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JOHN G. NEIHARDT AS AN EPIC POET

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This study of John G. Neihardt as an epic writer has been undertaken with the purpose of discovering the influences social, economic and literary, that caused the poet to turn exclusively to this form of literary art, when he was already on the road to success in another channel, namely, the short story. But, when we fully realize that all human achievements are preceded by a philosophy of life which shapes them, so we feel that the study of Neihardt's attitude to life may explain the change in the form of his art.

Neihardt views the human race, from the beginning of civilization up to the present time, as a continuous whole, with no divisions of time, such as are chronicled in history. With such a view, the Trans-Missouri Migration is merely the joining again of separated bonds of the race. To quote Mr. Neihardt (I) Neihardt, John G. The Splendid Wayfaring p. 2

"History is to be conceived, not as a succession of periods limited by dates on the calendar, but
rather as one continuous process. Thousands of years ago the Aryan or Indo-European Race, dwelling in the valley of the Euphrates, was seized with wanderlust. A portion of this people turned toward India, others toward the setting sun, and so the journey began that should continue for thousands of years and thousands of miles to reach our own Pacific Coast during the nineteenth century." These wandering people are our ancestors and we are what we are because of what they experienced. It is true that we can trace their progress in the pages of history, how they divided and became distinct nations, with their varying nationalistic tendencies, but what chronologically arranged data can tell us of the race mood that swayed these people in those thousands of years? We are forced to turn from the pages of history to those of literature, which portrays in its emotional element the very heart-throbs of a nation. The joys, the sorrows, the hopes, the fears and the aspirations of our forefathers, combined with the social atmosphere of the times, are laid bare by the poet. We find no better portrayal than that left us in the
epic, which is one of the earliest forms of literature that has become our heritage.

ESSENCE

Let us consider the epic as to form, scope and plot. It is the most dignified and elaborate form of narrative poetry relating, according to Dr. Butcher, (2) "A great and


complete action, which attaches itself to the fortunes of a people or to the destiny of mankind and which sums up the life of the period. The story and the deeds of those who pass across the wide canvas are linked with the wider movement of which men themselves are but a part. The hero is swept into the tide of events; the hairbreadth escapes, the surprises and the marvelous incidents of the epic story only partly depend upon the spontaneous energy of the hero." In the poems universally recognized as epics the personages, the actions and forces are apparently presented through the poetical
machinery of a double plot and two spheres of action with many points of contrast - a human and a divine plot complicated into one. Another mark of works universally accepted as epics, according to Dr. Butcher, (Ibid., p 3) is "their tendency to be social or national as opposed to the individual, to sum up and express in essence an epoch and a nation".

We have seen the structure of the epic as to plot and scope, and we know almost every great nation has produced a great epic, but what is the nature and purpose of the epic? It is the preservation, in enduring form, of heroic traditions in the origins of nations, to develop and perpetuate the group spirit and ideals, and thus to become through the ages, a contribution to the building of the race consciousness. The epic creates patriotism, which is nothing else than a passionate devotion to a land and its people, growing out of association with the heroic deeds of the fathers of a nation.

Nothing less than this passionate love can create in any people the unified group spirit, aggressive and triumphant, moving on to splendid
national achievement. The epic then must glorify the land and the heroes.

Thus we see that the history of epic poetry is as old as civilization, but not all nations have produced it, only those great nations that wish to hand down to posterity the deeds, real or imaginary, that have become linked with their own lives or the lives of their immediate ancestors. Thus among the Serbians, Russians and Serbian Tartars we find epic lyric songs, but they are never welded together into an epos.

Let us view the epics that have been produced by the various nations in the thousands of years that they were gradually moving westward toward our own great America, for "like causes produce like effects" and perhaps we shall see the need of an epic in our own native land or perhaps decide whether we really have one in the works of Neihardt.

**ANCIENT EPICS**

It is to Greece that we owe our first and greatest literary monuments of epical
character. They deal not only with war and personal romance, but also with the carrying out of a didactic purpose or the celebrating of the mysteries of religion. There are three divisions to which are attached the more or less mythical names of Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus, that seem to mark the earliest literary movement of the Greeks. When the traditions began to be preserved, everything of the saga-character was attributed to Homer, a blind inhabitant of Chias. Aristotle attributes these great poems to him, namely the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and *Margites*. The first two have been preserved for us as the type of the ancient epic, and are without doubt the greatest epics in any age; the *Iliad* is called the "beginning of literature", so when we speak of epic poetry, we unconsciously measure it by the best examples— the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

It is significant that Homer wrote in a disillusioned time many years later. Is there that in human nature that must find a glory in life, even if it be necessary to look backward for a golden age, when the present has become prosaic?
It is the purpose of reading the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the original Greek, that induced Neihardt, at the age of thirty, to plunge into the study of the Greek language without a tutor. He wanted to know Homer and Aeschylus — long loved in translations — as they really were. He wished to get the Greek feeling for life because of its fine quality, and especially, as being representative of that feeling, he wished to study Aeschylus. Neihardt once said that, "all great poetry has the Aeschylus principle, that of stern masculinity, both in material and form, as though the lines had been beaten out with iron, not molded from wax, as though life were storm not calm." In order to get the feeling of a passage as a whole, he would carefully work out the constructions and master the meters until he could read all rapidly and realize its beauty as a living piece of literature. Thus, for a time he became a Greek, "being, as it were, a listener in a theatre."(3) His love of Aeschylus has had a powerful influence in his life, although there is

nowhere any evidence of imitation in his work. The likeness is in the mood, the way of viewing the affairs of men.

When we view the epic as a whole, we see that it falls naturally into two divisions: first, those forms that are the outgrowth of a period of spontaneous composition of epic songs; secondly, those that are the creations of highly cultured and widely read minds, consciously using a long established form of accepted models. Homer's works belong to this first class.

From the Greek, the epic passes into the Latin and seems to have been cultivated from the very beginning of Latin literature. A Greek exile, Livius Andronicus, translated the Odyssey into Latin during the First Punic War. The most famous of the Roman epics is the Aeneid, begun in the year 30 B.C.; its author, Vergil, died nine years later, leaving three years' work unfinished, yet it is a priceless monument to art. Virgil continues the story of the Iliad, showing how Troy was taken and burnt, and then continues with the adventures of Aeneas, who escapes from the burning city and makes his way to Italy.
As a youth of fifteen, Neihardt was spending five hours a day on Latin. He could read the Aeneid at sight, thus he became acquainted with the elder gods. He was carried away by the music and imagery of the Aeneid. As a boy he was dreaming back old Troy and listening to the far murmur of the Simois as it "rolled along the shields and helmets and brave bodies of heroes swept beneath its waves." (Ibid., p. 7)

Thus in the study of Latin and Greek literature, Neihardt's ideals were set for his own career as a writer; he longed to sing as the poets of old had sung, but of his own native land, and the heroes of that land who were unknown to the greater masses of Americans.

**EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT**

Chronologically the next epic is the Teutonic, which deals with legends founded on the history of Germany in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, particularly such heroes as Ermonaric, Attila and Theodoric. The most noted of all Teutonic epics is the Nibelungenlied; it is written in four-lined strophes instead of the
rhyming couplets of the courtly epics. The Nibelungenlied is the best portrayal of the ancient Germanic ideal of Treue, faithfulness to death and even beyond the grave. (4)

In the Nibelungenlied, D.B. Shumway, The Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 20, p. 300

Teutonic epics, Beowulf is of most interest to English readers as it forms the basis for the earliest historical data of the time, which have come down to us and marks the beginning of our English literature. It gives us a faithful picture of many phases of ancient Germanic life moral as well as material, and particularly of Germanic social and military ideals, before they left their ancient homes on the continent for Britain. It is a priceless treasure of historical and literary value. (5)

From Beowulf to Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, Schaefer

The French epics of medieval times are a curious transitional link between the epics of England and Germany and modern poetry. The Teutonic poems are obscure and intense, while the
French are lucid and easy. The existing masterpiece of the latter kind is the magnificent _Chanson de Roland_, which is the most interesting and pleasing of all the epics of medieval Europe. This inspired the splendid romantic epic in Italy, _Jerusalem Delivered_, by Tasso, with its double plot of a celestial and terrestrial nature. Early Portuguese literature is also rich in epic poetry. The first production of literary merit composed on either American continent was _Araruona_, in Spanish verse.

**EPIC MATERIAL IN THE UNITED STATES**

No nation has richer material for epic creation than the United States. If an epic of the West is to be written it must be written while this history is sufficiently near us, that we may know and feel it, while yet some survivors of our heroic period are here to tell the tale, while yet old men who knew the pioneers, as Ashley, Smith and Fitzpatrick or their associates, can tell the tales of almost forgotten incidents of heroism to the poet, that it may be handed down to posterity in epic form.
Other epical topics may be found, as Kipling or some other English poet has said, in the rise and fall of the Confederacy. Abraham Lincoln, on the Union side, is an ideal protagonist for epic drama. The republic of Texas, most gallant and most brave of all small nations, would furnish excellent material for an epic. Some southwestern skald should be trying it soon. The Alamo was defended by human flesh as superbly as the battlements of heaven were defended with celestial engines by John Milton's angels.

That America has not produced a genuine epic is to be regretted, for we have an abundance of epic material. We have no poet, if we exclude Neihardt and his Cycles, with the vision and the artistry necessary for the work. William Vaughn Moody perhaps more nearly approached the epic genius than any other American. Edwin Arlington Robison does not succeed, to an exceptional degree in ordinary long narratives. He is too introspective. Ezra Pond, who can manage an epic rhythm, can not embrace the epic conception. Edgar Lee Masters, who might conceive one, could not execute it. The American nation may one day
have a great poem of its own, but that day is no
doubt far off. Few nations have ever produced

"The Frontier! There is no word in
more than one and each has been the fruition of
the English language more stirring, more intimate,
a long national travail.

or more beloved, than the one word - Frontier!

But in its broadest significance, the frontier
knows no country; it lies in other times and in
other lands than our own. When and what was the
Great Frontier?"(8) It was, in our early history,

Hough, Emerson. The Passing of the Frontier, pp.7-11

when the whole of America was a frontier. We have
only to turn back in spirit to the last half of
the fifteenth century, when once again the
western urge swayed the nations of Europe, and so
strongly was the old impulse felt, that Columbus
struck out into the unknown and turbulent waters
of the Atlantic and finally reached our own
America. Brave and bold men followed where he
dared lead, and for more than a hundred years,
ships plowed the sea of the New World in search
of wealth and adventure. The country was almost
wholly unknown, but compellingly alluring to bold
men. "Some impulse seemed to act upon the soul of
"The Frontier! There is no word in the English language more stirring, more intimate, or more beloved, than the one word - Frontier! But in its broadest significance, the frontier knows no country; it lies in other times and in other lands than our own. When and what was the Great Frontier?" (6) It was, in our early history, when the whole of America was a frontier. We have only to turn back in spirit to the last half of the fifteenth century, when once again the western urge swayed the nations of Europe, and so strongly was the old impulse felt, that Columbus struck out into the unknown and turbulent waters of the Atlantic and finally reached our own America. Brave and bold men followed where he dared lead, and for more than a hundred years, ships plowed the sea of the New World in search of wealth and adventure. The country was almost wholly unknown, but compellingly alluring to bold men. "Some impulse seemed to act upon the soul of
the braver and bolder Europeans; and they moved westward, nor could they have helped that, had they tried. They lived largely and blithely, and died handsomely, those old Elizabethan adventurers, and they lie today in thousands of unrecorded graves upon two continents, each having found out that any place is good enough for a man to die upon, provided that he be a man."

(Ibid., p., 14) Thus a new continent was found that was destined to become the last bond for uniting the race.

**PERIOD OF SETTLEMENT**

The first home-seekers came to the New World in 1607, landing in Virginia; they were sturdy Englishmen, ready and willing to take up the burdens of pioneer life. Closely following them came the Dutch, with their quaint customs, their thrift and industry. Thus colonies grew and multiplied until they formed a line along the Atlantic coast. The Dutch colony came under English dominion and the whole coast became English, extending from Maine to Florida.

The French located in the Saint
Lawrence and the Mississippi valleys and were devoting all their interests to fur trading with the Indians and to missionary labors.

The Spanish gold seekers settled in the South. They were great lovers of adventure, hoping to get rich and return to their native land.

The settlers along the Atlantic coast began to move inward; thus the frontier line began to crawl westward from seaport settlements, afoot, on horseback, in barges, or with slow wagon trains. The old urge was once more in the hearts of the people; they must see what lay beyond the Alleghenies and what it held for them. Immigrants were coming into the colonies, the settlers would make room by moving westward. With this migration of families came the Neihardts, one among many. In the New World they have always been found in the forefront of all pioneer movements from Pennsylvania to Oregon. Here with many others they lived the pioneer life, a life of personal adventure, in which the individual had no government behind him and he lacked even the protection of any law. Westward before him was
adventure, an unsettled country that was his for
the taking; the barrier between him and his
promised land must be overcome.

THE NEW WEST BEYOND THE ALLEGHENIES

Both the French and the English
were desirous of possessing the Ohio Valley; the
French had established trading posts in the
region claimed by Great Britain. The governor of
Virginia decided to send a written protest to the
French, warning them against occupying a region
"so notoriously known to be the property of the
Crown of Great Britain." Both nations were now
committed to the policy of armed occupation of the
Ohio Valley, which resulted in the "French and
Indian War" that broke the power of France forever
in the New World and made us an English speaking
nation. This gave the English settlers an
undisputed right to the West beyond the Alleghenies.
Soon bold pioneers from Virginia and North Carolina
pushed westward through the Cumberland Gap and were
settling in the region now Kentucky and Tennessee.
The westward advance of these backwoodsman was
stubbornly contested by the Indians, whose savage
raids gave Kentucky its name of "dark and bloody ground." Men like Boone, Kenton, Robertson and Sevier could not be held back, although for years their little settlements were subject to all the horrors of Indian attack.

The boldest defender of the Kentucky frontier was George Rogers Clark, a young Virginian, who headed an expedition that won for his country the Mississippi instead of the Alleghenies as its western boundary, and opened the way for the march of the American people across the continent.

The history of the westward movement in America is the story of a series of frontiers, which the pioneer reclaimed from nature and the American Indians, each frontier in turn becoming the starting-point of a new westward march of the population. The winning of the first frontier came as a result of the establishment of the thirteen original colonies along the Atlantic coast; and by the middle of the eighteenth century this frontier line was advancing towards the Alleghenies. After the Revolution our people began the task of occupying the country between the Allehenies and
The Mississippi. (7)


THE TRANS-MISSOURI MIGRATION

The Far West, the West beyond the Mississippi, had been thrust upon Jefferson, for France saw that it was impossible to hold Louisiana against the American advance. Jefferson, through his agent at Paris, asked only for New Orleans; but Napoleon thrust upon him the great West, because Napoleon saw, what the American statesmen and diplomats did not see, but what the Westerners felt; he saw that no European power could hold the country beyond the Mississippi when the Americans had made good their foothold upon the hither bank. So the men who settled and peopled the western wilderness were the men who won Louisiana.

The Government did not know exactly what it had acquired, for the land was not only unmapped but unexplored. Beyond the Mississippi all that was really well known was the territory in the immediate neighborhood of the little French
villages near the mouth of the Missouri. The Creole traders of these villages, and an occasional venturous American, had gone up the Mississippi to the country of the Sioux and the Mandans, where they had trapped and hunted and traded for furs with the Indians. At the northernmost points that they reached they occasionally encountered traders who had traveled south or southwesterly from the wintry regions where the British fur companies reigned supreme.

The headwaters of the Missouri were absolutely unknown; nobody had penetrated the great plains, the vast seas of grass through which the Platte, the Little Missouri and the Yellowstone ran.

What lay beyond them, and between them and the Pacific, was not even guessed at. The Rocky Mountains were not known to exist, so far the territory newly acquired by the United States was concerned, although under the name of "Stonies" their northern extensions in British America were already on some maps. (8)

The work of exploring these new
lands fell, not to the wild hunters and trappers, such as those who had first explored Kentucky and Tennessee, but to the officers of the United States army; the first of these expeditions was planned by Jefferson himself and authorized by Congress. The two officers chosen to carry through the work belonged to families already honorably distinguished for service on the Western border. One was Captain Meriwether Lewis, representatives of whose family had served so prominently in Dunmore's war; the other was Lieutenant William Clark, a younger brother of George Rogers Clark.

Every school boy knows how Lewis and Clark left Saint Louis in May, 1804, with three boats and forty-five men and after a difficult journey of sixteen hundred miles, reached the villages of the Mandan Indians in North Dakota and spent the winter near the present city of Bismark. The source of the Missouri was reached the following spring; leaving their boats, they encountered the Bitter Root Mountains, at length reaching the Columbia, and finally attaining their
goal, the Pacific, on Nov. 7, 1805. Then began their return journey, that ended "at noon, Tuesday, the 23rd of September, 1806, a ragged band of long-haired, bearded fellows was seen to steer in toward Saint Louis. They raised their muskets in the air and fired a salute. A rumor ran through the little water town that Lewis and Clark had returned; the whole village turned out to hurrah a welcome. The far wanderers had traversed, in all, over seven thousand miles."(9)

(9) World Review - April 7, 1927, p. 137

The expedition of Lewis and Clark has been immortalized in history, but many a brave man who helped to open up this great region will never be known in history. It is to the old fur traders that we shall devote our attention, and to the pioneers, who sought homes for themselves in this new land. To the trapper, the Missouri was the first and last of our great natural frontier roads. Its lower course swept along the eastern edge of the Plains, far to the south, down to the very doors of the most adventurous settlements in the Mississippi Valley. Those who dared its
stained and turbulent current had to push up, onward, northward, past the mouth of the Platte, steadily forward through a vast virgin land. Then the river bent boldly and strongly off to the west, across another empire. We who travel so swiftly and easily today should not fail to reflect on the long trail of the upbound boats which Manuel Lisa and other traders sent almost immediately upon the return of the Lewis and Clark expedition. We should see them struggling up against that tremendous current before steam was known, driven by their desire for new lands. We may then understand fully what we have read of the enterprises of the Old American Fur Company, and bring to mind the forgotten names of Campbell and Sublette, of General Ashley and of Wyeth - names to be followed by others really of less importance, as those of Bonneville and Fremont. That there could be farms, in this strange wild country, was, to those early adventurers, unthinkable. For then millions of buffalo covered the plains, millions of beaver swarmed in the streams, while Indians moved about the vast prairies, the undisputed posseors.
Here in the mid-continent, at the mid-entury, a new frontier was formed and the first great caravans of the Platte Valley, with wagon trains a hundred strong, differed from the scattering cavalcade of the fur hunters, seeking beaver pelts and satisfying their longing for adventure. Those who took to the mid-continental highway, known as the Oregon Trail or Overland Trail, were neither trading nor trapping man, but home-building men - the first real emigrants to go west with the intention of making homes beyond the Rockies.

Neihardt wrote not of the explorers but of the pioneers, the French from the Saint Lawrence, the Spanish, who came up the Mississippi, the English, the Germans and the Irish, who crossed the Alleghenies and came down the Ohio river. He wrote of them not as peoples of different nationalities, for that fact was obscured by the cause they had in view but as Americans, with one heart, one soul, united in one endeavor, to conquer the West. They are facing a life as daring and bold as their ancestors. The result of their group spirit is
our western civilization, with one territory reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a land producing everything needful in the life of man. The price? It has been paid in privations, struggles, and sacrifices, and even in life itself, by many who turned their faces toward the setting sun and the bison. There was another people that suffered on account of that movement, and disasterously. It was the red man; all that he had, all that he possessed was being wrested from him, his buffalo, his prairies, were being wiped out. He felt his struggle was hopeless, yet he fought for his own with despair in his heart. This struggle, the mood of both the white man and the Indian, Neihardt gives us. The white man was to result in triumph, the Indian in overwhelming defeat.

**PIONEER LIFE**

Thus we see that the American continent was not won in a day, but by successive waves of population reaching farther and ever farther to the west. Until recent years we have always had a frontier and pioneers.
Stand at the Cumberland Gap”, writes Mr. Turner, "and watch the process of civilization marching single file - the buffalo following the trail to the salt springs, the Indian, the fur trader and hunter, the cattle raiser, the pioneer farmer - and the frontier has passed by. Stand at South Pass in the Rockies a century later and see the same procession - the buffalo and the Indian making their last retreat, the hunter giving place to the cattle man, and the cattle man reluctantly and slowly yielding ground to the farmer, whose business it now became to reproduce the civilization he had left. And thus the progress of creating and recreating a new civilization on the ruins of an ancient wilderness went on through four centuries of American History.

"The pioneer saw in expansion the law of nature. Dispossess the Indian of the lands they did not use, kill the buffaloes to make way for the herds of cattle and fields of grain, fell the forests primeval, overturn the prairie sod.

"For he must blaze a nation's way, with hatchet and with brand,
This was no easy task; it required strength and courage and resourcefulness, characteristics which by common consent are always among the first to be attributed to the pioneer. The frontier did not attract the weaklings, and if by chance they found their way to the West they did not long survive the rough-and-tumble pioneer life. The wives of frontiersmen, for the most part unwilling pioneers, who followed their husbands from loyalty rather than from choice — were among the first to lose out in the pioneer struggle for existence. As a proof, go to any pioneer cemetery and let the gravestones tell the story. For the grave of every pioneer husband, you will find the graves of two or three pioneer wives. Probably the repose which these women found in death was the first that they had known in many years. Their sacrifices were indeed many, for they must make a home, that was happy even in
these crude surroundings. "Coarse and rough in appearance, these pioneers were "a race of poets" ever dreaming of better days. The pioneer bore all things, hoped all things, endured all things, but his quest was not for an intangible spiritual reward. He wanted houses and lands and barns and castles and dollars. He would take the land before him, he would wring from it all he desired. But in order to do this he must pay the price of disappointed hopes, heart sickening days, days of fear and dread of the Indian, days of hunger and cold; but with a bold heart he pushed on along the trails until he reached his goal. The constant procession of emigrants over this road, coming from the country east of the Missouri, caused the Indians to ponder and wonder, if the land from whence came so great an exodus to the West were not vacant.

"At first the Indian made no objection to this invasion over his traditional trail which he used when in quest of game, or as a more permanent trail to places of water. Ultimately a time came when protests from the
red man became so forceful in the way of ambush, raids, and open conflict against the white men, that those who went over the 'Medicine Road' now had to go in groups, and by force of fire arms held the coveted trail." (Ibid., p. 29).

Many who sought health and wealth in the country at the end of the trail failed to reach their destination; the numerous graves along the trail were silent witnesses in the battle for territorial expansion. Yet there as a small proportion that passed successfully and we may say that the Oregon Trail helped to win an empire for the United States.

THE FUR TRADERS

The earliest band of men to trap in the western streams that ran parallel with the Oregon Trail, which the Indians in time called "The Great Medicine Road of the Whites", belonged to William Ashley's fur company from Saint Louis. In 1822, a fur company was organized to go into the mountains, to trap. It is of this Ashley Fur Company that Neihardt writes in his "Song of Hugh Glass" and in "The Song of the Three Friends."
Among the members of Ashley's organization were Andrew Henry, Jedediah Smith, William Sublette, Milton Sublette, David E. Jackson, Robert Campbell, James Bridger, Etienne Provost and many others, all of whom wrote their names large in the early history of the West. Lakes, streams, mountain passes, peaks, forts, and cities bear testimony of the indomitable bravery of these men. These trappers were sent by their leader into an unexplored region of the Yellowstone and Big Horn, reaching the country by the Missouri route. (11)

(11) The Bozeman Trail, Hebard and Bininstool

The summer of 1823 found a party of Henry's men fighting the Indians of the Yellowstone; the expedition was abandoned after twenty-two horses had been stolen. The entire party then moved over near the mouth of the Big Horn River, following it toward its source. It was on this venture that South Pass was discovered. Through this pass the Oregon Trail later took its course to the Pacific. (12)

(12) The Bozeman Trail, Hebard and Bininstool
Doubtless, on this expedition of 1823, Bridger was a companion trapper of Hugh Glass, among many others. The story of Glass's terrible combat with a large grizzly bear is well known as a western classic of Neihardt's Cycle.

While en route up Grand River, Glass, who was accounted one of the best rifle shots in the command, was often detailed to go out after game. While forcing his way through a heavy thicket one day he stumbled upon a bear with two cubs. Before Glass could make a move to defend himself, the bear sprang upon him, bore him to the ground and tore off a huge chunk of flesh from his body, which she offered to her cubs. The trapper endeavored to escape from the animal, but was again pounced upon and mauled and mangled in a shocking manner. His cries for help were heard by some of his companions, who hastened to the spot and dispatched the bear as she was standing over Glass's supposedly dead body. The trapper, however, was yet a live, but so horribly torn and disfigured that it was not thought possible that he could live. It was further feared that if the
entire party were delayed to determine whether Glass would live or die, they might be attacked by Indians any moment. Finally Major Henry offered eighty dollars to any two men who would remain behind until Glass either died or recovered sufficiently to be removed to the nearest trading post. A trapper named Fitzgerald and one other - a younger man, who tradition says was Jim Bridger - agreed to remain with their injured companion. Five days they watched, but Glass clung to life with a tenacity that was marvelous. At last, seeing no prospects of the immediate death of their companion, the two watchers deserted him to his fate, even taking his rifle and accoutrements, and leaving Glass without means of protection. Overtaking the main body of the trappers, the two men stated that Glass had died and they had buried him as well as possible. They showed the rifle in confirmation and the story was believed. Glass, however, did not die, but gradually recovered his strength, and in a miraculous manner contrived to reach Fort Kiowa, a post on the Missouri River, a hundred miles away. History has not been able to prove
that Jim Bridger was one of these two villains who deserted Glass in his wretched condition; and taking into consideration Bridger's well known courage and the fact that he was a man to be depended upon in times of great danger, it is not likely that the story is true of Bridger. On account of his great courage and deeds in the West, Bridger is called "The Grand Old Man of the Rockies." From the South Pass Ashley's little band of fearless fur men journeyed down the Big Sandy to its juncture with the Green River. The place became known as the "Green River Rendezvous". Ashley was the first to use the word "rendezvous" to indicate a definite locality where they were to gather on a large scale, these hardy fur men. On July 1, 1825, Ashley met his men, who had been collecting beaver skins in an area between the 34th and 44th degrees of latitude on the Big Horn, Sweetwater, Green and Beaver Rivers, about twenty miles north of the present Utah-Wyoming boundary line. In this collected assemblage were twenty-nine fur trappers of the Hudson Bay Company, who with Ashley's trappers made a gathering together.
of one hundred and twenty men, divided into two camps. The site of this historic meeting is today of easy identification, an area of two hundred acres known as Bridger's Flat. The rendezvous was a selected site at which the yearly contracts between the traders and fur trappers were made and former contracts settled. Here would come gaily attired gentlemen from the mountains of the South, with the dash of the Mexican about them, their bridles heavy with silver, their hats rakishly pinned with gold nuggets, and with Kit Carson or Dick Wooton in the lead. In strong contrast would appear Jim Bridger and his band, careless of personal appearance, despising foppery, burnt and seamed by the sun and wind of the western deserts, powdered with alkali dust, fully conscious that clothes mean nothing, and that, man to man, they could measure up to the best of the mountain men. At this meeting you could find representatives of the various countries of Europe that were again blending into one nation as they were in the Euphrates valley, many thousands of years before. You would find the excitable Frenchman, looking for guidance from Provost, the two Sublettes, and Fontenelle, the
thoroughbred American, Kentuckian in type, with his long heavy rifle, his six feet of bone and muscle, and his keen, determined, alert vigilance; the canny Scott, the jolly Irishman, best represented in Fitzpatrick, the man with the broken hand, who knew more about the mountain conditions than any other man, except possibly Bridger; and mixed in the motly crowd an alloy of Indians - Snakes, Bannocks, Flatheads, Crows, Utes, - come to trade furs for powder, lead guns, knives, hatchets, fancy cloth, and, most coveted of all, whiskey, that made the meanest redskin feel like a great chief.

These fur trappers were strong and brave men, who trapped beavers for their pelts, slept in the open, with a gun beside them, ready at a moments notice to spring to their feet and begin a battle with the Indians. While they sought riches from their trade, they hungered for adventures more. They wanted to traverse the continent and search out its secrets.

In 1826 Ashley sold to Jedediah Smith, David Jackson and William Sublette, his interest in the Fur Company, which was operated
until 1834 under the name of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.

THE INDIAN WARS

With the passing of the fur traders came the pioneer settlers. The clanking of chains, the creaking wagons, the costly trappings of horses, made a deep impression on the red man, who while waiting to see the train pass in review, wondered if the white men were invaders into their treasured hunting grounds or were only passing on to other fields. To the perplexed Indian, the deep marks made by hoof and wheel were scars on the face of their traditional hunting ground.

Another thing that aroused the Indian was the purchase of Old Fort Laramie by the United States Government, as a frontier post on the Oregon Trail and as an outlet of the Northwest. It was located forty miles beyond the boundary of Nebraska, where the Laramie meets the North Branch of the Platte. It had formerly been used as a rendezvous of explorer, trapper, scout and voyager of all the Western country since its first
designation by William Sublette and Robert Campbell as a protection from the Crows and Pawnees in 1834. For the first year it was a stockade only. It was bought the next year by Jim Bridger and the American Fur Company. Fort Laramie was important as a basis for supplies in all the years of the Indian struggle, as well as the starting point into the Powder River Country. It was here that the conference in June, 1866, was held between the Indian chiefs and white commissioners wherein it was decided that the Indian would not permit a road through Powder River Country. From this same point Colonel Carrington pushed that summer into the forbidden country for the completion of Forts Reno, Phil Kearney and Smith. (Op.Cit., p. 30. Vol.1)

The chief stories of the Indian Wars that Neihardt has immortalized are Fetterman's Disaster, the Wagon Box Fight, the mighty Struggle at Beecher Island, the Rush for the Black Hills' Gold, the Attack on the Village of Crazy Horse, the mystery of the Sun Dance, the Battle of Little Big Horn, the Retreat of the Indians, the Fight on Slim Buttes, and the final
episode, The Death of Crazy Horse at Fort Robison.

The days of December 1866 were tragic ones for the forts on the Bozeman Road, particularly the one on Little Piney. Some of the younger officers at Fort Phil Kearney became restless, even to the point of secretly disobeying orders in connection with the conservative and cautious method of Colonel Carrington in dealing with the Indians. Foremost among these was Captain Fetterman, who having had no experience on the Frontier once said, "A single company of regulars could whip a thousand Indians", and "a full regiment could whip the entire array of hostile tribes." He further stated, "that with eighty men he could ride through the Sioux nation."

It was this spirit of reckless bravado possessed by Fetterman, Brown and Grummond, which brought them and seventy-eight brave soldiers to their death in the Fetterman Disaster.

The morning of December twenty-first was bright and clear, so as usual the wood train set out. It had only advanced a mile and a half, when it signaled for aid from the fort.
Fetterman was placed in command of the relief corps, with strict orders from Colonel Carrington, "Under no circumstances must you cross Large Trail Ridge". The order was disregarded to the disaster of the entire contingent. In a place fifty feet square lay the bodies of Colonel Fetterman and Brown, who apparently shot each other, when all hope of retreat vanished, with seventy-five enlisted men and two volunteers. Each man was stripped and hacked and scalped, the skulls beaten in with war clubs, and the bodies gashed with knives almost beyond recognition, with other ghastly mutilations that the civilized pen hesitates to record.

This tragedy brought the Indian problem before the country as never before. The hand of the Westerners must be aided by a stronger protection from the United States government, if they were to continue to dwell in the New West.

The Wagon Box Fight was described by Sergeant Samuel Gibson, U.S.A., former private of the Twenty-seventh Infantry, who was a hero on the occasion. Gilmore and Porter had taken a contract to supply Fort Phil Kearney with logs for
the sawmills and firewood for the following winter. To protect their stock from night attacks of the Indians, the contractors improvised a corral by removing the fourteen boxes from their wagons and placing them in the shape of an oval, so that stock could be driven in and protected at night. It was here, on August 2, 1867, that thirty-two men under the command of Colonel Powell held off more than three thousand Indians for an entire day. The terrible Sioux, for hours and hours, by the most savage attacks attempted to overthrow the power of the soldiers and to drive them from the country. "But the thirty-two

(13) Masters, J. G. The American Review of A Notable Literary Production."


men resisting the Indians were of the American breed, too, and held fast. As wave upon wave of the Sioux and Cheyennes fell, the white men nerved themselves for the terrible battle, and in the awful heat of the August sun, on the stench of burning corral and suffering blistering thirst, they fought until mid-afternoon, when the long
skirmish line of reinforcements reached the hill above the fort." Only three men were lost in the conflict. The victory was due to the courage of the soldiers, and to the effectiveness of the new breech-loading Springfield rifles, unknown to the Indians until that day. The rapidity and constancy of the firing puzzled the Indians, who were waiting for a lull in the resistance to make their final attack. In this battle some of the most wonderful feats of horsemanship were displayed by the Indians, especially in their charges and rescue of their dead. Their bravery was equal to that of the whites, but they were unable to withstand that terrible and constant fire that was poured into their ranks. Different estimates have been given of the Indians' loss, from three to eleven hundred.

No other such battle as The Wagon Box Fight has ever been recorded in all the Indian engagements of the West - where the whites were so overwhelmingly outnumbered, nearly a hundred to one. Neither has there been another battle anywhere in the United States in which the losses of the outnumbered party were so few compared...
with those of their opponents. The closest approach to it was the Beecher Island fight on the Arickaree Fork of the Republican River in 1868, where fifty men stood off about seven hundred Chyennes for several days before relief came.

The treaty of April 29, 1868, gave to the Indians the "Great Sioux Reservation" embracing approximately twenty-two million acres of land, west of the Missouri River, between the forty-third and forty-sixth parallels, and east of the hundred and fourth meridian, and granting the right to hunt and travel in unceded territory north of the North Platte and on the Republican Fork of the Smoky Hill River; this gave them to believe that they were the sole posessors of that country and they acted accordingly.

The provisions of the treaty, which prohibited the whites from settling on the Indian's land without his consent, were constantly violated. The seekers of gold and homes were the most flagrant violators of this provision. To mention the invasion of the red man's territory by individuals and officers in 1874 in the Black Hills country, where gold had been discovered, is
to explain Custer's last battle. The report in the same year by General Custer of rich gold deposits in the Black Hills created a stampede into the new gold camp, against which Red Cloud in 1875 made an angry protest. Depredations as a result of this "invasion" became so numerous that the government decided that the roaming Indian must be confined in his reservations. Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, leading chiefs, refused to leave the hunting grounds.

General Reynolds, during the winter of 1875, surprised the camp of Crazy Horse, but the band succeeded in retreating with comparatively small loss, in a storm. A little later Crazy Horse with a strong band of Sioux and Cheyenne compelled the forces of General Cook to retreat. He then strengthened his band by Indians from the different reservations, which were filled with a seething unrest by his agents. Others from the reservations joined Sitting Bull in Dokata. The forces of the two leaders joined, under the leadership of Sitting Bull, to go against General Custer.

(14) "Crazy Horse" p.168, The Encyclopedia Amer. Vol. 8
Neihardt gives us a beautiful description of the Sun Dance, a ceremony performed, with local variations, by most of the prairie Indians, including the Mandan, Omaha, Pawnee Loup, Cheyennes, Arikara, Hidatsa, Blackfeet, Nez Perce, Winnebago, Yankton, Santee, and Kiowa. In its ceremonial forms the sun dance of all these tribes seems related, and it may be regarded as a summer solstice ceremony though in many tribes this element is largely or entirely obscured.

The fundamental object of the ceremony seems to have been the over-coming of certain cosmic elements. The dance begins at sunrise and ceases at the following sunrise. The devotee or sun-dancer indulges in the ceremony to fulfill a vow, made by him during the previous winter or season from various motives, that he would make a prayer to the dispenser of what he needs through an appeal to the sun. The Tetons call the ceremony by the name which means "They dance looking at the sun". Each devotee persists in his part until he has received a vision from the sun; but if at the close of the ceremony no such vision has been vouchsafed to him, resort is had to self-sacrifice,
is that of having two wooden skewers inserted underneath strips of skin raised by slashing the breast or back, to which stout thongs are made fast, by which the devotee is drawn up and fastened to the sun-pole, to which he remains suspended until his weight, sometimes made greater by having a buffalo-skull hung to his person by similar skewers, causes the latter to rend the skin, thus letting the devotee fall to the ground, usually in a faint; another may have a buffalo-skull suspended from thongs passing through raised strips of the skin on the back or breast, which is allowed to hang thus until the skin is parted by violence and the thongs are freed. Some men who do not intend to dance seat themselves near the sun-pole, and small pieces of flesh are cut out in a row from the shoulders of each; these are offered to the being represented by the sun-pole.

(15) Handbook of the American Indians. Bulletin 30 Part 2, Government Printing office Washington, D.C. The insurrection organized by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse was to be put down, so in the spring of 1876 Sheridan made ready for
a decisive blow. After some sharp skirmishes the whole Indian force of 5,000 to 6,000 moved to the Little Big Horn. They were discovered by scouts and Custer was sent in advance, with his cavalry regiment of 600 men in 11 companies, to bar their escape east; he was to wait for the main body of troops at the junction of the Big Horn and the Little Big Horn June 26th. Custer arrived there the night of June 24th; his scouts discovered the Indian village the next morning; from imperfect information he supposed that they were from 1,200 or 1,500 Pawnees he had known were marching to meet Sitting Bull, and he resolved to surround and capture them all. The Indians were on a ridge west of the Little Big Horn; Custer kept five companies, 260 in all, for a direct attack on the center, gave four to Major Reno to assail their left, and two to Captain Beeten to make a southern detour of two miles and come on their right rear, cutting off their retreat. The Indians had broken up their tents and were about to retreat, when they discovered how weak was the assailing force. The three divisions forded the river, and Custer rode for the heart of the
Indian line. A rise across the stream masked the enemy, many hundreds of whom lay in a ravine between it and the higher ridge beyond; and as Custer swept down, the savages rode against him and swarmed around to his rear. Outnumbered twenty to one, the heroic band fought their way up to the ridge, and a small number with their general reached it; then a fresh band of 1,000 Cheyennes rose up under Rain-in-the-face, and not a soul was left alive. The bodies of the slain division were left as they lay, all horribly mutilated except Custer's. This terrible revenge, which the Sioux and Cheyennes took, was in the battle of Little Big Horn. This was followed by the Homeric running fight made by Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces—a fight which baffled our best generals and their men for a hundred and ten days over more than fourteen hundred miles of wilderness—these are events so well known that it seems needless to do more than to refer to them. The Nez Perces in turn went down forever when Joseph came out and surrendered, saying, "from where the sun now stands I fight against the whites no more forever". His surrender to fate did not lack dignity. Indeed, a mournful
interest attached to the inevitable destiny of all
these savage leaders, who, no doubt, according
to their standards, were doing what men should do
and all that men could do.

It was deeds so heroic that
inspired Neihardt to participate in them in
imagination in his "Song of Indian Wars". The
time of the Indian wars has passed, but the spirit
will live forever in the hearts of the American
people. Let them be immortalized in song and story.

Last summer President Coolidge met
arms from Maximilian, "Roemischer Koenig", the
and addressed ten thousand Sioux, some in
ceremonial costume, a few of them warriors who had
taken part in the battle of Wounded Knee fought
gules. "During the Thirty Years War, when a great
thirty-seven years before on the ground where the
portion of Germany was laid waste, the family lost
the Indian warrior is vanishing as did the bison and
the frontier.

in the poetry of his time, having been the first
to write dorfpoesie (village poetry). He was an
uncompromising opponent of Walter von der
Vogelweide, who represented the conservative
The ancestry of John G. Neihardt can be traced to the Neihardts who settled in Pennsylvania in 1737. The three brothers who settled in America were the only remaining members of an old Bavarian family of the Palatinate, the founder of which, Conrad Neuthardt, was ennobled by Frederick Barbarossa and given large estates near Zweibruecken. At the city of Mainz, in 1498, the Neihardts received a coat-of-arms from Maximilian, "Roemischer Koenig", the heraldic description running as follows: "Three barbed roses gules, on a bend azure, on a field gules." During the Thirty Years War, when a great portion of Germany was laid waste, the family lost its holdings in the Palatinate and became impoverished. The minnesinger, Neihardt von Reuenthal, was a member of a collateral branch of the Zweibruecken family. It is interesting to note that Ruenthal represented the democratic tendency in the poetry of his time, having been the first to write dorfpoesie (village poetry). He was an uncompromising opponent of Walter von der Vogelweide, who represented the conservative
literary tendencies of the time. It will be recalled that this ancient Neithardt accompanied the Bavarian army in the Fifth Crusade, taking his fiddle with him to Damietta. (Op.Cit., p.7) The history of the European as well as the American Neihadts is connected with poetry writing and love of adventure. The family seems to have had a passion to share in adventures, to be pioneers. Thus John G. Neihardt holds the honor of being the pioneer epic poet of the West and we will have to see how far he measures up to the qualities demanded of the epic of America in the eyes of critics and contemporary writers.

BOYHOOD

John Gneisenau Neihardt was born in an unplastered, one-room house on a rented farm near Sharpsburg, Illinois, on January 8, 1881. It was a blue-cold morning such as the poet has described many times in his epic. Shortly after his birth the family moved to Springfield, Illinois, where they remained until the fall of 1886. The following year was spent at the home of his mother's parents, a farm, in northwestern Kansas, nine
miles from the town of Stocton, Rooks County. Pioneer conditions prevailed there and the family resided in a sod house. During his stay there the future poet received his first impression of the compelling beauty of the prairie that with the years has more and more enthralled him. At this time the country was exceedingly wild and he could gaze upon illimitable prairies, from whose vast stretches the buffalo had vanished only nine years before. While there, he saw a prairie fire that is reproduced in "The Song of Three Friends".

Five years from 1887 to 1892 were spent in Kansas City, Missouri. It was as a Kansas City boy that he manifested the genius of an inventor. The back yard was filled with a cable car system of his construction, with tunnels, grades and all else necessary. That this inventiveness had some promise is shown by the fact that John had planned a turbine engine, though he had never seen or heard one. But while his brain worked with mechanical projects, there was another potent force at work that over-ruled and finally shaped his career in life. The father of John Neihardt used to entertain his son on
rainy Sundays by writing verses about the boy's own world. Once the verses concerned a pony, and sometimes the "inventive genius" was sung. The seed was being sown, by the parental hand, that would blossom forth in later life and bear much fruit; the boy was made to realize that subject matter for poetry lay around him in the ordinary things of life. Of what things should he write? The vast prairie stretched before him, the tales of frontier life were told to him every day, the Red-skin was his neighbor, and trappers and their adventures were a part of his every day life. That would be a theme dear to the heart of every American, but he must wait a while, he must sing little songs first, but he would not forget to sing of greater things and greater men in the days to come, men who suffered much to pave the way for civilization.

There was another force that awed the boy, in these early days, and that was the Missouri River. It was while living in Kansas City that his admiration for the river began, and with his admiration came his interest in the West. Neihardt's own words best tell us how this acquaintance began.
"I remember well the first time I looked upon my turbulent friend, who has since become as a brother to me. It was from a bluff at Kansas City. I know that I must have been a very little boy, for the terror I felt made me reach up to the saving fore-finger of my father, lest this insane devil-thing before me should suddenly develop an unreasoning hunger for little boys. For the summer had smitten the distant mountains and the June floods ran. Far across the yellow swirl that spread out into the wooded bottom-lands, we watched the demolition of a little town. Many a lazy Sunday stroll took us back to the river; and little by little the dread became less, and the wonder grew - and a little love crept in". From his earliest childhood he professed a profound love for the river. As he grew older he came to know it better and studied its moods. Truly "In the impressions of childhood often lie the germs of future greatness". The Missouri was the largest body of water that Neihardt had seen; it was his ocean. More than that it was his friend and inspiration. This love of Neihardt for the Missouri River gave him a consuming interest in
the events that had transpired upon its borders. As he studied the history of this new friend that had come into his life, he dreamed of the heroes who for more than a century explored it. His admiration and love for the river and its heroes colored his life, and from it is traceable the inspiration that led him to write an epic cycle of the West. The cycle, when completed, is to be a poetic story of the land and its heroes beyond the river.

The father, a companion and inspiration of the boy's life, was lost to him while in Kansas City, and in his place came poverty that was almost destitution. The experience bit deep. His mother supported herself and the children by working for fifty and seventy-five cents a day, though she could not always get work at any price. But the family always appeared respectable and the children were never allowed to be absent from school unless really sick. The heroic struggle brought its reward, not only in the lives of her children as educators, for all three graduated from college and became teachers, but has undoubtedly given Neihardt an inspiration.
for the heroic struggle so realistically portrayed in his heroes. The great endurance of Hugh Glass and his dogged determination to surmount every obstacle must have had a living exemplar for inspiration.

THE STUDENT

At the Nebraska State Normal College, Neihardt came under the influence of President James M. Pile, who knowing the poverty of the family engaged the boy, with the large head, sparkling eyes and mobile face, to ring the college bell. Twice every fifty minutes during the school day, which began at 6:30 A.M. and ended at 6:00 P.M. for nearly three years of forty-eight weeks each, Neihardt rang that bell, though often he had to come to school when blizzards were blowing and the thermometer registered twenty-five below zero. (Op. Cit. p. 7, p.

Neihardt's teacher, Professor U.S. Conn, tells us of his student days at the College, in Wayne. "Neihardt was a mere boy, then in his early teens, much younger than the other students, serious minded and a splendid student. While he
ranked high in mathematics and chemistry, it was merely from a sense of duty and not because he was especially interested in these lines.

In Latin he was a star pupil and always led the class. After one year, becoming impatient with the slow progress of the class, he induced me to hear him recite alone. We read Cicero, Vergil, Ovid's Metamorphoses and some selections from Sallust. The extent of the lessons was usually determined by the amount a brilliant student could translate in the recitation period. We read all the orations, some ten or eleven, which were printed in the text. Books were expensive and so long as there remained anything in the book to translate, it was done. He cared very little about the long prosy, complicated sentences of Cicero and Sallust, yet this afforded a fine drill in grammatical construction which he thoroughly mastered.

The study of Virgil and Ovid, however, was different. This led into a field of fancy, poetical expression and mythology, which proved to be a cause for unrestrained enthusiasm. The teacher in the case was bombarded with endless
questions in regard to the mythology involved. When the teacher did not know, as was often the case, and hesitated to reply, it had no apparent effect upon the pupil. He looked it up and told us about it the next day. The texts of both *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* were frequently reread and reviewed, until Neihardt could translate either poem almost as rapidly as one ordinarily reads English. His unusual ability as a student of language is best shown in his subsequent mastery of Greek which he now reads easily, although he has never had any assistance in this language from a teacher. His knowledge of language is also shown by the faultless diction and grammatical correctness of all he writes."(16)

(16) "Teacher and Student", U. S. Conn Goldenrod, Jan. 1925.

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"John G. Neihardt has earned his fame as a poet primarily, we would say, because of his lyrics. He is perhaps better known as a lyricist than as the writer of epic poems. His
are filled with vivid imagery, word play and rhythm, they do indeed conform to the standard by which one judges the true lyric. And of all those we know, there is none which contains a more powerful appeal than this."

"Let me live out my years in heat of blood.
That feels the Master Melody - and snaps!"


Neihardt's lyrics are the result of experiments in living and thinking. He feels the mystical onwardness of the universe, the unity of all time, and he thinks of himself as a vitalized continuing poet in the process of the race. The following bit from the lyric, "Envoi", gives us some idea of his attitude toward death.

"I bothered with the things that pass,
Poor giddy Joy and purchased Grief;
I go to heather with the Grass
And with the Sunning Leaf.
Not Death can sheath me in a shroud;
A joy-sword whetted keen with pain,
I join the armies of the Cloud,"
"My God and I shall interknit
As rain and Ocean, breath and Air;
And Oh, the luring thought of it
Is prayer!"

Why did Neihardt give up the short story and the lyric for the epic? Socially - Neihardt was the descendant of an old aristocratic race that had a passion for adventure and the writing of poetry. The day of the frontier had passed when Neihardt came to manhood, and nature had robbed him in stature, so the only way he could satisfy the pioneer longing was to turn to literature and the appealing force, to immortalize the adventures of his own ancestors and the heroes of our great West. He sought to supply in intellect what he lacked in physical makeup. He would be a pioneer, not in the short story, for the path was well trodden, not in the lyric, for there were others in that field, he would turn to the only field suited for his pioneer undertaking, the epic. Economically - Neihardt was poor, and
literary pay is not good, especially at the beginning, so Neihardt realized that he must win his way as a short story writer before choosing to attempt the more difficult and the least recognized by popular readers. He became a short story writer and was selling his stories at five cents a word and his lyric poems were going well. He was also forced for the sake of finance to become literary critic for the Minneapolis "Journal" from 1912 to 1923, when he was appointed professor of poetry at the University of Nebraska. Occasionally he lectures at colleges and universities and is at present employed as literary editor on the Saint Louis Dispatch. He is perhaps sacrificing the dearest wish of his heart, that of delaying of his epic Cycle. We who are interested in the work are anxious to view the whole. There are so many unfinished masterpieces that we desire to see the work progress as rapidly as possible. Robert Louis Stevenson once remarked: "A spirit goes out to the man who means execution, which outlives the most untimely end." Stevenson himself quitted life with two books uncompleted, the "Weir of Hermiston" and "Saint Ives". Of the
former a critic writes: "The pity of it - that Stevenson should die just when he had come into his own - is felt by all who loved the man and his work." The same record is left by many authors, a few of whom are, Chaucer, Spencer, Dickens, Dumas, Keats. All creators of art leave behind something unperformed - if it be only an unrealized dream of earlier years. **Literarily** - The lyric is the intimately personal subjective mode of expression which characterizes the romantic period in the life of man. That accounts for the highly emotional, song-characteristic of lyric poetry. In sharp contrast to this is the objective mode of expression of which the epic is the hightest form, and in which the poet appears only in the proximate cause. Still further, the only real happiness a man can know is in things outside himself. Extereme self interest and subjectivity result ultimately in unhappiness. The change, then, from lyric to epic mood was a natural automatic one. To put it crudely the poet had outgrown the lyric mood. The light of understanding and persuasion by which men live is constantly changing. *(Ibid., p. 58)*
I cite here the criticism of Harriet Monroe as to Neihardt's ability as a lyric writer: "The more personal part of Mr. Neihardt's poetry was the work of his youth - the lyrics comprised 'A Bundle of Myrrh' and two or three other small volumes published from 1907 to 1912. This was a rather barren period in America, and those critics who admired the young poet gave him extravagant praise. Reading these books now, one realizes how many voices clearer, richer and more moving have been thrilling us since Mr. Neihardt startled the world. Surely that early over-praise did him an injury, for it encouraged an egoism always too eager and never held in check by a sense of humor."

"Reading these early books now, in the first third of the Collected Poems, one feels that perhaps lack of humor is the root of the trouble. Humor is the law of perspective - it holds the different planes of life in proper relation. Ever so little of it would have saved this poet from the self-conscious attitudinizing one observes here, from his preoccupation with himself as the poet, the vates, and from strident
and declamatory utterances in this character. There is a portentous solemnity in his youthful vision of himself: 'Chaser of dim vast figures in the mist, Drawn by far cries, an alien to content, Builder of burning worlds that passed in gloom, Vain architect of great sky-spaces, filled with unreal suns, uncurtaining the day That fell again in dismal night - 'twas I!' This, of course, is oration, not poetry; the speaker is proclaiming his high vocation, not proving it with a few magic lines. And so, when he becomes conscious of another Being in his universe, the lady of his love is never individualized, is never a humble little human girl, but always the impossible She of man's invention, the Woman who never was on sea or land: Oh, I have found At last the one I lost so long ago In Thessaly, where Peneus' waters flow! 'For thou wert Lais, and of yore 'twas thus Unto That thou didst speak to me - Hippolochus! And I have not forgot.'
dinner-party, Mr. Yeats reminded us that poetry should be 'very simple, very humble'. This advice is thrown away upon Mr. Neihardt. The Self becomes for him the one blinding elemental fact, so he gives us a speech from a platform instead of 'a cry from the heart.' And it is the bitter penalty of this attitude that even the self becomes theoretic, so that he who is confined in it cannot achieve complete sincerity. He simply cannot give himself away: what he gives away is Man supreme, magnificent; Man the Thinker, the Sinner, the Lover, the Poet, Man trampling down the Devil and confronting God. In fact, throughout this earlier and more lyrical section of Mr. Neihardt's book I find the poet in a heroic pose, uttering appropriately noble and eloquent verses whose superficial frankness reveals always the author's idea of himself, rather than an actual suffering, singing, individual human soul. He is always the 'Child of Infinity'

'Fling back the dust I borrowed from the Earth
Unto the chemic broil of Death and Birth -
The vast Alembic of the Cryptic Scheme,
Warm with the Master-Dream!'
Youthful egoism is common enough, and not always impenetrable; but one would hardly expect Mr. Neihardt's later work to be influenced by the swift currents of 'the new movement', which set in soon after the completion of the two series, The Stranger at the Gate and The Poet's Town.

Indeed, one would not have wished him to be affected by its greater simplicity and directness if his style had been inherently original, unmistakably an indigenous growth of his own soul. We may pass over the two plays - Agrippina and Eight Hundred Rubles - as experimental essays in the well-worn sock-and-buskin mode." (18)

Monroe, Harriet, "What of Mr. Neihardt"?

I agree with Harriet Monroe that Neihardt is egotistical, but as I shall try to explain later, I think that the poets of the twentieth century have a greater reason for egoism than the poets of any other age.

We have found that Neihardt outgrew the lyric stage, just as the boy is superseded by the man. Yet, it was lyric writing that gave him
his first recognition as an artist and we may say
trained him for greater work of a narrative
writer.

The principal writings of Neihardt
including his epics are:

1900 The Divine Enchantment
different from that of Homer, Vergil, Milton, or
1907 The Lonesome Trail
our own American poets of earlier times,
1909 Man Song - Verse
Longfellow, Holmes, Poe, and even our more recent
1910 The River and I - Travel
poet, Whitman, who is considered the last poet of
1911 A Bundle of Myrrh - Verse
note in America,
1911 The Dawn Builder - Prose Romance
since Whitman few have been shaken from the tree.
1912 The Stranger at the Gate - Verse
and today the dispositions of our poets would seem
1913 The Death of Agrippiana
to be to affect a displaced myopia, which, by
1914 Life's Lure - Novel
in the innocent possession of the neutral and
1915 The Song of Hugh Glass - Epic Poem
minor, and the unpretentious. Poetry is the ego's
1916 The Quest - Collected Lyrics
proud and elevating claim upon everything that it
1919 The Song of Three Friends - Epic Poem
sees, hears, and touches. Each poet brews again
1920 The Splendid Wayfaring - Western History
of his own temperament; caring little what is
1921 Two Mothers - Poetic Drama
thought by others, he must write. The Garden
Viewing the poetry of Neihardt's
time and the social conditions under which he
labored, we are forced to change our attitude
toward the poet. His environment is very
different from that of Homer, Vergil, Milton, or
our own American poets of earlier times,
Longfellow, Holmes, Poe, and even our more recent
poet, Whitman, who is considered the last poet of
note in America.

"In materials of poetry surely our
American Eden offers some of the largest and most
luscious apples in the history of the world. Yet
since Whitman few have been shaken from the tree.
And today the dispositions of our poets would seem
to be to affect a discreet myopia, which, by
excluding the temptation of good and evil, leaves
them in the innocent possession of the neutral and
minor, and the unpretentious. Poetry is the ego's
proud and elevating claim upon everything that it
sees, hears, and touches. Each poet brews again
the facts and dreams of the world in the crucible
of his own temperament; caring little what is
thought by others, he must write. The Garden
Many changes have taken place in the world in which Neihardt lives and writes, immortalizing pioneer adventures and pioneer heroes, who were the ancestors of the present pulsating western civilization. "The poet's garden has changed since Whitman's time. The enormous fecundity of human discovery and invention in the twentieth century has cluttered it with the most astonishing growths. The jungle of psychoanalysis, full of strange fruits, and lit by lurid heat of lightenings, stretches endlessly into the distance. The towers of our commercial-mechanical civilization aspire more grandly in a way, than any towers which other ages have built into the blue. A decade ago came the shattering apocalypse of the war; and today the whole world moans in the ensuing peace, as in a trap. Yet our momentum seems irresistible; the
huge gears keep grinding; steel is torn from the
mountains and flung across the continent in a
shining spider-work of rails and high-tension
towers, and wide windowed factories; the oil drills
pierce a million years of geologic strata, and the
tortured earth belches a flaming curse of energy,
beneath which the populations of our cities and
towns are withered into automata."(Ibid., p.68.)

THE SOLIDARITY OF THE POET'S LIFE

"This, then, is our Garden. These are the tempests and phantasma amid which the poet must wander alone proclaiming his own soul in the teeth of a most ravenous Circumstance. For that is his duty, and his fated, heroic difference from other men. Take any of the rough classifications into which we moderns fall. The average person can scarcely be said to exist at all outside of his special group. Subconsciously the nonentities recognize this, and there is a defensive psychology in the American passion for joining, and we find clubs and societies of international status springing up everywhere as International Rotary Clubs, etc. Unfortunately,
the poets themselves are not immune to this passion, which is understandable in the circumstances. For the artist, the burden of loneliness is heavy indeed in a civilization the most powerful forces of which seem to reject and condemn him. He must, nevertheless, project himself and his personal vision again and again upon this cross world where he appears so frail a figure. He must offer himself not as a servant or sycophant or entertainer, but as the arrogant lord and master of the feast. Here is a man, whose mission it is to possess the whole of life, no refuges are needed and all refuges are denied.

"A strange and violent and dangerous place is our modern life, but it is all we have and our poets must stand alone as outrageously pretentious adventurers who choose all the world and all time as the arena of their success or failure, and who acknowledge responsibility to no career that can be described or diagrammed in social terms, but only to the gay and egotistical guests of their own souls.

"I think much has happened in American poetry since Whitman, but that we are
still awaiting the acceptance and vivification of those things that measure up to Whitman's great prospectuses." (Ibid., p. 68)

I do not see how a poet living in this Twentieth Century, alone, a single unit of productiveness, could be other than egotistical. I rather think that modesty is a curious trait for a poet to be accused of. To be an artist in any line is to be absolutely unlike the people rushing along with the complicated industrial and social life, living a retired and secluded life, away from the hum of the busy world and social activities of the hurrying populace. The poet is alone with his thoughts, which constitute his "We", just as Lindbergh and his plane were alone and the inseparable "We" in the non-stop flight across the Atlantic. The poet is just as much alone in his world as was Lindbergh on that solitary flight; no one can help him, everything depends on his individual initiative and the accepting of results by the populace.

THE FUNCTION OF PRESENT DAY POETRY

"I think that our poets have been
hopelessly intimidated. Here comes the weekly Saturday Evening Post with a budget of bad verse under the running head 'The Poets Corner', again poetry is listed as 'Fillers Material' on the make up charts of the magazines, even in the best. It may be argued that the Saturday Evening Post, being full of automobiles, prates demi-visages, anti-bolshevnic economics and prune advertisements, is scarcely the place for poetry. The mob that reads the poetry magazines are not large enough; nor is it hearty enough or noisy enough. Anyway they can make their own poetry, or think they can. "Poetry in America has become, and is, a kind of esthetic exercise, practiced, like dancing or gymnastics, by devoted coteries, a means of self expression, a vehicle for subtlety, but not one of the great arts, not as interesting as American architecture, not as vigorous as American fiction."(Ibid., p. 66.) This is the thing that I think that Neihardt is attempting, to raise poetry to its ancient status, by linking the present with the past classics. Why is this attitude maintained? The poets are writing for each other with that special consideration, voiced
by malice, always characteristic of criticism within a coterie by coterie standards.

Writers of all ages have been critics, we have only to turn the page of literature to find this; Carlyle speaking of Lamb called that gentle essayist "a stammering fool" and almost wept over the decadence of England that could hail such a writer as a genius. Scholarship and literary ability may be said to have been singularly displayed in the works of Samuel Johnson, yet the good Doctor said of Milton's Lycidas that the style is that of a pastoral; easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting. So Neihardt must pass through the line of critics that all poets meet; time will alone justify the worth of the criticisms made, even those of the most able critics.

including the Crows, and the Sioux. The Ogalala Sioux gave him the name of Igitou-Chickaio, which means "Little Cat". Such honors have been conferred upon few white men. So close was his friendship with the Indians that he was able to get much material from the old trappers and front men actually in the fights he describes in his poems, (31) In the course of the period of which
THE EPIC CYCLES OF THE WEST

The writing of an Epic Cycle, such as Mr. Neihardt has undertaken, is a work that requires intensive research in the history of the Trans-Missouri country from 1822 to 1890. Neihardt loved his subject so intensely that he was not satisfied with creating poems which would be merely rare gems of poetic expression, but he has devoted years to obtaining accurate historic data for his cycle. He cultivated the friendship of the trappers, rivermen, hunters, homemakers and traders. He lived among the Omaha Indians for six years, while their tribal organization was still intact. They bestowed upon him the name of Tae-Nuga-Zhinga, signifying "Little Bill Buffalo". He also spent much time with the other Indians of the plains, including the Crows, and the Sioux. The Ogallala Sioux gave him the name of Igimou-Chickala, which generally speaking the good in legendary characters means "Little Cat". Such honors have been conferred upon few white men. So close was his friendship with the Indians that he was able to get much material from the old tribesmen and from men actually in the fights he describes in his poems. (21) In the course of the period of which
Neihardt writes, the vast territory west of the Mississippi was explored and practically settled. And the last wave of the Aryan migration was finished. Many of the stories that have come out of this time are of stuff of which sagas are made, and the moods of the heroes have as their prototypes those of the ancient heroes. The growth of material civilization has not changed the hearts of men. The men who are the heroes of Neihardt's epic poems compare favorably with such men as Ulysses, Aeneas, Abraham and David. In spite of the advancement of democracy, modern readers are prone to see the qualities only in men whose names are legendary, forgetting that heroic qualities exist in common people, and that generally speaking the good in legendary characters has been enhanced by time and imagination. That which was best and that which was worst was called up in men who faced the prairie country when it was a barren wilderness. (32)

Prescott, Russell, T. "Midwestern Writers".
Neihardt through the reading of Greek, lives as comfortably with the ancient heroes as he does with his contemporaries. He has gone thoroughly into the literature of the world, including not only belles lettres but also works in philosophy, history and psychology, in fact, everything that concerns a thinker, and he has clothed his characters and his deeds with the swelling sense of sustained elevation and greatness. Can we lift Neihardt's epics into a place beside those we have viewed as representative of European nations, such as "Beowulf", "The Song of Roland", and the "Nibelungenlied"? It is difficult to answer with assurance, for we have few criteria by which to determine fairly what the epic imagination should achieve with a theme so different from those of the distant past, for "New generations develop new social moods", says Neihardt, in his recent article entitled "The White Radiance".

The spirit of the senses is true, often vivid, and the poet is always sincere and earnest, but he does not lift us to that sense of racial, or
National homogeneity, to the conviction that we are witnessing the march of the nation's consciousness, which we associate with the general epic. Perhaps we should suspend general judgment, however, until he completes the cycle with three more epic poems, which are to compose the grand unity. (23)

(23) "Has America Found and Epic Voice", Christian Science Magazine, March 1925.

It is, in any case, the intense sincerity of purpose which speaks in Neihardt's every line. So significant is this purpose, and conceived with such splendid apprehension of America's relation to the noblest traditions of the race, that he must be allowed to tell us in his own words, as outlined in the introduction of the school edition of this poem: "Long ago, when I was younger than most of you, who are now about to study the poems here presented, I dreamed of making those men life again for the young men and women of my country. The tremendous mood of heroism, that was developed in our American west during that period is properly a part of our racial inheritance.
and certainly no less important than the memory of ancient heroes. Indeed, it can be shown by these men, - Kentuckians, Virginians, Ohioans, Pennsylvanians, were direct descendants, in the epic line, of all the heroes of our own Aryan stock that have been celebrated by the poets of the past; descendants of Achilles, and Hector, of Aeneas, of Roland, of Singuird, and of the Knights of Arthur's Court. They went as torch bearers in the van of our westering civilization. Your present is, in a great measure a heritage from the past."(24)

Neihardt, John, G. "Notes to the Song of Hugh Glass" p. XXIV. Introduction.

Again, this time in the poetic passage of fine feeling he expresses the essential oneness of our heroes with those of the past:

"And now no more the makinaws come down,
Their gunwhales low with costly packs and bales,
A wind of wonder in their shabby sails,
Their homing oars flung rhythmic to the tide;
And nevermore the masted keelboats ride
The Missouri's stubborn waters on the lone
Long zigzag journey to the Yellowstone.
Their hulks have found the harbor ways that know
The ships of all the Sagas, long ago -
A moony haven where no loud gale stirs.
The trappers and the singing voyageurs
Are comrades now of Jason and his crew,
Foregathered in that timeless rendezvous
Where come at last all seekers of the Fleece."

(25) Neihardt, John, G., The Song of Three Friends
pp. 2 - 3.

"I am more thrilled by the history
of the Lewis and Clark expedition than by the
tale of Jason. John Colter, wandering three years
in the wilderness and discovering the Yellowstone
Park, is infinitely more heroic to me than Thesus". Such is the bold confession of an inspired faith
spoken out right manfully by one, who has embodied
his belief and his vision into living forms of art.
(Ibid., p. 77.)

It is for this high endeavor to
reveal in the epic strain the heroic qualities of
courage and devotion in the American pioneer that
that we must pay our homage to John G. Neihardt. "We have these facts", he once declared - meaning that we possessed the heritage of deeds, which express the same idealism that animated the heroes of old. "But", he added with humility, "we have no Homer". To say the least, though Neihardt may not be an American, he is the epic pioneer poet of America, whose mission it may be to point out the way, that others may follow.

Certainly the epic, in scope and plan, is well worthy of Neihardt's devotion or that of any other poet. It may be noted that the series falls into a natural thematic progression from individual exploits, through adventures of small groups, then of larger groups, and finally to the great contest and victory of the pioneers. The series is plotted according to the social evolution of the era. "The Song of Hugh Glass" dealing with the adventures of the Ashley-Henry men, comes first in order of composition. It is the story of the struggle of a single soul, against loneliness, desertion, physical weakness, the illimitable distance of the prairies and the vast negativity of might. The second, "The Song of
Three Friends" deals with Ashley-Henry men in the upper Missouri region in the twenties. It is a tale of comrade group, the loyalty of man to man, in danger, in toil, in song, in story, and the deep treachery in the betrayal of man to man. By the means of group force primitive man conquered the wild animals that swarmed upon the earth, survived the battle with hunger and cold and ignorance, emerged from the "chilling pale of Jovian scorn" to become the Man, "the Maker and the Seer". Without the loyalty of the comrade group, civilization, nay even human existence, would be impossible upon this planet. The third epic poem, "The Song of the Indian Wars", deals with the last great fight for the bison pastures between the "westering" white men and the plain tribes, the Sioux, the Cheyennes and the Arapahoes. Two great races meet, two states of civilization, two orders of value, and the wild struggle in the eyes of men will last as long as they are capable of admiration, of heroism and pity for suffering. It is epic in the original sense in which Homer is epic.

The poet is now engaged in writing
"The Song of the Messiah", which will deal with the last phase of Indian resistance and the ghost dance religion of the Sioux, which culminated in the tragedy of Wounded Knee. The third and fourth poems of the Cycle will require six years work.

The third will be called "The Song of Jed Smith" and will deal with the band of trappers who, under Smith in the late '20s, discovered and explored the central route from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. The fourth poem of the Cycle will be called "The Song of the Great Migration", and will deal with the period of migration as typified by the tremendous adventures of the Mormans. (Op. Cit. p. 75)

"Every major manifestation of nature on the prairies is found in these three songs: the prairie fire with its terrible beauty, the aurora, the blizzard, the grasshopper swarm that darkens the sky, the breaking of the ice on the river. Neihardt paints a thousand shades of light on the waste, changing every hour from dawn to midnight, and again from midnight back to dawn. He reveals the prairie in the killing heat of August afternoon; in the intense and blinding cold
of the blizzard, in the gathering of a storm, at its crisis and when the storm has passed; when the moon is new, is full, is old, and when the stars alone look down; in every season, in every imaginable light and shade impressing the reader with the unforgettable, deep carved impression of the majesty of the prairie." (24)


Mr. Neihardt gives us the pioneer heroes of our country in the first democratic epic, expressive of the spirit of the times. Neihardt knowing the common man, knows that he has heroic possibilities for courage and strength which are a race inheritance. Thus Neihardt has tapped new reserves of poetic material, especially fitted for our day. It is worth while to inspire in the race an appreciation of the spirit and achievement of these bands of common men whose "Names are written deep across the land In pass and trail and river, like a rune."

The conquest of land is a race
conquest and has been monopolized by those we know as leaders. Neihardt rests in serene consciousness that the world belongs to all who suffer and overcome. Out of the ruck, arising to a clearer view comes the common man; and on the far off heights of time he shall come to his own.

Neihardt is certainly to be admired for his patient research for material, his painstaking care in writing his work. I have been told by Mr. Joseph G. Masters, president of the Omaha Neihardt Society, and a personal friend of Mr. Neihardt, that previous to the beginning of this cycle in the fall of 1912, Mr. Neihardt had spent nineteen years in rigorous preparation for this monumental undertaking and that he proposes to give twenty of his best years to the American Epic. At first he produced only four lines a day as a finished product, but he was satisfied with the lines when finished. He spent fifty months of solid work on the "Song of Hugh Glass". In every sense of the word, Mr. Neihardt has experienced the thrills of western life, and his attempt to preserve the race-mood of courage which characterized these American pioneers in the
great migration into the Trans-Missouri country, is indeed praiseworthy. You have to get Neihardt's point of view, and feel as he does that the broken and scattered bonds of a race are again being bound up and that in the same way he is linking the last migration with the present race in his epic poem. We feel the old Greek spirit creeping in as though uniting with the nineteenth century heroism. At first this jarred on my sense of poetic beauty and unity of the whole, but since the purpose of the writer is felt, it makes the whole work meaningful. Mr. Neihardt seems to live in the present and the past at the same time in his epics; his Greek heroes seem to be just as close to us as our own through the constant references that are made to them. At least to a student of Neihardt's works they will never become obsolete.

"A short story such as Neihardt has given us in his Cycle, can only suggest the moods that underlie the movements of the people in that particular period. The people who live in the Trans-Missouri country today, have for the most part only a bizarre, moving picture
conception of events, that took place where they now live. What Neihardt would have the people realize is, that explorers, gold seekers, first poe...bound, rough individuals; the Trans-Missouri region. "The Song of Hugh Glass" they were people of courage, people whom the lure of the vast spaces, the hunting lust for wealth, the unsurpassed worship of adventure and action and freedom had transformed into a very real and interesting kind of hero. (Ibid., p 84)

"Neihardt is recognized as one of the most distinctive poets America has produced and...genuine, a story of many courage and loyalty and Bliss Carman and others even place him with...sweep of vision, extensity of conception, vividness of imagery and sustained power."


THE SONG OF HUGH GLASS.

In order of composition this is the first poem; it deals with the fur trade period of the Trans-Missouri region. "The Song of Hugh Glass" was published in the fall of 1915, second in the Cycle, relating to Western development. The narrative is based upon an episode taken from a much neglected portion of our history, the era of the Fur Trade. It is a story of turbid human passion interspersed with human tenderness - all womanless, a story of manly courage and loyalty taken from authentic sources, such as Chitendon's "History of the American Fur Trade," where it is quoted from the principal sources: the Missouri Intelligencer, Sage's "Scenes in the Rocky Mountains", and Cooke's "Scenes in the United States Army". The scenes of Hugh Glass begin after that military fiasco known as the Leavenworth Campaign against the Aroicas, which took place near the mouth of the Grand River in what is now South Dakota. (Op. Cit. p. 78, pp. Xii-Xiii.)

I have already given the historical account of the expedition Neihardt has chosen for his epic, so now, I shall confine myself to the
story told in the epic. General Ashley, and his hundred men, went up the Missouri River in 1823. With him was a noted hunter, Hugh Glass. During the summer this band had a battle with the Rickaree Indians in which Glass, a man of sixty years or more, was wounded in saving the life of his friend, Jamie, a boy of perhaps eighteen. Jamie has the boy's admiration for Glass, growing out of the fact that the latter has had many adventures and has a happy way of telling them. The rescue of Jamie deepens the friendship of each.

Shortly after the battle with the Ree, eighty of the band of two hundred separate from their companions and under Major Henry start up the Grand River to the mouth of the Big Horn, there to spend the winter and trade with the Indians. Of this number are Hugh and Jamie, their companionship growing ever more intimate.

Near the forks of the Grand, in what is now the northern part of South Dakota, the party runs out of meat and Hugh is told by the Major to kill some of the wild game that is abundant in the region. Though Jamie begs to accompany him Hugh prefers to go alone.
"And so they parted at an unseen gate
And even then some gust of moody fate
Clanged to betwixt them."

The poet is warning us that this separation apparently for a few hours is freighted with disaster for the two. On the evening of the second day of Hugh's absence, Jamie eludes the rest of the men and goes to find Hugh and enjoy the adventures with him.

He finds Hugh near the forks of the Grand, apparently dead by reason of a surprise attack by a grizzly bear. Jamie stays by Hugh, who remains unconscious, until the arrival of the rest of the men the following morning.

The finding of Hugh is visualized thus:

"The lad beheld, upon the grassy marge
Of a small spring that bullberries stooped to scan,
A ragged heap that should have been a man,
A huddled, broken thing - and it was Hugh;
There was no need for any closer view."

Hugh's condition is such that he can not be moved and he is apparently bound to die
soon. Major Henry calls for volunteers to stay with the wounded man until he dies or recovers sufficiently to continue the journey. Jamie volunteers and Jules Le Bon, the real villain of the story, consents, for pay, to remain with Jamie.

"Yet none, save Jamie, felt in duty bound To run the risk - until the hat went round, And pity wakened, at the silver's clink, In Jules Le Bon."

From the beginning Jules plans to desert Hugh as soon as possible. With consummate skill he works upon Jamie's fears until he, too, is willing to desert his friend, who really seems as good as dead. In departing, Le Bon steals Hugh's rifle, blanket and knife, thus making sure that the treachery will never be revealed, for if Glass recovers he is certain to starve to death. Thus the cowardly murder is conceived and executed, except for a slight miscarriage.

Hugh emerges from his trance, and in the words of the poet, "Old habit of the body bade him rise; But when he would obey, the hollow skies Broke as a bubble punctured, and went out."
Hugh discovers the betrayal, conceives Jamie as the betrayer, and nourished by berries, breadroot, etc., crawls to the Moreau, the Cheyenne, the Missouri and floats down to Fort Kiowa.

In this crawl many human passions are brought out, anger, revenge, despair, hunger, thirst, and endurance. The tortuous journey in his crippled and convalescent state was endured only for the revenge on the boy he once loved. That crawl and the terrible thirst and hunger endured in the desert is forcefully told; the relief Hugh experienced by the rain is compared to the solace of the Blessed Sacrament to a soul that has turned from sin and is comforted once again by the God of all consolation.

"Stripped of his clothes, Hugh let his body drink.
At every thirsting pore. Through trunk and limb
The elemental blessing solaced him;
Nor did he rise till, vague with stellar light,
The lone gulch, buttressing an arch of night,
Was like a temple of the Holy Ghost.
As priest in slow procession with the Host,
A gusty breeze intoned - now low, now loud,
And now, as to the murmur of a crowd,
Yielding the dim-torched wonder of the nave."

The journey is finished at last
and Hugh is once again "a man among men", but in
his heart there burns an implacable hatred against
those who have made him suffer so much. He will not,
can not rest, so Hugh goes north to Fort Henry
"white hot to kill", but Jamie, smitten by
conscience, has started south and they miss each
other.

Hugh, learning of this, goes south
to Fort Atkinson, only to again miss Jamie, who
has heard of the recovery of his friend and is
seeking him. Hugh hears of Jamie's search and
comes to realize how great is the boy's suffering.

But somewhere near the mouth of
Milk River Hugh loses track of Jamie, and when he
finds him for at the north, almost on the
Canadian line, in a village of the Piegan Indians,
the boy is blind from the explosion of a rifle
and sick almost to death with remorse. Of course
forgiveness and reconciliation follow.
The Piegan Indians are peaceful Christian Indians, evidently Catholic from the familiarity with which they speak of the things pertaining to Catholicity, and the obligation of summoning, to their sick, the Black Robe or priest.

We find this quotation,

"Lo, a leaden crucifix upon the wall!"

which is indicative of the work of the early Jesuit missionaries, who labored at this time among the Indians of the North. Jamie's mood is intensely portrayed in the remorse of these words,

"I can not eat! I've done a mighty wrong; It chokes me!"

The lad hears the creak of snow shoes and infers the Black Robe has at last arrived. Hugh's mood is portrayed in his words, he has come to forgive and not to punish. He speaks in the language of a priest:

"Peace be with you, friend! And peace with him herein who suffers pain! My son ---------- have faith and hope!

'Tis often nearest dawn when most we grope."

Hugh succeeds so well in filling the Black Robe's place that Jamie lays bare the secrets of his
There can be no peace for me, good Father, till this gnawing cease—
for the gnawing of a great wrong I have done."
Then Jamie's confession, his sorrow, his misfortunes, and the loss of his sight. Hugh is pictured in this scene, as well as Jamie,

"A snarl of bloody hair hung round the eyes that had a pleading stare,
and down the ruined face the gory beard of big tear-drops rolled."

In "The Song of Hugh Glass" Neihardt artistically and naturally portrays the highest, and most beautiful emotion of which the human heart is capable. Though both of the leading characters are for a time false to the gift they have known, ultimately each returns to his friend, truer and bigger for the period of sadness that had intervened. And because of these failures, the inevitable bitter consequences which life parcels out to every man, the reader is all the more moved by the lifelike picture he sees. Who could fail to be touched by the passionate tenderness the old man lavishes on the
goldenhaired Jamie; who would not sympathize with the jealous watchfulness he exercised? The light hearted response from the lad, his admiration for Hugh, hero of so many thrilling adventures, will influence the hearts of men as long as youth continues one of the choicest gifts life can offer.

"The Song of Hugh Glass" is a narrative portraying the love of man for man, of essential human worth over the devastating forces of primitive surroundings. Neihardt spares no detail to make human and natural setting valid, but concedes nothing to melodrama. Defeat looms before the hero, but an almost incredible endurance and strong will defy every fate that would crush him. Alone in the wilderness, apparently without hope, he at last reaches his goal and again becomes a part of civilization. Neihardt gives us in this poem, two descriptions of nature that are excellent; one is a prairie storm, that brings rain to comfort Hugh during the crawl and the other is a blizzard or snow storm that enfolded the world in a "white blackness and a black whiteness".
The theme is both ancient and new, ancient as the story of the love of David for Jonathan, new as the latest knowledge of the part of "blood brotherhood" among the hunting, warrior clan of primitive tribes, in the making of society.

THE SONG OF THREE FRIENDS

"The Song of Three Friends" is a story of comradeship with the element of woman love mixed in. It won for its author the five hundred dollar prize offered by the American Poetry Society for the best volume of poems published in 1919. It is written in iambic pentameter and is about three thousand lines in length.

This Song is Neihardt's second epic, in which the dominating motive is "the devotion of three lovable comrades, but as in the Iliad the influence of woman turns the scales, and the end is not reconciliation and redemption of character, but tragedy fraught with veracity and power. More dramatic than lurid, more tense than complex, a colorful pageant of those forces of human nature, which found tumultuous expression
in those early western days." (Op. Cit., p. 77)

"The Song of Three Friends" though concerned with the same country and type of life as "The Song of Hugh Glass", does not repeat either the scenes or the mood of the earlier poem. It has greater variety than "The Song of Hugh Glass" and the mood of joy. There are jest, song, and story, associations in work, feast and trade, with a momentary glance of love; pictures of the freezing of the stream and the breaking of the ice in the spring, and all with a joyous overtone, with the slow creeping of fate as the deeper note. Then, the "Friends" is the more dramatic and remorselessly tragic story. It goes with a headlong rush, with stroke on stroke, while in "The Song of Hugh Glass" the climax is reconciliation, and the approach is properly very gradual.

An Anglo-Saxon, Will Carpenter, and an Irishman, Mike Fink, with the Norman-French, Talbeau, are the closest of friends. The last mentioned is a small man, while the other two are large. All three are of superior physical prowess, but because of his lesser size Talbeau is
soaroly a possible rival for either of the others. Carpenter and Fink are crack marksmen and were accustomed to indicate their mutual love and confidence by shooting each at a target on the head of the other at sixty paces, the target being a whiskey cup filled to the brim. Will, my b'ya,

"And ever was the tincup smitten fair."

At the mouth of the Yellowstone, Major Henry goes into winter quarters, a party of Bloods come, urging that a number of the company go up the mouth of the Musselshell to trade with them. The three comrades are among the number and spend the winter on the Musselshell, and there "the net is cast", for "there was a woman", a half-breed girl whose white father was one of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Fink loves the girl and she loves Carpenter. Her choice of Carpenter makes Fink and enemy of his former chum. At this point Talbeau emerges from obscurity in the narrative to the leading part, and the remainder of the story is the tale of his endeavors first to bring his comrades together and second to save the soul of Fink after the latter has murdered Carpenter. The scene of the murder is thus described:
"We're ready Mike!"

A murmur ran and died
Along the double line of men.
Fink raised his gun, but set it down again
And blew a breath and said: "I'm getting dhry!
So howld yer noodle shtiddy, Bill, my b'y,
And don't ye shpill me whisky!" Cedar-straight
The tall man stood, the calm of brooding Fate
About him. Aye, and often to the end
Talbeau would see that vision of his friend -
A man-flower springing from the fresh green sod,
While, round about, the bushes burned with God
And mating peewees fluted in the brush.
They heard a gun lock clinking in the hush.
They saw Fink sighting - heard the fifle crack
And saw beneath the spreading powder rack
The tall man pitching forward."

The bystanders saw Talbeau run to his fallen friend
"And stoop to peer upon the prostrate man
Where now the mingling blood and whiskey ran
From oozing forehead and the tilted cup.
And in the hush a sobbing grew up:
"My God! You've killed him, Mike!"

Fink denies that he intended to
kill the man that was once his friend. Fink and
Talbeau are sent by Major Henry on an errand to
General Ashley, who was at that time ascending
the Missouri with a second band of a hundred men.
After a desperate race with a prairie fire, Fink,
while drunk, boasts that he meant to kill
Carpenter. Talbeau undertakes to make him repent-
ant. While Fink is asleep he takes the gun, and the
ammunition, arouses Fink, and drives him into the
bad lands. There, unhappily, Fink escapes his
pursuer, who had not meant to kill him, and
perishes of thirst, starvation and fear. The end
of the story is the finding of Fink's body by
Talbeau, when the whole tragic effect of his
well-meant intervention overwhelms him.

The beauty of the prairie life in
the spring is also portrayed in the "Three Friends".
In reading the description one is deeply impressed
with the great vastness of the awakening in this
silent country to the touch of nature.
"The Song of the Indian Wars" is truely epic in its material, being the tale of the last right between the two races for the possession of the bison pastures of the West. It opens with the invasion of the Trans-Missouri region just after the Civil War and closes with the collapse of Indian resistance at the death of Crazy Horse, the greatest of the Sioux chiefs, at Fort Robison in 1887. Thus we have the essence of epic poetry, heroic struggle and overwhelming disaster.

With swift sure strokes Neihardt begins his story, and at once the prairies become the scene of a tremendous drama. The long reaches of the Missouri, with all its tributary streams, are touched with magic. The muddy water, the usightly sandbars, the stunted cottonwoods of the Kaw, the Solomon, the Big Horn, the Yellowstone, the Powder, shine in "wakeful glory". The vast reaches of the plains, the loneliness, the terror of the desert hold a spirit of beauty.

"Not only does the poem reveal the Indian modes of life, but we see the Indian Chiefs, for the first time in literature, what they are
in fact, individuals, each with a temperament and philosophy of his own; Red Cloud, the natural rebel; Spotted Tail, disillusioned apostle of peace; Sitting Bull, medicine man, arch-demagogue, half hero and half montebank; Crazy Horse, mystic and seer." (26)

(26) House, Julius, T., "Neihardt Gives Latest Poem to Reading Public", World Herald, July 5, 1925

"It is a realistic treatment of Indian Wars and especially the Indian chief himself. The Red man's point of view is there; his psychology, his traditions, his ideals, his mood and moments, his wronged sense of logic. The poem is in episodes, which include only the major parts of the long struggle between the Indian and whites". (Op. Cit., p. 83) It opens with the close of the Civil War and the migration into the West. Quickly the scene shifts to the Council at Fort Laramie, which is interrupted by the treacherous entry of Carrington with his cavalry, come to seize the road for which the whites pretended to entreat, followed by Red Cloud's cry of defiance and the breaking up of the council.
In one of the episodes called "The Council of Powder" the reader sees Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, and Sitting Bull in all their grandeur as chiefs amidst their tribes. At this council of chieftains, Sitting Bull stampedes the Sioux into the greatest war the red men have ever waged on this continent, a struggle in which their world fell to ruins. The speeches made on this occasion, the author tells us, were told to him by tribesmen whose verbal memory was unerring. In their speech, as reported by Mr. Neihardt, one sees the Indian's feeling for imagery and eloquence. Speeches heard on an occasion of this kind were remembered and handed on as tribal history. The author has only paraphrased. The following is a part of Sitting Bull's address:

"Brothers, you have seen

The way the spring sun makes the prairies green
And wakes new life in animal and seed,
Preparing plenty for the biggest need,
Remembering the little hungers too."

Thus he begins and rises gradually to his climax in words:

"Shall we cower, dumb?"
Or shall we say: 'First kill us - here we stand!'

He paused; then stooping to the mother-land,
He scraped a bit of earth and tossed it high,
Against the hollow everlasting sky
All watched it drifting, shifting back again
In utter silence. 'So it is with men',

Said Sitting Bull, his voice now low and tense;
'What better time, my friend, for going hence
Than when we have so many foes to kill?''

"The reader can not but feel the
sad prophetic spirit of those who prayed to their
dying gods, shrewdly counted the odds and felt
that slow disintegration was far worse than a
world-shaking war in which they might die
"With many wounds in front,
Round Fort Phil Kearney mourning for the
slain."

The stories of the terrible conflict
that followed are known today as the Fetterman
Disaster, the Wagon Box Fight, the mighty struggle
at Beecher Island, the Rush for the Black Hills'
Gold, Attack on the Village of Crazy Horse, the
Mystery of the Sun Dance, the Battle of Little Big
Horn, the Retreat of the Indians, the Fight on
Slim Buttes, and the final episode, The Death of Crazy Horse at Fort Robison. Each of these struggles is completely objectified. Each group and each individual is sure he is right, and each is willing to give his life in devotion to the mighty cause of the struggle. Mr. Neihardt has portrayed all these scenes so vividly, that we are able to live again the drama that he has created for us, and we are able to hear, feel and see the great heroes again in action. So vividly are these two great elemental forces before us that we seem to be borne along on the wings of the conflict.

The poet knows and is fair to the whites. The dashing courage of Fetterman, riding to his death on Peno Hill, after he had boasted that with eighty men, he could ride through the whole Sioux nation, is told in lines that thrill.

"The cavalry, as hoping yet to win The summit of the Ridge, wheeled round and hewed and endure; where Roman Rose feared and A slow way upward through the solitude Of lances, howling in the arrow-storm. The rest, already circled by the swarm, Took cover in a patch of tumbled rock.
Where, huddled like a blizzard-beaten flock,
They faced the swirling death they could not stem."

"The story of how thirty-two men held off three thousand Indians during one terrible summer day in the Box Wagon Fight, having first made preparations for suicide, is surely an amazing song of battle. These warriors were the most savage the world has ever known and were pitted against a mere handful of men within wagon boxes. Sergeant Samuel Gibbon, U.S.A., gives us a graphic account of the terrible struggle, which has been related; he says that "Duty was so hard that year of 1866-1867 that I got only one night in bed all winter". (Op.Cit., p. 40)

The dogged endurance of Forsythe and his band on Beecher's Island, where for many days a company of whites fought and endured as heroes fight and endure; where Roman Nose feared and shrank, then painted himself for death and made atonement by deeds of desperate valor e'er his spirit fled to join his fathers; where the wounded white leader lay and gazed folornly...
at the horizon waiting for the rescue until one evening he looked,

"And knew

'Twas cavalry that made the hillside blue;"

the long retreat of Cook through mud and muck with men and horses falling from exhaustion—all these are in our literature to remain.

"In each scene some new phase of human nature, some new mystery of the human spirit, appears to compel the wonder of the reader. The nobility, the madness, the baseness are all there and no more authentic indictment of the materialistic spirit of men was ever written than the 'Yellow God', when the thousands excited by money madness rushed to the Black Hills on the discovery of gold. It reads like the denunciation of some old Hebrew prophet returned to earth." (Op.Cit., p 83)

It is safe to venture that the religious spirit of primitive man has never been shown with more truth or more perfect art than in the "Sun Dance", which was held this time, in the village of Crazy Horse shortly before the Sioux met and entirely wiped out Custer and his brave little band on the Little Big Horn. Essentially
this poem might have been written of any people. The pastures of the bison have shrunken and the Indians were facing starvation, but in spite of this the "victories of the Indians mount in number and impressiveness. With the finest body of cavalry that had ever been known, the Sioux sweep to victory and almost dare to believe they will conquer. At "High Noon" on Little Big Horn, Custer, the most dreaded of their foes, is wiped out with all his band, only one Crow scout, Curley, being left to reveal by sign language the story of the disaster, while Reno's troops, hemmed in on a hill four miles away, scan the horizon to find out what has happened. That night by the dim moon a lonely cavalry horse wanders on the field of the Little Big Horn searching for his master. (Op., Cit., p. 83) About Custer in particular, Neihardt weaves the mood of glory and of doom. "The gleaming chariots and spears of the Greeks and Trojan around the walls of Troy are not more colorful than "Long Hair" and his famous troop as they march out from Fort Lincoln, nor did Homer ever give better the sense of fate that moves in all his epics.
"The hero of the tale is Crazy Horse, who, a youth of twenty, rose in eleven years to be the supreme leader of the Sioux and at thirty-one was killed at Fort Robison. It is the inner nature of tragedy that the hero heads a defeated people and himself perishes. Hector is the real, though not the nominal hero of the Iliad. His death is at the hand of fate and typifies the glory and the transiency of Troy and all things human. We see the same in Crazy Horse and the Indian civilization. Crazy Horse is the noblest man of all the leaders on either side. He never fought off his own ground, land granted by the treaty. He merely resisted invasion. He was the refuge of his people, a mystic and a seer, and Homer wrote no better lines over Hector than Neihardt over this Indian here:

"Who knows the crumbling summit where he lies

Alone among the badlands? Kiotes prowl

Above it and the voices of the owl

Assume the day-long sorrow of the crows

These many grasses and these many snows.

"With the swiftness of Fate the Indian cause now sinks from "High Noon" to
"Twilight" and the end. Starved, but not beaten on the field; betrayed, but not defeated, Crazy Horse makes the sacrifice that ends the war.

"Troy is a "Timeless" town, but, we believe, no more so than the prairies and the mountains along the Missouri to the summits of the Rockies. The one "deep-browed Homer rules as his demesne"; over the other broods the spirit of John G. Neihardt". (27)

(27) House, Julius T., "The Epic West"

Omaha Bee, August 14, 1923

"From the human standpoint the most gratifying quality in "The Song of the Indian Wars" is the generous spirit of sympathy shown by the poet in his treatment of the Indian heroes. There is no blacker page in history than the extermination of the American Indian and no meaner human emotion than that of contempt for the savage who fought to the death for his native land. The whites, who resented being scalped, developed a hatred for the Indian that has been reflected in a horde of penny dreadfuls. Strategy has been trans-mogrified into treachery. The Indians' lies
are famous, but the lying treaties by which the savages were deprived of their land forced steadily back to the last gaunt frontier are not discussed in polite fiction and history. Mr. Neihardt, who paints the heroism of the frontiersman, (he was the aggressor, you know, not the savage), paints no less glowingly the heroism of the Indian and his bewilderment and rage at the encroachment of a ruthless, selfish, cruel and treacherous foe, who used a medicine with which the Indians could not cope. Mr. Neihardt's vision is generous. To that degree at any rate it is an epic. It has scope enough to embrace both sides of the picture." (28)

McClure, John, "Literature and Less"
The Times Picayune, Dec. 6, 1925.

In "The Song of the Indian Wars" Mr. Neihardt accomplishes that very rare feat of making narrative poetry interesting. The poet keenly realizes what he is writing about, but from actual experience and reliving the information given in imagination, and he is sufficiently expert at verse and rhetoric to
make you realize it too.

"In all its fourteen parts the poem moves forward with remarkable sureness, with vigor, with swiftness as if fitted with talaria. Moreover, it is so fused, so pervaded with its high tragic atmosphere, that it is difficult to select illustrative fragments which are complete in themselves or which convey more than a suggestion of the power of the poem as a whole. Always poignant in its quick cut to the emotions, vivid with its fresh imagery, the 'Song' is also notable for its strict economy of language with which effects are produced. From every true poem, doubtless, issues a meaning not to be gathered through any juxtaposition of words and perhaps not capable of analysis, but as truly present as the aroma of the birch pine. Such a quality has "The Song of the Indian Wars". Intangible, invincible as the wind, yet no less real, the soul of the poem reveals itself to our hearts communicating a living sense of relationship of the Red and White, of man and nature, of earth and sun, of planet and universe. The reader's mind is insensibly carried forward beyond the poem
until he wonders if we, the conquering race, victors not by right but by might, if we also in time, as the great Process continues, shall stand at last where Curley, the Crow scout, once stood, and to someone more mighty than ourselves echo his words: "The soil you see is not ordinary soil - it is the dust of the blood, the flesh and blood of our ancestors. We fought and bled and died to keep it. You will have to dig down through the surface before you can find nature's earth. The land, as it is, is my blood and my dead; it is consecrated and I do not wish to give up any portion of it." (29)


"The Song of The Indian Wars" is the last and most excellent of Neihardt's Songs, but he has yet to write of the period of exploration and the period of migration.
CRITICISMS OF CONTEMPORARIES

To view the production of one poet through the eyes of a contemporary writer is a very interesting thing. I have, for this reason, selected a few criticisms of John G. Neihardt from able writers and educators. The first cited is by Harriet Monroe, editor of the "Poetry Magazine": "Mr. Neihardt has always taken himself and his mission as a poet seriously and worked with high ambition and a sense of responsibility. His collected poems represent a life-work loyally carried on against all the crushing distractions - domestic, worldly, financial - which impede and often conquer many a fine vocation. His most important offering, filling nearly four hundred of these six hundred pages, is a series of Epics of the West, in which he has given a poetic setting, in rhymed couplets, to dramatic and characteristic episodes of our pioneer history. Thus he has filled, to an exceptional degree, the command of his muse; and in so doing, he has endeavored practically to monumentalize certain fast fading figures, to give heroic form to our conquerors of the wilderness. To work of such high seriousness,
covering such an ambitious range and presented now as a whole with its seven or eight volumes compressed into one, the reviewer owes respectful consideration from the standpoint not of the passing and momentary in poetic style but the permanent and valuable. The question is, how far does Mr. Neihardt’s poetry fulfill the purpose? How strong a bid does it make for a place among our treasured works of memorable art?

"If the present reviewer feels that this poetry has lacked first-hand inspiration, and has been artificialized by a rhetorical style and adherence to outworn fashions of technique, she owes it to him and his public to examine this complete exhibit with some care.

"In narrative we find the poet at his best - more dramatic than his plays, and less bombastic than in his lyrics. Sometimes he almost forgets himself and his poetizing in his story, and molds the heroic couplet into a swift and efficient instrument of his chosen style, so that the story moves along, for pages at a time, quite freely. Here he does a good job of the kind he set out to do, and hands on to the future
some lively rhymed tales of pioneers and Indian Wars.

"Thus one's quarrel, if there be any, is fundamental. In my opinion, there is, between Mr. Neihardt's subject and his method, an inherent inconsistency which necessarily artificializes the resulting work of art. It is, like Pope's Homer, 'a pretty poem, but not'—our rough-and-tumble pioneer adventuring. Not only is the couplet too smooth an instrument, but the poet polishes it with a too poetic diction. Figures which should be hewn in granite are carved in wax, and are less than life-size in the picturesque pageant which moves so adroitly through these four hundred pages. Words like unwitting, deem, youngling dream, twixt, morn, merry jest, gauds, e'er, classical allusions to Clotho, the Styx, Helen, Ariadne and many others, distort this picture and distract the mind. One's imagination rebels against such forced classicism as this description of a drunken revel of trappers:

'What roaring nights of wassailing they knew—
Gargantuan regales—when through the town
The fiery liquor ravined, melting down
The tribal hoard of beaver! How they made
Their merriest geegaws mighty in the trade!
Aye, merry men they were!

"Mr. Neihardt has given us some interesting chapters, as Longfellow did, for the juvenilia of our literature, and for this he deserves 'much thanks'. But the 'epic of the West' is still to be written—ah, that is quite another question."

In the criticism cited above by Harriet Monroe, in which she says that Neihardt's poetry has been "artificialized by rhetorical style and adherence to outworn fashions of technique" is partly accounted for by Julius T. House, who gives us a reason for Neihardt's adhering to the "outworn". "Neihardt was possibly the first poet to write the so-called 'free verse' and he did it with a sweep and power that made him at once the admiration and wonder of the literary critics. 'The Bundle of Myrrh', his first volume of lyrics, published in 1908, contains much of the new poetry and many of the so-called free verses. Free versers have been imitating Neihardt ever since the appearance of the volume. But Neihardt
soon developed a distinct conviction that poetry, like all the other forms of being, has a law that can not be disobeyed, that anarchy in poetry is as impossible as anarchy in life. This feeling is revealed in the later lyrics, both by their form and by their sentiment, and supremely in his epics. Formlessness, carelessness are hateful and ugly to Neihardt and while he holds that poets may properly experiment and may discover the new ways of writing, yet those are not true ways, except as they conform to law, hence we have the poet who will spend ten hours getting one line in an epic, counts three to ten lines a good day's work, and hence in an age in which much poetry is freed only in the sense of being 'shoddy'. (Op.Cit., p.83) This in a measure may account for the artificiality of Neihardt's poetry as seen by Miss Monroe. We are all aware that he took for his model the old Greek epics in form, in matter, and in style, but it would be a brave sailor indeed, that would brave the unknown seas, without any instrument for direction or distance. The poet, also, must be guided by what is already accomplished, the best should be chosen as models,
and the best epics are certainly the Greek and Latin epics, that have stood the test of time.

In an article entitled "Mid Western Writers", Russel T. Prescott gives us yet another point of view in regard to Neihardt, both as a man and as a writer of epic poetry. "It is doubtful whether any midwestern author has brought more sheer energy to the task of literary production than has John G. Neihardt. Energy is born of inspiration and inspiration is the essence of the artist's life. Neihardt's works reflect the depth of his inspiration. Energy is seen in the man's bearing, in his personality."

"Neihardt presents a unique outward appearance. He is short and has a large head, covered with a thatch of blond hair. His eyes are deep and his look is inquisitive and penetrating. He grasps one's hand firmly and chats in a friendly, almost aggressive manner. There is no egotism in him, he talks of his work and of other matters with the same frankness and vivacity."

"Neihardt's other works, lyrics, stories, etc., are but minature beside his Cycle. He has received much encouragement from reviewers
and the sales. "The Song of Hugh Glass" and "The Song of the Three Friends" are used widely in High Schools and Colleges. Roger L. Sergel said of the former in the Yale Review "Let us fervently pray that these Songs will take rank with, if not precedence over, Scott and Tennyson in our schools". William Stanley Braithwait, reviewing the former in the Boston Transcript said: "It has a big rhythmic sweep of something elemental in man, which is a part of the wild, untamed background of the Northwest, a feeling in all its glory which Mr. Neihardt seems to get in all his narratives".

In the opinion of John McClure, "As an epic, 'The Song of the Indian Wars', hardly qualifies. It is to be compared rather with Scott's, because more seriously handled and more carefully done. No other American has succeeded so well in the same sort of work." (Op.Cit., p.111)

My last citation will be from W.H. Thompson, in the Nebraska Educational Journal, "It is universally known that great epics are very important touchstones in culture because of the fact that the epic is the very epitome of literature. Without great literature there can be
no important culture. Literature may be adequately conceived as the organ of the race-mind by which the best expression of each generation is handed down to the children of men. It is the function of an epic to preserve certain priceless elements of the race in permanent literary form. Therefore, it may be conceded that the epic is an important part of any real education.

"In an epic of the west we may rightfully expect not only a sublime glorification of our own prairies in verse, an imaginary narrative that is faithful to historic fact, the recital of the struggles of a race coming into existence, the portrayal of heroes brave in deeds and mighty in resolve, but the finest expression of the spiritual genius of that elemental period. Any man who can accomplish so great a task by the stroke of the pen conveys the title deed of those priceless possessions to the future. If there is any inheritance from our illustrious precursors worthy of transmission, it is the heroic adjustment to life. The heroic adjustment of life is the concern of all times and is, in the
final analysis, the end of the only genuine education.

"How well John G. Neihardt is succeeding with his task is a matter for the aristocracy of letters and the testimony of time. It is enough for us to be interested." (30)


PUBLIC RECOGNITION

Nebraska is the possessor of the only Poet Laureate in the Western Hemisphere. The State Legislature by official action conferred this singular honor upon John G. Neihardt in 1921, thus creating this unique distinction for the first time in American History.

A monument has been erected to his honor at Wayne, Nebraska. This is an unusual proof that Nebraska is proud of her poet son and wishes to be the first to pay him honor.

"The Song of Three Friends" won the $500.00 prize offered by the Poetry Society
of America for the best volume of verse published in America in 1919.

The University of Nebraska has conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Letters. It is a rare honor given only for great merit.

Neihardt Societies have been founded in Nebraska and California; they bid fair to continue working for the purpose of making Neihardt better known and to honor him "to whom honor is due."

The best proof of Neihardt's popularity is the continued increase in sales of his works. School editions of "The Song of Hugh Glass" and "The Song of Three Friends" have been edited that are suitable for both High School and College work. The University of Nebraska gives an extension course for the study of "The Song of Hugh Glass".

Is our democratic epic not a Greek epic shore of its gods, with our frontiersmen in their plains? In place of the glory of the sea, Neihardt substitutes the prairie. In the days of honor only demi-gods and women of more than earthly beauty could figure in an epic; the gods constantly interfered and the heroes made windy speeches.
CONCLUSION

The Epics of John G. Neihardt have for me a fascination that I rarely find in other modern poetry. Yet, it is a tremendous thing to undertake to link a democratic epic, such as John G. Neihardt has written, and the old Greek and Latin epic spirit into one poem. There is a certain annoyance that comes to one at first when reading the story, for instance, of Hugh and Jamie; to be interrupted with the comparison of some part of the present theme to that of the Greek or Latin. Yet when we look at Neihardt's idea of uniting again the literature, as the race was once again united, there involuntarily springs up a different feeling, especially when reading a second or third time.

The thought has often come to me, is our democratic epic not a Greek epic shorn of its gods, with our frontiersmen in their places? In place of the glory of the sea, Neihardt substitutes the prairie. In the days of Homer only demi-gods and women of more than earthly beauty could figure in an epic; the gods constantly interfered and the heroes made windy speeches.
In our epic nature supersedes the gods and the heroes might be men we ourselves have known; it is only after all fitting new material to an old skeleton.

I think that if one were to search the pages of epic literature one could not find passages that would far excel some of Neihardt's passages. The "Sun Dance" is a fine rendition of Indian customs and superstitions. Some of Neihardt's thoughts are startling with unexpected beauty.

I agree with many of Neihardt's critics, that time alone will prove the worth of his work. Even if his epics do not take the place of those of earlier literature, no one can deny that his works are not the pioneer epics of the West, and he is blazing the trail for others to follow.

There is something about our western history that is absorbing, realistic, vitalizing. We seem to feel the blood rush to our veins and we long to be participators, just as the school boy does when he sits before the movie screen for a western show, and sighs with all his little heart that he lives in such a prosaic world.
Neihardt is an artist, but his task is not completed, he must yet sing of other bands and the adjusting of them to the environment of the West, of the mood that swayed them as it did the trappers, the gold seekers, the home makers and all that sought the West. Neihardt's work is to preserve for us the race mood, that it "perish not from the earth" but that it be preserved for "generations yet unborn".
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