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TRANSFORMING FACT: THE POETICS OF HISTORY IN JOHN G. NEIHARDT'S *A CYCLE OF THE WEST*

by
Billie Joyce Wahlstrom

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language & Literature)
in The University of Michigan
1975

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Cecil D. Eby, Chairman
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To Joe Lee Davis for teaching me American literature and Evelyn M. Pugh for never losing faith

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CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE AND THE SPIRIT OF CULTURE

In 1912, when John G. Neihardt began the cycle of heroic Songs which were to occupy his life for a period of twenty-nine years, he began an exploration of problems and issues infrequently treated in American literature. Choosing American frontier history as the subject of his major work, he decided to write A Cycle of the West as a series of five long poems, each with at least twenty-five hundred lines, directed at an audience generally not familiar with the American epic tradition. Yet what Neihardt set out to do with his Cycle places him squarely in what Roy Harvey Pearce has termed the continuity of American poetry. Further and most importantly, by his efforts to write an American epic, he casts light on significant problems in American literature in general: 1) the process by which historical or factual material, cultural reality, is transformed into poetry; 2) the mechanism by which the spirit of a culture, its ethos, finds symbolic articulation in the literary documents of a culture.

Neihardt's concept of his task in writing the Cycle places his work in the category of the American epic by virtue of its sharing with others what, according to Pearce, is "the long view." With other American epic

writers from Cotton Mather through Whitman to Pound, Neihardt wanted to "mythify . . . the total milieu and ambiance"[1] of the culture. Unlike them and other epic writers in America, he did not choose to create a hero, but to celebrate real ones; he did not choose to create a new context via poetry, but to recall a real history which surrounds the actual heroes of whom he writes. His choice of history and our ability to recover his sources provide valuable insight into the transformation of objects from the real world into poetry, and they clarify the process by which a writer adapts reality for literary and aesthetic ends.

When working from these premises, one can see that Neihardt's work is quite exciting in its scope. By looking at his use of historical material for literary and symbolic purposes, the relationship which exists between the artist and his creation is clarified; this, in turn, casts light on the process by which a culture transforms its ethos, its nature, into a coherent symbolic structure, its mythos. A culture transforms certain of its real members into legends which serve the function of carrying a symbolic articulation of the culture's values. Similarly, an artist, like Neihardt, who is striving to cap-

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[1] Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 61.

ture the underlying spirit of his culture is able to transform that ethos into poetry which articulates a coherent symbol pattern. A culture's values are internalized; its real persons like Daniel Boone and Mike Fink are chosen as cultural heroes because they embody the culture's unconscious or unarticulated beliefs. In such a way, Neihardt uses real material inherent in American cultural history and transforms his fact into symbol.

The period of history that Neihardt chooses for his Cycle begins in 1822 and ends in 1890. The choice of that period for his work is not an arbitrary one. 1822 marks the beginning of real western exploration begun by General Ashley and Major Henry; from the ranks of these trappers come "all of the great continental explorers after Lewis and Clark."[2] 1890 denotes the official closing of the frontier and signals the irrevocable loss of the Plains Indians' cultural wholeness. The shaping force of this period on the formation of American culture is almost too great to comprehend, and it is the reconstruction of this period that Neihardt chooses as the narrative vehicle for his epic.

A Cycle of the West was written in the twenty-nine year period stretching from 1912 to 1941 when it took its

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[2] John G. Neihardt, The Mountain Men (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1971), p. vi.

final form. Composed of five songs arranged but not written in chronological order, the Cycle moves along a continuum. The three songs which make up the first volume of the Cycle--"The Song of Three Friends" (1919), "The Song of Hugh Glass" (1915), and "The Song of Jed Smith" (1941)--concern themselves primarily with questions of physical prowess and skill and seek to define concepts like honor, loyalty and manhood in those terms. The second volume composed of two songs--"The Song of the Indian Wars" (1925), and "The Song of the Messiah" (1935)--completes the progression from predominantly physical concerns to ethical, religious, and philosophical ones. The first volume has at its center the white man, the trapper and explorer who opened the frontier to the settler who soon followed. The second volume deals with native Americans in conflict with that white culture, and it treats native American losses as a result of that conflict. Taken together, the two volumes define both in historical and symbolic terms the strengths, values, ethics, and weaknesses of two cultures in conflict. Because the end result of the conflict is foreknown, what Neihardt provides in the Cycle is a picture of the dominant American culture of the past and of how that past shaped our present.

To understand Neihardt's achievement of representing in poetry the spirit of culture, it is essential to under-

stand culture and the relationship of literature, myth, mythos, and ethos to it. Leslie A. White notes the correct relationship when he acknowledges that central to culture are symbols: "Culture is a class of things and events dependent on symboling . . . considered in an extrasomatic context."[3] What that implies finally is that there is a cultural significance in those things and events which utilize both verbal and nonverbal symbols. White goes on to describe what range of things and events are dependent on symboling; they include "ideas, beliefs, fetiches, charms and so on."[4] This means that among the products of culture there is an interrelationship, a shared ground.

The common ground from which this interrelatedness stems is what is known as the ethos or spirit of a culture. People do not know why they act as they do. In fact, people do not notice that they act in any particular way at all. What controls behavior is for the most part unconscious; the keys to behavior are learned and "forgotten" just as one forgets learning but remembers how to talk. Those keys to behavior are "silent determin-

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[3] "The Concept of Culture," Culture and the Evolution of Man, ed. M. F. Ashley Montagu (New York: Oxford Press, 1962), p. 46.

[4] White, p. 59.

ners"[5]; that is, something internalized dictates what is best for us to do at a given time. Values, for example, are shaped by the ethos: "It is the nature of values that they seem to the group that holds them to be 'the best,' 'the right.'"[6] Values are acquired virtually without notice because the socialization process begins so early. What gives members of a culture a similar vision of external reality are the underlying assumptions of the culture. The ethos does change, as it must, in response to the forces of external reality, but its power to shape culture remains a constant.

In order for the ethos to shape the culture, it must find a voice. The process by which this is accomplished establishes the relationship between mythos and ethos. If the ethos of a culture is those unconscious beliefs governing behavior, then the mythos of a culture is the working out of those beliefs in symbols capable of speaking to and for the culture as a whole. The mythos is shaped by the imaginative and experiential life of a people. In turn it shapes the myth of a culture. Myth in its broadest sense structures experience; it is a source of coherence for beliefs, values, and behavior. In a sociological

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[5] Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson, Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry (New York: Norton, 1968).

[6] Charles F. Marden and Gladys Meyer, Minorities in American Society, 3rd ed. (New York: American Book Co., 1968), p. 20.

context, Kenneth Keniston describes myth as a "symbolic interpretation of existence in a [set of] animating though unconfirmable convictions about the deepest meanings of life, history, and society . . . a set of symbols, themes, and conscious and unconscious visions of the desirable and undesirable, the holy and the profane. [In every culture] these premises are organized in a more or less coherent mythic whole."[7] That coherent whole is what is meant by mthos; it is a vision of the imaginative life and the experiential life of a culture articulated in symbols.

Myth and symbol have a close relationship to mythos. They share a similar identity; Henry Nash Smith considers them to be "larger and smaller units of the same kind of thing, namely an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image."[8] How that fusion takes place and how myths are formed is suggested by James K. Feibleman: ". . . myth is . . . [a] symbolic presentation of the emotional response of a social group to the ultimates of its external world. As specific periods in history recede into the distant past . . . what is insignificant fades into the background, is obliterated and forgotten. Significant facts, on the other hand, are logically

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[7] The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society (New York: Dell, 1970), p. 272.

[8] Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Random House, 1950), p. xi.

modified and transformed into meaningful and significant symbols."[9]

This symbolic articulation can take place in a number of ways because the mythos of a culture contains myths of two different sorts: the first is monomyth, to use James Joyce's term, and the other is culture-specific myth. The distinction between these is important to an understanding of the nature of the variable symbols which the mythos produces. Monomyth is myth which occurs cross-culturally. Thus there is a similarity in the expressions of these myths. Observers of culture who catalogue evidence of the commonality of human experience find their data in materials touched by monomyth. Culture-specific myths do not yield a cross-cultural commonality. What unity is found exists within a given culture. Statements of what a culture fears and desires recurrently appear in these sorts of myths; the heroes of a given culture, therefore, may bear remarkable similarity to each other.

Myth, then, is a part of the mythos. The relationship of myth to culture is analagous to that of the dream to the dreamer. In dream, as Northrop Frye points out, the symbolic communication is based on a "system of cryp-

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[9] The Theory of Human Culture (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), pp. 54-55.

tic allusions to the dreamer's own life."[10] In myth, the allusions are not cryptic or idiosyncratic. Instead they clearly point toward what is desired and what is feared by the culture. Myth is the narrative format that the ethos takes once it has undergone symbolic articulation.

The articulation of monomyth and culture-specific myths in the documents of a culture varies. In monomyth, the articulation is in the form of archetype; in culture-specific myth, the form is stereotype. Monomyth is articulated in archetypes, for they tend to embody characteristics of humanity which transcend cultural considerations. There are behaviors which are not dependent upon cultural determinants; procreation, birth and death are events that do not rely for their existence on cultural invention. As a result, many cultures share mythic patterns similar enough to provide materials for studies like Stith Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk Literature. There are other mythic patterns, however, which are unique to certain cultures. For example, the cowboy as a figure appears in both American and in Mexican mythology, yet in each culture the significance attached to his existence and ascribed to his nature varies. The vaquero and the slim-hipped cowpuncher mean different things to their respec-

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[10] Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 107.

tive cultures.

In the Hispanic culture, the vaquero presents an elegance foreign to the American concept of the cowboy. The vaquero and his horse are things of beauty, both often decorated with silver and turquoise. The American cowboy and his horse, on the other hand, are an efficient tool, a working pair, and any beauty is incidental and the result of their being functional. Both are also represented in their culture's respective literature with distinctly different views of work. For example, the cowboy--with all the rodeo trappings--engages in bulldogging and the working of cattle from chutes; the fastidious vaquero, however, considers such behavior "wallowing in manure."[11] These different attitudes about the same occupation reflect differing cultural preconceptions. Thus, Clyde Kluckhohn asserts that "A culture is not only a reticulum of patterned means for satisfying needs, but equally a network of stylized goals for individual and group achievement."[12] These stylized goals find their expression in the culture-specific myths, and the more stylized the

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[11] Arnold R. Rojas, "The Vaquero," The American West, 1, No. 2 (Spring 1964), 52. This article deals with the actual differences between the cowboy and the vaquero, but it is useful in that it traces these differences to their cultural antecedents.

[12] Culture and Behavior: Collected Essays, ed. Richard Kluckhohn (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 68.

expression, the more stereotyped the creation.

Because one of the significant questions to be examined by looking at Neihardt's work is the mechanism by which ethos finds its articulation in the literature of a culture, it is necessary to delimit our discussion by looking specifically at the American culture. In some ways it seems a dangerous assumption to imply the existence of only one American culture. Certainly there are sub-cultural groups existing within the dominant culture, but living in a culture where televisions are found in more homes than are bathtubs, no person can escape the pervasive enculturative process which all persons in this culture undergo. Therefore everyone in a culture, to some extent, shares in the values of that culture whether or not he is conscious of it.

When it is agreed that there is an American culture with its attendant ethos and symbol system, then one is free to consider what forces had primary influence in shaping that culture and what context would be most effective for a discussion of that influence. Certainly a number of historical periods could be used in literature as symbols of the American experience. The Colonial period is one of those emblematic times; yet Americans have never gotten excited about their powdered wigged ancestors as they have about their relatives on the western frontier. Because of Neihardt's choice of the frontier for the context of his

Cycle, one must consider his conviction that the frontier was an important shaper of the culture and that the real persons found on its edges could become, when transformed by the poetic process, representations of the American mythos.

The frontier is an important force in the creation of the American culture. Its effects on behavior and cognative processes are significant and demonstrable; and as a result, those people who participated in the frontier experience, making America one country and themselves Americans in the process, are suitable subjects for literature like Neihardt's which needs to be embedded in the psychic nature of a culture. As Dixon Wecter suggests in The Hero in America, the frontier with its myths, legends, and heroes holds a special place in American intellectual life: "The winning of the West is the great fantasy of our Republic. It is the epic the folk mind has looked upon as more truly American than the settlement of Jamestown and Plymouth, the life of the old plantation, or the building of stone and steel."[13]

The idea of the frontier has always captured the imagination of Americans. Popular comments on it and definitions of it reveal more of the American conception of

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[13] The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 182.

the frontier than of the thing itself. That impact of one's conception of reality rather than the reality itself is evidenced in George Catlin's comments about the frontier: "The frontier may properly be denominated the fleeting and unsettled line . . . which separates civilized from Indian populations--a moving barrier, where unrestrained and natural propensities of two people are concentrated, in an atmosphere of lawless inequity that offends Heaven, and holds in mutual ignorance of each other, the honourable and virtuous portions of two people, which seem destined never to meet."[14]

Finally, however, it is not enough for a cultural event to seem to be important; it has to have some tangible effect as well. The frontier as a real phenomenon did change the diverse American population into a culturally recognizable one. That is because the frontier is first a place: what Ray Allen Billington calls "a geographic region adjacent to the unsettled portion of the continent in which a low man-land ratio and unusually abundant, unexploited, natural resources provide an exceptional opportunity for social and economic betterment to the small-

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[14] Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, Inc., 1965), II, p. 233.

propertied individual."[15] Secondly, and more importantly, it is a "process through which the socio-economic-political experiences and standards of individuals were altered by an environment where a low man-land ratio and the presence of untapped natural resources provided an unusual opportunity for self-advancement."[16]

Thus the circumstances surrounding the frontier were able to alter the people who experienced them. A number of scholars document the role the frontier experience played in shaping a new culture. Frederick Jackson Turner was one of the first who conceived of the frontier as change-agent:

> The frontier is the line of the most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. . . . he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilder-

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[15] America's Frontier Heritage (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 25.

[16] Billington, p. 25.

> ness, but the outcome is not the old Europe. . . . . The fact is that here a is a new product that is American.[17]

Turner makes clear the relationship between frontier and wilderness; it is at the edge of the moving frontier that wilderness and civilization meet, and it is there that the process of culture-making takes place. Others shared Turner's understanding. Catlin, who was himself a sort of literary and artistic frontiersman, summed up the process by saying that the "true character of the American is . . . formed" on the frontier.[18]

The experience of the frontier gave to the people who underwent it a commonality of vision, caused them to internalize new values, provided a diverse and dissimilar group of people--drawn from many different cultures and backgrounds--with a common ethos. This is important for what is suggests about works like Neihardt's: that by recognizing the way in which an important cultural experience shapes real persons so that they become legendary or symbolic, a poet can recreate that process by the transformation of historical materials into poetry. Thus the poet articulates in his symbols a culture's mythos as the real people of whom he writes become legendary by

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[17] The Significance of the Frontier in American History, ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York: Ungar, 1963), p. 39.

[18] Catlin, II, p. 159.

virtue of their being made to embody the ethos. The problem that this suggests to the writer is one of determining the best format for handling this transformation. Neihardt's method for dealing with that problem is what places him in the American epic tradition. Yet his approach to that tradition points toward a new way of treating old concerns.

America has had an epic tradition which reaches back to its Colonial days when writers like Cotton Mather wanted to talk about Christian religion in epic terms. The most useful book that discusses this tradition is Roy Harvey Pearce's The Continuity of American Poetry. The value of his discussion lies in his recognition of the relatedness of poetry to "the achievement of American culture as a whole"[19] and in his insistence on the fact that American literary forms were and are still moving in new directions. Most readers of American literature hold a view of the epic tradition that is much more limited than Pearce's. The writer we most often think of in conjunction with that tradition in this country is Joel Barlow whose work it is a kindness to consider simply inadequate. Yet despite its failure, The Columbiad illustrates a significant direction for epic poetry in America. As Pearce

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[19] Pearce, p. 3.

suggests, Barlow wrote an epic which had at its center not a mythification, but an "imaginative use of language" which would bring about "mythification, or something like it."[20] In other words, the American epic form in poetry leads to "plotless epics in which poetical and moral objects are fused."[21]

Despite the failures of earlier epic writers, Pearce helps us to see that there is a viable epic tradition in America into which Neihardt's work properly fits. That tradition is exemplified by two forms not usually considered as epic: the prose romance and the personal poem. Both of these share a relationship with the reader which Pearce sees as part of the epic tradition in this country; they engage the reader's sensibilities in such a way that his aspirations are asserted in a manner congruent to those of his culture. These forms relate the reader to his world in a new way; they poetically transubstantiate that world. Both of these forms articulate the reader's humanity in a way consonant with his hopes for the future.

The principles behind the romance are clearly stated by both Cooper and Hawthorne. In their abandonment of the epic form as used by Barlow, they turned away from the use

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[20] Pearce, p. 61.

[21] Ibid.

of a passive hero, the recipient of visions, and turned toward active heroes engaged in tales with some sort of "definite moral purpose." Like Barlow and all other epic writers, however, they wanted to "[memorialize] the history of a society"[22] in such a way as to inculcate the society's values in their readers. Further, they wanted to project, in some way, their optimism about the future. In order to achieve these epic concerns, they were willing to turn away from actual history, but they tried not to swerve aside from what Hawthorne called "the truth of the human heart."[23] Thus they imagined their heroes and the contexts in which they were to appear in a way designed to "connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us."[24] Writers of romance are distinguished from historical novelists, not in their content, but in their approach. Instead of relying upon historical data for a context, they rely on a personal knowledge of history filtered through their own consciousness.

For Cooper, as for Neihardt, the problem of transforming reality to literature was a significant one. When

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[22] Pearce, p. 59.

[23] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Complete Novels, ed. Holmes Pearson (New York: Modern Library, 1937), p. 243.

[24] Hawthorne, p. 243.

he explains how he developed the hero of his Leather-Stocking Tales and the rationale behind his portrait of native Americans, he is defining one relationship between the world of the epic and the real world as it exists in American literature. Cooper says of Natty, "In a physical sense, different individuals known to the writer in early life, certainly presented themselves as models, through his recollections; but in a moral sense this man of the forest is purely a creation."[25] The key to this statement lies in our realization that Cooper and other writers of the romance were not trying to depict a real person, but to fuse as Barlow had tried "the poetical object and the moral object."[26] As a result, Cooper's hero is a "fit subject to represent the better qualities of both conditions [civilization and savagery], without pushing either to extremes."[27]

In his justification of sympathetic native American characters, he further clarifies his process for creating heroes by saying that "It is the privilege of all writers of fiction, more particularly when their works aspire to

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[25] James Fenimore Cooper, "Preface to The Leather-Stocking Tales," The Oxford Anthology of American Literature, ed. William Rose Benet and Norman Holmes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 278.

[26] Joel Barlow, "Preface to The Columbiad," cited in Pearce, p. 59.

[27] Cooper, p. 278.

the elevation of romances, to present the beau-ideal of their characters to the reader. This is it which constitutes poetry, and to suppose the red man to be represented only in the squalid misery or in the degraded state that certainly more or less belongs to his condition, is, we apprehend, taking a very narrow view of an author's privileges."[28] These distinctions about the use of reality and the envisionings of the poet's relation to his material will be important in evaluating Neihardt's approach to the same subject matter and to the world of the epic.

Like any epic writer, the writer of the personal poem, best exemplified by the work of Whitman, seeks to mythify that "total milieu and ambience, what the poet takes to be the forming spirit of his times and world."[29] And like the writer of the romance, he seeks to do that by creating rather than celebrating that which he finds. There are significant differences from the romance, however. The new form Whitman advocated would have no hero; instead, the new poem would, as Pearce points out, "teach by action, by calling forth and giving form to the possibility for the heroic in its readers."[30] Rather than con-

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[28] Cooper, p. 279.

[29] Pearce, p. 61.

[30] Ibid.

nect a present time with one in the past, it would transcend time, linking the present with a vision of the future; as Whitman explains it, " . . . the expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new. It is to be indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic. . . . Let the age and wars of other nations be chanted and their eras and characters be illustrated and that furnish the verse. Not so the great psalm of the republic. Here the theme is creative and has vista. Here one comes among the wellbeloved stonecutters and plans with decision and science and sees the solid and beautiful forms of the future where there are now no solid forms."[31]

Many other poets followed Whitman's path; Pound's Cantos, Crane's The Bridge, and Williams' Paterson, are among others, all moving in the direction suggested by Whitman. What they have in common is the context in which they see the final meaning of their works; by calling for the heroic in their readers instead of by providing their readers with heroes, they are writing epics of transcendence. What they envision is a new world and a new man in it. In this way, they use the reality of America as it exists in their poems as a bridge; not as a place in it-

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[31] Walt Whitman, "Preface to 1835 Edition of Leaves of Grass," Leaves of Grass, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 712.

self, but as a vision pointing toward new reality, the Atlantis of Crane's poem.

Neihardt clearly shares with writers of the traditional epic, romance, and personal poem a commitment to the "perilous mythification of man."[32] With all of them, he is seeking a means of identifying the self and of preserving it in a significant context. Unlike the writers mentioned, his approach is not based on an internal vision of the rightness and meaning of American life; he turns his poetic skills not toward creating new, and perhaps transcendent, heroes, but toward the representation of actual "heroes" taken from history. Pearce sums up his comments on the epic in America by saying that "the struggle to make the big myth into the little one--this is as good a definition as any of the American epic."[33] Neihardt saw that as a poet using narrative techniques and deriving his material from historical sources, he might consciously be able to make the "little" myth which exemplified American life, the American ethos.

His key to this articulation lay in the nature of his subject matter and his heroes. If he were able to select for his heroes, men who actually lived and who in some way

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[32] Pearce, p. 61.

[33] Pearce, p. 136.

embodied in themselves and for the culture at large values which were fundamental to the existence of the culture, then he could, by the process of making them into the subject matter of a poem, cause them to take on a symbolic significance for the reader. His characters and their contexts--as specified by history--reflect the culture as a whole. People in a culture seldom understand the mechanism by which they come to respect or idolize figures from past or present history. Clearly some sort of identification takes place. The poetic mind, always attempting to order the things of the real world, is able to see and understand the process of identification, giving utterance to it in the poetry it produces. Thus by articulating our values and concerns for us in his poetry, Neihardt and others using similar techniques, find ways to achieve what Robert Penn Warren describes as a transformation of the big history that we live into a little history which we can read.[34]

On a practical level this demands a search for what Pearce chooses to call the "authentic hero."[35] This authentic hero must be one who can make our history comprehensible to us; we must be able to see him in the role of

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[34] Robert Penn Warren, "Preface to Brother to Dragons," cited in Pearce, p. 136.

[35] Pearce, p. 133.

one who is making it, for it is in the making of it that we are made ourselves. The hero must be an embodiment of the ethos of the culture; he must himself, by virtue of his membership in a given community, be reflective of that culture or community's values and beliefs. In Neihardt's work, he becomes in poetry what he was in life, a maker of history and an articulator of values. This means that such a character could not exist solely as a creation of a poet's mind; without his first having lived and embodied the ethos, the direct relationship between life and art, between idea and articulation as symbol, would not exist. This relationship is a unique one, one that promises much. Its experience is not limited to narrative poetry, or to any other particular genre, but where it does occur, it offers in the reflection of the hero "a strong, assured image of our full possibilities as persons in our community"[36]; and that would seem to fulfill the requirements of the epic form. (How well Neihardt is able to utilize that relationship will be the subject of the last chapter.)

For Neihardt the relationship between what is and what appears in poetry is important. His commitment to the authentic hero and to the real world of America is

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[36] Pearce, p. 134.

clear, for he sees the relationship between the little myth of poetry and the larger one of history. As a poet he places himself in the same relation to reality as he places his poems. America's history speaks to John Neihardt: "Any one of my heroes, from point of time, could have been my paternal grandfather, who was born in 1801."[37] And as poet, he speaks for America's history: "As for knowledge of the wide land with which the Cycle deals, those who know any part of it well will know that I have been there too."[38]

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[37] John G. Neihardt, The Twilight of the Sioux (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. viii.

[38] Neihardt, Twilight, pp. x-xi.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE AND THE POSSESSION OF THE PAST

> Myths are public dreams. . . .
>
> --Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By*

> . . . this thing is an essentially American thing this sense of a space of time and what is to be done within this space of time . . . and anybody who is an American feels what is inside this space of time. . . . Think of anything, of cowboys, or movies, of detective stories, of anybody who . . . is an American and you will realize that it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always filled with moving. . . .
>
> --Gertrude Stein, "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*"

To choose to delineate American life and history in poetry is a frighteningly complex literary project. Selecting the "authentic hero" as the central figure of that poetic project is likewise frightening because it forces poetry to deal with real values and behaviors, and it is bound to show us that not all we dream is lovely nor all we worship, true. Yet what Neihardt does in the *Cycle* is important because no western writer has been able to weld the past and present together fully. As Wallace Stegner points out in the introductory essay to *Great Western*

Short Stories, no writer has created a "western Yoknapotawpha County, or discovered a historical continuity comparable to that to which Faulkner traced from the Chickasaws to the Snopes."[1]

Neihardt confronts the need of Americans for what Stegner calls a "sense of a personal and possessed past"[2] which provides the continuity between the "real western past which has been mythicized almost out of recognizability"[3] and the world we now inhabit. He does this by adhering closely to history, telling us, in fact, that we should be willing to read at least Harrison C. Dale's The Ashley-Henry Explorations and his history of the period, The Splendid Wayfaring, in order to appreciate his Cycle of the West. By examining these texts, books cited in their bibliographies, newspapers, and government documents of the period, one can piece together Neihardt's materials and focus on the process by which he articulates humanity by way of history, observing the technical transformation of fact into the substance of poetry. There is very little here that is sentimental. In its place, he substitutes stories of the mountain men whose attributes, in general,

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[1] "History, Myth, and the Western Writer," Great Western Short Stories, ed. Golden J. Taylor (Palo Alto, California: The American West Publishing Co., 1967), p. xxiv.

[2] Stegner, p. xxiii.

[3] Ibid.

were those necessitated by survival: men whose virtues gave them what Hemingway called "grace under pressure."

Neihardt does more than simply retell history using rimed couplets. In the first volume of the Cycle--The Mountain Men--he creates a backdrop for the action he will recount, and he delineates the scope, nature, and treatment of the themes which will occupy him. By alternately examining the history Neihardt utilizes and the poetry he creates from it, one sees how fact is transformed by his literary vision.

Most Americans have lost their sense of a real historical past; they have forgotten the discoverers of the Central Route from the Mississippi to the Pacific as well as its significance in terms of the development of the continent for the common man. Neither are they aware that those who discovered this route suffered hardships and enjoyed accomplishments which rival any culture's heroic feats. It is by way of the Central Route that the "tide of migration flowed across the Rockies and possessed the Far West. . . ."[4] These discoveries were not made by official government explorers, but by anonymous Americans responding to the prospect of adventure, the hope of gain, the desire

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[4] John G. Neihardt, The Splendid Wayfaring (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. vii. All further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as SW.

for freedom, in pursuit of the American Dream.

Those who opened the West were not superhumans aided by supernatural forces; they were only men, heroic by virtue of their humanity. They were, as Lewis H. Garrard knew them, "rough men--used to the hardships of a mountaineer's life--whose manners [were] blunt, and whose speech [was] rude--men driven to the western wilds with embittered feelings--with better natures shattered--with hopes blasted--to seek, in the dangers of the warpath, fierce excitement and banishment of care."[5] Raw and uncouth, but also brave and loyal--these men accomplished what they set out to do--they made America one country and themselves Americans. They also established the possibility of achieving the American Dream on the large scale, for as Frederick Jackson Turner suggests, the frontier increased the "possibilities of the common man to rise to the full measure of his nature under conditions of social mobility."[6] Neihardt's authentic heroes came West early, both beginning and continuing the "great migration": "The people who came to the banks of the wide Missouri . . . were the poor, the oppressed, the ambitious, the adventurous. Cheap land, gold and sil-

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[5] Wah-to-yah and the Taos Trail; or Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Ranceros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), p. 63.

[6] Rise of the New West, 1819-1829 (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 66.

ver, the chance to start over in a new country, religious freedom--these were the objectives impelling thousands to attempt the trek to the land of paradise beyond the Rockies."[7]

The context Neihardt chooses for the Cycle is the largest one possible; he envisions the westward movement both as an American phenomenon and as something more. For him the movement toward the West was another part of a vast Indo-European migration. Although American men and women moved for personal reasons, Neihardt adds to these more universal motivations as well. He sees them as tempted by "that old sireny of unknown things,"[8] just as were those who set out to prove the world round; and he lends to trappers and explorers an archetypal resonance by equating their adventures to those of mythic characters like Jason:

> The trappers and singing voyageurs
> Are comrades now of Jason and his crew,
> Foregathered in that timeless rendezvous
> Where came at last all seekers of the
> Fleece.
>
> (STF, p. 3)

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[7] Everett Dick, The Dixie Frontier; a Social History of the Southern Frontier from the First Transmontane Beginnings to the Civil War (New York: Knopf, 1964), p. 128.

[8] John G. Neihardt, "The Song of Three Friends," The Mountain Men (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 1. All further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as STF.

Neihardt's mythification of the western man is not totally inclusive; not all Americans have heroic potential, especially not those who remain at home. These "quiet men" content with the "hearth-reek" of town are "home-keeping men" who will never "see the face of Danger, and go mad/ With her weird vixen beauty. . . (STF, pp. 2, 4, and 5). They are outside the scope of this work, for Neihardt does not see in the town or in the agricultural frontier as clear a relationship between the people and the American ethos as found at the edge of civilization and wilderness."[9] His heroes, instead, are trappers from the farthest frontier, eager to shape a country, court danger, get rich and enjoy life:

> Rejoicing in the thread that Clotho spun;
> For it was good to feel the bright thread run,
> However eager for the snipping shears.
> (STF, p. 10)

Of these trappers and mountain men, the most important for Neihardt and the most significant historically were the Ashley-Henry men. On March 20, 1822, William H. Ashley placed a notice in the Missouri Republican addressed to "enterprising young men." It asked for one hundred of these persons who wished to "ascend the Mis-

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[9] See Smith's discussion of the Agrarian frontier and the Yeoman farmer and their role in American mythology in Book 3, Chapters 11-22 of Virgin Land.

souri to its source, there to be employed for one, two, or three years."[10] In no time one hundred suitable men, many of whom willingly left good and respectable jobs, were ready to leave on a risky adventure in the wilderness; from within these first groups were all the men who become the subjects of The Mountain Men. These men went out for adventure and for financial reward; they defined their culture and exemplified its ideals, values, and weaknesses.

The first song of A Cycle of the West, "The Song of Three Friends," deals with the most legendary--and therefore most historically anonymous--of the men Neihardt treats. Despite the fact that we know little that is real about them, we know enough of the broadest details of their lives to see that they exemplify major trends in American experience. In many ways, their experiences and lives are typical and in this first song, Neihardt uses them all--and Mike Fink especially--as manifestations of American behavior rather than as people solely.

Mike Fink, the primary subject of the song, is the only one of the three friends about whom much of anything historical is known. No one knows exactly when Fink was born or, indeed, where. Historical and literary sources generally acknowledge that he was from around Fort Pitt,

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[10] Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 20 March 1822, n. pag.

and what seems the best date, based on evidence of his later activities, is given by Walter Blair and Franklin J. Meine as 1770.[11] The area and environment into which Fink was born shaped the man he was to become, and his training was typical of what others in his time and locale received. He was born into a western frontier community surrounded by what Theodore Roosevelt called "fierce and treacherous warriors, who did not till the soil, and were hunters and fishers only, more savage even than those tribes that lay southeast of them."[12] The fact that these Indians were forced to leave ancestral lands, coerced and killed did not bother Teddy Roosevelt or other pro-settlers, and Roosevelt's attitude prevailed on the agricultural frontier where Fink got, with others of his era, his early "moral" training. It was here that Mike Fink learned his culture's values and came to carry within himself, as did the others around him, the cultural ethos. He was one of a community of backwoodsmen and frontier women who were what Roosevelt called a "green, stern people, strong and simple, powerful for good and evil, swayed by gusts of

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[11] Half Horse Half Alligator: The Growth of the Mike Fink Legend (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 3. This book is a collection of reprinted documents and analysis of the Fink legends and history.

[12] Episodes from the Winning of the West (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), p. 4.

strong passion, the love of freedom rooted in their very heart's core."[13] This love of freedom--however violent its manifestation--was an important part of Fink's enculturative process. Mike Fink becomes representative of basic American values because of training which was like that of those around him and because in his culture he was unique, for "Whilst yet a stripling, Mike acquired a reputation for boldness and cunning far beyond his companions."[14] Fink's difference from his companions is solely one of degree.

There is almost no accurate information on how long Mike remained an Indian scout in the area where he grew up; we do know that when he stopped scouting he did so in order to move West. That move places him in the important phenomenon which had as its focus the river; Mike became a riverboat man. The majority of tales told of the legendary Fink date from or deal with this period of his life. He was, in legend, if not in fact, the greatest of the ringtail roarers. All the things for which rivermen were known--women, drinking, fighting, and physical prowess--have been immortalized in these tales about him. Fink's cultural training equipped him to expect violence; that

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[13] Roosevelt, p. 15.

[14] Blair and Meine, p. 5.

background provided for success in his new environment.

He fitted into his new life well. The battles here were no more genteel than those he had, no doubt, known at home: "No natural weapons were barred. Fists flew at faces, feet kicked wherever they could find a target; knees bucked at unprotected crotches; teeth sank wherever there was flesh; fingers clutched at throats and thumbs seemed to gouge eyes from sockets."[15] Here too Mike was unique by virtue of doing what others did better; he was "champion of the waterways and inspired stories about his violent fights and his brutal jokes."[16]

The last phase of Fink's career began in 1822 with the advertisement Ashley put into the Republican; he was one of the first hundred men to go upriver, probably in charge of one of the keelboats used to carry food and equipment. With him on that expedition up the Missouri were his friends, Carpenter and another man named Talbot, about whom history gives us little more than names.

In light of the scant information about Fink, Carpenter and Talbot, it is quite easy to see Neihardt's technique at work. The contexts and events that Neihardt in-

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[15] Herbert and Edward Quick, Mississippi Steamboatin' . . . (New York, 1926), p. 27, cited in Blair and Meine, pp. 10-11.

[16] Blair and Meine, p. 11.

vents or reworks become a series of discrete symbols, emblems of culture. When Neihardt introduces the three central characters, he does so in a manner that indicates both their significance as Americans and their meaning in the larger context of humanity. The three friends not only represent themselves, the nature of the American melting pot, but a whole people concentrated in their bloodlines. This is illustrated by Neihardt's renaming of Talbot; by giving him a Norman name--Talbeau--Neihardt is able to use these men to represent three distinct backgrounds. They are joined together by common interests and experiences much as the culture itself is formed:

> Will Carpenter, Mike Fink and Frank Talbeau
> Were they--each gotten of a doughty breed;
> For in the blood of them the ancient seed
> Of Saxon, Celt and Norman grew again.
> The Mississippi reared no finer men,
> And rarely did the Ohio know their peers
> For pluck and prowess. . . .
>
> (STF, p. 10)

Because the movement of the entire Cycle follows a continuum moving from an interest in physical concerns toward religious and philosophical ones, the material of the first song deals primarily with issues of "indomitable physical prowess."[17] Therefore, Neihardt spends time de-

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[17] Neihardt, Mountain Men, p. vii.

lineating the physical nature of the three men, the least transcendent aspect of the American. Each of the men is carefully described. Because there is no historical information about them, Neihardt creates their descriptions to match their racial characteristics. Carpenter, "Quite six feet from naked heel to crown," is described as a "cedar of a man" (STF, p. 11). Flaxon hair, blue eyes, a "porching" brow, and eagle nose are offered by Neihardt as compensation for Carpenter, whose "wit seemed slow" (STF, p. 11). Yet it is clear that Carpenter's chief merit is his ability to fight:

> 'Twas when he fought the true import of
> those [features]
> Grew clear, though even then his mien de-
> ceived;
> For less in wrath, he seemed, than mildly
> grieved--
> Which made his blows no whit less true or
> hard.
>
> (STF, p. 11)

Talbeau is described in a manner congruent with his "Norman" heritage. He is little, barely "five feet six and slim." At first one is encouraged to wonder what men like Carpenter and Fink would see in such a "skinny wiffet of a man" (STF, p. 15). Fink, we are told, initially disliked Talbeau because of his diminutive stature, but after they fought and Mike was bested, Fink's attitude changed. He was forced to admit in admiration as he looked at his face in the "shtrame" after the fight that "'Och, the face

of me! I'm tellin' fac's--/ Ye'd wonder did he do it wid an ax!/ 'Twas foine! 'Twas art!" (STF, p. 16). So it was that Fink "an expert witness, testified/ To Talbeau's fistic prowess" (STF, p. 17).

With Fink, physical dimensions are paramount. Neihardt assigns to him characteristics of the Celt; Fink speaks with an Irish brogue, as unlikely as it might seem for one historically from Pennsylvania. He is described as a man of medium height, black hair, and greenish gray eyes (symbolic of his inherent jealousy). But as with the others, his chief asset is his strength:

> Then one saw,
> The pert pugnacious nose, the forward jaw,
> The breadth of stubborn cheekbones, and one knew
> That jest and fight to him were scarcely two,
> But rather shifting phases of the joy
> He felt in living.
>
> (STF, p. 12)

There are other dimensions to Fink; Neihardt supplies him with an archetypal resonance by the use of allusions:

> But when he stripped to swim,
> Men flocked to have a look at him,
> Moved vaguely by that body's wonder-scheme
> Wherein the shape of God's Adamic dream
> Was victor over stubborn dust again.
>
> (STF, p. 13)

Fink's body, in its strength and masculine beauty, represents the best of physical characteristics possible to man.

It is as if "God had made experiment with Fink,/ As proving how 'twere best that men might grow" (STF, p. 15). Clearly Neihardt wishes us to see Fink as the new Adam, the new man in his new world. While Fink might have a godly body, it is not symbolic of a godly interior; for his actions would "fill the goat-hoofed with delight" (STF, p. 12). Ideally a man of Fink's gifts should be a "dissolving symbol back to God" (STF, p. 14), but it is clear already that Fink will not fulfill his potential. Therefore, Neihardt withholds full approbation of Fink and his friends:

> Thus appear
> The doughty three who held each other dear
> For qualities they best could comprehend.
> (STF, p. 18)

After these descriptions, Neihardt begins an examination of one of the central themes of the Cycle, the nature and quality of human relationships; he does this by creating in the literature a complex series of interrelationships only vaguely hinted at in the historical sources he relies upon. One of the few facts that Neihardt has to work from is the ritual of shooting the cup. Fink and Carpenter affirm the nature of their friendship by this ritual significant to all three men. Fink and Carpenter shoot a cup of whiskey from each other's head: "'Twas a rite of love between the two,/ And not a mere capricious feat of

skill" (STF, p. 18). The feat symbolizes the kind of trust that exists between men, and they use it as a means of settling differences as well as affirming affection. When they were quarreling with each other, one would suggest that they "bore a pair of cups" and end the fight; importantly, "neither feared that either love might fail/ Or either skill might falter" (STF, p. 18). This trust changes a casual relationship into a vital one.

After establishing both the characters and the nature of their relationship, Neihardt returns to the historical narrative. Neihardt has the greatest amount of literary freedom in this song because, while the broad outline of Ashley's activities is known from historical documents, almost nothing is known about the specific roles Fink, Carpenter, and Talbeau played. The actual trip was a hard one but not too eventful. Fifty miles below the Kansas River, one boat was pierced by a snag and was lost along with its $10,000 cargo. At another time a raid by the Assiniboine took fifty horses, a common enough event to cause only general annoyance.

The party established winter camp at the mouth of the Yellowstone River, and Ashley returned to St. Louis with a few trappers to set up another group to follow in the spring. Fink and his two friends, Carpenter and Talbot, hunted and trapped in the Blood Indian country and spent some time camping with the Bloods on the Musselshell.

Neihardt treats the trip upriver and the Assiniboine raid with historical accuracy. After getting the Henry expedition established at its winter quarters, he returns to the central characters, carefully keeping them embedded in the historical context. All that is known about the actual wintering of Henry's men is that they hunted in the Blood Indian country and trapped on the Musselshell. All that is known specifically about Fink and his friends is that Fink and Carpenter quarrelled over the "good graces" of a squaw.

What we know about the actual fight and Fink's death comes to us from a variety of sources. While there are several hundred accounts of his death, four of the earliest provide as complete a picture as we are likely to get and adequately represent Neihardt's sources. The first account appeared in the Missouri Republican of July 16, 1823:

> By a letter received in town by one of Gen. Ashley's expedition we are informed that a man by the name of Mike Fink well known in this quarter as a great marksman with a rifle . . . was engaged in his favorite amusement of shooting a tin cup off the head of another man, when aiming too low or for some other cause shot his companion in the forehead and killed him. Another man of the expedition (whose name we have not heard) remonstrated against Fink's conduct, to which he, Fink, replied, that he would kill him likewise, upon which the other drew a pistol and shot Fink on the spot.[18]

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[18] Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 16 July 1823, n. pag.

The government record supplied by the firm of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette deals with the matter of Fink's death tersely. In the record concerning the "deaths of men caused by accidents and other causes not chargeable to Indians," we find that in 1825 "Marshall was lost in the Willow Valley near Salt Lake"; that in 1824 "Thomas, a half breed, was killed by Williams, on the waters of Bear River," and that in "1822 [probably 1823] Mike Fink shot Carpenter--Talbot soon after shot Fink, and not long after was drowned in the Tetons."[19] From this account, Neihardt would have been able to establish the names of Fink's companions, Carpenter and Talbot (Talbeau). Neville Morgan's account in 1828 adds only a little additional information. In it we are told that after Fink shot Carpenter, "a friend of the deceased who was present, suspecting foul play, shot Mike through the heart before he had time to reload his rifle."[20]

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[19] Smith, Jackson, and Sublette, Record Book, Vol. XXXII, containing copies of letters from Indian agents and others to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, 10 September 1830 to 1 April 1832, rpt. in Blaire and Meine, p. 13.

[20] Neville Morgan, "The Last of the Boatmen," The Western Souvenir, a Christmas and New Year's Gift for 1829, ed. James Hall (Cincinnati, 1828). The tale enjoyed numerous reprintings throughout the nineteenth century. The complete text is available in The Literature of the United States, ed. Walter Blair, Theodore Hornberger, and Randall Stewart (Chicago, 1953), rpt. in part in Blair and Meine, p. 260.

Of the more detailed accounts, the one of 1829 seems best.[21] It is based on the account of an "intelligent and respected fur trader" and relayed by a "valued correspondent to St. Louis." Further, it names for the first time in print (preceding the Smith, Jackson, and Sublette account which was presented in 1832) both Carpenter and Talbot, places events correctly and tells of Talbot's drowning in the Titan River, easily mistaken in sound for the Teton. In the account, Fink, Carpenter, and Talbot, who were all friends, were engaged by Ashley in 1822. They went west with the Ashley-Henry men in "the threefold capacity of boatmen, trappers and hunters." The account states that they built a fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone River from which small groups of men, ten to twelve, were sent out to hunt and to trap on the tributary streams of the Missouri and the Yellowstone. "As winter set in, the friends wishing to remain outside the fort built themselves a winter house in a cave." The text goes on to state that "Here Mike and his friend Carpenter quarrelled a deadly quarrel, the cause of which is not generally known, but was thought to have been caused by a rivalry in

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[21] Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 21 July 1829, n. pag. The story was also reprinted in the Missouri Intelligencer (St. Louis), 4 September 1829. All quotations are from that account.

the good graces of a squaw." In the spring, the men revived their quarrel over a cup of whiskey, but decided to "make a treaty of peace which was to be solemnized by their usual trial of shooting a cup of whiskey from each other's head, as their custom was." Only one question remained: who was to shoot first. Mike proposed to "sky a copper" and to determine from the flipped coin who had the first shot. Mike won. "Carpenter seemed to be fully aware of Mike's unforgiving temper and treacherous intent, for he declared that he was sure Mike would kill him. Being a man who would not breach his agreement, he agreed to stand the test." However, "He bequeathed his gun, shot pouch, and powder horn, his belt, pistols and wages to Talbot, in case he should be killed." He filled the cup and put it on his head as a target for Mike. At a distance of sixty yards, Mike smiled and said, "'Hold your noodle steady, Carpenter, and don't spill the whiskey, as I shall want some presently!'" He fired and Carpenter fell dead, shot between the eyes. Fink's first words were, "'Carpenter! have you spilt the whiskey.'" Fink claimed it was an accident and cursed himself and his gun.

The catastrophe was passed off as an accident. "But Carpenter had a fast friend in Talbot, who only wanted a fair opportunity to revenge his death. No opportunity offered for some months after, until one day, Mike in a fit of gasconading, declared to Talbot that he did kill Car-

penter on purpose, and that he was glad of it. Talbot instantly drew from his belt a pistol (the same which belonged to Carpenter), and shot Mike through his heart." No one thought to punish Talbot who was in "truth . . . as ferocious and dangerous as the grizzly bear of the prairies," and in a few months he himself drowned.

Working with these scanty sources, Neihardt has to offer motivations for Fink, Carpenter, and Talbeau's behavior. He has to explain why they would choose to leave the main body of the Henry men and go off with the Blood Indians. Obviously, the more general the motivation Neihardt chooses, the more likely it is to be indicative of general American values. The Bloods, therefore, "their warriors [needing] guns/ And powder " (STF, p. 30), tempt the Henry men with promises of many beavers and of women who are

> Strong bearers of the water and the wood,
> With quiet tongues and never weary hands;
> Tall as the fighting men of other lands,
> And good to look upon.
>
> (STF, p. 30)

When Henry calls for volunteers to go with these Indians, the friends "In whom young blood was like a beading wine" (STF, p. 31) are eager to depart. The men are clearly adventurous, but Neihardt is not fully sympathetic to the men's motivations. He has Mike accept the adventure by saying that he is willing to "'chance the bloody naygurs'" (STF, p. 31), and Neihardt creates an unheroic scene in

which the whites trade with the departing Indians:

> And whatso suited best
> The whimsies of the savage or his needs,
> The slim craft carried--scarlet cloth and
> beads,
> Some antiquated muskets, powder, ball,
> Traps, knives, and little casks of alcohol
> To lubricate the rusty wheels of trade!
> (STF, p. 31)

The rest of the trip to Blood country is uneventful, although Neihardt sets the scene for an important confrontation by describing the territory in language both opulent and imagistic. The land at the beginning of winter, "could have been infernal cinder-heaps,/ The relics of an ancient hell gone cold" (STF, p. 33). The animals share the stark majesty of their surroundings:

> And when a herd of bison rumbled past,
> 'Twas like a great fire booming in a blast,
> The rolling smudge whereof concealed the
> flame.
> (STF, p. 32)

In the fourth chapter, Neihardt introduces the cause of the friends' falling out: "There was a woman" (STF, p. 32). This whole event is taken out of the realm of the particular and examined as an emblematic situation. In his history. The Splendid Wayfaring, he dismisses the incident and the woman in a few paragraphs. In the poem, the quarrel is more than a falling out of friends; it becomes "The stuff of sorrow, wove 'twixt man and man/ The tan-

gling mesh, that friend might ruin friend. . ." (STF, p. 38). Likewise the woman is given a mythic resonance. She is no longer the halfbreed described by history, but tends toward archetype:

> What need to know her features as they were?
> Was she not lovely as her lover's thought,
> And beautiful as that wild love she wrought
> Was fatal? Vessel of the world's desire,
> Did she not glow with that mysterious fire
> That lights the hearth or burns the rooftree down?
> What face was hers who made the timeless town
> A baleful torch forever?
>
> (STF, pp. 39-40)

In planning Fink's response to her, Neihardt utilizes the symbolic nature of the situation; Mike acts for himself, but his actions also are those of all men ruled by physical rather than philosophical considerations. Thus, the woman's effect on Fink is extreme. Like Paris, he willingly risks all. His changed attitude is remarkable. He had been impervious to female charms before: "'It is me rule to love 'em all alike.'" He exclaims, ". . . 'Glass or gourd,/ Shure, now, they're all wan liquor whin they're poured!/ Aye, rum is rum, me b'y!'" (STF, p. 40) Both for Mike and for the kind of man Mike epitomizes, the incident pinpoints a fatal flaw in character. Mike, when he looked at the Long Knife's daughter, "looked on rum that was not rum" (STF, p. 43). The woman becomes an obsession. He applies to her father for possession, only to be

thwarted by her love of his friend, Carpenter. The particular nature of the precipitating incident is, of course, irrelevant. Any physical consideration might have led to the enmity among men whose friendship is founded only on physical appreciation. Carpenter, of course, takes the woman because he, too, values the physical above less tangible considerations, and Fink is left to brood over his betrayal in a carefully constructed setting. The scene of the betrayal is barren. The fury of a blizzard and a "writhing dark . . . shrill with spirits" (STF, p. 51) matches Mike's growing desire for revenge on Carpenter.

At the same time, Talbeau--the one character whose personality suggests a greater depth than Fink's--tries to reconcile his friends. This is an important counterpoint because Talbeau represents what is best in the three men:

> Talbeau was sick at heart
> With dreading that his friends might drift apart
> And he be lost, because he loved them both.
> (STF, p. 52)

He tries to bring the two estranged friends together because he cares for each equally: "How could he choose 'twixt food and drink/ When, choosing neither, one were sooner dead!" (STF, p. 53) Given the symbolic structure of the poem, the action is no longer occurring in a particularized human setting; rather, as in Greek tragedy, Fate and inevitability enter in. Being unaware of the role of

Fate, he does act. He arranges a card game which he hopes will renew their friendship. He is patient in his attempt to reconcile his friends, feeling that "One could not doff displeasure like a hat--/ 'Twould dwindle snow-like" (STF, p. 61). Yet Fate controls the outcome:

> But even then that Unseen Player came
> Who stacks the shuffled deck of circumstance
> And, playing wild the Joker men call Chance,
> Defeats the Aces of our certainty.
> (STF, p. 61)

The card game, instead of renewing the friendship between Mike and Bill Carpenter, ends in a fight in which Bill beats Mike. After defeating Mike, Carpenter washes Mike's wounds with snow, hoping to end the matter. Fink's desire for revenge, however, is not to be diminished. Forgiveness is not consistent with the nature Neihardt has given Fink.

In the spring the men return to the main camp. Superficially, Fink appears to have forgotten the incident with the woman; yet, at camp, he insults Carpenter's choice of women and precipitates new animosity. Talbeau again tries to save the friendship:

> Talbeau, intent to end the strife at last,
> Somehow persuaded Fink to make amends,
> And, as a proof that henceforth they were
> friends,
> Proposed the shooting of the whisky cup.
> (STF, pp. 83-84)

Neihardt uses this historical material in two ways: it provides the narrative vehicle--moves the plot along--and it illustrates cultural values. The actions of these men are meant to be representative of the whole class of men who opened the West. In this symbolic incident, then, the men flip a coin to see who shoots first, and Mike wins first shot. Carpenter, knowing he will die, promises his belongings to Talbeau. Yet his values are such that his manhood is more important, finally, than his life. Therefore, he leaves him his wages and admonishes him to "'drink to better days/ When friends were friends'" (STF, p. 84). Talbeau watches Carpenter stand with the cup on his head and has a vision of him as

> A man-flower springing from the fresh green
> sod,
> While, round about the bushes burned with
> God,
> And mating peewees fluted in the brush.
> (STF, p. 86)

When Mike kills Carpenter, it is clear that he has betrayed the trust implicit in friendship.

This seems an appropriate place to break off this sort of tale, and, in fact, Neihardt does end here in his historical version. However, "It seemed the end, and yet 'twas not the end" (STF, p. 88). Neihardt, instead, returns briefly to the historical context. In 1823, Henry asked for volunteers to go down river to meet Ashley. The

context is a real one, but the action is Neihardt's creation. He has Fink and Talbeau--not Jed Smith--volunteer for this duty, and from this point the story follows a poetic and not an historical rationale.

Again he uses the incident that results in a second symbolic confrontation--another testing of the nature of friendship and manhood. Mike and Talbeau set off down river but continually feel the presence of a third rider, Carpenter. Talbeau keeps recalling Bill's admonition: "'You won't forget I gave my gun to you?'" (STF, p. 85) He keeps weighing the responsibilities and obligations of friendship, wondering how he measures up. At night when the men are camped his worries deepen:

> "You don't suppose they'll dig him out?
> I carried stones till break of day.
> You don't suppose they'll come and paw away
> The heavy stones I packed, and pester Bill?"
> (STF, p. 93)

Mike says little in response to Talbeau's questioning, but both men are troubled and have a vision that night. This device is used frequently by Neihardt throughout the Cycle. Although himself a mystic, Neihardt is careful to create a situation in which the vision need not be regarded empirically. Often it is used as a function of conscience or insight on the part of the character; in those cases the vision is in the nature of an epiphany.

The vision which comes to Talbeau and Fink is one of

Bill smiling before them with a cup on his head. Later that same night they are awakened by a prairie fire and have to race ahead of it for their lives. Each muses on the meaning of the vision in that context. For Talbeau, Bill came as a friend:

> 'He tried so hard to come
> And warn us; but the grave made him dumb,
> And 'twas to show he loved us that he smiled.'
> (STF, p. 99)

Mike's interpretation is much different:

> And of the other terror made a child
> Whom often, for a panic moment's span,
> Projections from the conscience of a man
> Pursued with glaring eyes and claws of flame.
> For this the dead arose, for this he came--
> That grin upon his face!
> (STF, p. 99)

Neihardt's addition of a prairie fire at this point is an important literary stratagem. A fire of this sort was a common enough on the plains--Neihardt himself had experienced one as a boy. Here it serves both in the narrative and as a symbolic trial by fire for the two friends. As they flee the fire on horseback, it appears initially that both will escape. When Mike's horse is unable to keep up and finally collapses, Talbeau, still concerned with the nature of friendship and loyalty, is torn between the desire to save his own life and his loyalty to his friend: "Dear Yesterdays fought wildly for the reins,/ To-morrows for the

spur" (STF, pp. 101-102). Importantly, Neihardt has Talbeau decide in favor of his friend:

> One horse--and who should ride it? All he hath
> A man will give for life! But shall he give
> For living that which makes it good to live--
> The consciousness of fellowship and trust?
> Let fools so prize a pinch of throbbing dust!
> (STF, p. 102)

This, from the mind of Talbeau, is Neihardt's clearest statement of the nature of friendship, loyalty, and true manhood in this song.

This, too, might seem a suitable point at which to end a poem with those concerns. Indeed, had Neihardt been Wagner, Talbeau would have been burned to a cinder in an effort to redeem honor for mankind. Yet, he resists the pat ending. Talbeau is unable to complete his heroic action, for as he leaps from his horse to give it to Mike, the horse breaks away leaving both men on foot. This inability to achieve the perfect gesture of friendship reveals Neihardt's judgment upon friendship based primarily on physical qualities. They climb a butte and are able to endure the fire which passes below. Later they reach a stream and coincidentally find Talbeau's dead horse, recovering from it supplies, rum and the gun Carpenter had given Talbeau. That night, aided by the liquor, they talk, and Talbeau remembers their adventures while Bill had been alive. The fire had not purified Mike as it had Talbeau, however, and he shouts,

"'Ye fool! I mint to kill!/ And, moind me now, ye'd better howld yer lip!'" (STF, p. 108)

Fink's confession occasions a third symbolic confrontation. Now Talbeau's values are tested in the poetic context. Fink sleeps that night, and Talbeau considers killing him but cannot because "So many moments of long ago/ Came pleading" (STF, p. 109). Neither can he forget Bill's words about his gun. Those words take on a new significance and seem to indicate his role as punisher of Mike. He feels the gun was sent to him "To make Mike suffer and repent" (STF, p. 111). To that purpose, he gathers up the gun and supplies and leaves Mike asleep. In the morning he shouts down to Mike and tells him to begin walking over the purgatorial landscape: "'It's Bill's own rifle pointing at your head;/ Go east, and think of all the wrong you've done!'" (STF, p. 112)

Talbeau's values also prove to be too superficial to withstand the tests Neihardt proposes in the poem. A significant change comes over Talbeau as he realizes that he has the power of life or death over Fink. When he sees from the top of the canyon that Mike is afraid: "the watcher's eyes grew dim,/ For some thing old and dear had gone from him. . . (STF, p. 113). What has gone is, of course, the feeling of love which is now replaced by a feeling of power. Talbeau trails Mike, firing at him unseen whenever Mike stops to rest and refusing him when he asks

for water. In terror Mike rushes on "For lo, on every side/ The paling summits watched him, Argus eyed. . . (STF, p. 118).

Fink does repent, but the dire need for water makes him "[forget] the words he meant to say,/ The fitted words, regretful of his deed" (STF, p. 121). He shouts to "that Lord of water there" (STF, p. 121), but Talbeau, blinded by this new power over another, forces him on. Finally, Talbeau begins to ask himself "who was he, Talbeau, to play at God?" (STF, p. 123) He sets out to share water with his friend, goaded by his own thirst and by the memory of his own words: "Go on, and think of all the wrong you've done!" (STF, p. 125) When he finally finds Mike, it is too late to share anything.

Neihardt could as easily have allowed Talbeau to find Mike in time because he already substantially altered the historical context. His intent, however, is not to sentimentalize or to approve; instead, his description of their reunion is a gruesome one. Talbeau finds Mike's body covered with crows: "The thing remained!--It hadn't any eyes--/ The pilfered sockets bore a pleading stare!" (STF, p. 126) Mike is punished for his betrayal of Bill. The story ends here, but not before Neihardt reveals that Talbeau's

> . . . hoarse wail of anguish and despair
> Aroused the echoes. Answering, arose

Once more the jeering chorus of the crows.
(STF, p. 126)

Talbeau, too, is punished for his betrayal of another. The song ends in a chorus of crows for none of the three were able to rise above their physical natures. Thus, Mike Fink, a hard, rugged tamer of the West, passes through history and into the realm of poetry. His strength and physical prowess become part of that past, a symbol for Neihardt to use of the raw power which forced the path of American history.

In "The Song of Hugh Glass," Neihardt moves only a year ahead in time and chooses his central character from the same group of Ashley-Henry men that included Fink and his friends. Again he is dealing with characteristic adventures of Ashley-Henry men who opened the trans-Missouri territory. Yet, if the Glass story were nothing more than a celebration of physical prowess and an investigation of relationships based on externals, there would be little aesthetic reason for Neihardt to have placed it second or to have included it at all. It is, in fact, related to the first song, as it is a saga of physical strength and endurance; but Glass was a man different in real life from Mike Fink, and his story, transformed by poetry, deals with different and more vital issues. Thus this song, the second of three in The Mountain Men, is a pivotal one, for it represents in its theme a concern with issues which are both physical and spiritual, in the broadest sense.

Hugh Glass is an even less familiar figure than Mike Fink. Because of his obscurity, he might seem an unlikely candidate for an American epic. That is not the case, however, because Glass embodies many of the most important American values. His story is "a saga typifying the independence, hardihood, perseverence and raw courage of the trappers who first penetrated the vast territory opened to American enterprise through the Louisiana Purchase."[22]

Not much is known about Glass' life before he joined the Ashley-Henry men in 1823. One account which offers intriguing glimpses into his earlier life is "Chronicles of George C. Yount."[23] According to these accounts, Glass was an honest, seafaring man in his youth. That career was interrupted when Glass' ship was captured by the notorious Jean La Fitte.[24] Those captured had two choices--join or die. Glass joined up, but according to John Myers Myers, the Glass biographer, he hated piracy. As a result, he and

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[22] Aubrey L. Haines, "High Glass," The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West, ed. LeRoy Hafen (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1965-1972), VI, 161.

[23] California Historical Quarterly, II (1923), 24-33. cited in Haines, VI, 161.

[24] These tales are brought together in a coherent, semi-factual account by John Myers Myers in Pirate, Pawnee and Mountain Man (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963).

a friend soon fell into disfavor. Seeking to escape death, they jumped overboard while the ship was moored in a bay off the Texas coast.

They made it ashore and travelled inland until captured by Pawnees. Glass' friend was burned at the stake. Glass was lucky enough to have carried a small packet of vermillion from the ship; in a last gallant gesture, he presented the token to the chief. The chief, appreciating courage, adopted Glass into the tribe instead of incinerating him. Thereafter he learned Pawnee customs and the ways of survival in the wilderness. At a tribal trip to St. Louis in 1822, Glass escaped in time to answer the second Ashley-Henry advertisement.

Glass joined the Ashley expedition that went upriver on March 7, 1823. Prior to Ashley's leaving, Henry, who had established Fort Henry upriver, had suffered unexpected losses of men and horses during trapping expeditions on the Upper Missouri. Henry sent a courier to Ashley asking for replacements. In the meantime, Ashley had his own troubles. His grave lack of horses had led him to trade with the Arikara, an unpredictable group of river Indians. In the course of this exchange, there was a fight during which several of the trappers were, themselves, trapped on shore. As a result of Ashley's carelessness, eleven died and thir-

teen were wounded, among them Hugh Glass.[25]

This fight is of interest because of Neihardt's transformation of it in the poem. Historically it was significant because it provided the only communication actually written by Glass.[26] The letter has since been stolen from the South Dakota collection, but an examination of its text, which Neihardt includes in The Splendid Wayfaring, shows clearly that Glass had tact and literacy above the standard of the time. The letter must have had an effect on Neihardt's portrayal of Glass, for Glass is one of Neihardt's most human and humane characters.

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[25] Missouri Intelligencer (St. Louis), 8 July 1823 and Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 4 July 1823 print casualty lists upon which Glass' name appears.

[26] A facsimile of the letter can be found in the 1920 edition of Neihardt's The Splendid Wayfaring, p. 240. The text is as follows: "Dr Sir, My painfull duty it is to tell you of the death of yr Son wh befell at the hands of the indians 2nd, June in the early morning. He lived a little while after he was shot and asked me to inform you of his sad fate. We brought him to the ship where he soon died. Mr Smith a young man of the company made a powerful prayr wh moved us all greatly and I am persuaded John died in peace. His body we buried with others near this camp and marked the grave with a log. His things we will send to you. The savages are greatly treacherous. We traded with them as friends but after a great storm of rain and thunder they came at us before light and many were hurt. I myself was hit in the leg. Master Ashley is bound to stay in these parts till the traitors are rightly punished.
Yr Obt Svt
Hugh Glass [Signature]

Following the Arikara fight, Colonel Henry Leavenworth decided on a punitive expedition against the Arikaras. The Sioux--members of the Yankton, Teton, Saone, and Hunkpapa tribes--were delighted with the prospect and joined up with Ashley men, other trappers, and the infantry. The battle was one of the most ill-planned and badly carried out of the early Indian wars. It was so ineffectual that the disgusted Sioux left early. As a result of the enormous confrontation, there were two whites killed, two Sioux dead, and thirty dead Rees, including women and children (SW, pp. 96-97). At its conclusion, moreover, Ashley was left with only thirty men willing to continue upriver.

Neihardt fully establishes this historical context for Glass' adventure. The setting is 1823, just after the abortive Leavenworth Indian War run by the "ten score martial clowns."[27] Into this factual background, he introduces his version of Hugh Glass and the boy, Jamie. There is some historical evidence that the boy Jamie could well have been Jim Bridger, himself an important mountain man. But be that as it may, Neihardt is less interested in who Hugh and Jamie were in reality and more in what they signify for him. As literary representations they are suitable vehicles for his statements about values. With that intent in mind, his

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[27] John G. Neihardt, "The Song of Hugh Glass," The Mountain Men, p. 129. All further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as SHG.

descriptions of Hugh and the boy are not particularized. As he did with Fink and his friends, Neihardt imparts to the characters a cultural identity beyond that of the individual. Nothing is told of either's past, although the legends about Hugh's are more than mildly interesting and were surely known to Neihardt. He is careful not to confuse what he wants Hugh to stand for with Hugh's idiosyncrasies and singularities. Hugh, thus, is the "graybeard," a man

> Large of bone,
> Deep-chested, that his great heart might have play,
> Gray-bearded, gray of eye and crowned with gray. . . .
>
> (SHG, pp. 129-30)

The boy, whom Neihardt calls "the goldhair," is likewise described in general terms as a blond lad so young that "scarce began/ The downy beard to mark him for a man" (SHG, p. 130). Jamie is not yet a man and is so "femininely fair" that he seems to play at manliness. The two are set in opposition to each other. One is old, the other young; Hugh is constant, and Jamie like the "prairie weather." Together they are "A Ganymedes haunted by a Goth. . . (SHG, p. 131).

The relationship Neihardt establishes between them is a close one, at least on Hugh's side. They are as parent and child. To strengthen that relationship, Neihardt has

the men recall the Arikara raid in which Glass was wounded. He alters the actuality of the event slightly and turns the wound the real Glass incurred during the attack into an emblematic one gotten while fighting like "a grizzly for a cub" in order to protect Jamie. The injury becomes analogous to the "wound" a woman would get while giving birth, and Hugh accepts the responsibility of "parenthood" by deciding to make a man of Jamie. His first parental act is to spank "the lad with vigorous paw" (SHG, p. 132) for being foolhardy in battle. Thus the Glass story is also a saga of a boy coming of age.

In the legends which grew up about Hugh Glass, several treated the relationship between the boy and Glass as a homosexual one. Neihardt acknowledges the existence of these legends and dismisses them by suggesting that those who do not comprehend close relationships are "those in whom all living waters sank/ To some dull inner pool that teemed and stank/ With formless evil. . . (SHG, p. 133). Clearly, Neihardt regards Hugh's love for Jamie as something wholesome, though latecoming--a love "Grievous to bear, too dear to cast away" (SHG, p. 133). The quality of Jamie's commitment to Hugh is left deliberately ambiguous: ". . . 'twas a warm heart or a wind of whim,/ Love, or the rover's teasing itch in him,/ Moved Jamie?" (SHG, p. 134)

Neihardt, after establishing the nature of the men and their relationship, is careful to place them in the accu-

rate historical setting. His treatment of Glass' mauling by the grizzly and his subsequent abandonment rely heavily on the available historical material. After the Leavenworth war, Henry took a small party of thirteen men overland to reinforce his garrison upriver.[28] Hugh was one of those who set out. It is in this setting that Glass and the boy Jamie establish their relationship, with Glass teaching the boy about survival and about manhood in curiously constructed stories about himself which he tells in the third person: "'A fellow that I knew,'/ So nameless went the hero that was Hugh. . ." (SHG, p. 134).

Soon thereafter, the real Glass encountered the grizzly bear that was to transform his already interesting life into legend. He met the bear in South Dakota, and the encounter and its aftermath are recorded in three forms which are sufficiently different to indicate separate reporting. The basic story is clear. Glass, separated from his comrades, was attacked by a grizzly which he had been unable to stop with a single shot. He was so badly mauled that he was considered sure to die. The party could not leave him alone or wait for him to die because they had to reinforce Fort Henry and because they were in hostile Indian country.

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[28] Among them were Hugh Glass, Jim Bridger, and John S. Fitzgerald. Jed Smith, in reward for his bravery at the Leavenworth fiasco, was given his own party of twelve including William Sublette, Jim Clyman, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Thomas Eddy, and Edward Rose.

Two "volunteers" were to stay with Glass until he died. The two volunteers, attracted to the job because of the money, perhaps as much as an entire year's pay, and the promise of Glass' kit, soon abandoned him, leaving Glass without a gun or flint. The men quickly returned to the main group, telling the Henry group that Glass had died. Glass, understandably furious about the inhumane treatment, crawled down the Grand River to the Missouri and finally arrived at Fort Kiowa. From there he set out in pursuit of his faithless comrades but never caught the older one. He did catch up with the younger man who was less responsible.

For a long while this tale seemed impossible; and if it were, Neihardt's use of it would not be a real possessing of the past, but research has found it to be true.[29] The bear incident is attested to in fellow trapper, James Clyman's, diary entry for September, 1823:

> Amongst the party was a Mr. Hugh Glass who would not be restrained. . . . He went off the line of march one afternoon and met with a large grizzly bear, which he shot at and wounded. The bear as is usual, attacked Glass. He attempted to climb a tree but the

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[29] James Hall, Port Folio, Philadelphia, March 1825; Philip St. George Cooke, "Some Incidents in the Life of Hugh Glass, A Hunter of the Missouri River," St. Louis Beacon, 2 and 9 December 1830; Edmund Flagg, "Adventure at the Headwaters of the Missouri River," Louisville Literary News-Letter, 7 September 1839, 1, 326-327, cited in Haines, VI, 161, 164.

> bear caught him and hauled him to the ground tearing and lacerating his body in fearful rate.[30]

Glass' abandonment is also recorded in a letter by Daniel T. Potts. In it he tells of "One man who [was] also tore nearly all to peases by a White Bear and was left that way without any gun who afterwards recovered."[31] Dale Morgan supplies proof that the older man who abandoned Glass was John S. Fitzgerald, and not the man cited by Neihardt.[32]

Neihardt utilizes most of the available sources in his description of Glass' being mauled by the bear. He has the lad find him and care for him until Henry and his men arrive. This allows the reader to see that Jamie does, in fact, care somewhat for Hugh. As in the historical account, Henry, knowing that he cannot stay with Glass or leave him alone, asks for "volunteers" to stay with him. Here history suggests that there were Bridger and John S. Fitzgerald. Instead of a desire for money, Neihardt has Jamie stay because he feels duty bound to Hugh, but Jules Le Bon

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[30] Charles L. Camp, ed., James Clyman, American Frontiersman (San Francisco, 1928), p. 35, cited in Haines, VI, 165.

[31] Letter, Daniel T. Potts to Thomas Cochlen, 7 July 1824. The original is in the collection of the Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, Yellowstone Park, Wyoming.

[32] Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), p. 97.

(Neihardt's equivalent to Fitzgerald) does not decide to stay ". . . until the hat went round,/ And pity wakened, at the silver's clink. . . " (SHG, p. 146).

Jamie is, at first, gentle to Hugh, ministering to him "womanlike," a sure sign that he has not yet achieved manhood. Yet Le Bon's subtle insinuations about their danger from Indians begin to prey upon Jamie's feelings for Hugh. As Le Bon talks of hostile Indians, Jamie loves Hugh less and his skin more:

> All the while
> With some conviction, but with more of guile,
> Jules colonized the vacancy with Rees;
> Till Jamie felt that looseness of the knees
> That comes of oozing courage.
>
> (SHG, p. 149)

Now, instead of worrying about Hugh's worsening condition, Jamie feels a "furtive gladness" that soon he will be able to return to Henry's group and safety.

Glass does not die, however, and Jules soon tricks Jamie into believing that there are Indians all around. Because of his fear for himself, "the last heart-string that held him kind;/ Strung taut, the final tie that kept him true/ Now snapped. . ." (SHG, pp. 152-53). They leave Glass, but not before Jules, who is the "practical" one, takes Glass' flint, gun, knife, and blanket. Neihardt faults Jamie for leaving his friend, but his strongest condemnation is not for Jamie but for the older man. Just as Hugh had

taken it upon himself to teach the boy to be a man, Neihardt intimates that Jules too should have served as a moral example. Thus, the older man is doubly wrong. Yet, Jamie is wrong too for betraying a fellow man--especially one who loved him--just to save himself.

In the second chapter, "The Awakening," Glass begins to recover. He awakens from both unconsciousness and from a trust in his fellows. His first realization is about the extent of his injuries, and that is almost enough to unman him. His second realization is worse both for its nature and its suddenness:

> And in one breath the groping light became
> A gloom-devouring ecstasy of flame,
> A dazing conflagration of belief!
> (SHG, p. 159)

Hugh realizes Jamie's infidelity:

> His manifest betrayal by a friend
> Beat in upon him. Jamie had been there;
> And Jamie--Jamie--Jamie did not care!
> (SHG, p. 159)

For a moment he lets his love for the boy sweep over him. Then it is replaced by the desire for vengeance which

> Became a still white hell of brooding ire,
> And through his veins regenerating fire
> Ran, driving out the lethargy of pain.
> (SHG, p. 162)

Finally, the desire for vengeance is transformed into

defiance:

> Hugh's love increased the peril of his plight;
> But anger broke the slumber of his might,
> Quickened the heart and warmed the blood that ran
> Defiance for the treachery of Man,
> Defiance for the meaning of his pain,
> Defiance for the distance of the plain
> That seemed to gloat 'You cannot master me.'
> (SHG, pp. 162-63)

So, Glass dares to crawl across the hostile land, with little water, no food, knife, gun or flint, to reach safety. This he can do because he is now motivated by "the sullen patience that is hate's" (SHG, p. 163).

The narrative of Glass' crawl is straightforward; the only motivation to survive is the "sustaining wrath." The chapter devoted to that crawl makes use of a number of poetic devices traditional to epics. Neihardt sees Hugh's crawl as equal to the great ordeals undergone by other heroes. The language is suggestive of this epic adventure. The dangers Glass meets--hunger, fear, chance--are personified, and the landscape is a barren, hostile one. The land is seen as a place of mortal combat; one looks through Hugh's eyes--the eyes of a man betrayed, a man, temporarily at least, blind to natural beauty.

Throughout Hugh's crawl, Neihardt emphasizes his manly qualities. Crawling with a broken leg, no food or fire, Hugh sees an old Indian woman passing close by his daytime hiding place. She is alone and carries her small kit con-

taining at least flint and food, and she passes within his reach. He could easily kill her for her possessions which might guarantee him life. He asks himself, "Why not?/ . . . None should ever know,/ Save him, the feasted kiote and the crow. . ." (SHG, p. 206). Yet he chooses not to kill her because he has a vision of her as a person "haloed like a saint" who has done no wrong to him. That vision is a reflection of the values which make up his manhood, which do not allow him to kill her, even for his own salvation. Likewise when he desires to give in to grief, he is able to fight it off, and then "no grief . . made womanish the man. . . (SHG, p. 213). The knowledge of his manhood, his hardihood, sustains him, and he knows "that he [can] finish in the race" (SHG, p. 213).

What prevents him from being the ultimate hero for Neihardt is that when Glass arrives at the Post, he is still possessed by his hate. Instead of resting there, buying a "winter's comfort" with his tale, he tells those who ask him to remain, "'I cannot rest; for I am but a ghost/ Of someone murdered by a friend'" (SHG, p. 222). Neihardt does have Hugh tell his "saga-stuff" to those at the Post. As is usual for Glass, he tells the story of this experience as a third person narrative, indicating by his humility his true manhood. The reaction of the listeners indicates the potency of his tale:

The graybeard . . . began . . .

. . . . . .
His story, told as of another man
Who loving late, loved much and was betrayed.
He spoke unwitting how his passion played
Upon them, how their eyes grew soft or hard
With what he told them. . . .

(SHG, p. 223)

Hugh's trip upriver to Fort Henry for revenge began late in the fall and ended in the winter. Hugh is urged on by hate and by the information that those who betrayed him wait at the Fort. Upon his arrival, Glass confronts Le Bon. According to the historical accounts, Glass never caught up with the older man who finally escaped him altogether by joining the Army. In this poem, however, it is necessary that he catch the older man who is guilty of more than abandonment. Le Bon is Glass' foil, and it is important for the reader to see how Glass will treat Le Bon. When Hugh arrives at the Fort, he confronts the other man immediately. Jules cowers in a corner, and all expect Glass to shoot him. His refusal to do so recalls his sparing the old Indian woman because she had done him no harm. He spares Le Bon because to kill him would be to recognize him as an equal, something neither a woman nor a coward could be. Instead, Glass kicks him and says, "'Come, get up/ And wag your tail! I couldn't kill a pup!'" (SHG, p. 236) Then he sets out for Fort Atkinson and Jamie.

Historically, Glass did catch up with the younger man at Fort Atkinson and did forgive him. Neihardt alters his-

tory at this point to articulate Glass' values more fully. Whereas Mike Fink could not forget a slight or a beating, and Talbeau confused himself with God, Hugh was able finally to forgive a betrayal because his love was strong and tempered by his value system which comprehended a good beyond himself. On his trip to Fort Atkinson, he begins an interior dialogue between his bitterness and his love:

> He seemed as one who feeds upon his heart
> And finds, despite the bitter and the smart,
> A little sweetness and is glad of that.
> (SHG, p. 238)

After Hugh's discovery that Jamie has left the Fort in search of him, Hugh completely forgives the boy and goes after him:

> 'Mayhap
> He'll be at Henry's Post and we shall meet;
> And to forgive and to forget were sweet:
> 'Tis for its nurse that Vengeance whets the
> tooth!'
> . . . . . .
> So Hugh had brooded, till there came on him
> The pity of a slow rain after drouth.
> (SHG, p. 243)

Hugh finally tracks down the lad in a Piegan village. The boy, blinded by a misfire from the gun he took from Hugh, has sent for a priest to whom he can confess his sins of betrayal. Glass disguises his voice and tells the boy he is a priest. The boy confesses his sins:

> "O Father, I had paid too much for breath!

> The Devil traffics in the fear of death,
> And may God pity anyone who buys
> What I have bought with treachery and
> lies. . . .
>
> (SHG, p. 251)

Glass, who is in a way the father and the religion the boy wants, is eager to forgive. He hears in the boy's words what Neihardt wants us to hear, that the boy has learned about honor and manhood. Neihardt ends the song here, where "The Song of Three Friends" could not end, with a real friendship, one based on honor and a concept of manhood which includes love and forgiveness. The fact that the real Glass also forgave his betrayers[33] is what made him a significant American hero to Neihardt: "If, when the long pursuit was ended, Hugh had wrought vengeance upon his . . . betrayer, his adventure would have been little more than an astonishing exhibition of brute endurance and ferocity; but in the end the Graybeard forgave, and that fact raises his story to the level of sublimity" (SW, p. 138).

Despite the fact that Glass and Fink are colorful

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[33] In Cooke's version (cited above), Glass makes a speech to Jim when he meets up with him at Henry's Fort. "Young man, it is Glass that is before you; the same that, not content with leaving, you thought, to a cruel death upon the prairie, you robbed, helpless as he was, of his rifle, his knife, of all, with which he could hope to defend or save himself. . . . I swore an oath that I would be revenged on you, and the wretch who was with you, and I ever thought to have kept it. For this meeting I have braved the dangers of a long journey. . . . But I cannot take your life; . . . you have nothing to fear from me; go,--you are free;--for your youth I forgive you."

characters and received much of Neihardt's critical attention, it is clearly Jed Smith who is the most complex figure in The Mountain Men. After having completed what he envisioned as the whole of the Cycle, Neihardt had to return to the first volume; in 1941, twenty-nine years after he had begun the epic, he added "The Song of Jed Smith." Something had remained unsaid throughout those years of writing, and the final statements in volume two, The Twilight of the Sioux, were not a full articulation of it. Neihardt had to deal with religion in the broadest sense before he left the white man; he had to delineate more clearly the differences and similarities between the philosophies and values of the white and the native American. He had not fully treated the philosophy, ethics and religion of the white man, his "strong medicine."

Jed Smith, a fusion of American enterprise, masculine virtues, and white religion, offered himself to Neihardt as a suitable subject for pulling together American cultural values. The historical person was a combination of seemingly contradictory virtues and values; he was "A young man who prayed like a parson and was more daring than tough old mountain men" (SW, p. 63). His significance to the development of the West was unquestioned: ". . . this young fellow . . . [was] fated to become one of the great torch-bearers of the race; and within nine years [from 1822] he [had] pushed far in advance of the oncoming human tide,

discovered a main route of travel through the western wilderness to the Pacific Ocean, encountered many perils, and died the death of a hero, leaving as a legacy to his countrymen the memory of his years, as rich as they were few" (SW, p. 8). In this statement from his prose history of the period, Neihardt gives evidence of Smith's worthiness for inclusion in this epic poem. In that passage, Neihardt also specifies the method of treating Smith in the poem. The other songs follow a straightforward narrative line; the time is chronological, and characters periodically speak in their own voices. With the last song, the focus shifts. Smith is not only important for his real world achievements, as are Glass and Fink; his merit lies in both physical accomplishments and in the transcendent quality of his relationships. The importance of his effect on others, changing and forming their spiritual values, is emphasized by Neihardt's decision to have this song told in flashbacks through the reminiscences of three men who knew him and outlived him but not his memory.

Jed Smith was the first to find and recognize the only natural path to the Oregon country, the South Pass; he was the first white man to reach California overland and the first to cross the Sierra Nevada. He was the first to cross the Great Basin by the most direct route, the desert, and was the first to travel overland from California to Columbia. That he completed all these feats and died be-

fore he was thirty-four is remarkable, but not as remarkable as his almost total disappearance from the American public mind. The memories of this man and his exploits have been painstakingly reestablished by historians.[34] Neihardt too knew the sources, and what is more, he imbued the characters in this song with an understanding of Smith's importance on many levels. He has Art Black, one of the song's three speakers, reflect that understanding in his comment on Smith's achievements:

> He was seeing all the white
> Map westward as a page on which to write,
> For men to read, the story of a land
> Still lying empty as the Maker's hand
> Before creation. From the Great Salt Lake,
> Between the Colorado and the Snake,
> From burning sand to high Sierra snow,
> He wrote it. Some day men will read and know
> The man he was.[35]

The three speakers of the poem--one thoroughly transformed, one altered, and one mostly unchanged by his knowledge of Smith--view him from different perspectives. Each contributes his own insight to our understanding of Smith as man

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[34] The important works dealing with Smith are Harrison C. Dale's The Ashley-Smith Expeditions and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1918); Maurice S. Sullivan's Jedediah Smith: Trader and Trailbreaker (New York: Press of the Pioneers, Inc., 1936); and Dale Morgan's Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West.

[35] John G. Neihardt, "The Song of Jed Smith," The Mountain Men, p. 11. All further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as SJS.

and as symbol; together they present a response to Smith as Neihardt would have us see him, a culmination of American values, a new force in a new land.

The real Smith was one of the rare persons who sees himself as existing in history. Conscious of the role that he was playing in opening the West, he was serious, and as Neihardt described him always "'too busy with a dream that grew inside/ For laughter'" (SJS, p. 11). Unlike many others who ended up on the frontier by accident, Smith went to St. Louis in 1822 with the purpose of going west as a trapper to earn his fortune.[36] His arrival coincided with the Ashley advertisement for "enterprising young men," and Smith enlisted. This chance collection of talented and important men is quite remarkable in American history, a fact which Neihardt responds to in the song:

> What a bunch of men!
> This valley will not see their like again
> Until the evening and the dawn swap places
> And days run backwards!
>
> (SJS, p. 10)

The poem's narrative line follows history quite closely. In June of 1822, Smith went with Ashley up the Missouri to the mouth of the Yellowstone. He remained there

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[36] Alson J. Smith, Men Against the Mountain (New York: The John Day Co., 1965), Appendix C. This section contains relevant biographical information.

with Henry while Ashley returned to St. Louis and then went upriver to the mouth of the Musselshell to winter.[37] In the spring of 1823, it was Smith who was sent down river with the urgent message to Ashley asking for supplies and men. Smith reached Ashley before the latter's disastrous experience with the Arikaras. On June 1, 1823, that battle took place in which Glass was wounded and Smith distinguished himself by his bravery. After that battle he further demonstrated his courage by volunteering to go upriver to get Henry and reinforcements to participate in the Leavenworth Indian War.[38] He went there alone through hostile territory, returning in a month with Henry and his men. In the ensuing war, Smith was a captain of one of the two companies of Ashley-Henry men who fought under Leavenworth.[39]

After this battle in which nothing much was accomplished, Smith was put in charge of his own small trapping company,[40] and they set out to find new beaver territory

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[37] Alson J. Smith, pp. 2-10.

[38] Morgan, Jedediah Smith, p. 50.

[39] Dale L. Morgan, The West of William H. Ashley (Denver, 1964), p. 52, cited by Harvey L. Carter in "Jedediah Smith," Mountain Man and the Fur Trade, VIII, 334.

[40] Smith's company included William Sublette, Jim Clyman, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Thomas Eddy, and Edward Rose, cited in Carter, p. 334.

south of the Yellowstone River. They travelled westward in September 1823, and what we know of this trip comes mostly from Clyman's journals.[41] Neihardt attaches symbolic significance to Smith's activities. For example, Smith, like Glass, was badly mauled by a grizzly bear, and Clyman notes that he sewed him up under Smith's direction. After that episode, Smith wore long hair to cover the scars. Smith's tangle with the bear, very typical of mountain men's experience, becomes for Neihardt more than a physical event. With Glass, Neihardt used the episode paradigmatically--Glass' experience being more extreme but not unlike that of many early explorers. Neihardt uses Smith's incident differently; it becomes symbolic of Smith's dual parameters--physical and spiritual. Squire, the poem's least philosophical speaker, comments on this nature, which he views as being somewhat peculiar:

> . . . the scar he got that day
> He argued with the bear up Big Horn way
> And came off best--a bit the worse for wear--
> Some ribs caved in. But when you saw the bear,
> Heart-stabbed and belly-slashed--well, you began
> To know that Jedediah was a man
> For all his Bible-reading, parson ways!
> (SJS, p. 13)

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[41] Camp, ed., James Clyman, contains those journals.

Squire is the least changed for having known Smith. In most ways he represents an average American mentality, and it is interesting to note in that context that he is the only one of the three speakers for whom there is no historical counterpart. His perceptions are limited by his expectations for the usual, and while he recognizes something special about Smith, he cannot quite fathom its nature or importance:

> "'Twas the same [sort of feeling]
> Old 'Diah used to give me years ago:
> A feel of something you could never know,
> Except that it was big and still and dim
> And had a secret."
>
> (SJS, p. 15)

In early 1824, in search of new beaver country, Smith, following advice given to him by the Crows, looked for a new river beyond the Wind River Mountains. They trapped all along the Sweetwater River and later in March along the Siskeedee, or Green River, near the mouth of the Big Sandy. The crossing Smith had made use of was the South Pass (as distinguished from the North Pass used by Lewis and Clark). It had been used before, by the returning Astorians in 1811, for instance, but Smith's crossing marked the first conscious use of the pass and the first realization of its significance. Neihardt has Smith understand that significance, but he denies the understanding to Squire--as it was denied to most of the Americans who were to use the pass as a gateway to gold or to Oregon and California. Squire tells us

that after Smith found the Pass

> "Things got still
> And kind of strange. The others gathered round,
> Quit talking, and there wasn't any sound
> Except a bridle made it. Then it came--
> That funny sort of feeling,
> . . . . . .
> A feel of something you could never know,
> But it was something big and still and dim
> That wouldn't tell. It seemed to come from him
> Just looking down the Sandy towards the Green
> That had been waiting yonder to be seen
> A million winters and a million springs
> And summers! 'Twas the other side of things--
> Another world!"
>
> (SJS, p. 17)

Squire knows he is in the presence of a special man, one who was "man a-plenty" (SJS, p. 18), but he cannot grasp the transcendent nature of the moment of discovery. At best he understands what Smith means literally when he says "How that was where the water ran both ways,/ And over there beyond the valley haze/ The great Pacific rolled!" (SJS, p. 19)

Historically, Smith sent word to Ashley of his findings and of the availability of beaver, and Ashley set out to meet his field captain. He gave word that a rendezvous would be held on July 1, 1825, and at that meeting Ashley collected 8,829 pounds of beaver and headed for St. Louis with Smith. They arrived in St. Louis in October of 1825, and in about a month, Smith was on his way back into the mountains no longer just a field captain but one of Ash-

ley's business partners.[42] By the following year, Ashley had grown tired of the fur trade business and wanted to involve himself in other activities like politics. He sold out to the new firm of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette and agreed to act as their supplier.[43] Neihardt emphasizes this mercantile aspect of Smith's life in both the history and the poem. Smith epitomizes the Horatio Alger myth and the American work ethic, just as Mike Fink represented American violence and independence.

Neihardt recognized that Smith also embodied the adventuresome spirit of the other trappers. The new company split up its work, with Jackson and Sublette going north to hunt and Smith taking seventeen men and looking for new territory south and west of the Great Salt Lake.[44] Again in the song, Squire accompanies Smith and again he fails to understand the meaning of what he sees. He knows only that Smith understands something on a different level of experience: "'The way I thought of Jed/ Had turned into a picture! Still and dim/ And big with secrets!'" (SJS, p. 23)

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[42] Alexander Ross, Fur Hunters of the Far West (London, 1855), II, 171-75, cited by Carter, VIII, 336.

[43] Morgan, The West of William H. Ashley, pp. 142-52.

[44] Arthur Black, Manuel Eustanan, Rovert Evans, Daniel Ferguson, John Faiter, Silas Gobel, John Hanna, Abraham La-Plant, Manuel Lazarus, Martin McCoy, Nepassang, Louis Pombert, Peter Ranne (a black man), James Reed, John Reubascan, Harrison G. Rogers, and John Wilson are the men listed in Carter, VIII, 337n.

Neihardt is distancing Smith's achievement and his understanding of it from the understanding of the common man. He allows Smith to experience visions, but it is clear that it is Smith's perception which is atypical and not Squire's.

In 1826, after the rendezvous in June, Squire parts company with Smith. All in all the parting isn't a bitter one for Squire. To him Smith is unfathomable, his desires and responses not expected or familiar. When Smith sets out after the rendezvous on the trip that will lead him to California, Squire says that it was

> "Some river of the moon
> That he went chasing after, seemed to me--
> The wonderfulest river that could be,
> Because there wasn't any where it flowed
> Off westward there and made an easy road
> To the Pacific--which we knew by then
> The salt lake wasn't. Saw him once again,
> On Bear Lake, when you three came back half dead
> From California, Bob. And what a Jed!
> A buzzard wouldn't eat him! Made me glad
> He didn't take me!
> Now I wish he had--"
> (SJS, p. 25)

What Squire feels is nostalgia at a chance missed. Never does the meaning of the chance fully penetrate his consciousness.

Neihardt denies Squire both the historical and philosophical understanding of Smith's journey and what it signifies. Smith then set out for California, the first white man to do so via the central overland route. He claimed he had not specifically set out to reach California, but find-

ing no suitable beaver streams where he first looked, he ended up at a California mission. The path Smith and his men traveled has been well-documented in a letter Smith wrote to General William Clark and in the journal fragments of Harrison G. Rogers who traveled with Smith.[45] On this first trip to California, Jed Smith was accompanied by Art Black. Black also accompanies Smith in the song, differing from Squire both by being historically real and by being touched by Smith's personality and vision. Even Art, however, is uncomprehending at the beginning of the trip:

> "But when," said Black, "we had started for
> the sea
> That summer, Bob, not one of seventeen,
> I'll warrant, cared to know what life might
> mean.
> To ask that question is a kind of dying.
> What matters to a bird a-wing is flying;
> What matters to a proper thirst is drinking.
> A tree would wither if it got to thinking
> Of what the summers and the winters meant!
> There was a place to go to, and we went,
> High-hearted with a hunger for the new."
> (SJS, p. 27)

Yet Art is more perceptive than Squire. He is aware of the existence of things beyond the physical, and as a result he knows enough to envy the animals their simple existence of feeling:

> "The brutes are wise

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[45] Reprinted in Dale's Ashley-Smith Expeditions, pp. 186-94.

Beyond us, Bob. They can't philosophize
And get the world all tangled in their skulls."
(SJS, p. 27)

For Art, the knowledge of another reality is touched with feelings of sadness at his inability to maintain the transcendent vision.

The trip that Neihardt ascribes to Smith is historically accurate, but its historical significance is secondary to the importance of the going itself; Art asks,

"If living is a matter of arriving,
Why not just start to rotting at the first,
And save the trouble?"
(SJS, p. 28)

Art Black, who is the principal recounter of this part of Smith's history, speaks to that deeper meaning in the travels. He shares with Smith the vision of the West, of California and the imaginary Buenaventura River. The historical Smith, always the competent business man, arrived in California almost by accident, by virtue of his hunting peltry. The Smith Neihardt describes through Art Black went westward to realize a dream, to merge in some way his reality with the reality of his God. Thus in the song, California becomes more than a source of beaver; it becomes a clue in the fathoming of the mysterious stasis of God:

"The other side
Of ranges west and south, a dim world ran

> Uphill to where eternity began
> And time died of monotony at last.
> And when that rim of nothing had been passed,
> Why surely 'twould be California then;
> But would we all be long-gray-whiskered men
> Before we got there? No one seemed to mind.
> God only knew the wonders we might find,
> And how He must be weary with His knowing!"
> (SJS, p. 29)

The closeness of Smith to understanding God, and consequently the meaning of life, is made explicit a number of times by Neihardt. Historical sources suggest that Smith was, in fact, a competent leader, able to care for the needs of his men. Neihardt turns these characteristics into examples not of Smith's expertise, but into symbols of his clear vision and right sight. When during the expedition to California, the men run low on water, Art muses on the significance of Smith's going off from the company for awhile:

> "I know now he'd been praying.
> You'd swear he knew a spring along the way,
> And kept it for himself! He'd smile and say
> We shouldn't doubt, but we should trust and
> know
> There'd soon be water.
> And, by God, 'twas
> so--
> 'Twas so that afternoon!"
> (SJS, p. 31-32)

Only Art Black and the last speaker, Bob Evans, comprehend the significance of Smith's ability to find water. Squire is happy to hear about the experience without water only because if allows him to raise a thirst and consume

more liquor. The other men see it differently. Art chastises Squire by telling him that "'Water's holy stuff,/ Direct from heaven! When the grass gets green,/ That's worship!'" (SJS, p. 33) Evans agrees with him and suggests that Smith's ability to find water was "'The Holy Ghost,/ The dove descending'" (SJS, p. 33). Squire dismisses such talk with a laugh and suggests that they "'. . . let the kiotes lead a hymn!'" (SJS, p. 33) The reason for such exchanges is to strengthen the range of responses to Smith. Because the quality of relationships is one of the themes which permeates this book, each of the three speakers is defining himself by the nature of his response to Smith.

Whereas Squire remained fundamentally unchanged by his experiences with Smith, Art Black did undergo a transformation. He came to have a deep respect for the man and a deep respect for the man's feelings. Yet, he was unable to participate fully in them, or to generate them without Smith's help. As a result, his response for Smith is shown as a curious mixture: a respect for the man's religion and a real love of the man for the more traditional aspects of his manhood. When Black speaks of Jed's Bible reading, that mixture of feelings becomes clear and echoes Squire's earlier remarks about the grizzly bear:

> "No one cracked a smile
> Or said a word, and there were godless
> cusses,
> Whose on'ry fracases and rakehell muses

> Had sent them where they were, among the
> others.
> Like pious little boys who mind their mothers,
> They sat there waiting, mannerly and prim.
> And if they hadn't, there was that in him
> To whale the devil out of any man.
> I've seen him do it."
>
> (SJS, p. 34)

This dual admiration permeates Black's attitude. Later when he recounts Smith's and his men's meeting with a group of native Americans, he comments on how mannerly Smith treats the women of the tribe. He is, however, equally impressed by how Smith deals with maintaining discipline with the men who go after one of the women dressed only in a strategic "patch of rabbit fur" (SJS, p. 37). In response to the harrassment of the Indian woman,

> ". . . Jed
> Came riding, looking like a thunder-head
> With lightning in it just about to break.
> 'Respect a woman for your mothers' sake,'
> He said, 'or take a licking!'"
>
> (SJS, p. 37)

Black marvels also at Jed's personal treatment of native Americans. We have already heard from Squire the prevailing attitudes about "'Indians, and such/ Assorted varmints'" (SJS, p. 16). We see from Art Black that he shared these feelings, but also was impressed by Jed's compassion and inherent fairness; the Indian they say, Black tells us, "'was human mud,/ 'Twas badly baked and furnished with the blood/ Of rabbits'" (SJS, p. 37). Yet he notes

that "'Diah treated them the same/ As folks" (SJS, p. 37).

There is also a fundamental difference between Black and Bob Evans, the poem's third speaker. Halfway through the narrative of the first trip to California, Neihardt has Black temporarily give up his telling of the tale and allows Evans to continue. For Black, although he knew that there was more meaning to the trip to California than it outwardly portended, there was a tendency to forget that fact unless reminded. Without Smith's assistance, he is incapable of a sustained vision. For Evans, the knowledge of the real meaning of Jed's travels is clear. Art knows primarily of California. Bob and Jed Smith know more and attain a similar vision:

> "He spoke as if he knew [of California]
> And made hope certain as geography.
> Why, come to think about it, you could see
> The corn fields waving by the riverside!"
> (SJS, p. 43)

Evans' changed vision involves more than an understanding of Smith's meanings; Evans himself comes to share Smith's transcendent view. When speaking of an old Indian that they met, he says that the Indian

> ". . . sort of knew what really is
> And always was and shall be evermore,
> So that he wasn't bothered looking for
> What isn't, wasn't, and will never be."
> (SJS, p. 45)

Squire thinks of the same Indian as "'Another sort of tur-

nip'" (SJS, p. 45).

Evans shares with Smith that vision of God's stasis, of the wholeness of life in the midst of change, of the meaning of "things." He is able independently to envision

> ". . . the other side of things,
> Where running feet are still and eager wings
> Are folded, and all seeking is forsaken
> Because there's nothing to be overtaken
> In such a peace of being."
> (SJS, p. 45)

For Art Black, the miracle of accompanying Smith is that they "'. . . of all our breed, were born/ To see [California] first by land!'" (SJS, p. 48) He apprehends only this world, "'The Mission of the Padres! Journey's end!'" (SJS, p. 52) For Evans and Smith, the journey's meaning lies in an epiphanic instant when they find water in the desert and when

> "The ghostly yucca trees [are] . . .
> Transfigured by some ultimate despair
> That filled the stillness of the soli-
> tude. . . ."
> (SJS, p. 49)

Evans and Smith's vision does not limit the effectiveness of either in the real world. Evans does, in fact, understand the reality of the trip West. He understands the reality of going to California and of getting there: "I remember . . . ./ The journey's end!" (SJS, p. 50) But he also understands the other meaning of the experience, and

it is embodied in the instant they find water and both horses and men kneel before the pool, drinking "'Eye-deep in joy!'" (SJS, p. 51) At this point, Neihardt interrupts the narrative and returns the reader to the world of Squire, Black, and Evans, fifteen years after the experience of which they speak. This constant rhythm--fluctuation between past and "present"--serves to counterpoint Smith's vision. Smith had a vision of stasis, but Neihardt doesn't allow us to dwell there. Instead he returns us to the world of things, and he has Squire react to the description of finding water in a prosaic fashion:

> "Why . . . I was only thinking
> Of what's the use in talking about drinking. . . .
> . . . Why not have a drink?"
>
> (SJS, p. 53).

Neihardt is careful in this last section not to allow his song to dissolve into mysticism. He wants very much to maintain the tension he has established between the real world and the suprareal one inhabited by the spirit. Thus he follows the historical sources closely, and rather than describing the nature of the moment of vision, he has Evans articulate the process by which that vision is achieved. By allowing Evans to convey that information, Neihardt effectively shows that Evans himself is changed by Smith and is able to see what Smith saw. Thus Evans represents the continuity of vision after Smith's death.

Neihardt uses primary sources--journals and company records--to provide the narrative background of chapter five. On November 26, 1826, the men descended into the San Bernadino Valley, and Smith rode ahead to the mission at San Gabriel. The difficulties Smith had with the Spanish governors is discussed at some length in Rogers' journals.[46] Governor Echeandia finally let Smith and his men go, on the condition that they went the way they had come, and by January of 1827, they were on their way back home, trapping beaver along the route.

In April Smith was working his way back for the summer rendezvous with fifteen hundred pounds of beaver he had taken after leaving the mission in California. Smith and his company camped on the American River and were faced with crossing the snow covered Sierra Nevada. In May the party was forced to turn back and make camp on the Stanislaus River. Smith heard by rumor that the Spanish were upset by American trapping activity, but before they could apprehend him, he set out across the mountains. One of the men who accompanied Smith was Silas Gobel. The other companion is not mentioned anywhere specifically, but Neihardt, by collating lists of those who are or who must have been in the parties of 1826, 1827, and 1828, feels

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[46] Dale, pp. 198-228.

the other companion had to be Robiseau, another trapper. Smith left Harrison Rogers in charge of the party and promised to return in four months for the men and the peltry.

The trip was a most difficult one. Smith, in a letter he wrote to General Clark, tells of the difficulties attendant upon its beginning: "'I found the snow so deep on Mount Joseph . . . that I could not cross my horses, five of which starved to death. I was compelled, therefore, to return to the valley which I had left, and there, leaving my party, I started with two men . . . and succeeded in crossing it in eight days, having lost only two horses and one mule. I found the snow on the top of this mountain from four to eight feet deep, but it was so consolidated by the heat of the sun that my horses only sunk from half a foot to one foot deep'" (SW, p. 254). Smith likewise understates the hardships that he and his two companions faced once they had crossed the mountains. Continuing in the same letter to Clark, Smith devotes only about a paragraph to his unique accomplishment:

> "After travelling twenty days from the east side of Mount Joseph . . . I struck the southwest corner of Great Salt Lake, travelling over a country completely barren and destitute of game. We frequently travelled without water, sometimes for two days over sandy deserts where there was no sign of vegetation, and when we found water in some of the rocky hills, we most generally found some Indians who appeared the most miserable of the human race, having nothing to subsist on (nor any clothing) except grass-seed,

> grasshoppers, etc. When we arrived at the Salt Lake, we had but one horse and one mule remaining, which were so feeble and poor that they could scarce carry the little camp equipage which I had along; the balance of my horses I was compelled to eat as they gave out."
>
> (SW, p. 255)

Thus Smith comments on ". . . what was unquestionably a great feat and what must have been a terrible experience. Twenty days of toil and suffering in an unknown desert, and all summed up in one hundred fifty words! Most men would require more space for the discussion of an aching tooth" (SW, p. 255).

The narrative line of the song, told now by Evans, follows the factual material given by Smith himself. What Neihardt does with it is of more importance, for he is again playing off the real world against the world of the spirit. It is through this experience that Evans learns the mechanism by which he is able to share Smith's vision. The process by which he attains that vision is the central part of this fifth chapter. The process begins by Evans' developing an understanding of the dual nature of reality. Evans says,

> "Jed told me once God gave us goals to try us[;]
> . . . living was a kind of weaning.
> We needed sugar-teats of wordly meaning
> For some unworldly purpose of the soul.
> It seemed the goal was learning that a goal
> Is just the fleeing shadow that you cast,
> Until pursuing teaches you at last

What mattered was the light upon your back."
(SJS , p. 56)

Armed with that awareness, Evans' comprehension of the events in which he participates changes. He says of the trip back in 1827 that "'. . . it was hell;/ But there was heaven too'" (SJS, p. 57).

The process that changes Evans is one that he is hardly able to articulate; for him it has something to do with what he calls "dying" and which seems to suggest a reaching beyond self and the sensate world to another, intimately connected, but transcendent one. Evans says, "'I want to tell/ About the lives we lived, the deaths we died/ Together'" (SJS, p. 57-8). The "thing" that Evans wants to die into is that vision of the everlasting, the unity of simultaneous statis and flux. More and more as he goes on this expedition across the desert, Evans comes to realize that he cannot live without that internalized vision:

"You can try
To live without it, but you have to die
Back into it a little now and then."
(SJS, p. 82)

Evans realizes that he has achieved a raised state of perception when he sees a rattlesnake. Instead of the fear that he would have felt earlier, his perception is altered. He still sees the snake and its deadly potential, but he sees more:

"There was a whirring sound
That made the land be still--and there he
wound,
A deadly puddle stewing in the sun,
Head up to end what hunger had begun,
And weariness and thirst. A rage to kill
One foe at least just left me staring still
And wondering. Then suddenly it came!
It was the same, it was the very same
Still beauty saying what I couldn't hear,
So far away it was. . . .
. . . . . .
. . .Like a flower he grew,
Slow waving in a breeze that never blew
This side of heaven. Then he crawled away,
Still beautiful with what he couldn't say,
And scared because it never could be said."
(SJS, p. 93-4)

Evans is changed and that alteration is manifested in two distinct ways. The first is Evans' ability to see and understand the duality of the world, to comprehend the thing itself and its greater meaning. The second, providing the real world counterpart for Evans' increased perception, is his increased ability to move out of himself by loving another. In this way, we have a return to the themes of the first two songs, the nature and obligation of friendship, the nature of real manhood.

The examples Neihardt gives of Evans' ability to see the dual and hence the single, unified nature of reality are extensive. Evans muses about the fact that they found a tree on the mountainside when they were freezing, and that the tree had "'. . . fought until [they] came/ To burn it!'" (SJS, p. 60) He explains his understanding of its existence there by saying that he is now "'. . . seeing

double,/ The striving of the Spirit being one'" (SJS, p. 60). He reveals how he works to achieve and maintain this vision of unity within manifold reality:

> "There's something that you touch,
> And what you call it needn't matter much
> If you can reach it. Call it only rest,
> And there is something else you haven't
> guessed--
> The Everlasting, maybe."
> (SJS, pp. 81-2)

Perhaps the most important transformation which Evans undergoes is that which involves the nature and quality of his relationships. In "The Song of Three Friends," Fink, Carpenter and Talbeau all liked each other for reasons mostly physical. The friendship was easily corrupted by passions and revenge. In "The Song of Hugh Glass" there was an added element of forgiveness, but the majority of the story is an unraveling, as was the earlier song, of a desire for vengeance. In this, the final song in The Mountain Men, Neihardt comes his closest to spelling out the true nature of friendship and thus humanity, revealing what he sees as the strong parts of the white man's "religion." Evans does, in fact, share with Art and Squire the appreciation of Smith's physical qualities; he finds pleasure in the man's ability to lead and in his stamina to endure. Yet Smith is appreciated by Evans in strength and weakness alike; Evans does not feel as did Talbeau when he saw that Fink was afraid, that he was somehow superior and

absolved of the need to be concerned. When Evans sees Smith almost beaten by the physical ordeal they shared, he says,

> ". . . I went because he wanted me to go;
> For more than pity happened in that bleak,
> Forsaken moment when I saw him weak
> Upon that ridge. I'd just begun to love him,
> And something in the breaking manhood of him
> Was stronger than his old unbroken might."
> (SJS, p. 96)

Moreover, the affection is returned by Smith. Smith, unlike the boy Jamie or Talbeau, for instance, is constant. Once when navigating a narrow ledge single file, a mule fell off to its death, and Smith thought that Evans had fallen with it. Smith did not hide his concern, nor was Evans ashamed of it:

> "Then I heard Jed shout
> My name, and saw him yonder, leaning out
> Around the mare. He seemed about to fall.
> And when he saw me huddled by the wall,
> His frosted face went empty of the wild,
> scared look it had. It gentled, and he
> smiled--
> By God, he smiled, and I can see him now!"
> (SJS, p. 66)

The change that overcomes Evans is not one limited to his relationship with Smith. The change is a profound one, touching and improving the quality of all his other relationships. As Evans nears the limit of his physical stamina while crossing the desert, he has to rely on the other two men for help, for his life. They do help him,

and in a sense reminiscent of Ishmael's squeezing the ambergris and his fellow sailors' hands in Moby Dick, Evans feels the fellowship of men:

> "I can feel the burly might
> Of Gobel's arm, the hairy fingers close
> About my shoulder. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Then three of us were dancing on together,
> And they were saying that is wasn't far."
> (SJS, p. 88-9)

Evans, unlike any of the characters in the earlier songs, comes to understand that love, friendship, true and significant relationships must be reciprocal, can only exist between independent people willing to acknowledge their needs for others. He comes to terms with his dependence on Smith: "'I see that I had never known before/ How much I'd leaned upon him like a child. . . '" (SJS, p. 95). Yet even deeper than his need for Smith's support is the concern he feels for the man:

> "I didn't know how lean and hollow-eyed
> It [his face] was until the light of it went
> dim,
> That quicksand moment when I pitied him--
> (SJS, p. 95)

Even in his relationship with the dense and insensitive Squire, he can maintain the compassion that he learned from and observed in Smith. After Evans tells of the moving experience that the trip across the desert was for him, he is not disappointed that Squire will not understand; he

is simply self-contained:

> "Now if you say it was a foolish thing
> That happened there, I will not blame you,
> Squire.
> There's half of me here sitting by the fire
> Will share your laughter if you want to laugh,
> Without denying that the other half
> May somehow be the wiser, just the same."
> (SJS, p. 91-2)

What made Evans self-contained was Smith's last gesture on the trail back from the first California trip. Even after Gobel and Evans have given up, Smith is able to go on and to find water for them. Smith's return "With water in a kettle" (SJS, p. 103) takes on the dual nature of vision and reality. Evans says,

> "And very far away I heard him cry
> A name I knew--and every one of those
> Dim mountains far away became a rose,
> And he was blooming--like a yucca tree--
> All gentle light. And leaning over me
> Was 'Diah."
> (SJS, p. 102)

The vision stays with Evans from then on: "'. . . that look of joy and tears./ I've lived upon it all these lonely years/ From dream to dream'" (SJS, p. 102). Neihardt refuses to allow this sentiment to become maudlin. Thus, the narrative quickly returns to the "present" with Squire who

> . . . arose
> And with a boot heel broke the glowing doze
> Of gutted logs that startled into flame.

"I still can see the five [three men, one
mule, and one horse] of you that came
To Bear Lake Camp," he said. "If you had
died,
No buzzard would have thanked you for the
hide
And rags you packed!"

(SJS, p. 104)

Neihardt deals quickly with Smith's second California trip because he has shifted his attention away from Smith's physical achievements and toward his spiritual ones. After a difficult first trip as Evans recounts, Smith and his two companions made it to Cache Valley. Discovering the location of the rendezvous from local Indians, Smith and company rode on and surprised those attending the rendezvous who had all assumed them to be lost.[47] Shortly after the rendezvous, around July 13, 1827, Smith and a group of men set out for California once more.[48] Despite some trouble with the Mojave Indians which resulted in a loss of men and supplies, Smith and his remaining men arrived at his camp on the Stanislaus on September 18, 1827.[49]

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[47] This information is from Smith's journals reprinted in Sullivan's Travels of Smith, pp. 19-26, cited Carter, VIII, 341.

[48] Henry (Boatswain) Brown, William Campbell, David Cunningham, Thomas Daws, François Deromme, Isaac Galbraith, Polette Labross (described as a mulatto), Joseph La Pointe, Touissant Marechal, Gregory Ortago (identified as a Spaniard), Joseph Palmer, John Ratelle, John Relle, Robiseau ("a Canadian half-breed"), Charles Swift, John Turner, and Thomas Virgin are the men listed by Carter, XIII, p. 341n.

[49] Morgan, Jedediah Smith, pp. 363-64.

After numerous difficulties with Spanish authorities in California, Smith finally set off to the northeast on the return trip to the States in January of 1828. The route he travelled is discussed in his own journal. In July they crossed the Umpqua River and began trading with the Indians in the vicinity. On July 14, 1828, Smith, Turner, and Leland (an Englishman Smith had added to his party in California) went ahead to determine the best route. Harrison Rogers was left in charge with orders not to allow Indians to come into the camp. For some unknown reason, he did allow a large group of Kelawatset Indians into camp. The Indians, in retaliation for recent incidents, killed the group, except for Arthur Black who was able to escape and tell of it in the song. Smith and his companions returned to find all had been massacred. In the poem, Neihardt allows Black to dismiss the event and the journey in a short passage.

Smith and Black made it back to the trapping area safely, but they were not in time for the 1829 rendezvous. Smith and his partners were able to meet and decide on the new year's work, however. This time Smith got assigned the Blackfoot country and trapping proceeded as expected. The following year at rendezvous, Smith went back to St. Louis, not at all a poor man, and planned a caravan to Santa Fe with his partners from fur trading, two brothers, and a few others.

Through Squire, Neihardt explores typical responses to achievements like Smith's. Squire reduces all accomplishments to their lowest denominator--usually economic. Motives such as getting liquor and monetary gain are comprehensible to Squire, who seems to represent the most traditional aspects of American manhood. When Art Black muses about Jed's readiness to give up fur trade because "'he had enough/ Of worldly goods to help his folks and others. . .'" (p. 106), it is Squire who evaluates that statement in terms of the amount of money Jed must have had stored up. He says, "'Had a mess of brothers. . .'" (p. 106), in an effort to estimate Smith's total assets. Clearly, Smith's financial success and not his values impress him. He is not even really touched by Smith's death:

> ". . . I hear 'twas on the way
> To set them [his brothers] up in trade with
> Santa Fe'
> He got his hair raised."
>
> (SJS, p. 106)

Smith's Santa Fe caravan left St. Louis in April of 1831. In May crossing a dry stretch between the Arkansas and Cimarron Rivers, Fitzpatrick and Smith went ahead to look for water. At a dry water hole, Fitzpatrick waited and Smith went on--never to be seen again. From a letter written by Austin Smith, one of the brothers who accompanied Jed, to another brother Ira, we learn only a few de-

tails of Smith's death at the hands of the Comanches.[50]

This material about Smith's death is treated accurately but quickly by Neihardt. The effect of Smith's life and death on those who knew him is most important in this song. While Fink and his friends were unable to sustain friendship even through life, Evans is able to sustain his feelings even through Smith's death. That does not mean that Evans romanticizes Smith's death or fails to come to terms with it. Rather, his vision of Smith's death is specific and frightening:

> "'Diah fighting all alone,
> A-bristle with the arrows and the knife--
> Alone, alone, and fighting for his life
> With twenty yelling devils; left for dead,
> The bloody, feathered huddle that was
> Jed. . . ."
>
> (SJS, pp. 112-13)

Evans feels so strongly about Smith that he believes he ought to have died for or at least with his friend, and Art Black, also touched by Smith but not as deeply, agrees:

> "I should have been there with him," Evans
> sighed;
> "I should have followed anywhere he went."
> With grave and unintentional assent
> The elder nodded, and the canyon's moan
> Took up the old regret--alone, alone. . . .
>
> (SJS, p. 107)

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[50] Reprinted in Morgan, Jedediah Smith, p. 436.

Evans is, in a sense, haunted, possessed by the man that was Jed Smith. He names the dog which is his constant companion, Jed, perhaps as a legitimate way of talking "to" Smith even though he is dead. For Evans, without his friend, there is "'--Only gloom and silence left!'" (SJS, p. 113) And even the dog, sensitive to his master's moods, understands the man's loss and ". . . muzzle to the sky,/ Mourn[s] for the dear one mourning" (SJS, p. 113).

Not yet thirty-three when he died, Smith's contributions to geographical knowledge were incredible. He was a formidable man--called Mister or Captain by his men. He was not a smoker or a drinker and was clean shaven. He read his Bible and tried to be a practicing Christian--trusting Indians as he did other men, perhaps too much, as the circumstances of his death would seem to indicate. There is no evidence that Jed Smith ever showed a sense of humor, but he was a man of action with a sharp business head. A young man, and a prosperous one, he had come West to get rich quick and to make a name for himself. His estate was sizable after his death, and his name is still remembered by a few. Coming from the East in pursuit of the American Dream, he typifies much that is best in the westering American. He was one of a kind in American history, an American hero; and when he died, he was one about whom Neihardt said, "'. . .the lonely plain/ Went empty in the shimmer of the sun--/ Forever'" (SJS,

p. 110).

It should not be a surprise that these are the men Neihardt chose to articulate American history in poetry. Cultures have always turned to their early histories to recover their archaic clarities. It is here that one seems closest to the cultural ethos. When Freud spoke of being freed through what one remembered he was perhaps right. Maybe we do turn to these stories with their unrelenting violence and cruelty so that we can free ourselves of the horrors of our past. What seems most likely, however, is that Neihardt chose this history not to help us purge our demons of the past, but to help us gather into our consciousness the record of what we were and of what we remain. By his selection, Neihardt reminds us of what we value. His transformation of this history into poetry is simply the rendering of the ethos of America into its appropriate mythos.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE AND THE CHRONICLE OF CHANGE

> . . . Everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation and so long as the hoop was unbroken the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it.
>
> --Black Elk, Black Elk Speaks

> Where today is the Pequot? Where are the Narragansetts, the Mohawks, the Pokanoket, and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice and the oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun.
>
> --Tecumseh, Shawnee Chief

Volume Two of Neihardt's Cycle raises special problems in its analysis. Although both songs--"The Last of the Indian Wars" and "The Song of the Messiah"--have as their subjects real events and people, there is no one central character who dominates the action of either song. Instead, both tell of a confrontation, not involving single individuals, but of one involving race against race, one value system against another in the face of an inevitable outcome. In the first volume, Neihardt uses Mike Fink, Hugh Glass, and Jed Smith to delineate the range

of characteristics which he felt representative both of Americans' favorable and unfavorable qualities. The conflict in this volume has as its arena the Great Plains of the far West. In that area the forces of white civilization and those of the native American came together in a manner that was to result in the destruction of one social order.

The scope of Volume Two covers twenty-four years--1866 to 1890--during which the Sioux, along with other plains Indians like the Cheyenne and the Arapahoe, fought their last wars against white encroachment, saw their lands dwindle, watched their children massacred, and endured the disappearance of the economic mainstay of their culture, the buffalo. Left with neither land nor religion, they saw vast changes in the landscape created by whites. The period Neihardt considers was marked by a general and constant westward migration which was so extensive that government officials considered the frontier "closed" by 1890, the year of the Wounded Knee massacre. During this time, overland trails to California and Oregon were opened; railroads and telegraph lines were stretched across the continent; a major gold rush and several land rushes took place. Where fifty years before an occasional trapper might be found, now were towns and cities.

Because the period was one of substantial change and the end of that span is closer to our own time, Neihardt

utilizes sources for this volume which differ from those in the first volume. He does not rely primarily upon histories and historical documents in the traditional sense as he did in The Mountain Men. Although his details are accurate and meticulously researched, he uses more first-hand material. Neihardt's interest in this material and in oral histories is evidenced by his book, Black Elk Speaks (1932), which is based on his conversations with a medicine man of the Oglalas. His dealings with other native Americans is extensive, both personally and professionally. Neihardt worked as an agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1943 to 1946 and as a field representative from 1946 to 1948. In addition, he lived with the Omaha Indians from 1901 to 1907 and later with the Sioux and other native America friends whom he calls the "long-hairs." What this implies about his methodology is best explained by Neihardt himself: "When I have described battles, I have depended far less on written accounts than on the reminiscences of men who fought in them--not only Indians, but whites as well. . . . I was privileged to know many old white men, officers and privates, who had fought in the Plains Wars. Much of the material for the last two Songs of the series came directly from those who were themselves a part of the stories."[1] The fact that

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[1] John G. Neihardt, Twilight, p. x.

Neihardt relies on oral materials in addition to journals of travel and government accounts does not imply that his gathering of factual material was haphazard. The history is accurate, but the overall effect is one of greater immediacy and impact. In searching for the means to that impact, Neihardt traveled to Pine Ridge Reservation while working on the last song to find, as he says, "some old medicine man who had been active in the Messiah Movement."[2] He was seeking his history from those who had "[shared] the great hope and the tragic disillusionment" (BES, p. vii). It was clear to Neihardt that for these last songs, records and journals would not be enough: "What I needed for my purpose was something to be experienced through intimate contact, rather than to be received through telling" (BES, p. vii).

The approach to the second volume is somewhat different from that of Volume One. These songs, on the philosophical end of the continuum established in the first volume, are unified not by personality but by concepts. Therefore, they can be looked at topically. Once the history--both white and native American--is understood, the confrontation between the two cultures can be examined at

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[2] John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. vii. All further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as BES.

several points. By looking at general values--attitudes about land, community, wealth, distribution of power, and warfare, for example--Neihardt contrasts the two cultures. Religion, essentially the focus of the last song, is a major concern both of Neihardt and of the people he treats. What a people worship is a key to their value system, and Neihardt devotes special attention to native American religion. For that reason, and because Neihardt felt his Cycle culminated with ethical, philosophical and religious concerns, the issues raised by Neihardt in regard to religion are examined separately. By looking at religion before it was shaped as a response to white encroachment upon traditional life, that is, as it existed in the Sun Dance ritual, and by looking at it after the clash of white and native American values became acute, in the Ghost Dance phenomenon, one gets, perhaps, the clearest and fullest picture of cultures in conflict because of their values. Finally, by looking at some of the principal characters in the two songs--Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, and Sitting Bull for the native Americans and Custer, Fetterman, and others for the whites--one can see on an individualized level, what areas of similarity and disagreement existed between the two cultures.

Because Neihardt chose the Sioux nation as the counterpart of the white culture, it is important that one understand the rationale behind that selection. Neihardt's

decision is not a difficult one to defend, for the Sioux exist in a special and quite significant relationship to white American culture. They populate our fantasies about the Wild West, whether or not we recognize them as Sioux or simply as "Indians." Our concept of the Plains Indian--usually in conflict with the United States cavalry--is of a proud man, decked out in eagle feathers, astride a horse and wearing warpaint; this image is Siouan in its very nature. The Sioux were, as Helen Hunt Jackson points out, the "most powerful and warlike of all the North-western tribes."[3] They were also among the most numerous, having many tribal units like the Hunkpapas, Oglalas, Minneconjous, Tetons, and Sans Arcs. They lived on the Great Plains, roaming freely, depending on the buffalo for most of their necessities, and living in the "traditional" (to white thinking) home, the tipi--itself a Sioux word. From their ranks come many of the greatest western chiefs--among them, Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, Rain-in-the-Face, and Sitting Bull--names we recall more readily than those of most of the whites that they fought against. The Indians who ride through our films and who inhabit our popular western fiction are, superficially at least, modeled after the Sioux, and what we know about their lives and reli-

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[3] A Century of Dishonor: The Early Crusade for Indian Reform, ed. Andrew F. Rolle (New York: The University Library, 1965), p. 136.

gious ceremonies comes to us in popular media.

There were for Neihardt, however, even more important considerations. A number of significant native American activities were occurring in the period that Neihardt has chosen for his epic, and any one of those activities--Chief Joseph's Nez Perce resistence and Geronimo's fights--could have yielded stories of "spiritual triumph in apparent worldly defeat."[4] What makes the Sioux experience suitable for the author's purposes is that it is paradigmatic of the native American experience in America, and, secondly, though the Sioux met the same fate as did the other tribes, they were perhaps the noblest of the Plains tribes--a proud people, warlike but gracious, with an integrated culture and clearly defined ethics. Their fall was last and probably longest, their losses perhaps the greatest suffered by any tribe, for unlike many others, they were not exterminated but humiliatingly defeated. Neihardt does not regard them as "noble savages," but he is careful never to forget that "savage" or not, this "alien people" was composed of those who "also were men, and troubled."[5]

The history of white and Sioux relations goes back several hundred years. Their earliest encounters date

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[4] Neihardt, Twilight, p. vii.

[5] Ibid.

from about 1766 when they inhabit an area far to the east of the Plains, and the Sioux were always cordial and friendly to white trappers. Helen Hunt Jackson, in A Century of Dishonor, relates that the first whites were welcomed and sent off by the chiefs who asked that "'peace subsist between us so long as the sun, the moon, the earth, and the waters shall endure.'"[6] They wanted to think well of the government too, instructing the men to "'acquaint the Great King how much the Nadouwessies [the name is a corruption of the old French word Nadoussioux, which means enemies] wish to be counted among his good children.'"[7] Government relations began in 1815 and continued throughout the century; each treaty was marked by general good faith on the part of the Sioux and ended with a loss of land or a disregard for the terms of treaties signed by the government. Thus the Sioux, who were not native to the Great Plains, ended up there after being pushed from the East; once there they quickly adapted to Plains life, becoming the mounted hunters that we know them to be. But even there they were not able to escape the changes that white civilization was causing; before the century was over, those not particularly sympathetic to native Americans recognized the plight of the Sioux. Western histo-

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[6] Jackson, p. 136.

[7] Ibid.

rians like J. P. Dunn, Jr., in his Massacres of the Mountains, are forced to comment on the circumstances faced by the Sioux:

> On the east, the Sioux had been pushed back gradually until the great outbreak of 1862, in Minnesota, and then, by one stroke, forced into the confines of Dakota. At the south, the mining settlements of Colorado had grown populous and strong enough to entirely dispossess the Indian. On the southwest, the Saints had planted themselves immovably, and converted what hunting grounds there were in that section into farms. On the west, the gold-hunters had crowded up into the continental divide and were moving down its eastern slope. They had advanced from the Pacific coast, passing from one point to another in wild stampedes, as new discoveries of the precious metal were made, but always growing in numbers and always pressing towards the east.[8]

By 1865 the only real free land held by the Sioux and their allies the Cheyenne and the Arapahoe was that part known as the Powder River country--a piece of land which lay between the Black Hills, the Big Horn Mountains and the Yellowstone River. It is in this place and for this land that the Sioux fought their last fights, and this is the location for Neihardt's second volume.

During the Civil War, Americans were preoccupied with eastern battles and left the Powder River country pretty much alone, although they were pressing in upon it from

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[8] Massacres of the Mountains: A History of the Indian Wars of the Far West (New York: Capricorn Books, 1969), p. 397.

all sides. When the war was over, however, Americans once again began to look westward. Thus it is that Neihardt devotes the first chapter of "The Song of the Indian Wars" to establishing the context, the time, and the motivation of whites and native Americans. Neihardt felt the Civil War changed white Americans, brought out in them qualities perhaps better left dormant. To the "war-bit myriads," home no longer mattered: "Now the hearth of home had gotten strange/ To eyes that knew sky-painting flares of war."[9]

Neihardt acknowledges the war as the immediate cause of discontent, but he also sees another reason behind the renewed white migration westward. This reason is not specifically American; rather, it is an "Aryan urge." As in the first volume, Neihardt ascribes the movement in part to a continuation of racial drive:

> Again the bugles of the Race blew west
> That once the Tigris and Euphrates heard.
> In unsuspected deeps of being stirred
> The ancient and compelling Aryan urge.
> A homing of the homeless, surge on surge,
> . . . . . .
> The man-stream mighty with a mystic thaw.
> (SIW, p. 2)

Because Neihardt supplies the white man's racial mo-

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[9] John G. Neihardt, "The Song of the Indian Wars." Twilight, p. 1. All further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as SIW.

tivation does not mean that he gives him total approval at the same time. The second volume of this epic deals with the conflict of white and native American values--in such a case, neither side is likely to have all the admirable qualities. Thus it is not surprising that Neihardt finds certain "Aryan" and American traits unattractive, and perhaps evil. Americans are ". . . The driving breed, the takers of the world,/ The makers and the bringers of the law" (SIW, pp. 2-3). On the other hand, their coming to the West is a mixed blessing--they change the land for the worse, with ". . . The drifting reek of wheel and hoof" (SIW, p. 3) and by scarring the land with their wagons. Worse than those is the superficiality of change: "A name sufficed to make the camp a town,/ A whim unmade" (SIW, p.3). More terrible than white capriciousness is the American's willingness--as we saw manifested in Mike Fink--to make his vision come true with violence:

> "So the Cadmian breed
> The wedders of the vision and the deed,
> Went forth to sow the dragon-seed again."
> (SIW, p. 3)

Pitted against the white American is the native American. For these people, Neihardt has a great sympathy, while recognizing the inevitability of their loss to white civilization.

> But there were those--and they were also men--
> Who saw the end of sacred things and dear

> In all this wild beginning; saw with fear
> Ancestral pastures gutted by the plow,
> The bison harried ceaselessly, and how
> They dwindled moon by moon; with pious dread
> Beheld the holy places of their dead
> The mock of aliens.
>
> (SIW, p. 3)

For this part of the song, white civilization is symbolized by the railroad which whites built across Indian land. To native American sensibilities these trains were "weird monsters of an evil dream" (SIW, p. 4), "medicine-canoes [which] breathed flame and steam" (SIW, p. 4). To each, the other's ways were unintelligible. The whites went West to find "That paradise of every hope fulfilled" (SIW, p. 5). For the native American, as Neihardt conceived of him, both the dream and the method of realizing it were unfathomable:

> What devastating need
> Had set so many faces pale with greed
> Against the sunset? Not as men who seek
> Some meed of kindness, suppliant and meek,
> These hungry myriads came. They did but look,
> And whatsoever pleased them, that they took.
> Their faded eyes were icy, lacking ruth,
> And all their tongues were forked to split
> the truth
> That word and deed might take diverging ways.
>
> (SIW, p. 4)

As Neihardt views the conflict, more than possession of land is at stake. Tied to it are religious, ethical, and economic issues and conflicts, those things at the heart of any culture. The conflict is so vital that resolution dictates the irrevocable loss of a way of life to

one of the participants. Because that is true, and because the native Americans are presented by Neihardt as knowing the inevitability of their loss, Neihardt often tells the story from their point of view rather than that of the military or Indian agents. Thus the last songs are marked by resignation and a tragic heroism. Neihardt grants to his native Americans a perception that is usually only obtained through hindsight, and he allows them to know the viability and vitality of their culture in a way that most members of a culture usually do not know. Therefore, they display the tragic nobility of a proud people fighting for that which they know to be already lost:

> Then let it be with many wounds--in front--
> And many scalps, to show their ghostly kin
> How well they fought the fight they could not win,
> To perish facing what they could not kill.
> (SIW, p. 5)

Whatever the religious, intellectual, or racial justification for white migration and for native American resistance, the reality of the subsequent situation was bound to be unpleasant. Both groups would have to kill each other and pay "Their daily wage in blood" (SIW, p. 5), and nothing would be altered substantially because of it: white civilization will advance.

What Neihardt does in these songs is to select incidents which are themselves of varying importance histori-

cally, but which function symbolically for him. The first conflict he utilizes in "Song of the Indian Wars" takes place over the white use of the Bozeman Trail in June of 1866. The trail was a suitable symbol for Neihardt to select because it was of primary importance to two cultures for diametrically different reasons. There were two ways of reaching western settlements from the East. One was by way of the South Pass, discovered by Jed Smith. The other way involved going by boat up the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers and then traveling overland through Crow territory. As Dunn notes, these routes were circuitous, "being over five hundred miles longer than the direct road which was physically practicable,"[10] the route from Fort Laramie along the eastern base of the Big Horn Mountains--the Bozeman Trail. With increased mining in Montana, it became desirable to open the direct road, "and preparations for it were commenced in 1865, by negotiating with the Indians for the right of way."[11] The idea and the reality of the trail infuriated the Sioux. The area where the trail was to go was the best land which remained to them, and they were reluctant to participate in any negotiations which might lead to its destruction because it was so central

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[10] Dunn, p. 398.

[11] Dunn, p. 399.

to life as they conceived it.

In June of 1866, a general council was called at Fort Laramie by the government with the hopes of obtaining permission from the Indians involved for building the road. Prior to that council, government officials had been making a number of treaties with the Sioux which were to guarantee right of way. By fall of the year before, nine treaties had been made with the Sioux; these were hailed in Washington as the end of hostilities with the Plains peoples. In fact, the treaties were worthless because, as Dee Brown, among others, notes, not one warrior chief had signed them, and the small number of signatures did not ratify them.[12]

Government officials in the West realized the problems with the treaties and remained in the area trying to get Red Cloud and some other of the important Oglala (Dakota) war chiefs to attend a council at Fort Laramie. It was necessary to include Red Cloud because he and his Oglalas had been engaged in general harassment of travelers and miners in the Powder River Country since his emergence as a major Sioux leader in 1863. That meeting at Fort Laramie is the first major event of "The Last of the Indian Wars." In this episode of American history, Nei-

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[12] Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 119.

hardt finds the opportunity to present major chiefs and military figures representing the range of white and native American attitudes. Thus this council, one of a great many in this period, comes to represent the nature of the formal white and native American relations.

The conflict is not a simple one. Within both white and Indian camps, there are divergent opinions. Neihardt uses the Fort Laramie Council--which was only somewhat marked by disagreement--as a means of illustrating the complexity and range of responses to the problems of cultural conflict. On the most superficial and historical level, the meeting was designed to obtain rights of passage along the Bozeman Trail. Yet because of Neihardt's point of view and sympathy with the native American position, that proposal is presented ironically. First the Dakota and the Cheyenne receive notice of the council:

> 'Let grass be green again
> Upon the trails of war and hatred cease,
> For many presents and the pipe of peace
> Are waiting yonder at the Soldier's Town!'
> (SIW, p. 7)

This proposal is met by three separate responses in Neihardt's version. Some Sioux "remembering the White Man's guile" say, "'Make yet more arrows when the foemen smile'" (SIW, p.7). Others, tribal elders, advocate acceptance of the inevitable; they say, "'Life narrows, and the better days are dead./ Make war upon the sunset! Will it

stay?'" (SIW, p. 7) The third group, those "Counselled with a dream," the visionaries of the Sioux, says,

> "Great Spirit made all peoples, White and Red,
> And pitched one big blue teepee overhead
> That men might live as brothers side by side.
> Behold! Is not our country very wide,
> With room enough for all?"
>
> (SIW, pp. 7-8)

The answer given to this last group is the one that Neihardt seems to find most reasonable or at least most predictable. Those who do not trust the white man answer the ones with the dream with a taunt:

> "Not so they come;
> Their medicine is strong, their hearts are bad;
> A little part of what our fathers had
> They give us now, tomorrow come and take.
> Great Spirit also made the rattlesnake
> And over him the big blue teepee set!"
>
> (SIW, p. 8)

Despite the reluctance, but acknowledging the strong medicine of the white man, the Sioux war chiefs agree to attend the council. Neihardt focuses upon four chiefs who represent divergent views: the four he uses are Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, and Swift Bear. The first three have their historical counterparts, the first two representing both in history and in Neihardt's song an anti-conciliatory position and the third one, Spotted Tail, favoring the treaties. In reality, most of the Indians involved supported Red Cloud's position,

but Neihardt makes the factions within the Indian group more distinct.[13] What Neihardt shows by doing this is the process by which the Sioux arrived at their decisions. This has the effect of making the pro-war rhetoric appear the most persuasive. In reality, most Sioux had come to believe much earlier that war would be inevitable.

The peace-commission seeking to have a treaty made about the Bozeman Trail were there in direct violation of an earlier treaty made in 1851. That one gave whites the right to pass through Indian territory but not to build forts or roads. The new treaty would seek to justify by law that which was already being done in defiance of the old treaty. Neihardt places the peace-commissioners in a symbolic context, sitting under a bower of "withered boughs." In this setting, the commissioners make their request, spoken through "half-breed spokesmen":

> 'They wanted but a roadway through the lands
> Wherein the Rosebud, Tongue and Powder head,
> That white men, seeking for the yellow lead
> Along the Madison, might pass that way.
> . . . . . .
> . . . This could do no harm;
> Nor would there be occasion for alarm
> If they should wish to set a fort or two
> Up yonder--not against Cheyenne and Sioux,
> But rather that the Great White Father's will
> Might be a curb upon his people still
> And Red Men's rights be guarded by the laws.'
> (SIW, pp. 8-9)

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[13] Dunn, pp. 401-3.

This proposal is greeted by a mixture of responses.

Historically, both Man Afraid and Red Cloud oppose the suggestion. J. P. Dunn credits Red Cloud with an accurate perception of the result of accepting such a proposition: "Shrewd in all things, he [Red Cloud] was especially keen in his foresight. He realized that the building of the road meant the destruction of the game in their best hunting-ground and the reduction of his people to the beggarly condition of the Indians who hung about the government posts. He bitterly opposed the treaties from the start. An able second was found in Ta-shun-kah-Ko-ke-pah (Man Afraid of his Horses), the warlike chief of the Honc-pah-te-lah band of Ogallallas."[14] The reasons that Neihardt has them give are clear statements of their cultural values. Man Afraid speaks first and advocates rejecting the proposal:

> '. . . I know too well the forked tongue
> That makes a promise when the moon is young,
> And kills it when the moon is in the dark!'
> (SIW, p. 10)

Another reason Man Afraid gives is more important, however, because it is a statement about the difference between his culture and that of the white man. Essentially, the difference involves priorities. Man Afraid establishes one

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[14] Dunn, p. 402.

of the primary considerations of Indian culture, the value of the land:

> "Go around.
> I do not want you in my hunting ground!
> You scare my bison, and my folk must eat.
> Far sweeter than your words are, home is
> sweet
> To us, as you; and yonder land is home."
> (SIW, p. 10)

This theme is picked up by Red Cloud who fully articulates the native American's unique and beautiful relationship to the land:

> "My brothers, when you see this prairie here,
> You see my mother. Forty snows and four
> Have blown and melted since the son she bore
> First cried at Platte Forks yonder, weak and
> blind;
> And whether winter-stern or summer-kind,
> Her ways with me were wise. . . .
> . . . . . .
> What presents shall I trade my mother for?
> A string of beads? A scarlet rag or two?"
> (SIW, p. 15)

What Man Afraid suggests as the most important value for whites is a sharp contrast which Neihardt uses constantly in later chapters. It is the "yellow lead": "'Any trail is short enough/ That leads your greedy people to the stuff/ That makes them crazy!'" (SIW, p. 10)

The faction that advocated appeasement and acceptance of the treaty was led by Sinta Gallessca, Spotted Tail, chief of the Brulés. Neihardt describes Spotted Tail as a visionary; he is one whose eyes

> . . . Seemed peering past the moment and afar
> To where predestined things already are;
> And humor lurked beneath the sober mien,
> But half concealed, as though the doom foreseen
> Revealed the old futility of tears.
> (SIW, p. 11)

Neihardt does not portray him as a coward, but, like Red Cloud, as a chosen rather than hereditary chief. He acknowledges Spotted Tail's courage by recalling his bravery in the face of what seemed certain death:

> . . . none forgot his loving hardihood
> That day he put the ghost paint on his face
> And, dressed for death, went singing to the place
> Where Harney's soldiers waited.
> (SIW, p. 12)

But he shows Spotted Tail to be motivated first by a desire to protect his people--at the expense, perhaps, of their and his own pride. It was this motivation which made the real Spotted Tail and Standing Elk, another of the Brulés, surrender themselves for the safety of the tribe after the battle of Ash Hollow.[15] Thus it is in the poem that Spotted Tail says he has been "living at the Soldier Town/ To save my Brulés" (SIW, p. 13).

While there, Neihardt has him experience a vision which explains his defeat at the hands of the whites.

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[15] Dunn, p. 402; Donald E. Worcester, "Spotted Tail: Warrior Diplomat," The American West, 1, No. 4 (Fall 1964), 40-1.

What Neihardt has done is to transform Spotted Tail's actual trip East--which convinced him that the whites could never be defeated because of their superior numbers--into a vision. This transformation of reality to fit the dramatic needs of the poem provides an insight into Neihardt's method. Casting him as a visionary is Neihardt's way of showing his perspicacity without making him appear cowardly--one intimidated by whites in ways that great chiefs do not allow themselves to be. For Spotted Tail and those who share his vision of the universe, there is a time for everything, and the time for some things passes: "'The longest summer ends,/ And nothing stays forever. We are old'" (SIW, p. 13). Neihardt presents Spotted Tail as a philosophical man who tries to understand the meaning of events in his life and who attempts to preserve life if not dignity:

> ". . . let us give the Powder River road,
> For they will take it if we do not give.
> Not all can die in battle. Some must live.
> I think of those and what is best for those.
> Dakotas, I have spoken."
>
> (SIW, p. 13)

Although Spotted Tail was one of the Brulé Sioux's greatest chiefs, guiding his people with insight and diplomacy through the terrible years of their disenfranchisement, Neihardt's focus is not on peace and tact, but on the harder and crueler realities facing the majority of the Sioux and the Indian nation as a whole.

The last two native American speakers represent minor factions within the main body. Their presence here attests to Neihardt's desire to represent the full range of responses to white bureaucracy. As often as possible, Neihardt gives a balanced picture of the native American. He realizes that for every noble and heroic chief a tribe has, there have also to be less desirable members of the community. Swift Bear, another of the Brulé Sioux, is a sycophant:

> 'Twixt fear and favor poised. He seemed a
> man
> Who, doubting both his ponies, rode the span
> And used the quirt with caution.
> (SIW, pp. 15-6)

The Cheyenne Black Horse, in contrast to Red Cloud and unlike the great chief of the Oglala, is willing to sell out his land; his words are "an echo of the White Man's plea,/ Rebounding from a tense expectancy/ Of many pleasing gifts" (SIW, p. 16).

Neihardt's use of these divergent speeches is a wonderful device. It focuses attention solely upon the native American point of view and makes the revelation of the last part of this chapter all the more poignant. While the Indians are debating the issues and listening to the positions of their chiefs and wise men, the question has already been answered for them in a way that renders them powerless and thereby underscores the futility of their

struggle:

> But all the while
> These wrestled with the question, mile on mile
> The White Man's answer crept along the road--
> Two hundred mule-teams, leaning to the load,
> And seven hundred soldiers!
>
> (SIW, p. 16)

Historically, Standing Elk, Spotted Tail's second in command, was the first to see Colonel Henry B. Carrington and his seven hundred officers and men of the 18th Infantry Regiment as they neared Fort Laramie.[16] Carrington and his men were under order to establish a chain of forts throughout the Indian territory along the Bozeman Trail in preparation for the heavy mining traffic. Although his mission was planned well in advance of the Fort Laramie parley, none of the Indians involved in treaty signing had been told about it.[17] This sort of betrayal of the Indians' good faith, in this case even before a treaty had been agreed upon and assuming in fact that it would be, is typical of white attitudes toward native Americans. Thus the event is an emblematic one. Standing Elk's response to Carrington's declaration of intent is interesting; he says, "'There is a treaty being made in Laramie with the Sioux that are in the country where you are going. . . . You will

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[16] Brown, p. 123.

[17] Ibid.

have to fight Sioux warriors if you go there. . . . They will not sell their hunting grounds to the white men for a road. . . . They will not give you the road unless you whip them.'"[18]

Neihardt, using Red Cloud as one of the major voices in the poem, has him first sight Carrington. Red Cloud is no idealist and has no illusions about being able to defeat the whites; he reads "that picture-writing on the skies" (SIW, p. 17) with a great facility. Neihardt comments himself, as the poet, on the futility of what must be Red Cloud's and the Sioux nation's final decision:

> Loudly still
> The glib logicians wrangled, as they will,
> The freer for the prime essential lacked--
> A due allowance for the Brutal Fact,
> That, by the vulgar trick of being so,
> Confounds logicians.
>
> (SIW, p. 17)

Both the real Red Cloud and the one represented in Neihardt choose to fight against the military for their land and their way of life. Charles Eastman in Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains preserves Red Cloud's speech at Fort Laramie:

> Hear ye, Dakotas! When the Great Father at Washington sent us his chief soldier [Major General William S. Harney] to ask for a path through our hunting grounds, a way for his

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[18] Brown, p. 124.

> 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 seek 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. . . .
>
> Yet before the ashes of the council fire are cold, the Great Father is building his forts among us. You have heard the sound of the white soldier's axe 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? Dakotas, I am for war![19]

While this speech bears the touches of white diction and artifice, the sentiment is quite clear. Neihardt is faithful to this sentiment and adds to it echoes of the cultural values he has Red Cloud espouse earlier. First, Red Cloud declares himself in favor of open warfare:

> "These white men here have begged our hunting land.
> Their words are crooked and their tongues are split;
> For even while they feign to beg for it,
> Their soldiers come to steal it! Let them try. . . ."
>
> (SIW, p. 18)

Next Red Cloud distinguishes between himself and Spotted Tail. Historically, they vied for power over the Sioux,

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[19] Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains (Boston: Little, Brown, 1918), p. 102. Reprinted in Touch the Earth, comp. T. C. McLuhan (New York: Outerbridge & Diestfrey, 1971), p. 94.

with Red Cloud's strength being greatest at this time: "'You, Spotted Tail, may be the beggar's chief--/ I go to keep my mother-land from harm!'" (SIW, p. 18) Finally, he indicates the two sources of his strength:

> He tapped his rifle nestled in his arm.
> "From now I put my trust in this!" he said
> With lowered voice; then pointing overhead,
> "Great Spirit, too, will help me!"
> (SIW, p. 18)

The fact that he is touching deep tribal feelings is attested to by the final incident in the chapter; as Carrington rides into the fort,

> . . . hobbling after, mindless of the awe
> That favors might, a toothless, ancient squaw
> Lifted a feeble fist at him and screamed.
> (SIW, p. 19)

What this was to mean to the West was a protracted guerilla-style engagement called, because of his central position in it, Red Cloud's War. From 1866 onward for a number of years, Red Cloud engaged in an unremitting series of battles against whites, burning isolated settlements, stopping mail shipments, and killing miners. In many of these efforts he was aided by other Plains Indians in one of the few and rare times that they fought together as a unified force. Prior to Neihardt's literary treatment of this war in which he utilizes key incidents typical of the white-native American experience, the poet devotes a chapter to what he imagines the meeting of

the great war chiefs to be. At Red Cloud's camp, he gathers together Crow King, Big Foot, the younger Hump, Gall, Spotted Tail, and Sitting Bull, among others. There they discuss among themselves issues raised at Fort Laramie and further illustrate what Neihardt sees as an essential dichotomy between white and native American values.

Red Cloud is the central figure in the third chapter, "The Council on the Powder." The atmosphere of the camp reflects his mood, and it is not a mood of joyful preparation for war:

> Silently he rode,
> And they who saw him bent as with a load
> Of all the tribal sorrow that should be,
> Pursued the trail as silently as he--
> A fateful silence, boding little good.
> (SIW, p. 20)

Neihardt uses this lack of joy to emphasize the inevitability of defeat for the Sioux. On the whole village fell "The shadow of a thing that was to be . . ." (SIW, p. 21). In the face of their defeat, the Sioux and their allies remain courageous, however, and when word comes from the whites that they should return to parley, that the "'good white brothers call . . . being kind/ And having many gifts to give to those/ Who hear them'" (SIW, p. 21), the messenger is driven from the camp.

The poetic rationale for Neihardt's creation of the council is the opportunity it provides for contrasting white and Indian values and for describing the essential

and integral part religion plays in the lives of native Americans. Before the council begins, Neihardt elaborates upon native American ritual--what it shows us of Indian values, as Neihardt wishes us to understand them. The behavior Neihardt describes is stylized and presented in such a manner as to illustrate its long ritual tradition. The great chiefs act with a grace and finesse that bespeaks both familiarity and reverence:

> "The great men entered, formed a broken ring
> To open eastward, lest the Light should find
> No entrance, and the leaders of the blind
> See darkly too."
>
> (SIW, p. 25)

Then Red Cloud, as highest chief, performs other rituals. First, he offers the sacred, ceremonial pipe to the six directions--the supernatural dieties of earth, sky, and the four winds. Then he performs a chant directed to the same six "mysteries":

> "Before I eat, I offer this to you[;]
> . . . so all men should.
> I hope that what I eat may do me good,
> And what you eat may help you even so.
> I ask you now to make my children grow
> To men and women. Keep us healthy still,
> And give us many buffalo to kill
> And plenty grass for animals to eat."
>
> (SIW, p. 26)

This sentiment is presented, and while it is faithful to Sioux ritual, it is placed here in direct contrast to Red Cloud's next remarks. Sioux religion was integral to

everyday life, and, as Neihardt constructs this chapter, that life includes war against the whites. Here the initial Indian positions stated at Fort Laramie are refined down to two--the pro-war stance represented by Sitting Bull and Red Cloud and the pro-white side represented by Spotted Tail. By the amount of space Neihardt allows and by the juxtaposition, he displays his support of the pro-war attitude.

Red Cloud is the first to speak. His speech is both a recounting of past white injustices and a call for war:

> "My friends, 'twas many snows ago
> When first we welcomed white men. Now we know
> Their hearts are bad and all their words are lies.
> . . . . . .
> . . . Dakotas, think!
> Shall all the white man's trinkets and his drink,
> By which the mind is overcome and drowned,
> Be better than our homes and hunting ground,
> The guiding wisdom of our old men's words?
> . . . . . .
> . . . Are we cowards? Shall we stand
> Unmoved as trees and see our Mother Land
> Plowed up for corn?"
>
> (SIW, pp. 27-8)

He and Sitting Bull are both willing to die rather than lose their land to white men that they hate: "'What better time, my friends, for going hence/ Than when we have so many foes to kill?'" (SIW, p. 34) Their objections to the white man are not based solely upon their reluctance to give up ancestral hunting-grounds. Again, Neihardt

uses this war council discussion to emphasize differing cultural values. By not having a white spokesman--allowing the voices from The Mountain Men to stand as representative of white values--he allows native American comments to carry equal weight.

Red Cloud tells his men how he feels contact with whites would change them, and these alterations are not flattering:

> "Forget the way our fathers taught us all.
> As though you planned to live till mountains
> fall,
> Seek out all things men need and pile them
> high.
> Be fat yourself and let the hungry die;
> Be warm yourself and let the naked freeze.
> So shall you see the trail the white man
> sees.
> And when your tepee bulges to the peak,
> Look round you for some neighbor who is
> weak
> And take his little too."
>
> (SIW, pp. 27-8)

Neihardt introduces Sitting Bull by describing him in terms of his battle skills, bravery, and courage; yet, Sitting Bull's call for war is not predicated on a desire to obtain glory. His objections are ethical:

> "But hear me, friends!
> We face a greedy people, weak and small
> When first our fathers met them, now grown
> tall
> And overbearing. Tireless in toil,
> These madmen think it good to till the soil,
> And love for endless getting marks them fools.
> Behold, they bind their poor with many rules
> And let their rich go free! They even steal

> The poor man's little for the rich man's
> weal!"
>
> (SIW, p. 33)

And his reasons are religious:

> "Their feeble have a god their strong may flout!
> They cut the land in pieces, fencing out
> Their neighbors from the mother of all men!
> When she is sick, they make her bear again
> With medicines they give her with the seed!
> All this is sacrilegious!"
>
> (SIW, p. 33)

In contrast to these positions, the conciliatory stance of Spotted Tail weakens. Yet Spotted Tail's perceptions are accurate; his eyes hold a "quizzic humor" resulting from his vision of the inevitability of white triumph. His argument is based on two points. First, he sees the larger context and, much like Jed Smith, notes the unity of all life. Therefore he sees the inevitability of things passing:

> "There is a time, my brothers, for all things,
> And we are getting old. Consider, friends,
> How everything begins and grows and ends
> That other things may have their time and
> grow.
> What tribes of deer and elk and buffalo
> Have we ourselves destroyed lest we should
> die!
> . . . . . .
> We share in all this trying to begin,
> This trying not to die." (SIW, pp. 29-30)

Second, on a less philosophical but more practical level, he sees that the Sioux could never hope to defeat the

whites:

> "Consider well
> The White Man--what you know and what men tell
> About his might. His never weary mind
> And busy hands do magic for his kind.
> Those things he loves we think of little
> worth;
> And yet, behold! he sweeps across the earth,
> And what shall stop him?"
>
> (SIW, p. 30)

Although what Spotted Tail says is, in fact, true, his words do not touch his people; after he speaks, he sees

> . . . how his words
> Had left as little trace as do the birds
> Upon the wide insouciance of air.
>
> (SIW, p. 30)

The council on the Powder River ends with general agreement: ". . . fury took the crowd/ And set it howling with the lust to slay" (SIW, p. 34). Thus, Neihardt shows the beginning of the Red Cloud War. On the broader level, he has explained in general terms the shape of Indian wars--both those past and those which, in 1866, were yet to come. The next four chapters discuss events which took place in a two year period from 1866 through 1867. They do not represent all of the important incidents of that period. Cyrus Townsend Brady, in Indian Fights and Fighters, discusses how extensive the hostilities were during the building of Fort Kearney: "Taking at random two average months in the two different years

during which the post was maintained, one in the summer, another in the fall, I find that there were fifteen separate and distinct attacks in one and twenty in the other. In many of these, in most, in fact, one or more men were killed and a greater number wounded."[20] Surely, Neihardt suggests, no such extensive warfare could be based on anything less than the survival of an entire culture.

The next three chapters of this song deal with Fort Kearney and incidents involving its men. As a focus for a major portion of the song, the fort is unique both historically and poetically. As Brady points out, "From its establishment, in 1866, to its abandonment, some two years later, it was practically in a state of siege. . . . It was so constantly and so closely observed by war parties, hidden in the adjacent woods and the mountain passes, that there was little safety outside its stockade for anything less than a company of infantry or a troop of cavalry; and not always . . . for those."[21] Rarely in the history of the Indian wars of the United States has any fort been under regular siege, but for the two years Fort Kearney existed, native Americans engaged in a constant harassment--stampeding herds, attacking passing wagon trains, preven-

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[20] Indian Fights and Fighters (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904), p. 4.

[21] Brady, p. 3.

ting the cutting of timber, and stopping a variety of other activities. The fort was there in direct opposition to Indian desires; it was illegal and, in a real sense, immoral. In this it was not unlike other forts built in Indian territory. Thus, in itself and in Neihardt's poem, it symbolizes the nature of white and native American relationships.

The fact that Fort Kearney was closed down and burned by the Sioux under Red Cloud adds to Neihardt's interest in it as a symbol. The government was forced to withdraw; but as J. R. Dunn points out, "In the summer of 1868 the troops abandoned the Montana road, whose opening had cost so much money and life, and the Sioux burned down the forts which had been planned with such mathematical nicety, and constructed in such architectural perfection. We gave up an unquestionable right, though perhaps not then worth asserting. A few years later we broke our faith and reasserted it. Then the work had to be done again."[22] Native Americans had no hope against manifest destiny. Too many Americans believed, as did Dunn, that the right to Indian land was "unquestionable." For Neihardt, the fort and the actions surrounding it became a focal point of native American resistance.

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[22] Dunn, p. 422.

The building of the fort in the middle of the Sioux's best hunting-ground is treated by Neihardt as a symbol of the changes forced upon native Americans by white migration. Where once there had been elk, bison, and deer, there were now work-mules, milk cows, and steers. Clearly the destruction of the natural environment is sacrilegious for Neihardt as it was for the Sioux. The building of the fort is a defilement:

> What medicine the White Man's hand and brain
> Had conjured; how they harnessed up a fog
> That sent a round knife screaming through a
> log
> From end to end; how many adzes hewed;
> And how the desecrated solitude
> Beheld upon a level creek-side knoll
> The rise of fitted bole on shaven bole,
> Until a great fort brazened out the sun.
> (SIW, pp. 38-9)

The fort itself is something evil:

> And while that builded insolence was done,
> Far prairies saw the boasting banner flung
> Above it, like a hissing adder's tongue,
> To menace every ancientry of good.
> (SIW, p. 39)

These changes brought about by white "invaders" are symbolized in this chapter by a plague of locusts:

> One moment it was noon,
> . . . . . .
> . . . and the next,
> The spacious splendor of the world was vexed
> With twilight that estranged familiar things.
> (SIW, p. 37)

Clearly the white soldiers are like the "snow of locusts--tawny flakes at strife,/ That, driven by a gust of rabid life,/ Smothered the windless noon!" (SIW, p. 38)

Into this arena where all action is to be seen as symbolic of two cultures in conflict, Neihardt introduces the historical characters: Carrington, Fetterman, Brown, and Powell, all officers stationed at Fort Kearney, and the Sioux chiefs--Red Cloud and the young Crazy Horse. The first major incident that Neihardt treats is the set of circumstances leading up to and including what is known in the military as Fetterman's Massacre and called among the Sioux the Battle of One Hundred Slain.[23] In October of 1868, the Fort was enclosed. There was work yet to be done, so the wood trains went out each day accompanied by an armed escort guard because of the constant Indian harassment. The Sioux contented themselves at other times with riding near the fort, daring those inside to come out and fight.

The battle soon to occur is characteristic of those

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[23] Many accounts exist of the Fetterman Massacre. Among the more useful are Dunn, pp. 410-15; Brady, pp. 20-37; Brown, pp. 131-33; Frances Courtney Carrington, Army Life on the Plains and the Phil. Kearney Massacre with an Account of the Celebration of "Wyoming Opened" (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1910), Chs. 17-19. The historical background in this section comes from these sources.

that Neihardt chooses and is typical of that class of engagements where each side is ruled by hatred and hopes to annihilate the other totally. Typically, the government had given orders to keep the Bozeman Trail open with no regard for the actual state of Indian affairs. Neihardt sees Washington's willed ignorance of the situation as a major contributing force to the destruction of the Sioux nation and as ultimately responsible for needless warfare:

> Meanwhile Omniscience in a swivel chair,
> Unmenaced half a continent away,
> Amid more pressing matters of the day
> Had edited the saga of the dead.
> (SIW, p. 58)

Governmental passivity alternating with the government's inappropriate responses to situations about which it has no accurate knowledge typifies white and native American relations. Such confusion and ignorance is passed along from Washington, over the wires, to Laramie and results in more bloodshed. That meant "If peace was anywhere,/ It favored most the growing graveyard . . . " (SIW, p. 41).

The man chosen to keep the Bozeman Trail open was Colonel Henry Carrington, who commanded the 18th Infantry Regiment.[24] Carrington and his subordinate, Captain Fet-

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[24] Biographical and historical information about Colonel Carrington comes from the following sources: Dunn, pp. 406-420; Brady, pp. 4-71; Carrington; Brown, pp. 123-29.

terman, play important roles in both the massacre and in Neihardt's treatment of it, which relies very heavily on historical sources. Carrington had not been trained as a soldier; instead, he was an ex-Ohio lawyer whose major interest lay in fighting Indians but whose skill existed more in the planning and building of forts. Carrington's regiment had fought in the Civil War, but he had not fought with it and was largely untried in battle. In November, a new officer was added to the regiment; his name was Captain William Fetterman, and, unlike Carrington, he was thoroughly a fighter. He had served in the 18th during the Civil War and had received medals and battle promotions. The idea that Carrington did not engage in a massive retaliation upon the Sioux for their constant harassment of the supply and wood trains made Fetterman openly critical of his superior officer.

Neihardt chooses to minimize the dissention within the fort. For him, the major focus has to be the relations between races. With that consideration in mind, he suppresses all evidence of a split within the white ranks. Fetterman had his first chance to fight on December 6, 1866, when a large band of warriors attacked the wood train. Leaving other issues aside, Neihardt looks just at the battle, which exemplifies the unremitting savagery that characterized two cultures fighting for the right to survive:

It happened on the sixth December noon
That from a hill commanding many a mile
The lookout, gazing off the Piney Isle,
Beheld the log-train crawling up a draw
Still half way out. With naked eye he saw
A lazy serpent reeking in the glare
Of wintry sunlight. Nothing else was there
But empty country under empty skies.
Then suddenly it seemed a blur of flies
Arose from each adjacent gulch and break
And, swarming inward, swirled about the snake
That strove to coil amid the stinging mass.
(SIW, pp. 41-2)

The metaphor of the fight--the snake being attacked by a blur of flies--is not heroic; it points to the savagery of a war in which there must be one clear winner.

Fetterman was sent with thirty-five men to assist the train and chase the Indians back across Lodge Trail Ridge. The troops chased the Sioux for several miles until the latter turned to fight; then nearly all the cavalry fled, leaving Fetterman, Brown, and a few other men to face a hundred warriors. Whatever else Fetterman might have been, his courage is uncontested; Neihardt asks through a persona in the poem, "Can't you see the Captain's game/ To face them with a handful?" (SIW, p. 43) Fetterman and his handful were finally relieved by Carrington "galloping like sin/ Around the hill!" (SIW, p. 44) In the fight that ensued, several were wounded and two died. Neihardt documents the cost of this battle for cultural dominance:

Six of those
Clung dizzily to bloody saddle-bows;
And Bingham was the seventh and was dead;

> And Bowers, with less hair upon his head
> Than arrows in his vitals, prayed to die.
> He did that night.
>
> (SIW, p. 44)

The cost of this one confrontation was great, yet neither side considered quitting.

Instead of depressing both sides, the December 6 skirmish only made each more eager to fight. In this confrontation, Red Cloud commanded in person. He had lookouts posted on ridgetops who flashed mirrors and used flags and signs to signal troop movements. The Sioux controlled the day; as Dee Brown points out, "Before the day was over, the Indians had the Bluecoats dashing about in all directions."[25] The troopers themselves were not discouraged about the fighting; Neihardt emphasizes how much such behavior is engrained in the whole attitude of whites toward Indians:

> The fight was done;
> No victory to boast about, indeed--
> Just labor. Sweat today, tomorrow, bleed--
> An incidental difference.
>
> (SIW, p. 44)

The leadership was enthusiastic. The Sioux were greatly encouraged by their success: "In their camps that night and for several days following, the chiefs and warriors talked of how foolishly the Bluecoats had acted. Red

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[25] Brown, p. 129.

Cloud was sure that if they could entice a large number of troops out of the fort, a thousand Indians armed with only bows and arrows could kill them all."[26] In the meantime, Fetterman had been boasting about how he could cut through the entire Sioux nation with a force of eighty men, while ridiculing Carrington's caution. This boastful, confident attitude is picked up by the soldiers:

> It seemed the Colonel hadn't any pride--
> Too cautious. Look at Fetterman and Brown,
> Who said they'd ride the whole Sioux nation down
> With eighty men; and maybe could, by jing!
> Both scrappers--not afraid of anything--
> A pair of eagles hungering for wrens!
> (SIW, p. 45)

There were only a few voices that dissented: "These Redskins didn't run because they feared;/ 'Twas strategy; they didn't fight our way" (SIW, p. 45).

On the nineteenth of December, Red Cloud struck again, positioning about 2000 warriors in hiding and staging a decoy attack upon the wood train. When the train was struck, Carrington sent a relief party out under the command of Captain Powell: "And Captain Powell, leading the relief,/ Returned without a single scratch to show" (SIW, p. 45). Powell is set up as a contrast to Fetterman, who was not as disciplined an officer. Cyrus Townsend Brady

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[26] Brown, pp. 124-30.

commends Powell's handling of that assignment: "Powell efficiently performed his task. The Indians were driven off, and, although he was tempted to pursue them, he was too good a soldier to disobey orders, so he led his men back in safety to the fort."[27] In direct contrast to Powell, Neihardt uses Fetterman to exemplify white arrogance in underestimating both the skill and the commitment of the Sioux. On December 21, 1866, the wood train again came under attack, and Carrington once again turned to Powell to relieve it. Historically, Fetterman then claimed senior rank and asked to command it himself. Such a claim of seniority ought to have been ignored, and Carrington could have demoted Fetterman or in some other way punished his insubordination. Neihardt ignores those military implications and focuses on the inevitability of Fetterman's doom. Destruction is inevitable for those like Fetterman who "woo and wed/ Their dooms. . ." (SIW, p. 47).

Fetterman gathered together seventy-six men; with additional volunteers and two civilian employees of the Army, his force numbered eighty-one, one more than he said he needed in his boast. Neihardt has him represent those who are in a sense pawns of their cultures--so well indoctrinated into cultural values that they unwittingly participate in their own doom:

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[27] Brady, p. 22.

> . . . the eager Fates
> Told off the waiting hand and gloated: Done!
> He asked for eighty--give him eighty-one!
> Then Fetterman, unwitting how the rim
> Of endless outer silence pressed on him
> And all his comrades, spoke: "With deference due
> To Captain Powell, Colonel, and to you,
> I claim command as senior captain here."
> (SIW, p. 47)

Carrington allowed the request but gave strict injunctions against pursuing the Indians: "'Under no circumstances must you cross Lodge Trail Ridge. . . . .'"[28] Fetterman's forced march out to relieve the wood train did, in fact, break off the Indian attack. But the Sioux did not run very fast, and among them was a young warrior named Crazy Horse who displayed his bravery by acting as a decoy. The decoys rode back and forth taunting the soldiers. With bullets whining around him, Crazy Horse dismounted several times to adjust his horse's bridle or to look at the animal's hooves. Fetterman must have been infuriated because he pursued the Indians and walked his eighty-one men into an ambush. There were no white survivors.

Neihardt devotes Chapter Five to the Indian view of the massacre. There is an historical perspective that could have provided the information, but Neihardt's choice of a native American point of view is indicative of

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[28] Carrington, p. 144.

the position to which he gives at least minimal support. The Sioux--together with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes--are not fighting dispassionately. They are not like the soldiers who sweat or bleed with indifference. They are more like the monomaniacal Fetterman. The Plains tribes fought for their right to survive as sovereign peoples, and, thus, they went to war

> A thousand-footed, [with] single-hearted hate
> Flung forward. Now their chanted battle-
> songs
> Dismayed the hills. Now silent with their
> wrongs
> They strode. . . .
>
> (SIW, p. 50-1)

Neihardt makes it clear that the Sioux and their allies are acting as a group. A whole people stands in opposition to Fetterman, who had a personal though culturally sanctioned grievance based on his perceived superiority to the Indian and who wanted a chance "'to bring in the scalp of Red Cloud himself.'"[29] Therefore, when Neihardt describes Indian preparations for the ambush, he speaks of a people with solidarity--"the thousand footed, single-hearted." They wait "thousand-eared" to spring the ambush. When the "eighty-one" advance to their position in pursuit of "The fugitive decoys,/ Off yonder in the flat,

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[29] Carrington, p. 143.

like playing boys. . ." (SIW, p. 54), it is "A thousand hidden eyes" (SIW, p. 54) which watch for the signal to attack.

Neihardt chooses not to dwell on the fight itself. Actions are more important here for their symbolic meanings. There is a recognition of the terrible nature of loss in war: "Green manhood withering" (SIW, p. 55). Neihardt acknowledges the inevitability of destruction for those caught in the sort of situation that this war represents:

> The soldiers doomed whatever they might do,
> . . . . . .
> Of desperation scrambled up the slope.
> Strewn boulders yonder woke a lying hope,
> And there they waited, living, in their
> grave.
>
> (SIW, p. 56)

The terrible bitterness which marks the conflict between two ways of life is symbolized in the historical incident that Neihardt uses as the conclusion of this chapter. The only survivor is a trooper's wolfhound:

> And someone said:
> "Let yonder dog bear tidings of the dead
> To make the white men tremble over there."
> "No, teach them that we do not even spare
> Their dogs!"
>
> (SIW, p. 57)

Clearly, it is a fight to the end, and even Red Cloud's victory over Fetterman and Fort Kearney is at best

a staying action. Neihardt devotes so much space to this one fight because it was the single most important event of the Red Cloud War, an effective war against the United States government. At its conclusion, Red Cloud closed the Bozeman Trail, and the Sioux burned Fort Kearney; but the war against the white man was not won--defeat remained a certainty. That certainty--and Sioux heroism in the face of it--is driven home by Neihardt in the next two chapters. In those, which cover the Wagon Box and Beecher's Island fights, the Sioux and those southern tribes who were heartened by Red Cloud's "victories" meet the increasingly effective forces of white civilization, which hasten their destruction as a people despite most courageous actions on their part.

After the December massacre at Fort Kearney, the white government was shocked. Washington consistently underestimated the Sioux just as Fetterman had. For the next year, Red Cloud's power grew. On April 29, 1868, the government officially abandoned its Powder River Trail and closed the forts,[30] but before that event, there were two important incidents that Neihardt uses to illustrate the growing "twilight of the Sioux" nation.

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[30] Dunn, p. 421. There is some confusion concerning the date. Most sources agree that the last troop withdrawal was made before July 31, 1868, however.

The focus of these two chapters is Red Cloud and his influence. Even Brady, who clearly preferred the cavalry and had little sympathy for native Americans, was forced to admit Red Cloud's importance and his courage: "Mahapi-ya-luta, Red Cloud, was one of the most famous of the great Sioux Nation. He was a fierce and ruthless warrior, but withal a man of his word. . . . The skill and courage he displayed . . . won for him many admiring followers, and as war after war with the whites broke out and he won fresh laurels his followers increased in numbers. . . . The fighting men flocked to his standard, and when the awful massacre in which he played so conspicuous a part occurred, he was proclaimed Chief of all the Sioux."[31] For the Sioux, "Red Cloud was the summer and the sun" (SIW, p. 61), the promise of renewed life.

After the massacre, life at Fort Kearney resumed some of its normalcy. Neihardt stresses this to show how even victory makes little change in the Plains Indians' position. The wood-train had again begun to make trips from the fort to the woodcutters' camp where trees were being felled to finish the building of the fort. And Red Cloud, counting on a repetition of the decoy trick which had worked so well on Fetterman, decided to employ it once

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[31] Brady, pp. 40-1.

again.[32] Neihardt's choice of this fight, almost exactly like the first, is interesting because it reiterates the intensity with which both sides pursued their goals.

A premature attack on the horse herd warned the sentries of the ambush, and Red Cloud, hoping to salvage something of the fight, turned his full attention upon the woodcutters. Neihardt underscores the singularity of the earlier Sioux success by showing how, this time, fate had not provided the circumstances with another Fetterman. In his place was Captain Powell who had distinguished himself as an officer by relieving the wood-train successfully several days before Fetterman's abortive attempt. Powell chose an open area and created an enclosure made of fourteen wagon bodies. These he arranged in an oval and placed two complete wagons at either end so that they could be used to break a charge and cover those shooting from underneath them.[33] Powell's foresight proved important because Red Cloud had mustered a force of nearly a thousand warriors.

Thus the scene is set for another tragic confronta-

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[32] Accounts of the Wagon Box Fight are found in a number of sources. Brown, pp. 136-7; Brady, pp. 45-71, provide a balanced view of both military and Indian activities.

[33] The configuration of the wagons is pictured in Brady, p. 44.

tion. Neihardt utilizes all of the historical details because they are so easily made emblematic in this situation. In the open, the young men of two warring cultures confront each other again, as they had for several hundred years. What has been added to this situation is at the heart of white/native American conflict. The white men had a powerful magic--a result perhaps of different cultural preoccupations: they had new weapons, far more effective means of killing.

The Wagon Box Fight was among the most unequal fights in the history of the Indian Wars. Within the wagon box oval were thirty-two soldiers and civilians against a force of about one thousand Sioux. The soldiers expected to be beaten by the obviously superior force. They expected no mercy in this fight:

> Old Robertson, with nothing in his face,
> Unlaced a boot and noosed the leather lace
> To reach between a trigger and a toe.
> He did not tell, and no one asked to know
> The meaning of it. Everybody knew.
> . . . . . .
> When the finish came,
> At least there'd be no torturing for them.
> (SIW, p. 68-9)

When the Sioux attacked, the soldiers prepared to die bravely. Neihardt grants to each group a great measure of courage, but just as he gives Mike Fink strength, he does not approve fully of the way it is used. The Sioux attack, expecting to lose men but ready to "brave two vol-

leys for a rush/ Upon the soldiers, helpless in a hush/ Of loading" (SIW, p. 70). Instead, white superiority in arms makes the difference:

> Lo, like rifles in a dream
> The breech-fed Springfields poured a steady stream
> That withered men and horses roaring in!
> And gut-shot ponies screamed above the din;
> And many a wounded warrior, under-trod
> But silent, wallowed on the bloody sod--
> Man piled on man and horses on the men!
> (SIW, p. 70)

This scene epitomizes the heroism of the Sioux action:

> And still the mad Sioux fought
> To break this magic that the white men wrought--
> Heroic flesh at grapple with a god.
> (SIW, p. 71)

Neihardt captures the futility of the incident in his description of Red Cloud:

> Off yonder on the hill
> Among his chieftains Red Cloud waited still--
> A tomcat lusting for a nest of mice.
> (SIW, p. 75)

The Sioux took enormous losses. Faced with new weapons, they quickly withdrew their ponies. "Then [as a warrior named Fire Thunder recalled] we left our horses in a gulch and charged on foot, but it was like green grass withering in a fire. So we picked up our wounded and went away. I do not know how many of our people were killed, but there

were very many. It was bad" (BES, p. 17). Only three of the soldiers were killed; the rest were found alive, "Knee-deep in standing arrows" (SIW, p. 76). The "new medicine of great power" (BES, p. 16) that the Wasichus used for the first time that day made humiliation inevitable. The only hope left to the Sioux was the comfort of their war chant: "'There never was a better day to die!'" (SIW, p. 147)

Meanwhile, the tribes of the southern plains were heartened by Red Cloud's victories, and the fight at Beecher's Island was their response to the news that they had heard from the north. This disheartening characteristic of grasping at any hope typifies the native American at this period. This chapter, which deals with another abortive fight, illustrates a trend that is picked up in the last song of the volume--the desire of the defeated Indian nation to find, in the wreckage of their civilization, some person to whom they could turn, a new messiah.

Red Cloud appeared to be that messiah in the 1870's. Neihardt reveals how people were eager to hear of his victories:

> Hunters, drifting with the herd
> The fall before, had scattered wide the word
> Of Red Cloud's victory. "Look north," they said;
> ["] The white man made a road there. It is red
> With their own blood, and now they whine for peace!"
>
> (SIW, p. 81)

And he shows how vital it was to their well-being as a people to hear of a hero:

> Comanches, South Cheyennes and Kiowas,
> Apaches and the South Arapahoes
> Were glad to hear. Satanta, Roman Nose,
> Black Kettle, Little Raven heard--and thought.
> Around their winter fires the warriors fought
> Those far-famed battles of the North again.
> Their hearts grew strong. "We, too," they
> said, "are men;
> And what men did up yonder, we can do.
> Make red the road along the Smoky too,
> And grass shall cover it!"
>
> (SIW, p. 81)

Histories of the period document the effect that Red Cloud's northern victories and the building of the Kansas Pacific to Denver had in causing the great turmoil of 1867.

The leader of the opposition to the railroad was Roman Nose who said as early as the 1866 council at Fort Ellsworth, "'This is the first time . . . that I have ever shaken the white man's hand in friendship. If the railway is continued I shall be his enemy forever.'"[34] There was, of course, no stopping the railroad, for its progress was the irresistible progress of white civilization across the land of the native American. The Cheyenne went on the war-path, led by their principal chief, Roman Nose. The changes that the railroad symbolized were manifold and fatal to the southern Plains Indians' way of life as they

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[34] Brady, pp. 72-3.

were to the northern Plains people:

> North Platte City sprang
> From sage brush where the prairie sirens sang
> Of magic bargains in the marts of lust;
> A younger Julesburg sprouted from the dust
> To howl a season at the panting trains. . . .
> (SIW, p. 78)

In response to this desecration of their lands, the Cheyenne, as Brady relates, "swept through western Kansas like a devastating storm. In one month they cut off, killed, or captured eighty-four different settlers, including their wives and children. They swept the country bare. Again and again the different gangs of builders were wiped out, but the railroad went on."[35]

> So when the spring
> Was fetlock-deep, wild news ran shuddering
> Through Kansas: women captured, homes
> ablaze,
> Men slaughtered in the country north of Hays
> And Harker! Terror stalking Denver way!
> Trains burned along the road to Santa Fe,
> The drivers scalped and given to the flames!
> All summer Panic babbled demon names.
> No gloom but harbored Roman Nose. . . .
> (SIW, p. 81-2)

The southern peoples had their hero.

In response to the Indian unrest, the government sent General Sheridan to take charge on the field. His aide-de-camp was Major Sandy Forsyth. Forsyth was sent out with a

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[35] Brady, p. 75.

group of about fifty men to stop the Indians. The men were issued Spencer repeating rifles, which were good for seven shots without reloading. As Forsyth and his band of scouts neared the camp of the Indians, Roman Nose and his men were warned by hunters who had seen and recognized Forsyth. In preparation for the fight that all anticipated and none desired to avoid, Roman Nose gathered together five or six hundred warriors and planned a counterattack.

On September 15th, he planned to overrun the soldiers' camp with his force of warriors. His plans were disrupted, however, when several of his young warriors prematurely attacked the horse herd and gave the warning.[36] Forsyth and his men retreated to an island later named Beecher's Island after Lieutenant Frederick H. Beecher, Forsyth's second in command who was killed there--in the middle of the Arikaree River. Armed with "kicking Spencers" (SIW, p. 89), they were able to hold off repeated attack although greatly outnumbered.

Neihardt uses this battle as a model for the bravery and courage of both whites and native Americans. Although the weaponry gave the soldiers an advantage, many were wounded in the early fighting, including Colonel Forsyth. In the first surge, Forsyth was hit in the hip. Those in his command thought him dead, but he preserved his author-

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[36] Brown, pp. 159-60.

ity and reassured them at what must have been great personal cost:

> "Is Sandy dead?" So, rising on a knee
> That anyone who feared for him might see,
> He shouted: "Never mind--it's nothing bad!"
> (SIW, p. 90)

The gesture of courage was not his last, nor was his agony soon to end:

> Now presently the Colonel strove to raise
> The tortured limb to ease it, when a stroke
> As of a dull ax bit a shin that broke
> Beneath his weight.
> (SIW, p. 90)

After getting his second wound, Forsyth still does not give in to pain or despair; he remains firmly in command:

> Then, noticing how some of the command
> Pumped lead too fast and threw their shells
> away,
> He set about to crawl to where they lay
> And tell them.
> (SIW, p. 90)

At this point he receives his third wound, this in the head. The fight claimed important casualties--one of the first being the only doctor in the company. The Indians, unable to overrun the island, were unwilling to allow the men an opportunity to escape. They held the island in a state of siege for nine days, until the men left on Beecher's Island were relieved by "cavalry from Wallace" (SIW, p. 102). The cavalry found the survivors, and among

them was Colonel Forsyth--suffering from three wounds and reading Oliver Twist amid the carcasses of dead horses.

Forsyth was not the only man who showed courage. Beecher, after whom the island was named, died showing that same kind of inner strength. That incident--one of history's more painful moments because it is so personal a glimpse into the human soul--is recounted in the song. When Beecher was hit, he turned to his friend Forsyth and said, "'I think I have a fatal wound. . . .'" (SIW, p. 94). And then instead of railing at fate or condemning others, he turned to his friend and said "goodnight."

Neihardt is careful in this chapter not to leave one with the impression that courage is a white characteristic. He recounts in this episode the death of Roman Nose which illustrates the same sort of strength in the face of what seems--and often is--certain death. Roman Nose supervised the fighting at first but did not participate in it because he had inadvertently broken the power of his "medicine" and had not had time to undergo ritual purification. Neihardt constructs the scene in which Roman Nose tells of his loss of power in such a way as to illustrate the man's inherent honor:

> "My medicine is broken. Long ago
> One made a bonnet for a mighty man,
> My father's father; and the good gift ran
> From sire to son, and we were men of might.
> For he who wore the bonnet in a fight
> Could look on Death, and Death would fear him much,

> So long as he should let no metal touch
> The food he ate. But I have been a fool.
> A woman lifted with an iron tool
> The bread I ate this morning."
> (SIW, pp. 92-3)

Roman Nose listens to his men call him to the fight and says, "'What you say/ Is good to hear'" (SIW, p. 93), even though he knows that by going to war he will die:

> He cast his robe away,
> Got up and took the bonnet from its case
> And donned it; put the death-paint on his face
> And mounted, saying "Now I go to die!"
> (SIW, p. 93)

He does, in fact, meet his death that day. With Roman Nose, both in a real sense and in Neihardt's poetic sense, dies the hope of Southern Plains Indians for preserving their land and their way of life. Another messiah is lost to them.

For the last section of the song, Neihardt moves ahead in time about ten years to the 1870's. Here again the conflict is expressed in terms of the symbolic and historical confrontation of two important figures: General Custer and Crazy Horse. Each represents the most committed portion of his nation, and for Neihardt each represents those things that his culture values. This fusion of culture with character is made clear in the title of chapter eight, "The Yellow God." Neihardt uses that phrase to refer both to the gold in the Black Hills which precipitated

the next round of Indian wars and to Custer who fought the Indians in order to ensure white rights of passage and possession.

The treaty of 1868, which Red Cloud's War had won, specified several important things. It established a Great Reservation for the western tribes. Included in the area of the reservation was "all of Dakota Territory west of the Missouri River and south of parallel 46. . . ."[37] The treaty was very specific about the rights of the Indians to control and utilize their land as they saw fit.[38] The subsequent provision, referred to as Article 16, provided the terms of the agreement as it dealt with the Powder River country, the Montana road, and most importantly

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[37] Dunn, p. 488.

[38] The treaty stipulates that the reservation "is set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Indians herein named and for such other friendly tribes or individual Indians as from time to time they may be willing, with the consent of the United States, to admit amongst them; and the United States now solemnly agrees that no persons except those herein designated and authorized so to do, and except such officers, agents, and employees of the government as may be authorized to enter upon Indian reservations in discharge of duties enjoined by law, shall ever be permitted to pass over, settle upon, or reside in the territory described in this article, or such territory as may be added to this reservation for the use of said Indians; and henceforth they will and do hereby relinquish all claims or right in and to any portion of the United States Territories, except such as is embraced in the limits aforesaid, and except as hereinafter provided. The treaty is reprinted in Wilcom E. Washburn, ed., The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History (New York: Random House, 1973), IV, 2517-25.

the Black Hills:

> "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."[39]

The war that was about to begin was one based on violations of that treaty. In this war, the Sioux--both those considered "tame" like Spotted Tail and Red Cloud--fought not to stop whites from using a road through their country, but to preserve the land itself, now only a portion of what had been a whole country.

Custer, as an historical figure, had been growing as a symbol of white civilization throughout the 1860's. His participation in the Washita massacre, during which he had his military band play "Garry Owen" for the charge, had earned him a reputation as a tamer of Indians--a reputation that he sought to enhance by his mode of dress and his behavior. Custer was in the tradition of General Sheridan who had said, "The only good Indians I ever saw were dead,"[40] a phrase that was to pass quickly into the lexi-

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[39] Article 16 is reprinted partially in Dunn, p. 489, and fully in Washburn.

[40] Edward S. Ellis, The History of Our Country (Indianapolis, 1900), VI, 1483; cited in Brown, p. 166.

con of American aphorisms. His existence as a symbol of white values is made clear by Neihardt:

> Winter came;
> And lo! the homesteads echoed with a name
> That was a ballad sung, a saga told;
> . . . . . .
> By night the settlers hugged their cowchip fires
> And talked of Custer, while the children heard
> The way the wild wind dramatized the word. . . .
>
> (SIW, p. 103)

What this passage articulates is the process by which children are taught the values of their culture, for Custer is a symbol from the American mythos. The vision of him that Americans have is clearly that of a culture hero:

> And in their sleep they saw him riding still,
> A part of all things wonderful and past,
> His bright hair streaming in the battle blast
> Above a surf of sabres!
>
> (SIW, p. 103)

The parts of his history that make him so valuable to Americans, provide insight into American values. Custer was loved because he was competent at his job, which was killing Indians. In this way, he is like Mike Fink who is revered by his fellows for his strength, despite the use to which he put it. Secondly, Custer was a symbol of American values, in that he made it possible for Americans to settle the country, shaping it to suit their vision of its future and its potential. Neihardt suggests that for

Americans it was "song to talk of Custer" (SIW, p. 104). The particular song Americans liked best told of the Washita massacre:

> . . . the wild swoop down
> To widow-making in a panic town
> To widow-makers! O 'twas song to say
> How Old Black Kettle paid his life that day
> For bloody dawns of terror! Lyric words
> Dwelt long upon his slaughtered pony herds,
> His lodges burning for the roofs that blazed
> That dreadful year!
>
> (SIW, p. 104)

For members of a culture, there is virtually no understanding of another way of life; Indians were to be killed because they did not willingly give up their land to settlers. Those that removed them, removed an obstacle, as one removes boulders before the plow:

> Rejoicing Kansas raised
> Her eyes beyond the days of her defeat
> And saw her hills made mighty with the wheat,
> The tasselled corn ranks marching on the
> plain;
> The wonder-working of the sun and rain
> And faith and labor; plenty out of dearth;
> Man's mystic marriage with the virgin Earth,
> A hard-won bride.
>
> (SIW, p. 104)

It is Custer and those like him who win what the culture wants won.

The eight years since the 1868 treaty had seen fundamental changes in the landscape which altered the relations between the two races in the conflict. The Pacific Railway had been completed and with it came increased

numbers of settlers, branch lines, travel, and alteration of the land. In this chapter, Neihardt tries to convey both sides of the land-use issue. For the native Americans, these changes were as deadly to their way of life ad they were essential to the white Americans':

> . . . there were those--and they were human too--
> For whom the memory of other springs
> Sought vainly in the growing dusk of things
> The ancient joy. Along the Smoky Hill
> The might they could no longer hope to kill
> Brawled west again, where maniacs of toil
> Were chaining down the violated soil,
> And plows went wiving in the bison range,
> An alien-childed mother growing strange
> With younger loves. (SIW, pp. 104-5)

Again Neihardt stressed the inevitable destruction of the native American way of life: "So shadows of a thing that was to be/ Grew darker in the land" (SIW, p. 105).

The events that hastened the 1876 war stemmed from a differing attitude about the land and its gifts. Custer, in charge of a "military reconnaissance," explored the Black Hills. Under a thin disguise of military necessity, the group, which contained mining authorities, explored the area at the heart of the Sioux's sacred land. Word was already spreading among whites that there was gold:

> And in the creeks--in all the crystal creeks--
> The blessed creeks--O wonder to behold!--
> Free gold--the god of rabbles--holy gold--
> And gold in plenty from the grass-roots down!
> (SIW, p. 107)

Neihardt's choice of words like blessed, god, and holy are not accidental. They are, for him, statements of white values, echoes of Man Afraid's early fears. The irony of their use in this context is one of which Neihardt was well aware. The Black Hills were a holy place for the Sioux as well. They were valuable for what was beneath the ground, not gold, but the bones of ancestors. As Shunkaha Napin--Wolf Necklace of the Sioux expressed it, "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."[41]

Neihardt's portrayal of these conflicting impulses is biased. The claim that the Sioux have on the Black Hills is based on a motivation which Neihardt prefers. Those whites who are attracted to the god of gold are portrayed as despicable:

> And through the cities went the singing lure,
> Where drearily the human welter squirms
> Like worms that lick the slime of other worms
> That all may flourish. Squalor saw the gleam,
> And paupers mounted in a splendid dream
> The backs of luckless men, for now the weak
> Inherited the earth!
>
> (SIW, pp. 107-8)

The white religion is one of materialism; Americans seek "the god that weighs the soul by troy" (SIW, p. 108).

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[41] Brown, p. 263.

With the concern for gold driving the whites, the government--which represented its people--could not uphold the terms of a treaty clearly not in their best interest. Thus, the treaty weakened; it became "a rotten wier/ Already trickling with a leak of men" (SIW, p. 108). And when the Sioux refused to make a new treaty, saying as did Tashunka Witko (Crazy Horse) that "One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk,"[42] the treaty was broken: ". . . talking [is] ended and the man-dam burst/ To loose the living flood upon the West" (SIW, p. 110).

What this means is that the Sioux nation, already doomed, hastens its own destruction. Neihardt articulates their despair. The greatest warriors of the nation were dead or old:

> What giants, gone, alas, these many snows--
> And they who knew so near their taking off!
> Now beggars at the Great White Father's trough
> Forgot the bow and waited to be swilled.
> (SIW, p. 109)

Worse than that, the economic basis for Plains' life was being eradicated: "The buffalo would join the fathers soon" (SIW, p. 109). Yet there was hope, even though futile, in the remaining "strong hearts yet among the Sioux" (SIW, p. 110). Only Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Gall remained; from them the strength for the 1870's wars came.

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[42] Brown, p. 262.

Crazy Horse was as much an embodiment of his people's culture as Custer was of white American values. As Neihardt pictures him, Crazy Horse is almost holy, something of a savior to his people: "For something holy moved about the town/ With Crazy Horse" (SIW, p. 112). Neihardt gives him the background one expects of legendary or heroic figures. His parentage is anonymous as one would expect of heroes:

> No chieftainship had run,
> Long cherished in the blood of sire and son,
> To clothe him with the might he wielded then.
> (SIW, p. 112)

His merit has earned him his status as chief.

Neihardt describes Crazy Horse in physical terms much as he did Fink and his friends in the first song. There is a very significant difference though; while few men could boast of "fairer body" (SIW, p. 112), Crazy Horse has other attributes not shared by Fink: ". . . nothing seen/ About his goodly making or his mien/ Explained the man . . ." (SIW, p. 113). Unlike Fink, Crazy Horse has important inner dimensions. First, he is characterized by his love of his friends. Crazy Horse, even as a boy, kept the company of the older warrior, Hump, and unlike the tenuous relationship between Jamie and the older Hugh Glass, ". . . there was love between the man and lad" (SIW, p. 113). Crazy Horse is pictured as religious, and

his religion, like Jed Smith's, grants to him the power of vision, "the distant seeing in his eyes,/ The power in his silence . . ." (SIW, p. 113). The man also has the values which Neihardt saw as characteristically Siouan. The most important of these qualities is Crazy Horse's attitude about wealth:

> What had taught
> That getting is a game that profits naught
> And giving is a high heroic deed?
> His plenty never neighbored with a need
> Among his band. A good tough horse to ride,
> The gear of war, and some great dream inside
> Were Crazy Horse's wealth.
>
> (SIW, p. 113)

Finally, combined with his bravery, is his desire to ". . . shield his people in the days of wrong" (SIW, p. 113).

It is clear from Neihardt's portrayal of Crazy Horse that he will soon be the focus of the conflict between white and native American values. The first confrontation begins in the winter of 1876 when word comes from the government that Crazy Horse must bring his people into the agency or "'share/ The fate of hostiles'" (SIW, p. 114). Crazy Horse, mostly concerned about the safety of his people in the cold weather, but also understandably reluctant to obey such a peremptory summons, told the runners that he would come to the agency in the spring. The War Department decided that such insolence could not be tolerated and sent General Joseph J. Reynolds and ten troops of

cavalry to bring Crazy Horse in.[43] The attack on Crazy Horse's village in the dead of winter was as Brady termed it "a disgrace to the army."[44] It came ". . . As sudden as the storied wrath of God,/ And scarce more human . . ." (SIW, p. 115).

Neihardt uses this incident to illustrate the mercilessness of war on these terms, to reaffirm the unity of the Sioux behind their leaders and within their own value system, and to point out the frequent ineptness and inhumanity of the military. Neihardt emphasizes that the military most frequently wins its engagements not because of superior skill or devotion to a cause, but because of superior arms and numbers. When the Sioux are attacked by Reynolds, all of the people are involved: women and children must react; ". . . And grandpas, not forgetting they were Sioux,/ Made shift to do a little with the bows . . . (SIW, p. 117). History suggests that in the face of such resistance, Reynolds panicked and pulled his men out, leaving wounded to the enemy.[45] Neihardt preserves this piece of information in the poem to pinpoint white inadequacies: ". . . And certain of their wounded,

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[43] A discussion of the battle and its aftermath is found in Brady, pp. 183-87.

[44] Brady, p. 187.

[45] Brady, p. 186.

men have said,/ Were left to learn what hells are made of wrath" (SIW, p. 118).

The battle with Reynolds is used as a preliminary by Neihardt for the most significant confrontation of the Sioux war--Custer's fight on the Little Big Horn. Neihardt devotes two chapters--eleven and twelve--to the telling of this confrontation. Chapter eleven deals with Custer and his men, and twelve treats Sioux preparations for the fight. Because Neihardt can assume familiarity with this piece of history, he rapidly advances the narrative. The focus of these chapters is not on battle strategy, although that is included in an accurately outlined fashion, but on the essential courage and calmness of the participants. There is a feeling of finality in all the action. The Sioux encourage each other to "'Turn around!/ Die here today!'"(SIW, p. 142) And by name Neihardt mentions soldiers whose courage and serenity make them models of good warriors. Even Sitting Bull had to admit that "'I tell no lies about dead men. These men who came with the 'Long Hair' were as good men as ever fought.'"[46] All in all the cost of the battle was enormous, both in lives lost and in its aftermath.

The battle of the Little Big Horn was the most deci-

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[46] David Nevin, The Soldiers, ed. Ezra Bowen (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973), p. 219.

sive defeat the United States Army underwent in the course of the Indian Wars in America, but it was also a case where the Sioux won a battle and lost a war. The defeat of Custer and the death of a third of the 7th Cavalry sealed the fate of the Sioux. The battle changed the mood of the country and especially of Washington; there could now be no reconciliation.[47] Cavalry companies were expanded from sixty-four to one hundred men, and young men rushed to join up as "Custer's Avengers." Generals Crook (Gray Fox as the Sioux called him) and Nelson A. Miles criss-crossed the Sioux lands all winter and on into 1877.[48] The result was the devastation of the Sioux: "The Sioux ammunition was exhausted and no replacements were to be had. Their warriors were killed, their villages destroyed, their food supplies burned, their women and children left homeless in terrible cold. Though fighting flared periodically for 15 years more, there was never again a real war or even a battle on the scale of the Little Bighorn."[49] In chapter thirteen, "The Twilight," Neihardt treats these terrible changes in the quality of life for the Sioux after their defeat of Custer.

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[47] Brown, p. 283

[48] Nevin. p. 220.

[49] Ibid.

As a counterpoint to the historical material of Crook's and Miles' attacks upon the Sioux renegade bands, Neihardt presents a chronicle of less tangible Sioux losses. Woven through this chapter and the rest of Volume Two is the inevitability of humiliation; even the children must face the death of their entire cultural tradition:

> They saw it in the bravest father's eyes--
> That shadow--in the gentlest mother's face;
> Unwitting how there fell upon the race
> The twilight of irreparable wrong.
> The drums had fallen silent with the song,
> And valiant tales, late eager to be told,
> Were one with all things glorious and old
> And dear and gone forever from the Sioux.
> (SIW, p. 158)

The Sioux, for perhaps the first time in Neihardt's treatment of them, have no hope: "What hope was left in anything but flight?" (SIW, p. 159) For the Sioux, Red Cloud had been the sun, but now the sun had set and "Noon was dark,/ Night starless, and the fleeing meadowlark/ Forgot the morning" (SIW, p. 159). In the face of Miles' dogged pursuit, the Sioux were forced to constantly retreat: "Still fighting with their children at their backs/ The Sioux gave slowly" (SIW, p. 166). The chapter ends with another of the Sioux heroes, Crazy Horse, forced as were Spotted Tail and Red Cloud, to bring his people into the reservation. Crazy Horse, still a good chief, must consider his people's welfare:

> "I could fight!

> And I could fight till all of us were dead.
> But now I have no powder left," he said;
> "I cannot fight. Tell Grey Fox what you saw;
> That I am only waiting for a thaw
> To bring my people in."
>
> (SIW, p. 168)

The final chapter of the "Song of the Indian Wars" deals with the death of Crazy Horse; it tells of how ". . . The last great Sioux rode down to his defeat" (SIW, p. 169). In 1877, Crazy Horse brought his band of Oglala Sioux to Fort Robinson to surrender,[50] not as an admission that he had accepted the white way of life, but to provide his people with food. Neihardt sees in the great man a heart not willing to accept final defeat. When Crazy Horse hears of Chief Joseph and of the Nez Perce resistence, he can no longer bear the bond of servitude that reservation life implies. For Crazy Horse, there was "So much to win and only life to lose. . ." (SIW, p. 173). According to Neihardt, Crazy Horse abandons the fort because he is afraid that his people will see his discontent and do something violent and thereby be destroyed.

Crazy Horse is tricked into going back to Fort Robinson to parley, and while there, he is jailed and ultimately stabbed in the confusion. His dying speech has been

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[50] Brown, p. 316.

preserved;[51] but Neihardt does more than present his words; instead, he transforms Crazy Horse's words into an elegy by a dying man for his dying nation:

> "I had my village and my pony herds
> On Powder where the land was all my own.
> I only wanted to be let alone.
> I did not want to fight."
>
> (SIW, p. 177)

In his last speech, he catalogues his and, therefore, his people's losses at the hands of the soldiers:

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[51] E. A. Brininstool, Crazy Horse (Los Angeles: Wetzel, 1949), pp. 53-61, prints the text of Crazy Horse's dying remarks.

"I was not hostile to the white man. Occasionally my young men would attack a part of the Crows or Arickarees, and take their ponies, but just as often they were the assailants. We had buffalo for food, and their hides for clothing, and we preferred the chase to a life of idleness and the bickerings and jealousies, as well as the frequent periods of starvation at the Agencies.

But the Gray Fox [General Crook] came out in the snow and bitter cold, and destroyed my village. All of us would have perished of exposure and hunger had we not recaptured our ponies.

Then Long Hair [Custer] came in the same way. They say we massacred him, but he would have massacred us had we not defended ourselves and fought to the death. Our first impulse was to escape with our squaws and papooses, but we were so hemmed in that we had to fight. . . .

Again the Gray Fox sent soldiers to surround me and my village; but I was tired of fighting. All I wanted was to be let alone, so I anticipated their coming and marched all night to Spotted Tail Agency while the troops were approaching the site of my camp. Touch-the-Clouds knows how I settled at Spotted Tail Agency, in peace. The agent told me I must first talk with the big white chief of the Black Hills. Under his care I came here unarmed, but instead of talking, they tried to confine me, and when I made an effort to escape, a soldier ran his bayonet into me.

I have spoken."

> "The Gray Fox sent
> His soldiers. We were poorer when they went;
> Our babies died, for many lodges burned
> And it was cold. We hoped again and turned
> Our faces westward. It was just the same
> Out yonder on the Rosebud. Gray Fox came."
> (SIW, p. 177)

As a last indignity, Crazy Horse was denied his dying request to see his aged parents. Crazy Horse's loss was inestimable. The desolation left with his passing is reminiscent of that which Neihardt notes at Jed Smith's death as well:

> Who knows the crumbling summit where he lies
> Alone among the badlands? Kiotes prowl
> About it, and the voices of the owl
> Assume the day-long sorrow of the crows,
> These many grasses and these many snows.
> (SIW, p. 179)

Crazy Horse's death left the Sioux nation leaderless and without hope. The fact that his burial was in an unknown place, that "somewhere the heart and hand of him were grass/ Upon a lonely hill!"[52] is indicative of the estrangement of the native American from his heritage, from his sources of pride. This song ends with all worldly hope gone. What can only remain are promises of a new messiah and hopes for a new life in a new world. With the end of the Plains wars went the end of forceful conflict

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[52] John G. Neihardt, "The Song of the Messiah," Twilight, p. 9. All further references are to this edition and will appear in the text as SM.

between two cultures. The battle of cultural supremacy was not yet over, however. No war of this nature is over until another culture is beaten on all grounds, and that includes philosophical and religious ones as well.

Neihardt deals with two large and important religious events in the second volume of his Cycle. As one moves through the songs which make up the Cycle, it is apparent that Neihardt relies less upon plot, in the sense of structuring history for literary purposes, and more upon broad philosophical questions that underlie history. His examination of two separate kinds of religious ceremonies--one which occurred before life had been radically altered by the presence of the white man and one which occurred after--invites the most fundamental of contrasts. Neihardt has already shown what the physical effect of the coming of the white man has been upon the native American; now he treats the less tangible changes, the ones that are deepest and most illustrative of the needs and values of a culture under stress. Because it is less significant to the overall shape of the Cycle to dwell upon the religion of the native American before white encroachment, Neihardt devotes only a single chapter of "The Song of the Indian Wars" explicitly to the Sun Dance. He places, in contrast to this, the last song of the Cycle, which deals with the Ghost Dance phenomenon that swept through the Plains' tribes after the last of the important Sioux wars of the

1870's.

The Sun Dance religion in the complete form that Neihardt recounts was a relatively new ceremony for the Plains Indians, although its parts were reflective of ancient rites.[53] The dance was one conceived for the general good of the tribe. This concept is the cornerstone of Sioux religion and is what distinguishes native American religion from that of the white man. For the white American, religion is seen as a personal obligation and fulfillment. The salvation offered by most western religions is a singular one. Actions such as confession in the Catholic church or communion in both Catholic and Protestant churches involve a singular relationship between the worshiper and his God. For the Sioux, such a concept seems to have been foreign. Activities and religion centered on the concept of communal good. From the smallest newborn child to the oldest adult, all Sioux tried to act in the interest of the community. Infants were trained at birth to utter no cries; their mouths and noses were held gently closed when they began to cry so that they were taught the silence that would be necessary in emergencies. When Mari Sandoz recounts her experience with the Sioux

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[53] Ruth M. Underhill, Red Man's Religion: Beliefs and Practices of the Indians North of Mexico (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Ch. 14 provides a general background on the Sun Dance.

as a child, it is this concept of community which she finds most important to their way of life: "During the newborn minutes, that newborn hour, Indian children, boy and girl, were taught the first and greatest lesson of their lives: that no one could be permitted to endanger the people by even one cry to guide a roving enemy to the village or to spoil a hunt that could mean the loss of the winter meat for a whole band or even a small tribe. In return the child would soon discover that all the community felt an equal responsibility toward him."[54]

The Sun Dance as a full-fledged tribal ceremony does not go back much earlier than 1800, although we tend to think of it as an old ritual. It is of particular interest in Neihardt's poem because it illustrates how well native Americans were able to adapt to certain ideas and innovations offered by the white man when left to their own resources. To understand the Sun Dance fully, one must have an overview of early Plains Indian history. Before 1800, the Plains were essentially empty. There were gigantic herds of buffalo there, but on foot and armed only with bows and arrows, native Americans found it difficult to utilize this source of food. When the Spanish came to the southern plains, they brought horses with

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[54] These Were the Sioux (New York: Hastings House, 1961), p. 24.

them, and it was not long before the Plains Indians had made the horses their own. Having horses made hunts on the arid plains feasible. They also made it possible for great numbers of people to meet together and have adequate food and water. Thus, the Sun Dance became an actuality and was held after the midsummer buffalo hunt.

Throughout the last volume of the Cycle, Neihardt stressed the unique relation the native American had with the land. In his treatment of the Sun Dance, Neihardt begins by describing the native American's relation to his supreme being:

> They turned to One who, mightier than Man,
> Could help them most--the Spirit in the sun;
> For whatsoever wonder-work is done
> Upon the needy earth, he does it all.
> (SIW, pp. 123-24)

As Underhill explains it, the "purpose of the rites was to renew communion with the earth, sun, and the spirits, and especially with the winds, so that the tribe might have health and fertility and the buffalo might never fail."[55] Thus, it is clear that the ritual is not simply a formality--although it is formalized--but is integrated into the everyday life of the people. The ritual implications are seen by the people as lasting throughout the year; therefore, part of their ceremony involves a "remembering/ With

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[55] Underhill, p. 145.

thanks alike the autumn and the spring,/ The winter and the summer" (SIW, p. 126).

The ceremony of the Sun Dance required no elaborate paraphenalia; as Neihardt notes, nearly everything comes from the earth, and even the participants in and the leaders of the dance are volunteers rather than priests or prophets. The dance actively engages all members of the tribe who wish to participate. The first activity is the selection of the sacred cottonwood which is cut down and placed as a symbol of the ritual in the center of the village; it is around this tree, "Beloved of the Spirit" (SIW, p. 124), that all activities center.

Neihardt stresses the total community's involvement in preparation for the dance. After the tree is selected by the holy man--one who volunteers for the position because he wants to give thanks or to keep a vow made during the year--it is first attended to by women who have proven their fertility by having had children. It seems clear that this part of the ritual is an ancient one since the fertility aspects, as Neihardt presents them and as they were, are accentuated:

> And fruitful women danced about the tree
> To make the Spirit glad; for, having known
> The laughter of the children of their own,
> Some goodness of the earth, the giving one,
> Was in them and was pleasing to the sun,
> The prairie-loving nourisher of seed.
> (SIW, pp. 124-25)

Not only is fertility celebrated, but so also is the potential for fertility. To that end, it is a group of virgins who have the honor of cutting down the sacred cottonwood:

> Singing virgins came
> Whose eyes had never learned to droop with shame,
> Nor was there any present, man or youth,
> Could say them aught of ill and say the truth. . . .
> . . . . . .
> And each one took the ax they gave her
> And smote the tree with many a lusty stroke. . . .
>
> (SIW, p. 125)

Women are not the only participants in the dance's early stages.

The bravest warrior of that year also strikes the tree as do the virgins. He does not use an ax, however, but a coup stick, gaining honor as if he had struck a "dreaded foe" (SIW, p. 125). As evidence of his character, he is also given the honor of distributing his belongings to those in the tribe: "Let the coward save--/ Big hoard and little heart; but still the brave/ Have more with nothing!" (SIW, p. 125) Likewise, the chieftains of the tribe participate by carrying the tree after it has been felled, and the people celebrate after it is brought to the village as they would after a victory.

The most famous part of the Sun Dance ritual is that which involves the voluntary torture undergone by the

dancers. Men of the tribe have leather thongs passed under their skin or muscles and dance with the thongs tied to the sacred pole until they pull them loose or until, by fainting, they fall to the ground and are torn loose. Although this is the most famous part of the ritual and one that the United States Government banned from the dances, it is not as horrible or as violent as it at first might seem. Neihardt understands and seeks to convey the true meaning of this ritual. For him, it is more than a pagan self-torture ritual; it is instead a "death-in-torture to be born again. . ." (SIW, p. 126).

The ritual of self-inflicted pains sounds cruel to a culture which really has no comparable ritual other than medieval penitential practices upon which to rely. But in the context which Neihardt has created, the implications of the Sun Dance ritual do not seem cruel or masochistic. He has portrayed accurately the Siouan lack of interest in personal wealth, discussing the tradition of chiefs and warriors giving away their belongings to tribal members. In a culture which does not value material possessions or the accumulation of them, one has nothing to offer to a supernatural deity but one's self. As Underhill notes: "To the Indians, it [the Sun Dance "torture" ritual] was a sacrifice of what was most precious to them, their own flesh. It was meant to convince the Powers of their earnestness in seeking supernatural help. A man vowed to suf-

fer in this way when he needed help in trouble or for future success."[56] Neihardt tries to convey this relationship with the Sioux deity in a metaphor of fertility:

> So all day long the spirit-haunted tree
> Bore bloody fruitage, groaning to the strain,
> For with the dropping of the ripe-in-pain,
> Upon the stem the green-in-courage grew.
> (SIW, p. 127)

The result of all the suffering--in which the women also participate by gashing their flesh to share the pain of their loved ones--is twofold. First, the Sioux were able to reestablish their heritage, for while the dance went on,

> . . . the multitudinary dead
> Pressed round to see if heroes such as they
> Still walked the earth despite the smaller day
> When 'twas not half so easy to be brave.
> (SIW, p. 127)

Secondly, the Sioux purchase the promise of power and fertility with their sacrifice: ". . . and the mother sod/ Received the red libation; and the god/ Gave power to his people" (SIW, p. 127).

When a people is powerless, when it knows it will lose all battles against a superior force, then a dance designed to give strength becomes one more exercise in futility. With the disappearance of the dance, there is a

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[56] Underhill, p. 150.

general weakening of the culture. Robert M. Utley points out that "With the proscription of the Sun Dance, the social and religious framework of the Sioux began to give way. No longer could they appeal directly to Wi for personal power and assistance. No longer could they experience the pervading sense of religious security that came only from the Sun Dance. No longer could the Sun Dance strengthen such values and institutions of Teton society as still existed. The Sioux had been dealt a shattering emotional blow, and their lives began to seem like a great void."[57] Underhill comments on the tremendous effect the white man's coming has upon the native American religion: "Ceremonies no longer gave peace of mind and kept man's world in order. Some revival of power was needed, and all over the continent prophets arose, as they have everywhere among distressed people. Their remedies went all the way from attempts to revive and purify the old pattern to proposing a new pattern fitted to the new needs. The two hundred years or less covered by this era of the prophets probably included more religious change than had occurred in the whole millennium before it."[58] Neihardt's

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[57] The Last Days of the Sioux Nation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 33.

[58] Underhill, p. 254.

last song, "The Song of the Messiah," addresses itself to this new pattern, but as the title of the song implies, what Neihardt is discussing has wider implications than the problem involving the Sioux. In this song he deals with the psychological concerns of a beaten people--that they happen to be the Sioux is less important than the means they take of coping with their defeat and the response that their effort elicits from the dominant culture.

Neihardt's description of the process by which a people loses faith is generic. He is talking about the Sioux, but he describes their problems and their losses in such a way as to imply that what he is dealing with are human rather than Sioux truths. Essentially, what he talks about is the process of aging: he makes the same point that James Mooney does in his scholarly and humane book about the Ghost Dance: "As with men, so is it with nations. The lost paradise is the world's dreamland of youth. What tribe or people has not had its golden age . . . ? And when the race lies crushed and groaning beneath an alien yoke, how natural is the dream of a redeemer, an Arthur, who shall return from exile or awake from some long sleep to drive out the usurper and win back for his people what they have lost. The hope becomes a faith and the faith becomes the creed of . . . prophets, until the hero is a

god and the dream a religion. . . ."[59] Neihardt conveys that desolation in his description of the pervasive feeling of loss and of futility in living:

> There was no longer magic in the earth;
> No mystery was vital in the air;
> No spirit in the silence anywhere
> Made doubly sure a wonder that was sure.
> To live was now no more than to endure
> The purposeless indignity of breath. . . .
> (SM, p. 4)

It is the Sioux nation that is dying, but on one level it is also a vision of the earth, for ". . . it was autumn long before the frost" (SM, p. 5).

In this environment where one is out of touch with the ancient verities and is pursued by new and "formless wolves" (SM, p. 5), a desperate new hope must come. Anthropologists and cultural historians like John Greenway document the fact that this coming of new hope is a cultural phenomenon not in any way restricted to the Plains Indians. Greenway suggests that "When hope has been eroded among a long-oppressed people, there occurs one of the strangest manifestations of polygenesis the study of man produces. This phenomenon has been variously named . . . : the nativistic endeavor, the messianic complex, the despair cult, the revitalization movement, the cargo cult. Uncan-

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[59] The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890, ed. Anthony F. C. Wallace (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 1.

nily, it takes the same form, wherever it appears. . . . When one culture is threatened with extinction, going down to defeat before the forcible encroachment of another, superior civilization, when all reasonable hope has vanished, unreasonable hope appears--usually among the poorest, most degraded elements of the harried society. It appears in the person of a shaman. . . ."[60] This process is what Neihardt calls the ". . . Rebuilding [of] heaven with the stuff of woe" (SM, p. 9). And it is first manifested in "A timid rumor" (SM, p. 9) heard by the Northern Plains Indians.

This visionary experience was common both with the Sioux and with what Greenway terms the cults of despair. The Sioux had a close relationship to the supernatural powers in their world as Neihardt has already made clear. As a result of that relationship, it was possible for all members of the tribe--in some cases women might be excluded--to share in the visionary experience. Each person was considered to have a personal relationship with the deities of his world who came to him in visions and who gave him special powers. The process of obtaining a vision is described consistently by Neihardt as a kind of dying, during which a person leaves this world and visits

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60 "The Ghost Dance," The American West, 6, No. 4 (July 1969), 42.

somewhere else for the purpose of gaining information. That explains why the rumor heard by the Sioux was of a man ". . . Who once had died, and verily had trod/ The Spirit Land. . ." (SM, p. 10).

This event follows a traditional pattern of the cult of despair. The prophet, in this pattern, "has a vision . . . that he has actually been taken up (or down) into the spiritual world, where he meets God, Jesus (where the religion of the superior culture is Christianity), the Master of Life, an aboriginal god (one Amazonian . . . shaman claimed to be a descendant of the Inca Atahuallpa on the one side and of Jesus on the other), or some recognizing high deity."[61] The Messiah of the Ghost Dance, Wovoka--a Paiute who was called Jack Wilson by the whites--did describe his visionary experience in this way for Mooney: "'When the sun died, I went up to heaven and saw God and all the people who had died a long time ago. God told me to come back and tell my people they must be good and love one another, and not fight, or steal, or lie. He gave me this dance to give to my people.'"[62]

The rumor, when it reaches the Sioux in 1889, is given the following shape by Neihardt:

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[61] Greenway, p. 42.

[62] Mooney, p. 2.

> The man had died, and yet he had not died,
> And he had talked with God, and all the dead
> Were coming with the whirlwind at their head,
> And there would be new earth and heaven!

The Sioux are not portrayed by Neihardt as a people so devastated as to be willing to believe all rumors immediately. Instead they are shown as cautious, but interested. They cannot ignore the hope that takes "root/ In hearts long fallow" (SM, p. 12), but they send a committee to talk with the messiah before they commit themselves to a dream. The delegation which Neihardt has sent to the messiah is composed of five men: Good Thunder, Kicking Bear, Short Bull, Flat Iron, and Yellow Breast, some of whom, in reality, were sent on the train to meet with Wovoka. When each returns, he tells a version of his experience. The rationale behind that device is interesting, for it shows clearly what different things the messiah represented to different people and yet how all those visions were grounded in the same need for hope and for a future.

The first two speakers, Good Thunder and Kicking Bear, reveal the profound shaping effect that Christianity had on the Ghost Dance. Native Americans had long been willing to listen to white missionaries and had borrowed parts of religious ceremonies that appealed to them. As Underhill points out, only one part of Christian theology was repellant to the native American: "Indians had never considered that mankind was naturally sinful and in need of

redemption. To them all nature was good and man was a part of nature. Life did involve certain ills, such as death, disease, and witchcraft, but these were not man's fault. They were due to chance or mischief on the part of some primal being. And other primal beings had given ceremonies for handling them."[63] That means rituals involving Christ, Mary, the resurrection, and the crucifix, for example, could all be incorporated into existing and new religious ceremonies of the Sioux.

Thus, it is not surprising that Good Thunder and Kicking Bear discuss their experience with Wovoka in terms that sound very Christian. The major promise of the new prophet and the new religion is the resurrection of the dead. Good Thunder tells those gathered about the fire,

> "Believe and cry no more! The dear, the dead
> Are coming with a spring forever green!
> Already they are marching!
>
> (SM, p. 17)

And Kicking Bear reiterates this idea by telling of his vision of "souls of thousands who believed" in salvation. For a people who had no hope in this life, as was true for the Sioux, this part of Christian dogma must have held an important psychological promise.

Neihardt has both of these speakers in the poem tell

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[63] Underhill, pp. 254-55.

of their firsthand experience with the messiah and with the dream of resurrection. Kicking Bear especially regards the messiah as the new Christ:

> "I tell you He is Jesus come again!
> I saw the marks upon Him! It is so!
> Have not the Black Robes told how long ago
> One came to save the people? It is He!
> Did not Wasichus nail Him to a tree?
> Did they not torture Him until he died?
> I saw the spear-wound bleeding in His side!
> His lifted palms--I saw them white with scars!"
> (SM, p. 29)

Psychologically, if the prophet could be made into a Christ, then that provided direct proof of the validity of his claims for a new resurrection.

Kicking Bear's assertion about the divinity of the prophet also makes possible a subtle kind of coercion. Neihardt has him suggest that the white man was stupid for killing the first Christ. That stupidity makes possible their own supernatural destruction. Kicking Bear tells how "He was kind/ As rain and grass the other time He came" (SM, p. 33). Because of his crucifixion at the hands of the whites, he has come the second time to the Indians, who will not be so inhumane or so stupid as to offend such obviously strong medicine. Thus, Wovaka promises a destruction of the whites and the resurrection of all Indians along with a renewal of the traditional way of life. Neihardt has Wovoka and his religion symbolize the chance to regain lost Indian power.

To these Christian elements of the new religion are added several important native American components: the dance itself and the ghost shirts. It is Yellow Breast who tells of the function of the Ghost Dance, which "would make the dead return/ And new earth blossom" (SM, p. 37). All the tribes involved with the messiah engaged in the ghost dance, but the Sioux added to this ritual a part of the Sun Dance ritual. They placed a dead cottonwood tree--the symbol of life, ever renewed--in the center of the dancing area. Those who lived "beneath the Blooming Tree" (SM, p. 27) would live forever. The ghost shirts, suggested in Neihardt by the Young Black Elk who learned of them in a vision, were to be "holy shirts" (SM, p. 55) which, when worn properly embroidered and marked, would protect the wearers from death and the white man's bullets. The dance and the shirts gave the people hope:

> Death became afraid
> Before the dancing people so arrayed
> In vision of the deathless. Hundreds burned
> With holiness.
>
> (SM, p. 56)

As the dancers began to be more and more often harassed by white agents who wanted to stop them, the claims for the effectiveness of the shirts grew until the people were told that if they were attacked by soldiers, "Their guns [would] not go off" (SM, p. 66).

There are those who share with the whites a fear of

the Ghost Dance. Sitting Bull and other chiefs have their worries about the rapidly growing feelings of confidence the dance and the shirts gave to those who utilized them. Neihardt conveys both Sitting Bull's humanity and his concern for what might happen to his people by having the chief tell a story about a "fool who, feeling wise,/ Would catch a bear . . ." (SM, p. 77). The tribal elders all laugh at

> how the panic people ran
> The day the stridden bear brought back the man,
> Precariously clinging by its hair,
> And shouting wildly: "I have caught a bear!
> Behold!"
>
> (SM, p. 77)

They know the meaning of Sitting Bull's story and share his fears. It is not that Sitting Bull disbelieves the story of the messiah or of his vision, for he says that they are good; what he fears is the "foolish hearts that have not understood . . ." (SM, p. 8i).

Sitting Bull did, in actuality, have a right to be afraid. The government had feared that the dance would lead to greater discontent and a final uprising. By accident, Sitting Bull's name had appeared upon lists of those Indians actively engaged in supporting the dancing, and orders were given to have him arrested. In the confusion around his arrest, he was shot by members of his own tribe, and the last of the great chiefs died. Neihardt underlines

the pathos of this situation by ending it with a picture of Sitting Bull's horse--which he had gotten while in Wild Bill Cody's Traveling Show--doing tricks to the gunfire as he had been taught.

The last two chapters of this song are not really an ending but an epilogue. After the shooting of Sitting Bull, the Hunckpapa Sioux fled to the leadership of Sitanka--Big Foot. In the midst of starvation--for the terms of the treaties made with the Sioux, which had promised food and clothing, had not been met--he preached a religion quite Christian in its ethics:

> . . . And even if the soldiers come to kill
> The Spirit says that we must love them still,
> For they are brothers. Pray to understand.
> Not ours alone shall be the Spirit Land.
> (SM, p. 101)

The War Department ordered the arrest and imprisonment of Big Foot, whose name, like Sitting Bull's, had appeared on the list of "fomenters of disturbances." Big Foot, after hearing of Sitting Bull's death, started to move with his people toward Red Cloud and the Pine Ridge Reservation, hoping to be protected there.

On December 28, 1890, the Minneconjous sighted four troops of cavalry approaching. Big Foot immediately sent up a white flag and later met with Major Samuel Whitside, 7th Cavalry. The major ordered the Indians to move on to Wounded Knee and camp. Expecting trouble the next day

when he planned to collect the guns, he camped the 350 Indians, which included 230 women, so that they were surrounded and covered by Hotchkiss guns capable of sending explosive charges at almost a shell a minute for a distance of more than two miles. Later, the rest of the 7th Regiment--Custer's old command--arrived under Colonel James W. Forsyth who took charge of operations.

That night Major Whitside treated Big Foot well, issuing rations and providing a doctor for Big Foot who was hemorrhaging from pneumonia. The next day Forsyth began collecting weapons from the bedraggled Sioux. In the confusion, a shot was fired; the military returned it, using all its weapons. Dee Brown documents the destruction that resulted: "When the madness ended, Big Foot and more than half of his people were dead or seriously wounded; 153 were known dead, but many of the wounded crawled away to die afterward. One estimate placed the final total of dead at very nearly three hundred of the original 350 men, women, and children. The soldiers lost twenty-five dead and thirty-nine wounded, most of them struck by their own bullets or shrapnel."[64] Neihardt conveys this tragedy in his imaginative creation of Big Foot's death:

> Then he saw
> One face above him and a gun-butt raised;

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[64] Brown, pp. 417-18.

A soldier's face with haggard eyes that
blazed. . . .
. . . . . .
Brief as the weapon's poising and the stroke,
It burned upon him; and a white light broke
About it, even as a cry came through
That stabbed the world with pity. And he knew
The shining face, unutterably dear!
All tenderness, it hovered, bending near,
Half man, half woman, beautiful with scars
And eyes of sorrow, very old--like stars
That seek the dawn. He strove to rise in vain,
To cry "My brother!"
And the shattered brain
Went out.

(SM, p. 109)

With the massacre at Wounded Knee, the twilight of the Sioux became a night, "And darkness fell upon the face of day" (SM, p. 110).

The conflict that Neihardt posed between the two races of proud men ends with "The iron-footed squadrons" (SM, p. 110) marching away, triumphant in their victory. Yet Neihardt does not rejoice in that victory. He notes what has been lost, some key necessary to understanding the meaning of things, some insight that only the Sioux could provide. For that reason, the song and the Cycle must end with a victory but one that is empty with the passing of a great nation. The Cycle ends mid-winter in the midst of a mounting blizzard:

"All night it swept
The bloody field of victory that kept
The secret of the Everlasting Word."
(SM, p. 110)

Neihardt tells and retells of this loss. He ends Black

Elk Speaks with Black Elk's vision of the same event. Somehow the meaning of it must be told:

> I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.
>
> And I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth,--you see me now a pitiful old man who has done nothing, for the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.
>
> (BES, p. 276)

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERATURE AND THE POETICS OF HISTORY

> The two--the hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found--are thus understood as the outside and the inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world.
>
> --Robert Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

> [The hero] is an index to the collective mind and heart. His deeds and qualities are those which millions endorse. He speaks words that multitudes want said; he stands for things that they are often willing to spill their blood for. The hero is he whom every American should wish to be.
>
> --Dixon Wecter *The Hero in America*

A poet or an artist of any sort exists in a unique relation to his culture. One has already seen how features of the culture--the ethos, mythos, myth, and symbol--are interrelated, but the position that the artist plays in respect to his culture has not been fully explored. If in a culture all the things and events which are dependent upon symboling are shaped by that culture's ethos, then it is inevitable that both artist and art are formed by that symboling. They are both, in a sense, created by their culture. An author's creative behavior has idiosyncratic,

social, and biological determinants,[1] but they are modified by--and modify if only in a limited fashion--his culture. An author, like all other members of the culture, learns his culture's dominant values. Clearly all artists, or all people, do not think alike or express themselves similarly; yet authors are intelligible to those who read them, and the basis of intelligibility is more than shared language. What distinguishes an artist from his fellow culture members is that, to a lesser or greater degree, the artist is conscious of the mechanisms of his culture--that is, he "knows" on some level what will and what will not "work" in his art.

He is conscious of how the ethos is worked out in a certain consistent fashion, utilizing the symbols and myths of the culture. There are patterns which tend to recur. John G. Cawelti uses the term convention to define the most identifiable elements of the mythos: "Conventions are elements which are known to both the creator and his audience beforehand--they consist of things like favorite plots, stereotyped characters, accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors and other linguistic devices, etc."[2] The more an author seeks to appeal to the broadest possi-

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[1] Kluckhohn, p. 25.

[2] The Six-Gun Mystique (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, n.d.), p. 27.

ble audience, the more he is likely to rely only on conventions. Popular literature is highly formulaic, and, as a result, its myths and symbols tend to be culture-specific. Cawelti notes that relationship: "[The formula] represents the way in which a particular culture has embodied both mythical archetypes and its own preoccupations in narrative form."[3] When an author is less concerned about the popular audience, he is freer to experiment with both form and content, and his products are less likely to reflect only cultural conventions.

What that means, practically, is that the popular writer has limited his effectiveness as a cultural shaper and changer, although he remains a powerful transmitter of culture. Because his works rely heavily on what a culture already knows and believes, their potential for causing change is minimal. If an author wishes to have his work both reflect and change the society, as it is clear that Neihardt does, then he must move beyond conventions but still consciously retain the connection with the culture of which he is a part.

For an American epic poet like Neihardt, the solution is in his recognition of the potential for using history as a poetic source. History, as we tend to conceptualize

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[3] Cawelti, p. 30.

it, is an abstract entity, divorced in most ways from the life we lead in our culture. We think of it as something which happens to us in a way which estranges us from it. We ignore the fact that a culture shapes its history and is shaped by it as well. Henry Nash Smith considers that relationship in Virgin Land: "History cannot happen--that is, men cannot engage in purposive group behavior--without images which simultaneously express collective desires and impose coherence on the infinitely numerous and infinitely varied data of experience."[4] In other words, the ethos of a culture determines--and is, of course, modified by--its history. Similarly, that is why any work of art provides cultural insights when one considers its historical background; thus, in literature, as Richard Kuhn says, ". . . there are not only a set of identifiable objects, but also a 'psychic content,' an expression, which is a reflection of, indeed the expression of, attitudes, presuppositions, beliefs, and the outlook of the artist and the society responsible for the work. It is given as much as objective meaning, but to be fully understood it requires an analysis of the historical background of the work."[5] By examining Neihardt's utilization of history,

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[4] Virgin Land, p. x-xi.

[5] Structures of Experience: Essays on the Affinity Between Philosophy and Literature (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 89.

by recovering his sources and considering the changes he made in them, we can get an accurate picture of cultural values.

Neihardt was able to circumvent the problem of having to rely upon conventions to convey culture-specific materials. It is important to consider his commitment to a more factual kind of "truth" than one generally finds involved in the process of making poetry. As an American epic writer, he is concerned about the mythification of the total culture, and that is clearly a painful task at times. Yet his involvement with that pursuit places him in the midst of twentieth century poetic concerns. If Neihardt wants to make the reader's history accessible to him, then he has to be more concerned with lived truth than constructed truths such as those found in Cooper or Whitman. Wallace Stevens knew the necessity for a pursuit of that kind of undeclared truth: "We keep coming back/ To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns. . . ."[6] Stevens suggests in another poem that the poet should turn his attention to the thing itself instead of the concept of the thing, no matter how painful that activity finally is:

Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky

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[6] "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," The Palm at the End of the Mind, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 336.

> Without evasion by a single metaphor.
> Look at it in its essential barrenness
> And say this, this is the centre that I
> seek.[7]

Neihardt's use of history as the source of his epic is in keeping with this general poetic concern articulated by Stevens.

Neihardt sees that poetry, especially that which chronicles the life of a culture, has to be hard. In his book on poetic values, he says of poetry, "We must insist that it is not less reality that we want but more. . . ."[8] By reality, he meant a kind of tough, hard truth: "Truth, for us, must be limited to the livable" (PV, p. 28). This concern with actual truth, the kind found in history, is at the center of Neihardt's aesthetics. He rejects, fundamentally, the epic as Cooper and Hawthorne sought to present it in the romance: "More and more . . . it has become the proper thing to say that poetry, for instance, creates a world of imagination into which one may escape at times from the stress of reality. But if poetry (and by poetry we mean the essence of all the arts) has no greater function than that, then the practical person should employ not a poet but a bootlegger" (PV, p. 18). As a shaper of

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[7] Stevens, "Credences of Summer," p. 288.

[8] Poetic Values: Their Reality and Our Need of Them (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p. 18. All further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as PV.

culture and as a purveyor of it as well, Neihardt is in the unique position of being able to make readers more aware of their internalized values while at the same time offering both a critique and alternatives.

The method by which Neihardt transforms history into poetry to affect changes in his readers casts light upon both the poetic process and the relationship of the author to his material and his culture. In order to transform history, he must have some larger vision which allows him to employ segments of history in symbolic ways. Neihardt suggests that this is done by having the artist "[regard] his subject matter from the viewpoint of an extended field of attention, and [undertake] to present a given portion of the world in the larger aspect" (PV, p. 94). The extended field of attention is that conscious awareness of one's culture--a knowledge of the ethos, in the case of the epic poet--which allows the selection process that accompanies the use of historical materials to function. Thus, incidents selected by a poet become paradigmatic of cultural behavior and values. Neihardt calls that selection the "creative drama" which ". . . is the process of reconstructing the ordinary representation of the world in keeping with an expanded view of it. . ." (PV, p. 97).

This process of making the small myth that we read out of the larger one that we live is what Neihardt does in A Cycle of the West. In the complete work, Neihardt

looks at the question of heroic action represented in the first volume as physical and in the second volume as religious. The new myth created by these two volumes serves a traditional function. As Joseph Campbell suggests, the function of myth ". . . has been ever that of validating and maintaining some specific social order, authorizing its moral code as a construct beyond criticism or human emendation."[9] By selecting the specific materials for the first three songs of the Cycle, Neihardt orders history in such a way as to clarify the moral code and validate the social order of America's dominant culture. His next problem is to articulate that history in a manner which utilizes symbols chosen from the American mythos.

One can see the process by which Neihardt places his subject in the "extended field of attention" by his choice of the mountain men as subjects of the first volume. As William H. Goetzmann points out in his essay about the mountain men, the period during which mountain men flourished could well have been called "The Age of Expectant Capitalism."[10] Neihardt discusses the mountain men he chooses for his songs in ways which make them a part of

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[9] "Mythological Themes in Creative Literature and Art," Myths, Dreams, and Religion, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), p. 140.

[10] "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," Myth and the American Experience (New York: Glencoe Press, 1973), p. 231.

that age. He establishes the context for their actions by means of his conception of American values, the most representative one. The movement in which they participated as trappers was economically based, and as Goetzmann points out, "If one examines their lives and their stated aspirations, one discovers that the Mountain Men, for all their apparent eccentricities, were astonishingly similar to the common men of their time--plain republican citizens of the Jacksonian era."[11] Thus, Neihardt was able to select for his representative Americans individuals whose actions--which involved courage and physical achievement--and whose values and commitments speak to the broadest level of the American culture.

The myth of the mountain man as an apotheosis of the free and heroic American permeates American frontier literature. Washington Irving sums up that myth through the words of Captain Bonneville in his book The Rocky Mountains:

> There is perhaps, no class of men on the face of the earth . . . who lead a life of more continued exertion, peril, and excitement, and who are more enamoured of their occupations, than the free trappers of the west. No toil, no danger, no privation can turn the trapper from his pursuit. His passionate excitement at times resembles a ma-

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[11] Goetzmann, p. 231.

> nia. In vain may the most vigilant and cruel savages beset his path; in vain may rocks, and precipices, and wintry torrents oppose his progress; let but a single track of a beaver meet his eye, and he forgets all dangers and defies all difficulties. . . . Such is the mountaineer, the hardy trapper of the west; and such as we have slightly sketched it, is the wild, Robin Hood kind of life . . . now existing in full vigor among the Rocky mountains.[12]

By utilizing the elements of this myth--a formulaic pattern of the culture's mythos--and by placing them in his extended field, Neihardt transforms history into poetry. But because he is using history, which he approaches with a hard attitude toward truth, the poetry is not always an affirmation of positive values or concepts; it is not always presenting "pretty" topics. Once it is clear that Neihardt is looking at history as it appears to one who is conscious of the cultural presuppositions which make up the ethos, then Neihardt's use of fundamentally unattractive characters like Mike Fink and his friends is understandable. Neihardt is saying that many American values manifested in behavioral norms are not attractive and need, perhaps, to be changed. He is frequently critical of American norms and suggests that poetic values ought to have practical counterparts (PV, p. v). The characteris-

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[12] The Rocky Mountains: or, Scenes, Incidents, and Adventures in the Far West (Philadelphia, 1837), I, 27, cited in Goetzmann, I, 232.

tics of which he is most critical are the economic and physical preoccupations he stresses in the first volume. Neihardt resists the American notion that our values are the only viable alternatives, are god-given and eternal: "To the general consciousness of the multitude in which this despotic mood of sordid utilitarianism exists, it is as though the prevailing scale of values has always prevailed; as though mankind had always been concerned chiefly with the accumulations of that which represents power to gratify physical needs and many clamoring lusts of animal life" (PV, p. 10). These physical needs and animal responses are the subject matter of the first song. With Neihardt's dislike of the base orientation of Americans is an accompanying criticism of American materialism, which he sees as a prevailing, though surely not positive, ethic: "It is not to the individual minds that one must go to determine the dominating belief of the time, but to the general consciousness revealed in the object of its spontaneous attention. And certainly no one would contend that the laying up of treasures in heaven beyond the reach of moth and rust and the income tax is to be regarded as even one of the key industries of the United States" (PV, p. 12).

These values and the favorable ones represented by Hugh Glass' ability to forgive and Jed Smith's Christian and innate religion are presented in the first volume.

In the second volume, Neihardt turns his attention to those values in a situation where they are tested by their being placed in opposition to another set of cultural norms and beliefs. Here, by generating a real sympathy for the Sioux, Neihardt is able to help the reader perform critical activities in regard to the evaluation of his history. The reader comes to have a genuine understanding for the meaning of his heritage. By presenting the Sioux as a people, cruel and primitive at times, but human and humane nonetheless, Neihardt forces the reader to reevaluate his actual values, the things his culture holds dear.

As we have seen before, truth is not necessarily pleasant, nor does Neihardt intend that it be other than true. If an American epic is not to fade off into abstractions about everyman and consequently no man in particular, then one must confront the culture and its heroes full face. What Neihardt has written is an American epic, but the ambiguity of his vision at the ending of the Cycle, is intentional. The total work is about the heroic, and in defining epic, one is working with the fine line dividing courage and foolhardiness, bravery and cruelty. Because he wishes both to identify and preserve American cultural traits and at the same time to suggest possible alternatives and consider repercussions of them all, he reinforces the irony inherent in the history he uses for the conclusion of the Cycle. Thus, we are left with the

question he intends to leave us with. We must ask what the nature of the heroic is for ourselves. If we decide that those actions which are most heroic end in victory, then we can unequivocally regard as heroes the Americans who opened the West and those who made it safe for settlement. But if we hold the view that the heroic act does not always end in victory, that it can as much involve a transcendence of the self in an act of self-sacrifice, that it can include the futile though courageous gesture, then we are able to say with Neihardt that there is much to learn from those who are not necessarily representative of American values, that there is much that could be learned, in this case, from the Sioux.

One must ask finally how well Neihardt succeeded in what he set out to do. The final assessment of his work must be a mixed one. There are stylistic and poetic problems in his work that are not transcended by the importance of the task he set for himself. The major shortcoming of Neihardt's work lies in his concept of its form. There is a gap between his concept of the subject and his method of treating it. The result is an artificial product in some ways. Despite Neihardt's skillful use of enjambment and the invention of new words--especially his innovative use of hyphenated words--rimed iambic pentameter seems somewhat artificial when it deals with the rough and realistic materials Neihardt chooses. There are also

some problems regarding Neihardt's diction. In her review of Neihardt's "Epics of the West," Harriet Monroe pinpoints the effect of this poetic diction on the total poem: "Figures which should be hewn in granite are carved in wax, and are less than life-size in the picturesque pageant which moves so adroitly through these . . . pages. Words like unwitting, deem, youngling dream, twixt, ageless, morn, merry, jest, gauds . . . classical allusions to Clotho, the Styx, Helen, Ariadne and many others, distort this picture and distract the mind."[13] Finally, though, these distractions are just that. There are occasional lapses, but when Neihardt is working with his narrative, one forgets the verse form.

Despite the somewhat archaic verse form and language, Neihardt's Cycle is a significant work. His use of history to serve as the foundation for a poetry of change points the new direction for the American epic. It allows for a new use of history in the creation of authentic heroes, and it provides an opportunity for the new epic to be one of hard and tough reality, something which Barlow, Whitman, and Cooper never foresaw in their work. Neihardt's work is important also for what it teaches us about the poetic process. Through an examination of it,

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[13] "What of Mr. Neihardt?" Poetry, 30 (May 1927), 104.

we gain insight into the ways the poet is able to filter the larger aspects of his world through his individual consciousness of his culture. History is recoverable to us in ways that most poetic inspiration is not, and, as a result, the selection and transformative process becomes accessible. Finally, Neihardt's Cycle is useful in cultural as well as in literary ways. Because Neihardt does not rely entirely upon either cultural conventions or upon recognized cultural symbols, an examination of his work clarifies the mechanisms by which the spirit of the culture manifests itself in the literary documents of the culture. By creating heroes grounded in another cultural ethos--in this case, the native American--Neihardt clarifies the process by which a culture adds to its pantheon of heroes. Thus Neihardt shows us the seeker and his goal in a small segment of history in such a way that we are able to see that it is identical to the larger world which we inhabit. He is able to do what all visionaries have done and what he hoped to show in the person of Jed Smith--that by having an unflinching view of the small reality immediately before him, a person can know the larger reality which is reflected in it.

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