

**THE COMPLETE LETTERS AND POEMS  
OF  
BUFFALO BILL CODY AND ANNIE OAKLEY  
1870-1917**

Don Eulert

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“ Buffalo Bill's adventures and Salgari's voyages carried me far into the world of dreams. My first loves, the purest ones, found expressions in letters to Blanca Wilson, the blacksmith's daughter. “

--P. Neruda

Note

The quotes in “ Some Ghost Dancing” are from Sell and Weybright's BUFFALO BILL AND THE WILD WEST (Oxford, 1955).

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## **A Homemade Education**

## TUMBLING BACKWARD

1. As if i am ten  
actual rabbits  
come out around  
the rockpile at  
sunset light pink in  
the grass holding  
their blood

my brother has two of them by  
their back feet they had gone  
through the chicken wire he  
staked around the garden

its water ditch  
stands full of  
horse-hair  
larvae they  
wiggle on a  
stick the  
actual/ moves:  
2

.  
i am in the empty  
hay wagon  
bouncing off my  
feet i am six i can  
only hold on  
the reins tied around my neck

the black horses know the way they hurry towards the barn i worry about the stump  
coming here the road bows double which way can i make them go onto it/ no it washes  
over /farther back:

3.  
in the limestone tenant house i  
am standing in the screened  
porch the cedars have the  
wind the wind is through the  
three- sided screened porch/  
the wind  
comes down through the cut  
in the cliffs

the door is  
latched too high

for a three-year-  
old i am alone  
am silent

there is nothing in  
the garden bare  
trees along the  
river three crows  
over there i have  
no brother nor  
three sisters/ a  
mother a father  
only the wind says  
somethingi have  
my hand out on it  
am living beside  
stones my father  
laid/  
they go up the bluff  
a road/ this  
builds and builds receding

## **A WOMAN CRYING**

He was seven, he leaped through the door at her outcries to this picture: stove pipe collapsed in pieces across the floor, one joint angling from the wall, and half across the room, the black snout over the stove buckled and pointed downward, his mother's head down under the man's arm her ass up, spanking sounds like the snicking of bolts of rifles surrounding a gunfighter going it alone, his father's fusillade of orders sent him reeling in whirls of dark soot

## THE CHRISTENING

At five Annie watches her father get up to  
stalk a deer. She, in early dawn, creeps out  
of her sleeping roll. She can see him at first,  
then she follows his sound  
then because of the quiet she runs. She hears a shot

She is running out of the  
brush into the  
clearing  
where her father is  
running towards  
the deer  
which is running with its  
body head  
rocking  
going nowhere  
its legs knotted



## THE RIFLE

After he won the rifle from the hardware store by guessing the number of bullets in a jar

the older kids tried to trade him out of it figuring they needed it worse than he did, and

finally got together in a compact of jealousy to steal it from him. The way he remembers it before he was old enough to use the rifle heavy with its scope, his mother shot up all the bullets standing in the front yard shooting in the air to scare them off, whoever they were out there

whatever it was scraping around at odd hours, her husband off at the sawmill, something watching her.

**INTERSECTION**

In the one-room country  
school about 18 altogether

doesn't matter if you come in last  
choosing teams at recess

just the way it is kid you'll  
get your chance in the 8<sup>th</sup>  
grade

along with the gist of algebra  
concepts of geometry

Bill will track the grade of  
trails with the horizontal  
eye of buffalo

see herds of railroad cars  
coming his way

in both directions the tracks narrow  
in the distance disappear

## THE ONE AND ONLY

He was a horse to remember, Willie, the only colt  
of Queen, she sorrel tall mare had a fistula on  
her right shoulder, a lump that drained  
she'd hit it on something  
hard enough to bruise, bone-deep,  
otherwise she was sound, lived long  
graceful in her body her mane and tail  
more like a palomino a blonde switch on  
a happy rump in running.

That Arabian they hired,  
she waited until he reared to stud, and cracked  
both hind feet against his chest once twice thrice  
until the men twitched a rope around her bottom  
jaw and liplike a tourniquet until she stood  
trembling and took it.

**WILLIE**

Queen threw Willie, and licked him to a stand, his trembling hind legs spread far apart.

Ungelded,  
Willie pranced so high-necked what with his dam's high-jinks and his Arabian sire's flare eyes used to looking over sand dunes, well,

Willie never could see a hidden ditch, a prairie-dog hole, a tree-trunk down in the grass when he went

full tilt and showy with his head up after some steers that got loose through the creek water-gap tripped both front legs

and nearly broke Bill's neck Bill over the ears with no horse under him leapt like Hermes

furrowed an entry for *Old Bill's Ways*:

“ When you get the chance  
unexpected for flight, be sure to let go the reins. “

## THE REINS

long harls of wind  
in the silk on  
every brittle weed

low sun long harls of  
silk on every brittle  
weed  
lines of the east wind grown cold

threads  
of the sun down horizon of earth

at dusk, the  
orange eye gone  
Pleiades up the  
horizon its seventh  
sister lost

firepit light  
lifts in the branches overhead

in the dark of the moon  
the fire talks owl hollow  
the deep well of the fire  
the wind saying lonely  
the first category of life  
as he sees it now from  
wind

from green  
proposals of trees  
hung with wind  
their  
rise and bow  
INTERDICTION

to intersect space to find the world's  
navel Bill harries the troops over  
the horizon and will be restless to  
the end of his days. No boundary  
no center is a kind of freedom and  
schizophrenia.

When the body drops away, the  
mind goes into the imagination's  
costume- shop and comes back

dressed as a railroad, or an angry blue-green snake comes to him tonight.

What he wants is to be waked by her calling, saying his name out of desire. She comes from the whorl carrying both candle and dagger.

## PLAYMATES

Bill saw the moving line  
first, in the dust of the  
path by the gate. " Wait,  
see, it may be a  
rattlesnake, " he sd, and it  
is, ribbed tail hissing

but before he could reach  
for a rock or a stick she had  
moved in on it And before  
he could warn her back she  
had ripped off buttons and  
blouse, stamped up to the  
snake and on it

grabbed it still live but  
submissive, she held its  
head eye to eye, up to  
her pointed tongue. Then, starting

with the hollow below her throat  
she lay the head, slowly  
crossed herself touching it there  
and there and there

while Bill stood transfixed by  
the stand of her breasts, and  
the way the light came off her  
skin in the hot sun.

**THE FIT**

When he saw inside her room  
when he saw she kept  
beaded deerskin gloves with  
long gauntlets laced with  
thongs on, the way other  
women hung *God Bless This  
Home*, he asked to stay, he  
sent the rig the night away.

The morning she and he walk  
outpleased with their bodies  
down a path to the spring her  
hands cup  
the water momentarily to warm it

her wet hands strip a  
glove of finery down his  
body the rising sun a  
dazzle rutilant through  
her hair.



## ODYSSEUS AT TOMBSTONE

Then when he asked her to come to him she'd simply said yes, and after a few days she showed up at the cabin back up Salt Creek which was his true hideout. When he tried to remember how it was came a vision of Remus and Romulus there under a she-wolf drawing down Mediterranean purples, long ships, bronze shields that advance like the sun.

Then after she'd gone, that night he saw every lamp glass washed invisibly clean. She had left him with more light, again, and what had he given her?

**UNDRESSING ANNIE**

Medals and leather-fringed  
collar to undo before you  
get to vest-coat, the first  
turn of the neck opening a  
hollow between the  
collarbones you must turn  
your eyes from, as when  
she turned the fanned air to  
light, turning, at her Quaker  
father's forge

We are only the wind that  
blows through us, she says

a Kansas  
tornado silent  
at the eye of  
her mandala

## FIRE MAKING

Sometimes when she is with him he  
shuts his eyes she is a bright column of  
light, a fire-making for fire, for fire, for  
fire, be fire-bringer return of the old mind  
to the center for fire-boring the waking.

Coyote tried to make fire striking together shells  
that fell out of the big dipper when it turned over

he tried to use the pieces of stars that came  
down he was-trying to dip up some fire  
shining on water

he tried the grass and trees that had sun in them.

Finally coyote dug a little in the sand made it  
nice and a woman came in there who  
moved like a swan

she came in there and lay down in the sun  
she was a bright column of light, he got  
himself with her so they were moving just  
right there was just one thing and he turned  
that into a hawk with burnished wings  
beating until they started fire-making along  
the edges then fire-bringer hawk brings fire  
into this world

## YOUR ACTUAL FIRE

One of his guests from the East said,  
softly between silences, that the heat from  
an actual fire is somehow different, and  
that gets Bill started.

*That's because you know the source, he says.  
Source one is where you got it, and how much  
work. And you know what heat looks like in  
original form. And you know the source to  
turn to and move closer and back away from,  
now turn your backside to it, now kneel down,  
put your hands out palms up and thus you  
pray and dance.*

*If someone's there  
you dance with them and the fire. If you're alone  
you dance with just the fire, it's a fine slow  
dance.*

*And this heat is dry since the fire dries the  
air and thus feels different, especially as  
radiant heat rows out properties of heat  
rays different from your furnace room,  
and*

Bill realizes that uninvited he has embarked on A  
Homemade Education rap, and pauses.

And seriously my love, this is true, you can  
measure all manners of people in the looks  
you give each other across your actual fire  
an eye a trembling light.

## **Col. W. F. Cody in the Saddle**

**CLAIM**

In a pattern of grass and dry leaves, a  
hieroglyphic stuck to a discarded heart

Concerns a leather-fringed figure standing one foot  
forward, his long rifle planted butt down in the high plains,  
Meridian 100 degrees

This stony declaration stands ready  
in the heat of summer, surrounded  
by endless buffalo grass which has  
raised up billions of small red  
battalion flags, on thin thin stalks.

## BUFFALO DANCE MOON

Buffalo Bill's abroad  
tonight, in the  
moonlight. He kicks a  
root cluster around in  
the fire, it tumbles out.

Half a numinous moon,  
one cloud a glowing  
buzzard moving fast with  
feet down, ready to swing  
on any ghost's throat.

Here's the Train full of  
hides stopped at the  
Orion crossing. ripple  
sound of oak flame

What will the full moon  
be like, Bill, and will  
you be burned by it?  
how many returns,  
how many dances,  
how many  
buffalo dances will it  
take to send them all  
home and so back?

I'll start one now.

Dark buffalo shapes  
move already under the  
trees, by the stream, they  
are hunching to their  
feet, waiting to be  
dissolved in the moon.

Dear Cap. Jack:

I think we can pull off hunt for the Russian Prince Alexis here in the next month. We could get good or bad weather in January, but I will find out where we should get a good variety of game wintering.

If you can arrange with Sarah about her present ladies, we could assure a first rate time in Denver. You should check Gen. Palmers idea of supplies and stock as carefully as you can without offending him.

With all respect I can't get it in my craw that Gen. Sheridan would try to get Custer and Spotted Tail in the same train. The first is a rooster's tail,

and you don't know which way these souix will shoot if you put a rifle in their hands.

So, this fellow is a Grand Duke! and wants to shoot some of these "wonderful beasts." Well I will leave it up to you to talk to Sarah for Denver accommodations, and to list the extra rifles and shot, and if possible line up the hunting dogs we talked about.

Yours, Bill  
Kit Carson Camp  
December 4, 1871



## SOME GHOST DANCING

Bill and Johnny Baker had an act worked out, shooting from running horseback side by side, Jack usually doing the throwing, of glass balls. They got to the point where they were paid to put it on, five or six times a week. One time they were hired out in a put-up deal by some old scouts from Arizona who seemed to be getting up a general show for some easterners.

At a good gallop the glass balls actually stand almost still. The first time they went at it, Bill could see painted on the side a kind of hump-backed flute player. He drew right on it with the shot load and nothing happened. He knew then there was nothing he could do about it, they'd just have to go through with it while those boys got their laughs.

It turned out that Dr. W. F. Carter, who billed himself as the "champion all round shot of the world" and "The Evil Spirit of the Plains" was behind it. He was Indian born and had listened in on some ghost dance medicine. Carter paraded as a dentist, but he wanted to power Bill into a partnership. They went out as "The Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition." P. T. Barnum liked the show, but Bill nearly lost Nate Salsbury's friendship over his capitulation to Dr. Carter. When Bill got his power center back, he flipped a coin to see who would take over, and won.

The next year he went in with Nate. **America's Greatest Entertainment, The Romantic West Brought East in Reality, Buffalo Bill's Great Wild West Show and Host of Western Celebrities** met with a riverboat collision and sank, with the exception of the Deadwood stage, horses, and band wagon. Then Bogardus, the crack shot attraction, quit in a period of incessant rain.

"As he pondered this blow, two visitors, looking like a couple of midwestern farm folks, the woman small and shy, the man a little more self-assured, came. . . They were Butler and Oakley, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Butler, the best marksmanship team in America. Buffalo Bill's show was the kind of troupe they would like to join. "



## BUFFALO BILL THE CONSUMER

He wears a buffalo horn shiny with  
wear between his legs. He refuses to  
put on

any coat that isn't unseamed buffalo hide soft as young  
deer-skin, chewed months by toothless Cherokee virgins,  
lovingly.

One bull, spine-shot, dragging its hindquarters, he shot  
again and splintered a front leg.

Still it stood, a paralytic propped on one leg strong as a  
railroad tie cemented upright.

Bill split that strong front hoof for boot-heels, the pair  
tipped with sundried buffalo scrota.

Now when he walks there's a tension afoot, when he  
stops his heels fit with a click.

Many's the time he orders up the locomotive for his  
private car, and drifts into the edge-less prairie, a yacht  
running in the bluegrass.

Where the horizons meet he stops at  
sunset. He has a whole hump  
broiled, then he signals the chef. He  
eats only the center slice, *au jus*.

He has sent a telegram to Annie Oakley

## THE SLUG

Capt. Jack: What do you mean, we have to get  
“crackerjacks” ?

Buff. Bill: Short acts to get everybody's  
attention while we set up the stage-coach  
attack or such.

Capt. Jack: I had a kid friend who would bite a  
snail or a slug in two for a nickel. . . What  
was his name? I could dredge it up.

Buff. Bill: That's the trouble with theatre. You can remember the  
act but not the person's name.  
We've got to change that.

**LETTER TO “*Dear Bill, when I think*”**

Dear Bill, when I think of the things I did before I met you, it's like memories from before my birth. This is a sunny Sunday morning when I write to you. And I feel like talking to you just to tell you everything is fine here. I don't remember if my last message was a bit depressing, it might have been. But the bad dream is over. Back to life. Sunny days, only sunny days. And for ever, I'm sure, so sure as never before. I need to hug you now and say “ Bill I have my Beauty Way back again. And I believe in it. “ I put your photo in front of me a talk to you everyday.

I've made a brave decision, and feel very proud now, as I might. Faith in life is awakened in me. I love. My capability of loving— I doubted so much. And now, somebody who thought about himself in the same way has proved it is most human to love. We both can love—it's a fascinating feeling. Oh Bill, there are no words for it. And we don't care about words do we? Dear Bill I could write and write about it, but all this would sound like one great platitude, so I'd better stop.

You are probably right, it is surprising that I am a performer. I believe that being a woman hermit-ess is my natural bent. But you should not think my husband was to blame, if there is blame. After all, how should we have met? Although of course we would have.

Oh, I am so glad the rain is over! I don't know why it should make me sad. Yesterday as I sat here, little black-headed birds with white breasts were happy—hopping and pecking among the plips that the rain was making, much bigger than they were. Think how that must have seemed to them. But now I shall be that happy all the time, no matter what!

Your Loving, “ Missie Annie”

Louisville, Ky.  
October 3, 1885

## ACT OF LOVE

“ Every time is a horse  
                   turned into a great  
 round corral”           she  
 said

“ We ride  
 around and  
                   find the  
 right one, it is  
 ahead of us, it  
 is graceful  
 and fiery

“ just the one we want to find       finds us  
 teasing us in circles of flight; we  
 bring it down from the mountain. “

Now she has ridden him close  
 they are all moving  
                   arching their necks  
                   dozens of them wheeling flank to flank  
 and some stancing regal, and they are noble when they move       and a  
 pack of ponies       and chestnut  
 horses with white stars, and  
 tall cord-muscled  
 whites, and the  
 biggest are black  
 (they played with us like dogs) ah  
                   golden manes moving  
 serene w/alert  
 heads turning from every graced angle

ears point and hold they watch  
 her with recognition:

now at the draft of her  
 reins  
 he comes in, front feet high       the velvet       muzzle  
 flaring  
                   eyes rapid  
 (feeling his way)  
 he is not tamed  
 he does not want  
 to escape  
 she is without fear



**LETTER TO “Dear Annie: You write to me again”**

Standing Rock Reservation  
June 15, 1886

Dear Annie:

You write to me again in a kind of apology, as if you were afraid of taking up my time. So now I will say direct--Please write to me as often as you can, and I will answer in kind. The way you are excited and faithful in belief of my kind of life, I come to need it. I put so much stake on your thoughts and admiration, that your “worship” (as you say, as wrong placed as I know it to be), still makes me believe again. I feel fresh as a colt from your last letter, with true feelings put down as shy and dear as only you can, young Missie!

Faithfully,

“Bill” Cody



**BILL LOOKS ASIDE FROM ANNIE AND SAYS AN 18-  
SYLLABLE HAIKU**

Yellow butter flies when  
we two are joined like  
that we too take turns  
flying!

**BILL THE GEOGRAPHER**

I am looking for a place on your body to  
leave some mark that does not require  
pain to stay.

Your lean flanks lead to fall to  
cotton wood turning to flame they  
could line a creekside in South  
Dakota leading on to wheatfields in  
the Canadian steppes drifts of  
white snow.

Your mouth that sings sunrises of wet grass  
maps bridges of amber incense across  
streams across paths of small animals on  
mooned' nights.

Under your nipples there runs a  
prairie flow of wildflowers the blood  
of birds in flight outside a fast train  
window. Your bones truss a mine  
gem-full of summer lightning  
storms.

A white spider with only air to start its web  
hangs swinging on your breath at my shoulder

It looks for the turning earth and its  
weathers that have gathered hidden  
under your bent knee.

## LETTER TO “Dear Bill, My Dear Bill”

Dear Bill, my dear Bill:

I don't know what is wrong. Everything is missed up, and only your letters seem real. I love these moments in the evening when I'm sitting at the table, the room is dark, only one small lamp. But sometimes it is hard to believe in the old good things when your mind is somehow confused. You can't think clearly. There is Indifference—the worst of feelings—it happens to me and I hate myself at such times. I tried to find something and I am still writing. It's not friends, practice, love (perhaps I'm a person that's not able to love? )I do not know. Paper, you touch it and there's no feeling. If I read poetry I start feeling something and

I'm back alive. But somebody speaks and I do not understand. And all that outside I deny. Oh, I notice objects and touch them and I feel alive, wonderfully alive. But this is only physical contact. A friend of mine said its like laudanum. I know you must be disappointed in me. I have so many good words from you, that's priceless and there is love in this. But I do not know why I decided to write all these things. It is possible in any hour I'll start all this and write in a different manner. But Bill, please tell me. I must do something about all this, how do I start? You  
say

there are people who do not ask...

I don't believe it. They may not be so selfish.

This must be the end of my stupid confession.

I want to tell you if you won't laugh at me. I want a red bicycle, a tall one. Imagine riding it in the show, smooth. As if I had dreamed this a thousand times, I am riding it, practically it goes by itself, and I am shooting and breaking glass balls easily, and never missing.

I do miss you, awfully. Please tell me.

Annie

Oakley,  
Kansas Oc  
t. 30,  
1886

**BILL GIVES ANNIE A FULL BOX OF CARTRIDGES**

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack! Click.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Click.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Click

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack! Click.

## **Buffalo Bill and the Silk Lasso**

## THE WAY TO CODY, WYOMING

I have come to repair this track,  
laughing. One rain has passed to  
the north mountain and another rain  
comes from the south.

Living water has knifed sharp  
channels many feet deep, and I  
may never get out!

The sage sags heavy with fragrant  
water. With my cupped hands I shake  
from its ferns a cold tea that has  
steeped all last night.

**ANNIE STUDIES THE RECEPTIVE**

In every woman's life  
it happens sometime  
she  
sits in a temple  
beside the road of  
her days and waits  
to take the lance of  
a stranger. Calm  
the face of his  
approach in the lake  
I made of myself  
knowing what would  
come as we traveled  
north, delivered by  
my silent husband.

Now if I could  
break the  
glass of  
distance in  
these  
performances  
! The more  
you do the  
more you  
have to do  
the more you  
are alone.

The applause that  
rises pushes me  
farther away.

After this  
triple-shot  
I'll salute  
him, king  
with his  
white  
leather, a  
parade by  
himself into  
the waiting  
arena.

I'll take a  
drink with  
the stock  
hands, laugh  
at Capt.  
Jack's goaty  
old saws.

I am glad that he, at  
least, knows about us.



## THE BUFFALO

The buffalo dreams trembling,  
icicled rain heavy on his hump

From horizons of honey-  
sweet grass butterflies  
rise into moons flooding a  
silver lake over the plains.  
He dances in bone-white rivers

His skull a wind-drum of  
desire, he dreams of the  
hawk fluting

Asleep he is horned like an elk, and lithe as antelope he  
leaps from horse death smoke, from red lizards of flame  
with tongues that sing the prairie into ashes

In his secret crystal breast  
a grandfather bellows and rakes dust into cloud shape of  
the White Buffalo

He follows her up the  
rainbow path past the frozen  
redmen of February  
who pray continuously to the horizon

## THE LESSON

Capt. JACK: What do you do now, Bill, it looks like we're surrounded.

Buff. BILL: Find another way out.

Capt. JACK: I just believe we're gonna come up on the realization that we're totally surrounded.

Buff. BILL: Well, it's a hero story, we just have to do it. The tribe back east is gettin' pale and lackluster, and they need a myth. Everybody does. It gives you something to live for. You are just naturally encouraged by it. Puts you back on your feet.

Capt. JACK: (sings) " When you come to the end of your rope,  
that's when the hope. . . begins. "

Buff. BILL: Listen, when I first started scouting, Kit Carson says to me, " Bill, you buffalo, there are two kinds of men. One of them looks to the mountains all the time. Another one notices the rivers. "

Capt. JACK: What did he mean by that?

Buff. BILL: Wish I knew. If we could only get around behind that line of scrub over there. . .

Capt. JACK: Yeah, and if shit was sugar we could crap in our coffee.

Buff. BILL: Here they come!

Capt. JACK: Alright, Bill, no more clownin' around.

Buff. BILL: I know, I know " . . . the right thing at the right moment. " My feet tell me this one is NOW!

Capt. JACK: Okay, throw all your stuff behind you. Make your self light as possible, and when you're near invisible, flow through them.

## BILL TRACKS THE CAT

Suppose you come with me up on the big  
rock, Bill, a sunset look for the mountain  
lion whose tracks we've seen on the trail  
for almost a week now.

The moon a quarter up the east already, three-  
quarters full herself, glaring bright and raggedy-  
edged. Say we look at her until we think of how  
we look, a blue heartbeat of crystal rounded  
against black velvet.

Say you are carried into the chaparral by  
birds, Bill, say you enter the mouths of caves  
in the canyon wall, the time of evening  
enters its silence and inhales you vulnerable  
now that you're alone and unarmed.

Say you see a sign in the west, the breaking  
purple, a sign truly mysterious, even though as  
you watch it for a long time you think of warheads  
on an easterly course, or maybe you think of  
riding a control stick in space,  
Until you think what a Navajo holy man did with his sign,  
and you ride until you see four hawks in the sky at once  
and know you have to give up horse and buffalo rifle the  
way he gave up his hogan, move to a desolate place.

Say you search a sign that rises until this rock pivots the  
Great Bear and Polaris, and the wind splits around it like  
a buffalo stampede whirling around the Old Trapper.

Suppose you refuse the seduction of one silence  
Breathing you in, shift to another thing to watch, and  
find it too wants your whole knowledge to fasten in  
there,

the time of light when everything you expected shivers  
apart in the refraction of night on you, given a sign  
that lifts you from history to look past the moon until  
you lose your body wrapped in hides, until you get  
wisdom.

Say you remember the camp and the woman  
by the fire down there a quick hike, but still  
you stay on the rock for one more fracture of  
what the dark opens, the stalking Cat, the  
sight of lions long forgot and trivial,

your own ears tripped, every bush a possible  
companion, and you without one good word.  
Suppose you catch your song, sing it spirited and full  
as in your best dream, but only coyote hears, and  
you lose it forever, all but how it seemed.

## **BILL CONFESSES THE ATTRACTION OF OPPOSITES**

I used to pick up rocks that were interesting, the so-called Kansas diamonds or moss agate from the Flint Hills, or cat's eyes or sometimes just a homely node that happened to catch my eye.

Going along I'd end up dropping them off somewhere, I figured I was doing them a favor, another look at things they couldn't have imagined without it.

Then I met Annie, and we were always in a brangle about it, she couldn't believe I hadn't thought about it, how I was breaking up their families.

**LETTER TO “Dear Annie, It happens like this”**

Dear Annie,

It happens like this, you're on a track, near dark, not trusting yourself to cross the high creek all rapids and chest-deep out here alone. you know you can't make it back to camp tonight. The things you think of during a bare-pack night, the shadows that run into the fire! A person out here needs to change

or be carried off by the wind.

Finally, it's day out.

Bill

**LETTER TO “Dear Bill, Mercifully you”**

Dear Bill,

Mercifully you were not in the house that day a woman came from the desert and waited all day with me for her brothers to follow and kill you. “ Why did he marry me? “ she kept asking.

A fire coming from the desert! They followed you into the trees, and then killed everyone else in the old house.

The youngest brother came lamenting what his brothers had done among the twisted trees, all cut at one level, bottom branches coming back to life.

Smoke came up from the desert. Then from a window I saw a river spread over the land steaming behind me I ran to a barren city, its streets covered with snow. How good it will be to have water, Annie

**TWO MORE DIALOGUES**

Black Elk: D'ya think wearing eagle feathers is making  
any impression on the white-eyes, they still  
can't see our power?

Long Bow: Hell, I dunno. If they don't, let's paint our  
faces too.

\* \* \* \*

BILL: I can't believe I won't live forever! What we have  
to do is get " forever" packed in the time we have.

JACK: Existentialism is so fuckin' religious, it makes me  
tired.

BILL: Jesus. What was it I wanted?

JACK: A drink. Try this, it will turn your prick to bone.

BILL: Huh! So far it's turning my bones more like my prick.



## THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD SPIKE

*January 1, 1893*

Bill takes some ashes from  
the campfire rubs in both  
hands until they are silver.  
Here I am, supposed to be “  
meditating the future” they  
say, all I can think is Annie  
with her legs around my hips  
riding bareback said she was  
born to it.

What a crowd out to catch the  
first cold of the new year or a  
new century already. Gold  
won't keep this spike from  
festering and no Indian is doing  
any gandy dancing.

Bill thinks of his sorrel filly, body  
silvered by the froth of their  
exertions, he whispers a chant  
about the ascendancy of horses,  
his breath he then catches in his  
medicine bag, knowing his soul  
is lost, although it is easy to find:  
it has gone everywhere, except  
in him.

Bill drops something into the dry  
grass and mounts to enter the  
warm railroad car. His hoof-footed  
animal self turns and runs into  
darkness. He has seen himself  
enter a tunnel made of two  
crescent moons.

Thinking of changes he ought  
to make he rides into this  
mouth of desire.

**LETTER TO “Dear Bill, It’s been three months”**

Chicago, Ill.  
March 15, 1893

Dear Bill:

It’s been three months now trying to be with him. How hard it is to be accurate and honest all the time with the other but how hard it is to get on with yourself if you’re not. And it’s difficult to be close to that person. Maybe it’s my longing for some ideal relation not to be found in life? I miss something in life, Bill, I don’t know—some colours, something pure, maybe something completely different. God, it seems I haven’t learnt anything in the time passing and all the experiences, maybe even lost something.

You remind me of the first passage we made, in charge of our ark with all the animals and constructions of a world. Now it’s my turn. Remember that bench where we hardly talked after our walk through the trees. It was just that easy, I remember thinking “when I’m tying my shoe, I’m tying my shoe. When I’m listening to music, I’m listening to music.” I think about it all the time, and it’s helpful for me, very touching, the most precious thing for me.

Being with you feels like you just say yes! to what I know when there aren’t many people who know what I’m about, let alone can say yea. If as you say “life is just unfinished business,” then you might send me something that needs doing. I am finished with this.

A rattlesnake did show up on my path, crossing right to left.

As you said was necessary to do after a kill, I cleaned and ate the serpent. The skin is stretched and drying.

What to do next?

Yours, as always, Annie

**SOMETIMES**

It was spring, so naturally you think about  
snakebite, but I hadn't said anything how often  
snakes had been coming up in conversation  
or had been found by others  
lying in places where I would have been walking next

I hadn't said anything about looking for the  
medicine this last week, just a visit to Captain  
Jack for good times

When we were getting ready to leave he gives  
me a bundle with a razor and a strap, some herb  
powder  
and some advice I don't think about much until then

Leaving I kick a piece of bone ahead of me on  
the path so I get a good look at the meaning of  
bones in the dark  
beside the grass still rattling the dry sound it has

In a dream where the snake threshes not  
able to let go of this body too big to eat  
anyway, who will kill her with rocks, or

Follow your advice to lie down with her and take her off  
slow.  
She will bring you the visions you need to know.

## LETTER TO “Dear Annie, If I point”

Cody, Nebraska  
November 11

Dear Annie:

If I point out to you that I am slightly bow-legged, it's only to serve myself in a way, that you can't think bad of my ways but as an endearment. And so I shouldn't drag you into this, but it has that side of declaring how things are with me.

She charges me again that I have secrets, as if she would not. She claims to keep me up on what she's thinking exactly all the time. Whereas I'm off somewhere I'll never tell her. That's how I am cause for all our problems. The truth is that I do value secret places and the advantage of a trail nobody else knows, a hideout where nobody comes without being asked.

But when I start up on what I'm keen on, it does not get listened to, it gets judged. That's just the way she functions on things, and she means to give me the best of her talents. The ten weeks I was working on the Sioux position for the Senate committee, and what I get after I read her one paragraph is a plea to disown my preachments. She wants me detached from my own words and choices. It's hard enough to discover the difference between what you believe and just want to, without somebody beside you who fears going to the edge in anything, and will always try to pull you back. So I keep my gambles and fears and dazzle air-tight against her hysteria designed to get me out of the poker game and into soliciting her symptoms.

So things hardly shown to anyone, and never whole, begin to want daylight. And need exercise, which is action in line with vision. A vision begins with recognizing a place on a trail. The place is a point of attention. You could be looking where to put your foot next, and realize everything depends on it, and all the skills you ever practiced get brought in. You shift your weight on it, and it holds. Then the way in front of you looks as you knew it would. Unmarked it lays as clear as a game migration track in Tanzania or a wagon trail cut

through short-grass in the high plains leading to  
your new home. You know it well, the fragrance  
alone could tell you that.

For yr pollen path, W. F. Cody

**BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST**  
**The Reality of Imperishable**  
**Dreams**

## CROSSINGS

I walked out to the city of Rome one day,  
 some concrete stakes in the grass's sway  
 remains of Bill's town plots sold by  
 survey.

*“ Most of us crossed the Mississippi or Missouri  
 with no money left but a vast wealth of hope and  
 courage. . . Haste to get rich has made us  
 borrowers, and the borrower has made  
 booms, and booms made men wild, and  
 Kansas became a vast insane asylum  
 covering 80, 000 square miles. “*

-- A Kansas state official on the mid-1880's

While the grass sweet yearning whispered come,  
 come bluestem head-high creek water walnut trees  
 wild grapes Indian wars and slave-state raiders on  
 horse-back.

In 1854 the territorial governor swore,  
*“ Govern Kansas? You might as well try to  
 govern hell! ”* In our first scene, were we in  
 sequence, Isaac Cody speaks for the free state,  
 and is Bowie-knifed from behind.

Kansas Pacific peddles deeds 40 miles wide of the rails  
 connecting army forts with spur lines wherever it  
 chooses.

*“ There was a feverish land boom in  
 progress during the 80's, nurtured in part by  
 the fact that Kansas alone had more  
 railroad trackage than all the New  
 England states combined. “*

Is Bill a scout? He stakes out the city of  
 Rome, on inside information stacking meat  
 for Fort Haysheadquartering Custer, the  
 Seventh Cavalry, the New Terminal Depot  
 Loading Docks and Hub of the West.

Custer will get busted for using Army  
 transport to get together with his young wife,  
 they had enough of foldup tent cots always  
 ending up on the ground, better the back of  
 medical wagons, then shacking in officer's  
 quarters in Fort Riley while getting duty pay  
 and train vouchers from St. Louis headed

for Fort Hays slowly the coincidence did him  
in, off to Little Big Horn with new epulats and  
braid he's designed,

and Bill in a Mexican cape scalped when the railroad  
routes to the south fork of Big Creek, leaving  
Bill to make refunds on his word if he will.  
The railroad changed the right-of-way, the city  
of Rome disappeared in a day. Shit happens.

*Quotes from O'Conner, IRON WHEELS AND BROKEN MEN*



#### No. 4 DREAM IN THE BUFFALO EYE ART GALLERY

On the frame of this picture,  
sage folded in the shape of a  
cross, tacked by a thorn:

My daughter was priestess  
to my act with the horse, who  
lay as I rested on one of its  
legs. Rose heat. Held the  
melt to a shudder of thighs as is  
meet and right to do. Then  
meeting their eyes calmly, each. Later

I talk to you about mating with the  
horse, about what you also want or  
fear to do.

Dark when we came to the place  
where a well had been. The horse waited  
in its shadow, only I to prepare. Picked  
plants in their order, arranged  
on this otherwise clear ground,  
and dropped them over the fire. Will  
you take this horse as male or  
female? In the small light I wait for the  
sign of readiness: water springs  
from the old well, and sheets  
the ground in a sanguine shine

This picture itself, wedged  
between blue granite boulders,  
looks high up the cliff- side  
where a ragged black bird once  
hung on one of three remaining  
limbs, a burnt- out jackpine.  
That purification, they say,  
swept in a single flame up the  
west fall of the mountain, until it  
rose into sight  
of the ocean, and

My Annie. New Year's day. Got up in Greenwood Falls, we  
are almost to Crest. And then we head north to Leadville  
once we drop down a little and cross a high prairie. This  
place you would like to see. Flat grassland away to a  
mountain range, the other side. You see a great crater,  
especially in winter, the way it sits in here like a white lake with

mountains splashed up all around it. The trick is, the mountains on the other side look about the same as where you stand, and this time of year when it is clear they look like they're in your lap. With the snow there aren't any trails you can see, or herds you could go by for size. You think you could cross the crater in three hours. But it must be near a hundred miles across. What looks like those mountains your size go about 14, 000 feet, Cap Jack says.

There used to be a little town down there about half way across where we hope to be able to stop comfortable enough tomorrow night.

Meantime we have victuals for a king including hindquarters from a young doe for a dollar down at the springs in case of short time and poor luck.

We didn't run into any snow until we were in sight of Crest. Not that it has not been cold enough! It is pretty dry on the east side compared to plenty inside there, Leadville keeps three feet on the ground this time of year even if there is a warm spell like this. Hope it holds.

When I do not get a letter for awhile, I never know what it means. We do have long silences, don't we? It must have been two month you did not get from me with that last mail mix-up. I expect the same.

I hope you are not another time suffering to yourself how we should go on. You know we always do anyway as we have found out already, White Bear Woman.

I hope you are easy and happy to get this May be when you practice today you will pat your Winchester as our friend as you always say. Our situations will not always be the same.

Trading for the land around Lookout means two weeks if I can find what I want. Taking some bad weather into account. I know it would have been faster East around castle rock but the real investors are still in Leadville. Yes I should agree that I always have a good time there. Be sure I will be in time to Denver with every hope of our meeting there.

Your affectionate, Bill

P. S. I am sending this to you by Al, who is the only one I am sure will be there. He will think it is only business.



**LETTER TO “My Dear Old Bill, A quick note”**

My Dear Old Bill,

A quick note for the quick shot of your anger, though it has I know passed. Bill...I'm not taking anything back – what I am trying to do is keep my will from making the world over in my order, to make it line up with selfish wishes. I have the power through concentration to align events, and once started the process goes on automatically. It's only holding the right door open at the right time which leads into a hall with another door that finally and naturally opens to reveal the expected and desired. It is not different from shooting a marble in the air.

We all have the power to do this. And it can be done unconscious, it can bring sharks to a worried swimmer. But it can bring lessons, or money if that's what you want, love, or it can bring allies like an owl in the daylight. There's a side of you that won't be touched until it has been taken by such a will and perhaps you already know this. I don't want mine to be doing that, and now in any case is the wrong time -- especially as it would rob you of the joy of responsibility. Or seem to. What you may not know is that your own will has allied—  
Love, Annie O.

**ENTRY September 12, 1897**

Came out to listen, hearing the  
bobcat's throat-call, what was it he  
wanted? reehuuhg, reeh-uuhg-ing to  
Cassiopeia  
and the reeling Herdsman in the sky

I could guess from the way he  
said it he didn't want a thing, just  
something to do

while waiting the silver  
moon not up for three  
hours yet to light the trail of  
kangaroo mice, gophers  
arising  
from their burrows. Everything equal

a cry rising in the night and myself

**LETTER TO “Dear Bill, Your letter”**

New Orleans  
February 14, 1899

Dear Bill:

Your letter has caught up to me and I will be to St. Louis in time to help set up, bringing in the wagons and gear you listed. It has been so good wintering in New Orleans that I don't know how much more of it I could stand anyhow. The air is conducive to sweet excess. Where I stayed some newlyweds checked in. The evidence was that she was on top and melted onto him and both melted on down into the sheet, and they couldn't extract them from the weave. If it hadn't been for their dental work they wouldn't have been able to find out what happened.

Actually, that's not the truth. The truth is, that's what happened to me. I am writing this with a pencil held between my teeth while I'm being reconstituted by a Chinese with 28 years of experience. I have great faith in him based on progress to date, and have every hope of seeing you at the end of March.

The only doubt, which you will understand, is that anything that good has to be against the law, and surely belongs in jail. But I am keeping quiet about it. The Chinaman won't let on out of professional pride. If you get this missile, we are probably o. k.

Yr faithful, Captain Jack

P. S. As to your other question, the evolutionary trend has been shown to be towards increasing programmability and flexibility in the reticular mind—a highly complex switchboard. We are continuously making up ad hoc systems and can probably do this faster than historical change. Secondly, putting-it-on-the-back-burner is an incubatory problemsolving technique. (This means you wake up at 4 in the morning and can't go back to sleep from worrying about it). Thirdly, the way we store memory is in an affect-coded array. Thus memory is a value judgment. Add to this the reminder that new knowledge is affective, and old learning is not. Logical information can also carry affect: analytical rock-climbing and breathing hard at the chess-board. Finally, the medulla determines the optimum for the body, and there's a septum in there that signals how the body is doing in terms of pleasure.

How's yours?

Dispassionate knowing is rank absurdity, he sez. JC.

## TWO CONVERSATIONS AND A SONG

### *One*

Cpt. JACK: The skeeters are worse than wd be useful  
even in hell's river tonight.

Buff. BILL:What do you think we shld do abt it?

Cpt. JACK:We cd build a little scarecrow.

Buff. BILL:D'ye think a copy of what tastes good to  
them wd scare them much?

Cpt. JACK:Yr right.

Buff. BILL: How about a little statue of a trout?

Cpt. JACK:(After laughing. ) I may wake up in the morning  
with a completely different perspective  
about this conversation.

### *Two*

Annie. “ Want some of this mushroom first? “

Bill. “ Unm--maybe. A little bit. “

Annie. “ This? “

Bill. “ More'n enough. Last time I lost you completely.  
Almost. White bear woman is great, but she's  
got such sides to her I can't hardly find my simple  
Missie any more! ”

Annie. “ Just be with you and me tonight. “

### *Song that Annie Picked*

Don't say how long it's been  
since we been hungry,  
Don't say how long it's been since we  
been sad

Everybody knows when you get  
something going you don't say how  
long it's been good,

(Repeat)

Hold on, just enjoy it, keep your eyes  
turned ahead, don't say how long it's  
been good.

(Repeat) don't say  
how long it's been this good.

**BILL IS HAPPIER THAN HE WILL EVER BE AGAIN**

Big Horn Basin, 1902

Leaning on the fence, Bill  
Cody settles the tough  
ridges of his wrists between  
starry barbs on the top wire.  
His elbows out a little, he  
springs it, feeling the stretch  
of the wire on the muscles  
over his shoulder blades.

The sun is out, and there is a  
breeze. The line is drawn so  
taut, a sparrow sitting between  
the next two posts doesn't  
move as he rocks on the wire.

His look follows the fence line  
slowly through green, until it  
disappears over the rises. The  
songs of V-necked meadow  
larks roll around him, the same  
way he heard them from the  
grass outside on sunny days,  
when for a moment everyone in  
the schoolroom was quiet.



## LETTER TO “Dear Missie, This Summer”

Dear Missie,

This summer has gone by like shot from a gun. I was going to tell you that you remind me of Captain Jack with some of the things that you say. But though he is the poet of the pure prairie, I think in your way you're more of a poet than him. He mostly writes the things that we see around, and even puffs them up, but you go inside. I don't know why there are not some more women poets. I'd like to read them. I never went to any singing on the stage where I ever got very excited listening to a man's voice. Though I could admire them, a girl's voice is what carries me off, and I don't know why they shouldn't do that in writing too. The way you won't quite say everything, I just give in to it, and I'd give you anything just to have you finish a sentence. With a man, he's always trying to run his line on you.

Annie, think of the changes since ten years ago! I can't tell anyone who hasn't done it about the pleasure of the eyes to unbroken distances. What the scout saw that kept us in the game was miles unmarked, for him to choose one, any line across it. I remember the buffalo herds moving, past what the eye could see, and never being out of sight of deer, Limon trail to Denver. You know I had Old Charlie to Europe on the 1887 tour. I did a hundred miles on him in nine hours and 45 minutes on a bet (which nearly did us both in). Now fifteen years later I heard a road machine there did a hundred miles an hour.

They are all crossed up with roads. What the Show can't take is the space, and when we fill up the arena with bodies and moving, in fact the west was just the opposite. My scout jobs were exactly to not have the kind of meetings and action they are crazy for. Isn't that a curiosity?

You say that you were patient for me to say the word love because I would know it from knowledge. Ah sweet missy, it counts for nothing. You are teaching me everything I know about that kind of claim.

Yes, I will tell you about my truth of the accounts that have been coming out regarding the Cheyannes. At the moment of Yellow Hand's charge I raised with the finished intention to fire, without the least of scruples. This was curious for me to discover, after all the business with my father in Kansas, with one hand of men ready to bloody the other. I thought many times I would

have none of it. Also, between the time of drawing down on him and triggering,

I was clear I didn't want to hurt him, but I had to stop what he was doing. I have had the same clear feeling each time I have acted against anyone. This realization, and the regret that some policy of the Senate in Washington should have brought us to this, has been my absolution in nights that begin in blame. This is as near as I have got in saying what I felt to anyone. So once again you have got me to the heart of the matter!

Your Bill

## WHAT HAPPENED

Bill fiddles around with god-knows-what,  
 some crystals he traded from the Black  
 Hills. . . . *batting glove day coming up  
 at home may tenth opening up a home  
 stand againstthuh  
 fillies here it's one to nothing inthuh ninth  
 it'll be fingers three and one thuh  
 year with an ee are a of two point  
 seven three coming on. One big  
 hit, asingle by thuh rookie shortstop, a  
 hardground ball up thuh middle with one  
 down two on in thuh sixth has been the  
 whole story of thuh game so far, now thuh  
 venerable third baseman rose of thuh reds  
 who just went over three thousand,  
 ahead of roberto clemente on thuh all  
 time list coming up switch hitting  
 looks like he's using a split draft against thuh  
 slider. . . .*

“ What thee fuck is going on what language IS that?  
 “ wants to know Cpt Jack the pure poet.

“ SSssh, “ sez Bill, but then he has to  
 leave for General Phil's full dress  
 afternoon reveille, and when he gets  
 back the ball game is over, Jack can't  
 say one thing about what happened.

The way you go back to little big horn and  
 wonder what happened. Or, the teams  
 were screaming their asses off and you had  
 to go do chores, you come back from being  
 gone a century or so, walk back and forth in  
 front of the backstop, the empty field says  
 nothing about what happened.

She gave it all to you, that night she came  
 to the camp on Molino Basin, and now you  
 wonder what it was she gave beside that  
 desert stream.

That London actress, you know the one cost him thirty  
 thousand, Katherine Clemmons will marry another man,  
 she says, and in her eyes no plain where your eye can

come to rest, it is an empty field where fences have gone  
up on every side, it  
is impossible to believe the molting buffalo  
will not stream up the Flint Hills in the spring,  
Kanza following them to the mountain  
runoff far up the Platte. All seemed manly  
parade and talk, who could get the best of  
who. Now nothing moves.

## THE BUFFALO WITH THE BLUE HUMP

Crowds of men had sighted the apparitions in the sky, and now they followed the last one. through the grass. Bill, he is sad to hear of it, their sighting of the blue-humped buffalo.

He remembers the thin flanks and legs the way they hitched along on shooting gallery rollers, pulling away from him over the rise. Away from him. Let someone else kill this one.

He had liked the powder-smell, the dust mixed with smoke, their motions in a strange cloud.

But to trail after the last buffalo with the blue hump? Indian wuzn't a bad word. to old Bill.

## COVENANT

In the closed purification lodge Bill hears  
 the splash of water on glowing stones  
*now this water come to us on earth  
 from the skies is sweetened with sage and  
 movesthrough our bodies, and moves  
 again between heaven and earth, O  
 great spirit made visible, move in us the  
 help for all things living, to live in a  
 sacred manner, all my people, for the four-  
 legged people, the crawling ones,  
 for the winged, and the gree  
 ngrowing, for all the relatives who live in  
 grandmother earth!  
 hear me! Hi ye, thanks! May you*

he breathes the steam, then shuts his  
 eyes, dark yes dark dark dark as the room  
 of Juliet's womb.

Then a little to the right across the prairie of  
 his mind something burns with a hard  
 gemlike flame, a camp fire too far off yet to  
 see the flickering he supposes, and he rides  
 towards it  
*deliver us from self-importance and  
 fear, hear the voice of a weak and  
 poor two-legged here offered to  
 grandfather sky may the holy wind  
 one breath move*

. . . comes out the  
 other side to find himself admiring the  
 vapor of morning, the early air of  
 September in Wyoming. Ah! Bill, the  
 covenant of champagne and whiskey, the  
 blood of antelope, and the wagons of  
 women, laughing!

Now he vests himself in soft white  
 deerskin, a hood of rabbit, a throw of  
 light leather heightening his  
 shoulders. His carbine, which is still  
 a carbine, is also a true rod of  
 sorcery.

A white buffalo will appear when the sun breaks through. This buffalo (which is buffalo and something other), after we have watched, given the awe of silence, and named her ghost, must be chased away. So it is.

**THE NORTH PLATTE RANCH**

This place won't do  
for long, nor what  
goes with it either.

Day, the hysteric  
flows of air,

the August winds clatter the cottonwood leaves all night.

This woman who lives in  
my house moves in front  
of the fire. I have  
stayed up late drinking.

She angers me little.  
Though her ass is broad,  
there's memory.

Don't laugh, Annie, it could  
be you and me after all this  
time,

except our present laughable shapes  
still roll like mountain water.



## THE RETURN

*B. bison, shaggy-maned No. American wild ox, with short horns, heavy forequarters and a large muscular hump, measuring up to 16 feet long and eight feet in height.*

Mounds of hide and points of bone crowd the night. The great buffalo return, and just before dawn the largest clubs his head at the cottonwood trees grown up around Isaac Cody's old Salt Creek claim

He clubs his polished horns on the rattling limbs and waits for somebody to come out of the houses. People compare picture postcards of the buffalo penned outside Ft. Leavenworth and shake their heads.

Against the first light, they wait the white spirit that will take buffalo shape and mate with them.

Black haunches bunching, they move towards the creek where Bill shot prairie hen.

## **BUFFALO WALLOW**

*(Buffalo Bill Productions, Ltd. )*

Buffalo wallow! Has a nice  
sound to it. They would get  
down in the mud to get the  
hornflies off, rooting and  
rolling. That time Doc  
Ballard's grandmother as a  
girl watched them go by for  
five days where highway  
281 now crosses the Smoky  
Trail. They drank the river  
dry.

They cut the  
banks for crossings we still use,  
wallowed out the flats to catch  
rain and laid trails you didn't  
have to be a scout to follow.

A man on a horse could see out,  
the big bluestem would close up behind anything else.

A kid walked out from the claim,  
got lost in the grass through  
the grass and flowers  
they never found him.

Take a day when we've had melting snow, go up about 5,  
000 feet, the wallows you can see them still, dished out  
on a span about eight miles wide, going on out of sight.

Spud Whitman, I think it was, rigged his  
pickup with a dog wagon on the back,  
jumped a pair of coyotes up Rhine  
Creek.

Gain' about fifty across that high  
pasture to head them off before  
they could get away

down the cut between buffalo stampede cliffs just  
back of Eulert's place, you know?

Spud dropped into a wallow hid by  
grass, tore his transmission right  
out from under him, like to drove  
his asshole up between his

shoulder blades. Them buffalo  
wallows!

**Distance Travelled 63,000 Miles  
or Nearly Three Times Around  
The Globe**

## THE JOURNEY

They wait beside the dark pit of  
tracks. Train wheels scrape to a  
stop on some line the cars jolt  
small explosions each more  
distant the night's images printed  
on the skin of Annie's body come  
to mind now, the breath catches,  
the dawn a thin whistle in a  
foreign station.

With the insistence of a  
sharp bell, with the clarity  
of frozen metal, some link  
is opened or latched.

The man and woman wait in  
early morning, the belongings  
they most need lean to a center  
beside the leather suitcases.

They walk a little way in the  
direction they are going, and  
then come back along the  
open track. Beside them  
people turn and settle  
themselves inside  
compartments going places.  
Yellow squares of light tick away.

For a moment they are  
waiting alone. The way  
distances have closed on  
them they laugh their breath  
joined white the cold air the  
snows that start this week in  
the Engadine the desert  
winds that clear the Pacific for  
sun, floods that unexpected  
wash over them.

## A NEW TERRITORY

Annie with a naturally good  
ear for song picked up a fair  
language for the trip,  
studying a little, not for  
pretension but a country girl  
minding her manners and  
speaking what the place  
called for.

Bill couldn't get enough of it, had her speak nothing but  
French in the train, at the hotel desk, all through the meal,

and afterward tracked the inflections  
where they led, a scout gathering up markers like fruit left  
on a night trail to someplace he'd never been before.

**LETTER TO “Friend Love Bill, You asked”**

Friend Love Bill,

You asked how to know when you're ensured in love. I'll tell you then, it's not a matter you can mistake. Whatever the thing itself is, what comes with is clear. Don't laugh! You can smell better, at least good smells. Sweet, or strong, that must have been there all the time, now they swim in your head.

I would think you would know, all the women who came to you dabbed up after her bath, it's to make you mistake the effect for the cause (which I guess you have often enough, old Sweet William)! Maybe the trouble's in your nose, though that distressed lady who roomed beside us in Rapid City knows, it's not your Nose!

At the moment, I am struck sad, to think that I may have put barbs into what I meant to say in all good spirit only to make you smile. But I began with a truth, and now I shall tell you another. There are times you must think nothing of, that mean everything to me. If I am full of content things should be that way, then I am sure I love you. Remember that train wagon on the UP you complained about, although it still is our best true home? I find some ice for your whiskey, and I put three more dippers of water into the dishpan on the stove, so now I can play you one more game of cards while it gets hot. Perhaps you'll think this silly to remember such a thing, but it was just such a moment that I knew I should be happy to have it go on forever.

Or at least until the water got hot! You see I can't stay serious tonight. There is time for only one more letter between us perhaps, and writing you makes me think suddenly half the time is gone. You can tell that your Missie will not be having a long face, when you meet her! And you, you had better be ready with a little story like that, if you expect any help with your boots.

I have not spent all my time in remembering, and I have a surprise for you that will be fine for the show, you'll see!

Please think of me, your Annie

New Orleans  
March 11, 1903

## ANNIE INVITES HER SOUL

Nineteen years she has been on the road. Again her hands slide the trunk open. A sheen from her own wear begins to match her father's palm-print on his jack-plane. Inside, the gunpowder smell on her clothes is never quite damped by the lavender.

The smell of wood-curly she collected from his carpentry! They turned easily to their center, and light they floated down. Her rifle stock glows like the handle of his gouge.

Without the ways of a father she is educated by strength of men she fell in love with without their knowing it, shy as she was she walked like a cavalryman in her dreams, looked out a high window at the dance, and saw every girl but herself covered with lace.

She has made her way loafing with the men's ease, stayed free of the suspicions of women. She has met the generals, queens, and he of slow dawn in his smiles, flights of geese in his eyes. How could she, with her broken fingernails, speak to him of her other dreams-

-

She watched her sister fall from the window, was told she alone has secret knowledge of the rightful king, who is never the one she chooses. For Bill, she will balance halos of crystal on bullets in the air, and be his lover, but never choose him.



## WHAT WE MADE OF IT

### I.

The pattern for our acts was not cut by me  
 alone. We leave the finished castle or  
 Concord on our search, sail on the ship  
 Demand across space towards Dream. In its  
 service we are decorated with guilt because  
 we never recognized some vaporous ideal.  
 As convicted rapist for the trees we cut and  
 the buffalo we hunted, we limp on this  
 maimed foot.

If you had kept a clear vision of the land, you  
 pilgrims with gaping mouths, kept some  
 tenderness and straightforward human need,  
 would it be different? How do you service a  
 dream, should we have spent our life standing at  
 stud for fata morgana? Who has assurance of  
 doing right, in his own time, by later judgment?

Get Emerson to look up the pipeline, and him to  
 tell what the laws are: Nature must be the  
 mouthpiece. See what deathless patience carves  
 these commandments of stone, how tenderly time  
 prints the vocable lines recorded inside trees.  
 of course it would be better if we were always awake  
 inside our dreams.

### II.

In the Great American Desert, over the horizon appear  
 thousands of dunebuggies, their antennae quivering.  
 . . . *breaker ohnine, do you read?*  
 . . . *this is REDMAN, got a copy?*

In the white silence, speech drowned. . . .  
*hell, I admit it, this is BILL!*  
*Does anybody have a copy?*

An undesecrated hump, an  
 unscathed cactus, They  
 descend! *Breaker, This is*  
*BILL. Do you read me?*  
*I am awake inside your dreams!*

An outpost

relays, dimly, *We have*  
*found the enemy, and it is*  
*us. BILL, his voice*  
 receding to Lookout Mt. :

*Look tenderly, tenderly.  
This is what we made of  
it. We could have done  
nothing else.*

## **BILL POSES AS A GEOLOGIST AND BRAGGART**

“ In 1870 I was detailed by General Sheridan to act as guide for Professor Marsh, the noted geologist of Yale, who, with four or five professors and about twenty-five students, desired to make the trip into the Basin in search of fossils.

“ We outfitted at Old Fort Laramie and came over the mountains by way of Powder River and the Paint Rock. I was much interested in the conclusions of the professors, who stated that conditions throughout the centuries had served to make the soil of the Basin the richest and deepest to be found in America. There was first the inland sea, then the wash as the waters receded, step by step, after they had made their initial break through the mountains.

“ The rich soil deposited on the beaches would, they believed, make this the most fertile valley in America. They read the Basin like an open book. They said it would prove rich in oil and gas and all kinds of minerals.

“ Their talk made a great impression on me and I found my self constantly recalling what they had said. I had picked out a beautiful ranch on the North Fork of the Shoshone. I wanted a railroad in the Basin, and I went to President Perkins of the Burlington with the hope that I might prevail upon him to build it. He said they could not do so at that time, as they had gone to the extent of their resources. Later, after I pointed out the wonderful resources of the Basin, he told me if I would come in and help in its settlement he could build the road at the earliest opportunity. “ I came in and was the first to operate under the Carey Act. Then the first deed under the act was given to Johnny Baker, one of my men. When President Perkins was about to resign he recalled his promise to me and said, 'I promised Colonel Cody to build that line, and I am going to do it before I quit, ' and he did. If it had not been for me you would not have had your railroad. “

Interview quoted in *Big Horn County Rustler*,  
January 21, 1910

**BILL AGAIN**

Wm cradles his long buffalo rifle  
in both arms, and looks far off

In the wavering distances  
he has seen thousands of tongueless  
buffalo heading into the unwatered desert

His hysteria, projectile at its bright yellow edges, whumps  
into the dark humps

He moves across the drying grass with its tiny red flags,  
his left foot slightly dragging

**LET IT SPEAK**

Eckhart: *Suffering is the fastest horse that carries you to perfection.*

Bill, some days he was feeling his age and not living up to his promise, this squandering, how many lives could he expect to live, each one being his superior in the show.

Bill, he has come to the end of now is the hour, let us glorify what we have killed, put on costly perfume and garments, the skins of animals and hold up antlers to dance now the rustle of the ghosts of deer moving in and out the tips of horns.

The deer dance down to the water at midnight, staying out of the moon and we cannot bring them into sight.

*Oh my suffering,  
pathroad to my  
dreams,*

*If the survey goes through my house like they are saying, kill my horse throw his legs in four directions.*

## LETTER TO “Dear Annie, I write in regards”

Denver, February 20, 1910

Dear Annie,

I write in regards our separation these three weeks. We have always had this season in Denver. I believe from what you say there is no use your coming when there will be parties and you don't like them. You work hard at being your true Missie, and keep hoping to pull me over there. I stand here in my own boots and don't know if I'm being stubborn or standing true to Bill so you know who you loved.

Now I am going to give you as best I can my true way of thinking. This will probably be the longest letter I ever wrote in my life. I have love for you more than I had ever, but I'm not sure you know it. Or maybe you do know it and you have waited until Old Bill loves you enough and now you'll try to change his ways!

I like the shows and these outlaw friends of mine, and even the others hanging around are some kind of kin I'd have to claim. It seems like a type when they come west of Chicago they've concluded to bust out of rules for the rest of their lives. They keep looking for something that is their brand of thing to do, and end up some like me. Drifting from one thing to another, whichever is a way to try something out. Like getting up Duke Alexis' hunt when I was little more than a kid. I suppose there wasn't a respectable man among us, unless you count a newspaperman!

Anyway I am old enough and finally get smart enough to look back and see it is my bent to travel and to be among maverick people. I have been otherwise in tried at respectability, you know. Before I'd swing back that way, I will surely have to change some more than I have. For now we will work out how to keep the same affections. I would not have you suffer again, or try to like what you don't.

Now we are getting to the point of when will Will Cody settle down. Missie, you're younger than me. When I take a turn in the road now I want it to lead on clear and smooth. I don't have the time or the itch enough to make a big change and then one more getting back. So if I don't go gull tilt down the road of common sense, I hope you know I'm tracking out in that direction. You are like a mother who will trick the first

steps out of her child, for its own good I guess. For me you should know my character for all your praises is trained in duplicity and survival. In every affair there is another face, and I was bred to that and can't help it any more than coyote bays the moon.

You are my only true silence after the circus. I don't know if I mean the show or my life. You know Nate and Burke looked at the things I've done and that's mostly how we got the show. It looks like history, but it's all parts of my life in a row. Missie, you know what, things were never any more real when they happened than they are in the show? (Black Elk knows this was also for him, and left. )For me each time is another life, it starts over again with the empty grounds, and each time there is a chance to get it right. Maybe some time I'll figure out what happened, right or wrong. But in all this I remain,

Your Affectionate, Bill

**AN OLD MAN WITH A SWOLLEN PROSTATE**  
IN A DENVER HOTEL, BILL READS  
ABOUT HIS  
REPUTATION ASA  
LADIES' MAN

Only the body  
remembers the  
body's beauties,  
remembrance in the act

the revisited body a  
slow ganglia  
once or twice struck dumb

leaves an ache the mind  
only conjures, gives  
foolish pieces it has saved, as

she would let down suddenly  
fine balsam, oil for the lingam

or how she was shy to laugh, woman that she was, or  
shout.



## TOP GUN ANNIE

The air is a soft drift off the  
desert, a balsam stroke on her  
arms and face. None but demure  
words as she checks out.

At 18:45 on a June evening she lifts off,

thrusters slipped to ride on the  
trim wings of her F-16, the full  
moon on her left, the blue  
green over fuscia of the  
Japan- down sun on her right.

She boots it from  
Miramar Naval Air Base over the  
burgundy- dark sea, then bellies over.

*“ He caught  
her by her garment, saying lie  
with me”* She smiles at Bill and  
sheds her chute.

Floating over the crest she  
dives her arms trained on the  
marbled moon.

**BILL SAYS**

Bill says, you've got to cut across  
 circumstance, it's mere. You've got to  
 realize it's show time movie camera  
 before you're sure you got out alive from  
 scrub country in one piece, it's railroad  
 towns  
 and oil leases while I still owe Sitting Bull a horse

It's a grand hotel chamber on Coronado  
 Island with a tennis court on the beach  
 and your liver's not that bad yet, but yet  
 if you stop they fence you in, desperate  
 about the future, you've got to leap

*William,  
 William, Where have  
 you been?*

*I've been to London  
 To visit the Queen,*

and have Katherine to think about, dying  
 in Denver while they practice Howard  
 Hughes on me, keeping my body up  
 there on Lookout Mountain. I belong in  
 Wyoming. I hear there's a battle lined up  
 for 1995 over my bones. They're ready.  
 Maybe I took on too many things, for a  
 piece of ground.

A ripe soil doesn't decide for itself what  
 will grow on it nor which its flower. I  
 planted exotics at Cody, not satisfied  
 with plain runs of grass.

**HEAD ON**

Bigger dark and far  
bigger than he could  
have thought it leaping  
in front of him

a black buffalo with  
perfect pyramid spired  
horns splitting white air

on tracks that  
converge just  
below his vision

howl ye prairie winds  
crack your cheeks

## INTERMEDIATE STATE

At the end, the  
pupils click  
open like  
triggers trying  
to fire the last  
flash of light  
into the brain,  
which has  
already turned  
its eyes away,

“ Goodnight old sun, brother and  
father. In my next-life, how  
many worlds must I travel to find  
your equal?

“ O, great hawk that flies with the bronze sun,  
I would dwell in the house of coolness;

“ O, dung beetle that burrows through my  
left eye, I would pass into the house of  
fire;

“ My double is Captain Jack Crawford.  
I bear his visions in my saddle-packs forever.

“ My soul, as you know, was carried in the  
loins of Missie Oakley. Clothed in wavering  
grass under your eye of sun this was not  
fornication; my divorce was granted in the  
poison my wife served.

“ My heart, my mother heart, has beat in moving  
grass heart-high. The heads of antelope that stop to  
look steady have set the lines that net me to your  
eye.

“ My spiritual body has already spoken  
to you: Yellow Knife when I dropped  
him was balancing on the horns of his death  
these words I sent ahead to thee, *Here I  
stand; release the blaze of these forearms I  
raise if you are able.* “

When it is time for the fourteenth  
round, the road chiefs turn silently to  
each other, and read nothing to help  
our judgment, as Bill:

“ I have not snared  
geese from the goose-pens of  
the gods.

“ I have not stopped water when it should flow.

“ I have washed my being with  
laughter. “ If my mouth is not opened  
in true ceremony, may I hence eat offal  
in the desert.

“ But if I have rightly sued what is permitted, let me pass  
forever possessed of my dreams and desire. “

## BY THE STARS

Horoscope: “ *Colorful Pisces whose name stirs memories and images: Buffalo Bill Cody. . . Pisces is Neptune, secrets, dreams, mind-reading, lie detection, and prophetic poetry.* “

Horologe: Buffalo Bill drives a white Caddie with Texas plates down **I-5** to San Diego past the flags of America and Hilton Hotels squared by the ocean westerlies off Mission Bay. His sideburns, white beard, and hat brim are wider than ever. His southerly flow will crux west running **Interstate 8** in two miles, the very bottom left corner of the board.

He reaches across, pats Annie, who has changed her act a bit and is hardly recognizable. In the flash of their going by it is hard to guess what she means by the smile she gives him.

Late afternoon clouds typical of the season have moved in, but not enough to hide, stretched over them from Sea World to El Capitan, the Great Timepiece in the Sky.

## From *OLD BILL'S WAYS*

1. Nothing ever happens by itself.
2. If you're in it, you had something to do with it.
3. A crow can count seven people coming out of the trees;                      after that they're a crowd.
4. Where there's anger, look for fear behind it.
5. Broken-off posts can still hold a fence line.
6. Build a good stone wall, it will look better in 50 years.
7. Can't soar like an eagle in the morning if ya hooted    with the owls all night.
8. No use hating the desert because it ain't green.
9. Call yr poker hand right, wins more times than not.
10. The moon will let you look at her, but tell you nothing.
11. Awake to the sun, to the grass wet.
12. Awake to your suffering, awake to, until there is only awakening.
13. " Let all your things have their places" (sd Ben Franklin)

## EPILOGUE

Annie snuggled in to take their selfie and  
the iPhone said **Memory Full**

She put it on *Download to Cloud*  
and it sd **No Backup Ever** and insisted

*No Sender No Subject*  
*This Message has no Content*