

56 QUOTATIONS



Black Elk

(1863-1950)

Black Elk of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux) related his life story *Black Elk Speaks* (1932) through an interpreter to the poet John Neihardt, who edited the book in English. “As I sit here, I can feel in this man beside me a strong desire to know the things of the Other World. He has been sent to learn what I know, and I will teach him.” *Black Elk Speaks* is the major work of Native American literature, for its historical significance, resonance, unity, narrative power, archetypal thinking, metaphorical language, transcendent vision, humanity and majestic style.

ORDER OF TOPICS: Black Elk speaks, archetypal order, pantheism, whites, voices, vision, reviving the waste land, spiritual rebirth, war, battle of the Little Big Horn, Crazy Horse, the black road, circles, man and woman, despair, wild west show, majesty, messiah, massacre at Wounded Knee:

Excerpts from *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* as told through John G. Neihardt (1932; U Nebraska, 1961):

BLACK ELK SPEAKS

My friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life, as you wish; and if it were only the story of my life I think I would not tell it; for what is one man that he should make much of his winters, even when they bend him like a heavy snow? So many other men have lived and shall live that story, to be grass upon the hills. It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit....

ARCHETYPAL ORDER

See, I fill this sacred pipe with the bark of the red willow... These four ribbons hanging here on the stem are the four quarters of the universe. The black one is for the west where the thunder beings live to send us rain; the white one for the north, whence comes the great white cleansing wind; the red one for the east, whence springs the light and where the morning star lives to give men wisdom; the yellow for the south, whence come the summer and the power to grow.

PANTHEISM

But these four spirits are only one Sprit after all, and this eagle feather here is for that One which is like a father, and also it is for the thoughts of men that should rise high as eagles do. Is not the sky a father and the earth a mother, and are not all living things with feet or wings or roots their children? And this hide upon the mouthpiece here, which should be bison hide, is for the earth, from whence we came and at whose breast we suck as babies all our lives, along with all the animals and birds and trees and grasses. And because it means all this, and more than any man can understand, the pipe is holy....

WHITES

I remember once that I asked my grandfather... "When the scouts come back from seeing the prairie full of bison somewhere the people say the Wasichus [whites] are coming...to kill us all... What does it mean?" And he said, "That there are many." When I was older, I learned what fighting was about that winter and the next summer. Up on the Madison Fork the Wasichus had found much of the yellow metal that they worship and that makes them crazy.... All this time I was not allowed to play very far away from our teepee, and my mother would say, "If you are not good the Wasichus will get you..."

Fire Thunder Speaks: It was very bad. There is a wide flat prairie with hills around it, and in the middle of this the Wasichus had put the boxes of their wagons in a circle, so that they could keep their mules there at night. There were not many Wasichus, but they were lying behind the boxes and they shot faster than they ever shot at us before. We thought it was some new medicine of great power that they had, for they shot so fast that it was like tearing a blanket.... Then 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....

VOICES

Maybe it was not this summer when I first heard the voices, but I think it was, because I know it was before I played with bows and arrows or rode a horse, and I was out playing alone when I heard them. It was like somebody calling me, and I thought it was my mother, but there was nobody there. This happened more than once, and always made me afraid, so that I ran home. It was when I was five years old that my Grandfather made me a bow and some arrows. The grass was young and I was horseback... This was not a dream, it happened. And I was going to shoot at the kingbird with the bow my Grandfather made, when the bird spoke... "Listen! A voice is calling you!" Then I looked up at the clouds, and two men were coming there, headfirst like arrows slanting down...

VISION

They came clear down to the ground...and stood a little way off and looked at me and said: "Hurry! Come! Your Grandfathers are calling you!" Then they turned and left the ground like arrows slanting upward from the bow. When I got up to follow, my legs did not hurt me any more and I was very light. I went outside the teepee, and yonder where the men with flaming spears were going, a little cloud was coming very fast. It came and took me and turned back to where it came from, flying fast. And when I looked down I could see my mother and my father yonder, and I felt sorry to be leaving them.

Then there was nothing but the air and the swiftness of the little cloud that bore me and those two men still leading up to where white clouds were piled like mountains on a wide blue plain, and in them thunder beings lived and leaped and flashed. Now suddenly there was nothing but a world of cloud, and we three were there alone in the middle of a great white plain with snowy hills and mountains staring at us; and it was very still; but there were whispers. Then the two men spoke together and they said: "Behold him, the being with four legs!"

I looked and saw a bay horse standing there, and he began to speak: "Behold me!" he said, "My life-history you shall see." Then he wheeled about to where the sun goes down, and said: "Behold them! Their history you shall know."

I looked, and there were twelve black horses yonder all abreast with necklaces of bison hoofs, and they were beautiful, but I was frightened, because their manes were lightning and there was thunder in their nostrils. Then the bay horse wheeled to where the great white giant lives (the north) and said: "Behold!" And yonder there were twelve white horses all abreast. Their manes were flowing like a blizzard wind and from their noses came a roaring, and all about them white geese soared and circled. Then the bay wheeled round to where the sun shines continually (the east) and bade me look; and there twelve sorrel horses, with necklaces of elk's teeth, stood abreast with eyes that glimmered like the day-break star and manes of morning light.

Then the bay wheeled once again to look upon the place where you are always facing (the south), and yonder stood twelve buckskins all abreast with horns upon their heads and manes that lived and grew like trees and grasses. And when I had seen all these, the bay horse said: "Your Grandfathers are having a council. These shall take you; so have courage."

Then all the horses went into formation, four abreast—the blacks, the whites, the sorrels, and the buckskins—and stood behind the bay, who turned now to the west and neighed; and yonder suddenly the sky was terrible with a storm of plunging horses in all colors that shook the world with thunder, neighing back. Now turning to the north the bay horse whinnied, and yonder all the sky roared with a mighty wind of running horses in all colors, neighing back. And when he whinnied to the east, there too the sky was filled with glowing clouds of manes and tails of horses in all colors singing back. Then to the south he called, and it was crowded with many colored, happy horses, nickering. Then the bay horse spoke to me again and said: "See how your horses all come dancing!" I looked and there were horses, horses everywhere—a whole skyful of horses dancing round me.

"Make haste!" the bay horse said; and we walked together side by side, while the blacks, the whites, the sorrels, and the buckskins followed, marching four by four. I looked about me once again, and suddenly the dancing horses without number changed into animals of every kind and into all the fowls that are, and these fled back to the four quarters of the world from whence the horses came, and vanished. Then as we walked, there was a heaped up cloud ahead that changed into a teepee, and a rainbow was the open door of it; and through the door I saw six old men sitting in a row. The two men with the spears now stood beside me, one on either hand, and the horses took their places in their quarters, looking inward, four by four. And the oldest of the Grandfathers spoke with a kind voice and said: "Come right in and do not fear." And as he spoke, all the horses of the four quarters neighed to cheer me. So I went in and stood before the six, and they looked older than men can ever be—old like the hills, like stars.

The oldest spoke again: "Your Grandfathers all over the world are having a council, and they have called you here to teach you." His voice was very kind, but I shook all over with fear now, for I knew that these were not old men, but the Powers of the World.... I knew this, and was afraid, until the first Grandfather spoke again: "Behold them yonder where the sun goes down, the thunder beings! You shall see, and have from them my power; and they shall take you to the high and lonely center of the earth that you may see; even to the place where the sun continually shines, they shall take you there to understand."

And as he spoke of understanding, I looked up and saw the rainbow leap with flames of many colors over me. Now there was a wooden cup in his hand and it was full of water and in the water was the sky. "Take this," he said. "It is the power to make live, and it is yours." Now he had a bow in his hands. "Take this," he said. "It is the power to destroy, and it is yours." Then he pointed to himself and said: "Look close at him who is your spirit now, for you are his body and his name is Eagle Wing Stretches."

And saying this, he got up very tall and started running toward where the sun goes down; and suddenly he was a black horse that stopped and turned and looked at me, and the horse was very poor and sick; his ribs stood out. Then the second Grandfather, he of the North, arose with an herb of power in his hand, and said: "Take this and hurry." I took and held it toward the black horse yonder. He fattened and was happy and came prancing to his place again and was the first Grandfather sitting there. The second grandfather, he of the north, spoke again: "Take courage, younger brother," he said; "the earth a nation you shall make live, for yours shall be the power of the white giant's wing, the cleansing wind..."

And now it was the third Grandfather who spoke, he of where the sun shines continually...he held in his hand a peace pipe which had a spotted eagle outstretched upon the stem; and this eagle seemed alive, for it was poised there, fluttering, and its eyes were looking at me. "With this pipe," the grandfather said, "you shall walk upon the earth, and whatever sickens there you shall make well"...

And now the fourth Grandfather spoke, he of the place where you are always facing (the south), whence comes the power to grow. "Younger brother," he said, "with the powers of the four quarters you shall walk, a relative. Behold, the living center of a nation I shall give you, and with it many you shall serve." And I saw that he was holding in his hand a bright red stick that was alive, and as I looked it sprouted at the top and sent forth branches, and on the branches many leaves came out and murmured and in the leaves the birds began to sing. And then for just a little while I thought I saw beneath it in the shade the circled villages of people and every living thing with roots or legs or wings, and all were happy. "It shall stand in the center of the nation's circle," said the Grandfather, "a cane to walk with and a people's heart; and by your powers you shall make it blossom."

Then when he had been still a little while to hear the birds sing, he spoke again: "Behold the earth!" So I looked down and saw it lying yonder like a hoop of peoples, and in the center bloomed the holy stick that was a tree, and where it stood there crossed two roads, a red one and a black. "From where the giant lives (the north) to where you always face (the south) the red road goes, the road of good," the Grandfather said, "and on it shall your nation walk. The black road goes from where the thunder beings live (the west) to where the sun continually shines (the east), a fearful road, a road of troubles and of war. On this also you shall walk, and from it you shall have the power to destroy a people's foes. In four ascents you shall walk the earth with power.

I think he meant that I should see four generations, counting me, and now I am seeing the third. Then he rose very tall and started running toward the south, and was an elk; and as he stood among the buckskins yonder, they too were elks. Now the fifth Grandfather spoke, the oldest of them all, the Spirit of the Sky. "My boy," he said, "I have sent for you and you have come. My power you shall see!" He stretched his arms and turned into a spotted eagle hovering. "Behold," he said, "all the wings of the air shall come to you, and they and the winds and the stars shall be like relatives. You shall go across the earth with my power." Then the eagle soared above my head and fluttered there; and suddenly the sky was full of friendly wings all coming toward me.

Now I knew the sixth Grandfather was about to speak, he who was the Spirit of the Earth, and I saw that he was very old, but more as men are old. His hair was long and white, his face was all in wrinkles and his eyes were deep and dim. I stared at him, for it seemed I knew him somehow; and as I stared, he slowly changed, for he was growing backwards into youth, and when he had become a boy, I knew that he was myself with all the years that would be mine at last. When he was old again, he said: "My boy, have courage, for my power shall be yours, and you shall need it, for your nation on the earth will have great troubles. Come." He rose and tottered out through the rainbow door, and as I followed I was riding on the bay horse who had talked to me at first and led me to that place....

Now the earth was bright again as we rode. I could see the hills and valleys and the creeks and rivers passing under. We came above a place where three streams made a big one—a source of mighty waters—and something terrible was there. Flames were rising from the waters and in the flames a blue man lived. The dust was floating all about him in the air, the grass was short and withered, the trees were wilting, two-legged and four-legged beings lay there thin and panting, and wings too weak to fly....they all cried together: “Eagle Wing Stretches, *hurry!*”

REVIVING THE WASTE LAND

And all the world was filled with voices of all kinds that cheered me, so I charged. I had the cup of water in one hand and in the other was the bow that turned into a spear as the bay and I swooped down and the spear’s head was sharp lightning. It stabbed the blue man’s heart, and as it struck I could hear the thunder rolling and many voices that cried “*Un-heel!*,” meaning I had killed. The flames died. The trees and grasses were not withered any more and murmured happily together, and every living being cried in gladness... You see, I had been riding with the storm clouds, and had come to earth as rain, and it was drought that I had killed with the power that the Six Grandfathers gave me.

So we were riding on the earth now down along the river flowing full from the source of waters, and soon I saw ahead the circled village of a people in the valley. And a Voice said: “Behold a nation; it is yours. Make haste, Eagle Wing Stretches!” I entered the village, riding, with the four horse troops behind me—the blacks, the whites, the sorrels, and the buckskins; and the place was filled with moaning and with mourning for the dead. The wind was blowing from the south like fever, and when I looked around I saw that in nearly every teepee the women and the children and the men lay dying with the dead....I felt like crying as I rode. But when I looked behind me, all the women and the children and the men were getting up and coming forth with happy faces. And a Voice said: “Behold, they have given you the center of the nation’s hoop to make it live.... Behold the circle of the nation’s hoop, for it is holy, being endless, and thus all powers shall be one power in the people without end”...

And as we went the Voice behind me said: “Behold a good nation walking in a sacred manner in a good land!” Then I looked up and saw that there were four ascents ahead, and these were generations I should know.... And as they walked the third ascent, all the animals and fowls that were the people ran here and there, for each one seemed to have his own little vision that he followed and his own rules; and all over the universe I could hear the winds at war like wild beasts fighting. And when we reached the summit of the third ascent and camped, the nation’s hoop was broken like a ring of smoke that spreads and scatters and the holy tree seemed dying and all its birds were gone. And then I looked ahead and I saw that the fourth ascent would be terrible....

Now I was on my bay horse again, because the horse is of the earth, and it was there my power would be used.... Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all [Harney Peak, Black Hills: “But anywhere is the center of the world,” said Black Elk], and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy....

As I rode through the rainbow door, there were cheering voices from all over the universe, and I saw the Six Grandfathers sitting in a row with their arms held toward me and their hands, palms out; and behind them in the cloud were faces thronging, without number, of the people yet to be.... I looked below and saw my people there, and all were happy except one, and he was lying like the dead—and that one was myself.... And as I entered the teepee, some one was saying: “The boy is coming to; you had better give him some water.” Then I was sitting up; and I was sad because my mother and my father didn’t seem to know I had been so far away....

SPIRITUAL REBIRTH

They told me I had been sick for twelve days, lying like dead all the while, and that Whirlwind Chaser, who was Standing Bear's uncle and a medicine man, had brought me back to life. I knew it was the Grandfathers in the Flaming Rainbow Teepee who had cured me; but I felt afraid to say so....I was only nine years old. Also, as I lay there thinking of my vision, I could see it all again and feel the meaning with a part of me like a strange power glowing in my body; but when the part of me that talks would try to make words for the meaning, it would be like fog and get away from me.... It was as I grew older that the meanings came clearer and clearer out of the pictures and the words; and even now I know that more was shown to me than I can tell. The evening of the day when I came back, Whirlwind Chaser...came over to our teepee. He sat down and looked at me a long time in a strange way, and then he said to my father: "Your boy there is sitting in a sacred manner. I do now know what it is, but there is something special for him to do, for just as I came in I could see a power like a light all through his body."

WAR

I was ten years old that winter, and that was the first time I ever saw a Wasichu. At first I thought they all looked sick, and I was afraid they might just begin to fight us any time, but I got used to them.... When the men paint their faces black, the women all rejoice and make the tremolo, because it means their men are going to kill enemies.... The soldiers killed as many women and children and men as they could [Six companies of U.S Cavalry attacked his village early in the morning of 16 March 1876].... When the war party was getting ready, I made up my mind that, small as I was, I might as well die there, and if I did, maybe I'd be known. I told Jumping Horse, a boy about my age, that I was going along to die, and he said he would too. So we went, and so did Crab and some other boys.

When the Wasichus saw us coming, they put their wagons in a circle and got inside with their oxen. We rode around and around them in a wide circle that kept getting narrower. That is the best way to fight, because it is hard to hit ponies running fast in a circle. And sometimes there would be two circles, one inside the other, going fast in opposite directions, which made us still harder to hit. The cavalry of the Wasichus did not know how to fight. They kept together, and when they came on, you could hardly miss them. We kept apart in the circle.... The soldiers came there to kill us, and many got rubbed out. It was our country and we did not want to have trouble....

BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIG HORN (1876)

Soon the soldiers were all crowded into the river, and many Lakota too; and I was in the water awhile. Men and horses were all mixed up and fighting in the water, and it was like hail falling in the river. Then we were out of the river, and people were stripping dead soldiers and putting the clothes on themselves. There was a soldier on the ground and he was still kicking. A Lakota rode up and said to me: "Boy, get off and scalp him." I got off and started to do it. He had short hair and my knife was not very sharp. He ground his teeth. Then I shot him in the forehead and got his scalp.... My mother gave a big tremolo just for me when she saw my first scalp.... We were all crazy... A man by the name of Little Bear rode up to me on a pinto horse, and he had a very pretty saddle blanket. He said: "Take courage, boy! The earth is all that lasts!... It is a good day to die!"

I met a soldier on horseback, and I let him have it. The arrow went through from side to side under his ribs and it stuck out on both sides. He screamed and took hold of his saddle horn and hung on, wobbling, with his head hanging down. I kept along beside him, and I took my heavy bow and struck him across the back of the neck. He fell from his saddle, and I got off and beat him to death with my bow. I kept on beating him awhile after he was dead, and every time I hit him I said "*Hownh!*" I was mad, because I was thinking of the women and little children running down there, all scared and out of breath. These Wasichus wanted it, and they came to get it, and we gave it to them.... The soldiers were all rubbed out there and scattered around.

The women swarmed up the hill and began stripping the soldiers. They were yelling and laughing and singing now. I saw something funny. Two fat old women were stripping a soldier, who was wounded and playing dead. When they had him naked, they began to cut something off that he had, and he jumped up and began fighting with the two fat women. He was swinging one of them around, while the other was trying to stab him with her knife. After awhile, another woman rushed up and shoved her knife into him and he died really dead. It was funny to see the naked Wasichu fighting with the fat women.... Many other little boys had come up by this time, and we rode around shooting arrows into the Wasichus. There was one who was squirming around with arrows sticking in him, and I started to take his coat, but a man pushed me away and took the coat for himself....

There was a soldier who was raising his arms and groaning. I shot an arrow into his forehead, and his arms and legs quivered.... I saw some Lakotas holding another Lakota up.... He was my cousin, and his father and my father were so angry over this, that they went and butchered a Wasichu and cut him open. The Wasichu was fat, and his meat looked good to eat, but we did not eat any.... I was a happy boy. Those Wasichus had come to kill our mothers and fathers and us, and it was our country....

CRAZY HORSE

Crazy Horse was an Ogalala too, and I think he was the greatest chief of all.... Afterwhile we came to the village on Powder River and went into camp at the downstream end. I was anxious to see my cousin Crazy Horse again, for now that it began to look like bad trouble coming, everybody talked about him more than ever and he seemed greater than before.... It was his sacred power that made the Crows afraid of him when he charged...he became a chief because of the power he got in a vision when he was a boy....Crazy Horse dreamed and went into the world where there is nothing but the spirits of things. That is the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world. He was on his horse in that world, and the horse and himself on it and the trees and the grass and the stones and everything were made of spirit...

It was this vision that gave him his great power, for when he went into a fight, he had only to think of that world to be in it again, so that he could go through anything and not be hurt. Until he was murdered by the Wasichus at the Soldiers' Town on White River, he was wounded only twice...he never kept one horse long. They wore out. I think it was only the power of his great vision that made him great...his eyes looked through things and he always seemed to be thinking hard about something.... They say that when game was scarce and the people were hungry, he would not eat at all.... Maybe he was always part way into that world of his vision. He was a very great man, and I think if the Wasichus had not murdered him down there, maybe we should still have the Black Hills and be happy.

They could not have killed him in battle.... They told Crazy Horse they would not harm him if he would go to the Soldier's Town and have a talk with the Wasichu chief there. But they lied.... Crazy Horse came in with the rest of his people and the ponies that were only skin and bones. There were soldiers and Lakota policemen in lines all around him when he surrendered there at the Soldier's Town. I saw him take off his war bonnet.... They took him to the little prison with iron bars on the windows, for they had planned to get rid of him. And when he saw what they were doing, he turned around and took his knife out of his robe and started out against all those soldiers.... And while they were struggling, a soldier ran a bayonet into Crazy Horse from one side at the back and he fell down and began to die.... I cried all night, and so did my father.... And he was only about thirty years old when he died.... [1877] Then they put him in a box, and I heard that they had to cut him in two because the box was not long enough.... It does not matter where his body lies, for it is grass; but where his spirit is, it will be good to be....

THE BLACK ROAD

How could men get fat by being bad, and starve by being good? I thought and thought about my vision, and it made me very sad; for I wondered if maybe it was only a queer dream after all.... I was fifteen years old that winter, and I thought much of my vision and wondered when my duty was to come; for the Grandfathers had shown me my people walking on the black road and how the nation's hoop would be broken and the flowering tree be withered, before I should bring the hoop together with the power that was given me, and make the holy tree to flower in the center and find the red road again....

You have noticed that the truth comes into this world with two faces. One is sad with suffering, and the other laughs; but it is the same face, laughing or weeping. When people are already in despair, maybe the laughing face is better for them; and when they feel too good and are too sure of being safe, maybe the weeping face is better for them to see. And so I think that is what the heyoka ceremony is for.... After the heyoka ceremony, I came to live here where I am now between Wounded Knee Creek and Grass Creek. Others came too, and we made these little gray houses of logs that you see, and they are square. It is a bad way to live, for there can be no power in a square.

CIRCLES

You have noticed that 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.... The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children. But the Wasichus have put us in these square boxes. Our power is gone and we are dying, for the power is not in us anymore....

MAN AND WOMAN

It is from understanding that power comes; and the power in the ceremony was in understanding what it meant... The woman is the life of the flowering tree, but the man must feed and care for it....the power of the man encircles and protects the power of the woman....

DESPAIR

I looked back on the past and recalled my people's old ways, but they were not living that way any more. They were traveling the black road, everybody for himself and with little rules of his own, as in my vision. I was in despair, and I even thought that if the Wasichus had a better way, then maybe my people should live that way. I know now that this was foolish, but I was young and in despair....

WILD WEST SHOW

But late in my twenty-third summer (1886), it seemed that there was a little hope. There came to us some Wasichus who wanted a band of Ogalala for a big show that [Long Hair, Buffalo Bill] had. They told us this show would go across the big water to strange lands, and I thought I ought to go, because I might learn some secret of the Wasichu that would help my people somehow....

I was surprised at the big houses and so many people, and there were bright lights at night, so that you could not see the stars... We stayed there and made shows for many, many Wasichus all that winter. I liked the part of the show we made, but not the part the Wasichus made. Afterwhile I got used to being there, but I was like a man who had never had a vision. I felt dead and my people seemed lost and I thought I might never find them again. I did not see anything to help my people. I could see that the Wasichus did not care for each other the way our people did before the nation's hoop was broken. They would take everything from each other if they could, and so there were some who had more of everything than they could use, while crowds of people had nothing at all and maybe were starving. They had forgotten that the earth was their mother. This could not be better than the old ways of my people...the Wasichus had even the grass penned up....

MAJESTY

The name of this very big town was London. We were on land now, but we still felt dizzy as though we were still on water, and at first it was hard to walk. We stayed in this place six moons; and many, many people came to see the show. One day we were told that Majesty was coming.... We stood right in front of Grandmother England [Queen Victoria]. She was little but fat and we liked her, because she was good to us. After we had danced, she spoke to us.... "All over the world I have seen all kinds of people; but to-day I have seen the best-looking people I know. If you belonged to me, I would not let them take you around in a show like this." She said other good things too, and then she said we must come to see her, because she had come to see us. She shook hands with all of us....

Then we saw Grandmother England again. She was sitting in the back of the wagon and two women sat in the front, facing her. Her dress was all shining and her hat was all shining and her wagon was all shining and so were the horses. She looked like a fire coming.... When she came to where we were, her wagon stopped and she stood up. Then all those people stood up and roared and bowed to her; but she bowed to us. We sent up a great cry and our women made the tremolo. The people in the crowd were so excited that we heard some of them got sick and fell over.... We liked Grandmother England, because we could see that she was a fine woman, and she was good to us. Maybe if she had been our Grandmother, it would have been better for our people....

MESSIAH

There was hunger among my people before I went away across the big water, because the Wasichus did not give us all the food they promised in the Black Hills treaty.... So the people were hungry before I went away. But it was worse when I came back. My people looked pitiful. There was a big drought, and the rivers and creeks seemed to be drying... The Wasichus had slaughtered all the bison and shut us up in pens. It looked as though we might all starve to death. We could not eat lies... My father died in the first part of the winter from the bad sickness that many people had. This made me very sad....

Then it was spring (1890), and I heard that these men had all come back from the west and that they said it was all true...people said it was really the son of the Great Spirit who was out there; that when he came to the Wasichus a long time ago, they had killed him; but he was coming to the Indians this time.... I heard many wonderful things about the Wanekia [messiah] that these men had seen and heard, and they were good men. He could make animals talk, and once while they were with him he made a spirit vision, and they all saw it.... So I got on my horse and went to this ghost dance on Wounded Knee Creek...

So I dressed myself in a sacred manner... I thought of my father and my brother and sister who had left us, and I could not keep the tears from running out of my eyes. I raised my face up to keep them back, but they came out just the same. I cried with my whole heart, and while I cried I thought of my people in despair. I thought of my vision, and how it was promised me that my people should have a place in this earth where they could be happy every day. I thought of them on the wrong road now, but maybe they could be brought back into the hoop again and to the good road.... Because of my vision and the power they knew I had, I was asked to lead the dance next morning.... As we were dancing I had the same queer feeling I had before, as though my feet were off the earth...

Against the tree there was a man standing with arms held wide in front of him. I looked hard at him, and I could not tell what people he came from. He was not a Wasichu and he was not an Indian. His hair was long and hanging loose, and on the left side of his head he wore an eagle feather. His body was strong and good to see, and it was painted red. I tried to recognize him, but I could not make him out. He was a very fine-looking man. While I was staring hard at him, his body began to change and became very beautiful with all colors of light, and around him there was light. He spoke like singing: "My life is such that all earthly beings and growing things belong to me. Your father, the Great Spirit, has said this. You too must say this." Then he went out like a light in a wind....

MASSACRE AT WOUNDED KNEE (1890)

In the morning the soldiers began to take all the guns away from the Big Foots, who were camped in the flat below the little hill where the monument and burying ground are now. The people stacked most of their guns, and even their knives, by the teepee where Big Foot was lying sick.... The people were nearly surrounded, and the wagon-guns were pointing at them. Some had not yet given up their guns, and so the soldiers were searching all the teepees, throwing things around and poking into everything. There was a man called Yellow Bird, and he and another man were standing in front of the teepee where Big Foot was lying sick. They had white sheets around and over them, with eyeholes to look through, and they had guns under these. An officer came to search them. He took the other man's gun, and then started to take Yellow Bird's. But Yellow Bird would not let go. He wrestled with the officer, and while they were wrestling, the gun went off and killed the officer.

Wasichus and some others have said he meant to do this, but Dog Chief was standing right there, and he told me it was not so. As soon as the gun went off, Dog Chief told me, an officer shot and killed Big Foot who was lying sick inside the teepee. Then suddenly nobody knew what was happening, except that the soldiers were all shooting and the wagon-guns began going off right in among the people. Many were shot down right there. The women and children ran into the gulch and up west, dropping all the time, for the soldiers shot them as they ran. There were only about a hundred warriors and there were nearly five hundred soldiers.... They fought soldiers with only their hands until they got their guns. Dog Chief saw Yellow Bird run into a teepee with his gun, and from there he killed soldiers until the teepee caught fire. Then he died full of bullets....

I painted my face all red, and in my hair I put one eagle feather for the One Above.... I started out alone on the old road that ran across the hills to Wounded Knee. I had no gun. I carried only the sacred bow of the west that I had seen in my great vision.... We rode fast, and there were about twenty of us now. The shooting was getting louder.... Cavalrymen were riding along the gulch and shooting into it, where the women and children were running away and trying to hide in the gullies and the stunted pines.... There were two little boys at one place in this gulch. They had guns and they had been killing soldiers all by themselves. We could see the soldiers they had killed.... By now many other Lakotas, who had heard the shooting, were coming up from Pine Ridge, and we all charged on the soldiers. They ran eastward toward where the trouble began....

Dead and wounded women and children and little babies were scattered all along there where they had been trying to run away. The soldiers had followed along the gulch, as they ran, and murdered them in there. Sometimes they were in heaps because they had huddled together, and some were scattered all along. Sometimes bunches of them had been killed and torn to pieces where the wagon guns hit them. I saw a little baby trying to suck its mother, but she was bloody and dead.... When I saw this I wished that I had died too, but I was not sorry for the women and children. It was better for them to be happy in the other world, and I wanted to be there too...after the soldiers marched away from their dirty work, a heavy snow began to fall.... There was a big blizzard, and it grew very cold. The snow drifted deep in the crooked gulch, and it was one long grave of butchered women and children and babies, who had never done any harm and were only trying to run away....

And so it was over.

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.

