



NELS HANSON

Exile

My farming life is fading, memory
bleached sky, no sun, old negative
turning paler, near pure white now.
In the Great Valley, San Joaquin, I
saw Sierra Nevadas each day and
people came to heal sick lungs. My
grandfather's father's wagon near
Fresno paused half an hour for one
pronghorn herd to cross dirt road.
I drank purest water from the well
he dug. Farmer's paradise, Garden
in the Sun, it lasted just more than
a century, alluvial rich soil, endless
temperate growing season, rivers
and tulle ponds, vast subterranean
lake fed each spring by snowmelt.
Will global warming kill us before
high-tech wars, updated Crusades?
Which catastrophe would be better
for surviving flora, fauna that did
no harm, valley kit fox, kangaroo
rat hopping like kangaroo? Should
I do more than do less wrong, stay
silent, still, never stray five miles
from the Pacific? All my days this

shore is lovely, place surely good
or better than on any planets our
size though experts' last estimates
predict a trillion Earth-like worlds
fill the universe. Do you care about
them or their inhabitants and how
they compare to us? What possible
difference can it make, way we've
become since Cain slew Abel, fled
east of Eden to spoil these lands of
Nod? If you know better please let
me know. My name is in the book.
I watch grey seabirds, blue waves
depart, arrive, curve dolphins leap,
a pattern perfect fifty million years.

Pebbles, Breadcrumbs, Ash

In those days of famine the mother of Hansel and Gretel
died and their stepmother convinced their father
to abandon his children in the woods

so the happy couple would have more
to eat. Frightened brother and sister overheard
and when their father led them into the forest

Hansel dropped a trail of white stones
to mark a way home. The stepmother was angry
so their father took the two deeper into the dark trees

and this time Hansel left a path of breadcrumbs
torn from the last slice of bread. The birds
ate them all and the children were lost and starving

until they came upon a house of gingerbread
they could eat. It belonged to a witch nearly blind
who locked Hansel in a cage to fatten him

for a feast and made Gretel her slave. Hansel
discovered one bone from the witch's last meal
and each day pushed it between bars

so the witch felt his thin finger

and knew he was still too skinny to cook
until the famished witch decided

he was fat enough. She ordered Gretel to start
the fire but Gretel pretended she didn't understand
when the witch asked if the stove was hot

enough. The eager witch leaned forward
to test for herself and Gretel pushed her in, shut
the oven door and burned her to ash. Then

she freed Hansel and they found the witch's
rich treasure and rode on a black swan, scattering
the witch's ashes as they flew home. The cruel

stepmother had died and their lonely father
who missed his poor children had gone to search
in the forest. Soon he noticed the white trail

and running fast followed the ashes
to the witch's house made of cake. In the cold
oven he discovered the last bone of Hansel or

Gretel. He hung it around his neck and locked
himself in Hansel's old cage, certain no

witch would ever come to feed him.

The Tombs Near Dangeil

In a cemetery from the Third Kingdom of Kush, near Meroe its once-lost capital, north toward the modern-day Sudanese village of Dangeil

archaeologists uncovered several underground tombs, finding artifacts including a silver ring engraved with an image of a god, and a faience,

a glazed earthenware box, decorated by two large eyes. Kush controlled the Nile's Nubian Valley northward to Roman Egypt and at times

was ruled by a queen. Many of its pyramids survive but the cemetery contains no surface structures although unearthed funeral articles

suggest widespread belief in an afterlife. Special goods and foods provided departed souls sustenance as demonstrated by tall clay jars that held beer

brewed from sorghum and a "party tray" with seven attached bowls, six in a circle with a bowl at the center, to serve varied dishes on the journey

to another world. The ring bears the visage of a

horned deity, perhaps the god Amun, whose head resembles a ram's. Ancient officials pressed state

symbols into wet pottery though seal rings of silver are rare. The yellow-green box is painted with a talisman the Kushites and their Egyptian rivals

called "udjat," "eyes," protection from the Evil Eye. One tomb yielded arrowheads and remains of a man wearing a stone thumb ring, an "archer's

loose," for drawing back a bowstring. Kush society highly prized skill in archery: Royalty, both women and men, wore the rings and fearsome lion-headed

Apedemak the war god fought as an archer. In 2002 farmers digging a ditch first discovered the graveyard close to Dangeil, south of the Nile's fifth cataract

where its last tributary joins the great river flowing to the Mediterranean. The Atbarah – "water coming from the shades below" – enters violent shallow rapids

amid boulders and myriads of small islands confusing easy navigation and for six thousand years threatening

safe passage of desert sailors trying to reach the sea.

Wovoka

By Nevada's Walker Lake Jack Wilson the Ghost Dancer reached the Father, the Great Spirit, who prepared to create a New World. Wilson was Wovoka, the Indian Messiah, friend of the Mormons – an anonymous

pamphlet appeared in Salt Lake announcing the Christ had returned at Walker as a Paiute. "I found my children were bad, so I went back to heaven and left them. I told them that in so many hundred years I would come back

to see my children. At the end of this time I was sent back to try to teach them. My father told me the earth was getting old and worn out and the people getting bad, and that I was to renew everything as it used to be

and make it better." Wovoka talked to spirits, preached love to all men, to Indians from all across the country who came to Mason Valley to learn the Ghost Dance. The dancers painted their white muslin shirts blue and

yellow with an eagle on the back and could wear no knives or metal or weapons. The men and women held hands in a single circle, dancing, the dying dancers breaking away and entering the enclosing wheel, fainting

into a trance as Wovoka waved an eagle feather and the white eagle came and carried them to the other world where they saw Wovoka with the buffalo and departed family and friends. Then they woke, bringing messages

from the dead and a buffalo tail or a piece of wrapped buffalo meat. “He made no argument and advanced no proofs but said simply that he had been with God as though the statement no more admitted of controversy

than the proposition that 2 and 2 are 4,” reported James Mooney the pioneer ethnologist who danced the Ghost Dance and wrote that Wovoka had fallen into a fever during a complete solar eclipse New Year’s Day 1889.

When the sun died, Wovoka said, he went to sleep in the daytime and rose to heaven, where he saw God and the dead, who were happy and young. He returned with good tidings of peace and reunion and five weather

songs – for mist or cloud, a snowfall, a shower, a hard rain or storm, and clear sky. Wovoka on a summer day made an ice block fall from the air. He formed icicles with his hands and lit his pipe with the sun. “Everybody

is alive again, I don't know when they will be here,
maybe this fall or in the spring, by the sprouting tree
when the green grass is knee high." The delegate from
the Cheyenne Tribe didn't believe though Black Coyote

the Arapahoe ambassador knew Wovoka spoke truly:
"I looked into his hat and saw the whole world." Their
Ghost Song says, *My Father, have pity on me! I have
nothing to eat, I am dying of thirst— Everything is gone!*