearms.”⁹⁸

Pvt. Adams: “On the night of the 25th of June I saw the Indians burn two of our men at the stake. They put a stake into the ground and raw-hided the man fast to the stake and built a fire around him. They don’t put this fire close enough to kill him at once, they torture him to death. After they ran around it whooping and hollering.”⁹⁹

*With a yell and a whoop
(There are women shall weep!)*¹⁰⁰

Maj. Reno: “We could see as the day brightened, countless hordes of them pouring up the valley from out of the village, and scampering over the high points toward the places designated for them by their chiefs and which entirely surrounded our position. They had sufficient numbers to completely encircle us, and the men were fighting all the Sioux, and also the desperadoes, renegades, half-breeds, and squawmen between the Missouri and the Arkansas and east of the Rocky Mountains, and they must have numbered at least twenty-five hundred warriors.”¹⁰¹

Pvt. Petring: “Benteen was on his feet all day June 26, and, it being hot, his shirt tail worked out of his pants and hung down, and he went around that way encouraging the men. He would say ‘Men, this is a groundhog case; it is live or die with us. We must fight it out with them’.”¹⁰²

Lt. Varnum: “We fortified as much as the four spades we had would let us, and all day long they piled lead into us as a fearful rate. Then men fell fast, but young boys soon became old men, and men lay in the trench beside corpses with flies and maggots, and struck and fought like old veterans of years’ standing.”¹⁰³

Pvt. Pickard: “Immediately on my left, close enough so that I could reach out and touch him, was a trooper who had dug a shallow pit. As he raised his head to shoot a bullet struck him in the throat and the gushing blood from his severed jugular vein choked him to death.

A moment or two later another soldier lifted him out of the depression where he was lying and put his body in front of the hole as a barricade.” ¹⁰⁴.

*In the midst of their little circle, with their slaughtered horses for
breastworks...* ¹⁰⁵.

George Herendeen, scout: “After we were corraled on Reno hill, my horse was killed, and he was one of the dead horses piled up on Moylan’s line. I lay behind him on June 26, and he was bloated up with gas, and two or three times when the body was struck, I could hear the hiss of escaping gas.” ¹⁰⁶.

*Then did he blench? Did he die like a craven?
Begging those torturing fiends for his life?
Was there a soldier who carried the Seven
Flinched like a coward or fled from the strife?* ¹⁰⁷.

Lt. Godfrey: “Benteen called out, ‘All ready now, men. Now’s the time. Give them hell. Hip, hip, here we go!’ And away we went with a hurrah, every man of the troops ‘B,’ ‘D,’ ‘G,’ and ‘K’ but one, who lay in his pit crying like a child... A most singular fact of this sortie was that not a man who had advanced with the lines was hit; but directly after everyone had gotten into the pits again, the one man who did not go out was shot in the head and killed instantly. The poor fellow had a premonition that he would be killed, and had so told one of his comrades.” ¹⁰⁸.

*But when some craven heart
From honor dares to part,
Then, then, the groan, the blanching cheek,
And men in whispers speak,
Nor kith nor country dare reclaim
From the black depths his name.* ¹⁰⁹.

Pvt. Petring: “Lieutenant Gibson was trying to get out of sight in a pit too shallow and was acting so cowardly that he was in the way of men passing back and forth. Benteen got ashamed of him and told the men to run over him if he persisted in lying there.” ¹¹⁰.

*The sense of sacrifice, the roar
of war!... ¹¹¹.*

Pvt. Thompson: “A man, by the name of McVey, to whom I handed the canteen that he might drink seemed determined to keep it in his possession. I jerked it from his grasp and passed it on to the next. With a cry of rage he drew his revolver from beneath his overcoat and taking aim at me he told me to skip on or he would put a hole through me.” ¹¹².

Lt. Godfrey: “Up to this time the command had been without water. The excitement and heat made our thirst almost maddening. The men were forbidden to use tobacco. They put pebbles in their mouths to excite the glands; some ate grass roots, but did not find relief. Some tried to eat hard bread, but after chewing it awhile would blow it out of their mouths like so much flour.” ¹¹³.

Pvt. Thompson: “The offers of money by the wounded for a drink of water was painful to hear. ‘Ten dollars for a drink,’ said one. ‘Fifteen dollars for a canteen of water,’ said a second. ‘Twenty dollars,’ said a third and so the bidding went on as at an auction.” ¹¹⁴.

Pvt. Pickard: “Our throats were parched, the smoke stung our nostrils, it seemed as if our tongues had swollen so we couldn’t close our mouths, and the heat of the sun seemed to fairly cook the blood in our veins.” ¹¹⁵.

Lt. Godfrey: “The parties worked their way down the ravines to within a few yards of the river, filled the camp kettles, and returned to fill the canteens. Some Indians stationed in a copse of the woods, a short distance away, opened fire whenever a man exposed himself which made this particularly hazardous service. Several men were wounded, and the additional danger was then incurred of rescuing their wounded comrades. I think all these were rewarded medals of honor.” ¹¹⁶.

The cavalry companies fighting to the last in sternest heroism... ^{117.}

Lt. Godfrey: “About two o’clock the Indians came back, opened fire, and drove us to the trenches again, but by three o’clock the firing had ceased altogether. Late in the afternoon we saw a few horsemen in the bottom apparently to observe us, and then fire was set to the grass in the valley.” ^{118.}

Low Dog, Oglala Sioux: “Then we heard that another force was coming up the river to fight us (General Terry’s command), and we started to prepare to fight them, but the chiefs and wise men counseled that we had fought enough and that we should not fight unless attacked.” ^{119.}

Gall, Hunkpapa Sioux: “I wanted to attack these soldiers, but the medicine men said we had killed enough. They said that the medicine wasn’t right yet. The warriors believed this, but I always thought a good gun was the strongest kind of medicine.” ^{120.}

Lt. Godfrey: “About 7 p.m. we saw emerge from behind this screen of smoke an immense moving mass crossing the plateau, going toward the Big Horn Mountains. This moving mass was distant about five or six miles, but looked nearer, and almost directly between us and the setting sun, now darkened by the smoke and dust laden atmosphere...” ^{121.}

Sgt. Windolph: “...we caught glimpses of thousands of Indians on foot and horseback, with their pony herds and travois, dogs and pack animals, and all the trappings of a great camp, slowly moving southward. It was like some Biblical exodus; the Israelites moving into Egypt; a mighty tribe on the march.” ^{122.}

Fred Gerard, interpreter: “The great horde of warriors and ponies and squaws and children passed so near to us that we could plainly see wounded warriors on travois and dead warriors thrown across and tied to the backs of horses. Above all the noise and rattle and the hum of voices and cries of children we could hear the death chanting of the squaws.” ^{123.}

*Long Hair has not returned.
His wife is crying all over.
Look there!
She is crying
all over.* ^{124.}

Book V

*The battle-bulletin,
The Indian ambushade, the craft, the fatal environment...* ^{125.}

Gen. Terry: “It is my painful duty to report that day before yesterday, the 25th instant, a great disaster overtook General Custer and the troops under his command.” ^{126.}

Col. Gibbon: “We were utterly unprepared for the startling report which our Crows brought back after calling across to their friends on the opposite bank of the Big Horn. ...Custer’s command had been entirely cut to pieces by the Sioux, who, so said the interpreter, ‘were chasing our soldiers all over the hills and killing them like buffalo’.” ^{127.}

Sgt. Ryan: “General Terry put down a piece of paper and gave Curley a lead pencil, and he made dots on the paper, showing where the soldiers were on the inside of a circle, the Indians on the outside. Terry then asked him how many were killed and he picked up a handful of leaves and shook them over the paper saying: ‘The white men all dead, and the Indians as thick as leaves’.” ^{128.}

Curley, Crow scout: “At the steamer I told of Custer’s defeat by sticking little sticks in the ground and then sweeping them away with my hand. I also pointed at the sticks and made motions like scalping by pulling at my own hair and groaning, but the soldiers were dull and did not appear to understand me.” ^{129.}

Pvt. White: “The shocking news stunned or paralyzed the mental faculties of every hearer there. The report of the Crow scouts, discounted or discredited had been their scant story, had not prepared us for learning of so monstrous a catastrophe. For a quarter of an hour or longer there was very little talking. Nobody knew what to say. Veteran soldiers, some of them the hardest-hearted and toughest characters in the old-time West, simply sadown or wallowed on the ground and bawled like baffled children.” ^{130.}

*Did I hear the news from Custer?
Well, I reckon I did, old pard;
It came like a streak of lightnin',
And, you bet, it hit me hard.
I ain't no hand to blubber,
And the briny ain't run for years;
But chalk me down for a lubber,
If I didn't shed regular tears.* ^{131.}

Lt. DeRudio: "Presently a long line of infantry appeared on the plain and Gen. Gibbon came up. Ah! who that was there will ever forget how our hearts thrilled at the sight of those blue coats! And when Gens. Gibbon and Terry rode into our camp, men wept like children." ^{132.}

He Dog, Oglala Sioux: "Did not have time to do Reno and Benteen up before Terry came. Had not assistance come to them, we would have worn them out in a few days." ^{133.}

Lt. Gibson: "Can you imagine what a relief it was, and how grateful we felt when we saw these troops coming to succor us, absolutely taking us right out of the jaws of death, and such a horrible death." ^{134.}

The Bozeman Times: "The Indians left the battleground looking like a slaughter pen, as it really was, being in a narrow ravine." ^{135.}

*Straight into a slaughter pen
With his doomed three hundred men...* ^{136.}

Pvt. White: "It was evident that not a man of the five troops of cavalry had escaped alive. The dark-colored and light-colored 'buffalo carcasses' we had seen over there were the dead cavalry horses and the naked bodies of the men themselves." ^{137.}

Lt. Godfrey: "I can never forget the sight: the early morning [of June 28th] was bright, as we ascended to the top of the highest point where the whole field came into view, with the sun to our backs.

‘What are those?’ exclaimed several as they looked at what appeared to be white boulders. Nervously I took the field glasses and glanced at the objects; then almost dropped them, and laconically said, ‘The Dead!’ Col. Weir who was near sitting on his horse, exclaimed, ‘Oh, how white they look! How white!’” ^{138.}

*Continues yet the old, old legend of our race,
The loftiest of life upheld by death...* ^{139.}

Maj. Reno: “...they lay as they had fallen, scattered in wildest confusion over the ground, in groups of two and three, or piled in an indiscriminate mass of men and horses. They had lain thus for nearly three days under the fierce heat of the sun, exposed to swarms of flies and carrion crows and the scene was rendered even more desolate by the deep silence which seemed to hang like a weird mystery over our dead friends.” ^{140.}

*Now, stark and cold,
Among thy fallen braves thou liest,
And even with thy blood defiest
The wolfish foe:
But ah, thou liest low,
And all our birthday song is hushed indeed.* ^{141.}

The Helena Daily Herald, July 5, 1876: “The news received last evening of the defeat of Custer and the massacre of his entire command, fell upon the festivities of the day with a gloom that could not be shaken off.” ^{142.}

*And say that our broken faith
Wrought all this ruin and scathe,
In the Year of a Hundred Years.* ^{143.}

Pvt. White: “All the bodies were stripped to utter nakedness. Faces and hands were hacked. Bodies and limbs were slashed. Chests and abdomens were wide open, with viscera protruding. In some instances heads were missing. A hand, or a foot, or an arm or a leg, or both, or some of these or all of them, were gone from most of the

body trunks. These extreme mutilations, supplemented by the effects of the warm weather, made recognition of individuals a difficult or impossible attainment.”¹⁴⁴.

Pvt. Thompson: “The bodies were turned brown from the heat of the sun and were swollen to great size.”¹⁴⁵.

Sgt. Windolph: “One ghastly find was near the center of the field where three tepee poles were standing upright in the ground in the form of a triangle, and on top of each were inverted camp kettles while below them, on the grass, were the heads of three men whom I recognized as belonging to my command. These heads had been severed from their trunks by some very sharp instrument, as the flesh was smoothly cut and they were placed within the triangle, facing one another, in a horrible sightless stare. Their bodies were never found.”¹⁴⁶.

*Even as the sword of Custer
In his disastrous fall,
Flashed out a blaze that charmed the world
And glorified his pall...*¹⁴⁷.

Pvt. Adams: “Bodies were mutilated in every conceivable way, some being set up on elbows and knees and the hind parts shot full of arrows.”¹⁴⁸.

*Like heroes they died
Man to man—side by side...*¹⁴⁹.

Maj. Reno: “Many of their skulls had been crushed in, eyes had been torn from their sockets, hands, feet, arms, legs and noses had been wrenched off; many had their flesh cut in strips the entire length of their bodies and there were others whose limbs were closely perforated with bullet-holes, showing that the torture had been inflicted while the wretched victims were yet alive.”¹⁵⁰.

Pvt. Adams: “What makes me think they were alive was because of the blood running out of the head. After they got the wounded men scalped they knocked them in the head with a tomahawk. I could tell every man that fell wounded by the looks of the horror in his face.”
151.

*Desperate and glorious, aye in defeat most desperate,
most glorious...* 152.

Pvt. White: “The dead man was lying lengthwise under the edge of the swollen belly and between the thighs of a dead horse.... Inside of one thigh of the dead horse was a gash that had evidently been made by a knife. Lying beside the right hand of the man was his hunting-knife. His left hand was rigid in its clasp of the handle of a tin cup containing two or three ounces of clotted blood. The extreme thirst of a wounded and dying man doubtless brought about this shocking situation.” 153.

*Alone from that field of slaughter,
Where lay the three hundred slain,
The horse Comanche wandered,
With Keogh's blood on his mane.* 154.

Pvt. Adams: “When we found old Comanche he was sitting on his haunches, braced back on his forefeet. We lifted him up in his feeble condition and he followed us around.” 155.

*Cavalry, cavalry
(Tramp of the hoof, champ of the bit),
Horses prancing, cavorting,
Shying and snorting,
Accoutrements rattling
(Children at home are prattling),
Gallantly, gallantly,
“Company dismount!”* 156.

Col. Gibbon: “On the very top are four or five dead horses, swollen, putrid, and offensive, their stiffened limbs sticking straight out from their bodies.” ^{157.}

Pvt. Petring: “Custer’s body lay just below the end of the ridge, and within fifty yards of it lay the body of Tom (Boss) Tweed of Company L, who had once been my ‘bunk’ and whom I recognized. His crotch had been split up with an ax and one of the legs thrown up over his shoulder. He was shot with arrows in both eyes. A wounded horse lay near him groaning, and we knocked him in the head with a bloody ax that lay near by, evidently one that had been used by the Indians to cut up or mutilate the wounded.” ^{158.}

*But the foeman fled in the night,
And Rain-in-the-Face, in his flight
Uplifted high in air
As a ghastly trophy, bore
The brave heart, that beat no more
Of the White Chief with yellow hair.* ¹⁵⁹

Pvt. Thompson: “...all the scalp was removed, leaving only tufts of his fair hair on the nape of his neck. The skull was smashed in and a number of arrows had been shot into the back of the head and in the body. I remarked that I believed it was Tom as he and I had often gone in swimming together and the form seemed similar. We rolled the body over; the feature where they had touched the ground was pressed out of shape and somewhat decomposed. In turning the body, one arm which had been shot and broken, remained under the body; this was pulled out and on it we saw ‘T.W.C.’ and the goddess of liberty and flag. This, of course, completed our identification. His belly had been cut open and his entrails protruded. No examination was made to determine if his vitals had been removed.” ^{160.}

Lt. Roe: “Tom Custer was found a short distance from General Custer with his heart cut out. A man’s heart with a lariat tied to it was found in the village; possibly it might have been his.” ^{161.}

Sgt. Windolph: “There was in the whole army no more popular man than gallant Tom Custer. He was young, handsome, a prince of good fellows and full of bravery that characterized the Custers. He had served with distinction during the war and had frequently before been engaged in Indian fights.” ¹⁶²

Pvt. Brininstool: “I observed especially the body of Capt. Tom Custer, which was the worst mutilated of all. Many arrows bristled in it.” ¹⁶³

*Give the savage his triumph and bluster
Give the hero to perish with Custer,
To his God and his comrades true.* ¹⁶⁴

Sgt. Windolph: “As a tribute to his bravery the Indians had not mutilated General Custer and he lay as if asleep...” ¹⁶⁵

*Dead, our young chieftain, and dead, all forsaken!
No one to tell us the way of his fall!
Slain in the desert, and never to waken
Never, not even to victory’s call!* ¹⁶⁶

Lt. Godfrey: “He found the naked bodies of two soldiers, one across the other and Custer’s naked body in a sitting posture between and leaning against them, his upper right arm along and on the topmost body, his right forearm and hand supporting his head in an inclining posture like one resting or asleep.” ¹⁶⁷

*Thou, wild young warrior, rest,
By all the prairie winds carressed!* ¹⁶⁸

Pvt. Thompson: “...all were scalped or mutilated, but there was one notable exception, that of General Custer, whose face and expression were natural; he had been shot in the left temple and in the left side. Many faces had a pained, almost terrified expression.” ¹⁶⁹

*Oh, It were better dying there
On glory's front, with trumpet's blare
And battle shout blent wild about—* 170.

Col. Gibbon: “Standing upon that hill he must have had a full view of the struggle taking place around him, and of the Indian village lying at his feet, but not within his power. And when forced back by overwhelming numbers, only to find the valley behind filled also with yelling hordes of savages, he must, whilst straining his eyes in that direction from which alone help could have come, have recognized when too late the courageous-born error he committed in dividing his force in the presence of so numerous an enemy.” 171.

(O glorious disaster!) 172.

Col. Gibbon: “Riding across the valley towards the bluffs, we passed the site of the two teepies filled with dead Indians, now a mass of charred remains, and approached a clump of small trees, in and near which the Indians had buried a number of their dead, the ponies slaughtered in their honor lying about the remains of their dead masters, now tumbled upon the ground from the destruction of the scaffolding by those human ghouls whose existence seems to be inseparable from a fighting force, *after* the fighting is over, and whose vandal acts painfully impress one with the conviction that in war barbarism stands upon a level only a little lower than our boasted modern civilization.” 173.

Sgt. Knipe: “I cut the buffalo robe from around one of the Indians to see what was buried with the Indian, and I found one piece of rawhide about two feet long lie full of white people’s scalps. Some of them were women’s scalps, with hair several feet long. These scalps I left there with the dead Indian.” 174.

Pvt. White: “Our foraging band of civilized people took many of the articles as souvenirs. Lieutenant Doane took two or more pairs of moccasins. Dr. Paulding, our surgeon, selected a pair of moccasins beaded on the soles as well as the uppers. He tugged at getting them off the dead feet. But the offensive odor and the adhesion of skin that slipped away from the flesh caused him to quit his efforts.” 175.

*For while we plant his cross
There is glory, even in the loss...* ^{176.}

Corp. Hammon: “Many times in taking hold of a body to lift it into the grave the skin would slip from the wrists, or the shoulders become dislocated, etc.” ^{177.}

W.R. Logan, scout: “We buried the bodies, as I have said, about where they fell. We had no picks and shovels, the graves were dug out with knives and broken plates and other sharp utensils we could obtain. In some cases very little dirt and sage brush were put over the bodies. I was to the battle field some ten or fifteen days after the burial, and a great many of the bodies had become exposed by the coyotes digging them out of their shallow grave.” ^{178.}

Capt. McDougall: “In burying the men the stench was so great that the men (my men) began to vomit, so we had to pile large chunks of earth upon them, broken off from the sides of the ravine.” ^{179.}

Pvt. Pickard: “It made me sick to see my fellow-troopers of F troop lying on the hillside, disemboweled with stakes driven through their chests, with their heads crushed in, and many of them with their arms and legs chopped off.” ^{180.}

Fred Gerard, interpreter: “The eyes of surviving comrades were filled with tears, and throats choked with grief unspeakable. The stench of dead men was nauseating.” ^{181.}

Lt. English: “Stench of dead bodies and horses fearful around us.” ^{182.}

*Comrades, our children shall yet tell their story,—
Custer's last charge on old Sitting Bull;
And ages shall swear that the cup of his glory
Needed but death to render it full.* ^{183.}

Col Gibbon: “...the troops engaged have not even the poor consolation of being credited with ‘glory,’ a term which, upon the

frontier, has long since been defined to signify being ‘shot by an Indian from behind a rock, and having your name wrongly spelled in the newspapers!’”¹⁸⁴.

Union—Extra
Thursday, July 6, 11:30 A.M.

GREAT BATTLE WITH

THE INDIANS.

Terrific Slaughter

GEN. CUSTAR’S COMMAND

ANNIHILATED.

CUSTAR KILLED!¹⁸⁵.

The ancient banner perfectly maintain’d
*O lesson opportune, O how I welcome thee!*¹⁸⁶.

Sgt. Windolph: “After leaving Custer’s field I went with my command over my own battleground. Here we found the waistband of Sergeant Hughes’ trousers very much stained with blood; he had been Custer’s flag bearer, and as his was among the missing bodies we concluded that he had been brought here alive and had been given a death of torture.”¹⁸⁷.

*(I bring no dirge for it or thee, I bring a glad triumphal sonnet.)*¹⁸⁸.

Maj. Reno: “I send you these observations made during a most terrific battle, under circumstances which would induce men to fire with recklessness, as one’s capture was certain death & torture, & the

men fully appreciated the result of falling into the hands of the indians, & were not as cool perhaps as they would have been fighting a civilized foe.”^{189.}

*A song for their death, and
No black plumes of sorrow...*^{190.}

Beautiful White Cow, Hunkpapa: “The great chiefs who led the fight are dead: Gall, Crow King, Crazy Horse, Big Road, and other head men are dead and gone to the land of the ghosts, but their deeds live, and we of the Sioux nation keep them in our memories, even as we keep in remembrance Long Hair and his men, whose bravery in battle makes the bravery of their conquerors a thing that cannot be buried in the grave nor forgotten, because their ghosts are at peace.”^{191.}

*But there by the shore
With the ghosts of no-more
The shades of the dead through the ages lie dreaming.*^{192.}

Lt. Col. George A. Custer: “If I were an Indian, I often think I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my people adhered to the free open plains rather than submit to the confined limits of a reservation, there to be recipient of the blessed benefits of civilization, with its vices thrown in without stint or measure.”^{193.}

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Gary David: Confabulum Vitae



***Gary circa 1987 in Hill City, South Dakota.
Photo, coincidentally, by David Hill.***

“My non-confessional stance notwithstanding, I countenance the following personae: erudite rube, regionalist by choice, provincial by penury, lone lobo, lowbrow Ohioan turned high desert rat, first of birth-family to graduate secondary school—sole member to matriculate (B.A. Kent State, M.A. University of Colorado), refugee from academia, ex-adjunct professor, online publisher/webmaster, poeta non grata, factotum ex libris, iconoclastic iconographer, rock art critic, Anasazi ruins Rambler, music mercenary, lead guitarist and vocalist barking amped blues for Buddha, journeyman in the Bardo profundo.

“For over three decades I have worked as a wayward wordsmith. Volumes published: *Eye of the Phoenix* (divagations in the mirages of the Southwest), *The Orion Zone* (true stories of Hopi star cities), *Tierra Zia* (lines & petroglyphs from New Mexico), *Divining the Eagle’s Vision* (lyric verse of the High Plains), *A Log of Deadwood* (postmodern gold rush epic), *The Possibilities of Blue Sky* (callow Dakota poems), several self-inflicted chapbooks.

“My residences or sojourns have included: Boulder, Santa Fe, Rapid City, San Francisco, New Orleans, Lawrence (Kansas). During the past two septennia I have lived with my wife, daughter, and two cats in decreasingly rural northern Arizona.”

“Gary David expands the limits of a form he has been instrumental in creating—the verse documentary. At a time when poetry flounders, and historiography is at war over old grounds, his work may well be the light of the future.”

—Edward Dorn, author of *Gunslinger* and *Way West*

“Gary David’s poems. . .are rooted in place and history, giving us a view of our past and its influence on the present. This work promises to establish him as a major voice in Western writing.”

—Gary Holthaus, author of *Circling Back* and *Wide Skies*

What Ken Burns did for film, Gary David does for poetry. The Black Hills of South Dakota, or “Inland Island,” became the historic crossroads where frontier settlement and Manifest Destiny ultimately clashed with Native American traditions of earth wisdom and spirituality.

This unique volume constructs a narrative from journals, autobiographies, newspaper accounts, annals, and government documents. The author balances these written records with indigenous myths, chants, and lyric vision. We hear legendary figures such as explorers Lewis & Clark, mountain man Jedediah Smith, painter George Catlin, and General George Armstrong Custer as they challenge Lakota Sioux warriors such as Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Black Elk. Their collective voices echo across the American West from remote places like Fort Laramie, the Little Bighorn, and Wounded Knee. The majestic landscape is a major force in this epic human tragedy that reached a climax during the late 19th century. The country has never been the same.