

Literature 2.2.2

Literature



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Native American Poetry “ The Cities of White Men” Those men build many houses: The white settlers seem many to the Native Americans, and they seem to need a lot of buildings

They dig the earth, and they build;

They cut down the trees, and they build;

They work always — building.

Cutting down the trees to clear land and collect building materials seems more important to these people than anything else, and they always seem to be doing it.

From the elevation of the mountainside

I behold the clouds:

The clouds build many beautiful houses in the sky:

They build, and they tear down;

They build, and they dissolve. . . .

The author here is discussing both true cloud “ houses” and comparing them metaphorically to teepee cities of his people. The Native American teepee settlements can be put up and torn down in a matter of hours, without marring the landscape, whereas the “ white mans cities” are permanent and destructive.

The cities of white men,

They are not beautiful like the cloud cities;

They are not vast, like the cloud cities. . . .

The author does not appreciate the progress of the new cities, and prefers the impermanence of the Native American teepee settlements.

A wind-swept teepee

Is all the house I own. . . .

Perhaps the author here wishes that the white men of the cities recognize that they do not need such large buildings and extravagant houses.

“ The Blizzard”

Whipped onwards by the North Wind

The air is filled with the dust of driven snow

The earth is hidden,

The sky is hidden,

All things are hidden,

The air is filled with stinging,

Before, behind, above, below,

Who can turn his face from it?

All the animals drift mourning, mourning

Only the Gray Wolf laughs.

This is a poetic description of winter weather, the white out blizzards that are common on the plains of the Midwest. The stinging snow blows in every direction and there is no escape for any animal except, according to the author, the gray wolf.

Who are ye who wallow in the winds?

Who are ye who strike with stinging blows?

Man beings out of the North?

Beast beings out of the North?

Snow beings with fingers of thin ice?

The white men of the North are being compared here both to the blizzards and to animals. The buildings and the civilization of the new settlers are as destructive to the land as the winter blizzards.

I am a Daughter of the South:

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My lips are soft, my breath is warm,

My heart is beating wildly,

I cannot live in the cold

All my animals drift mourning, mourning

Only the gaunt Gray Wolf is laughing.

The destruction caused by the invasion of civilization destroys both the Native Americans and the animals of the area.

To-morrow three suns will rise, side by side

All the earth will be covered with dazzling snow,

Cold, cold, and very quiet

The animals will lie buried in the snow,

Cold, and very quiet

But the gaunt Gray Wolf will break a new trail,

Running, with three shadows blue upon the snow.

Moving forward into the future, the growth of civilization will continue to destroy the land and the animals. However, the author references that the animals are “ sleeping”, indicating that they may one day return, and that the Gray Wolf will “ break a new trail” and return to dominance.

Both of these poems take a very negative view of the civilization style of the newcomers. The houses and buildings of the “ white man” are seen to have a permanent, destructive, effect on the land around them. However, “ The Blizzard” chooses to show this effect by comparing it to another destructive natural phenomena, winter. The imagery used in the second poem is violent. In “ The Cities of White Men” the author chooses a much softer, sadder tone, contrasting the cities with the calmness of a partly cloudy sky. A similarity

again, though, is that both authors choose a natural event as a metaphor, even though they are describing a man-made city.