1971

Rosebud

Jon Anderson

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1175

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.
ROSEBUD

There is a place in Montana where the grass stands up two feet, yellow grass, white grass, the wind on it like locust wings & the same shine. Facing what I think was south, I could see a broad valley & river, miles into the valley, that looked black & then trees. To the west was more prairie, darker than where we stood, because the clouds covered it; a long shadow, like the edge of rain, racing toward us. We had been driving all day, & the day before through South Dakota along the Rosebud, where the Sioux are now farmers, & go to school, & look like everyone. In the reservation town there was a Sioux museum & 'trading post,' some implements inside: a long-bow of shined wood that lay in its glass case, reflecting light. The walls were covered with framed photographs, the Ogallala posed in fine dress in front of a few huts, some horses nearby: a feeling, even in those photographs the size of a book, of spaciousness. I wanted to ask about a Sioux holy man, whose life I had then recently read, & whose vision had gone on hopelessly past its time: I believed then that only a great loss could make us feel small enough to begin again. The woman behind the counter talked endlessly on; there was no difference I could see between us, so I never asked.

The place in Montana was the Greasy Grass where Custer & the seventh cavalry fell, a last important victory for the tribes. We had been driving all day, hypnotized, & when we got out to enter the small, flat American tourist center we began to argue. And later, walking between the dry grass & reading plaques, my wife made an ironic comment: I believe it hurt the land, not intentionally; it was only meant to hold us apart. Later I read of Benteen & Ross & those who escaped, but what I felt then was final: lying down, face against the warm side of a horse, & feeling the lulls endlessly,
the silences just before death. The place might stand for death, every loss rejoined in a wide place; or it is rest, as it was then after the long drive, nothing for miles but grass, a long valley to the south & living in history. Or it is just a way of living gone, like our own, every moment. Because what I have to do daily & what is done to me are a number of small indignities, I have to trust that many things we all say to each other are not intentional, that every indirect word will accumulate over the earth, & now, when we may be approaching something final, it seems important not to hurt the land.