

a light returns to the Shining Mountains

by Erin Robertson

Dora Mountain

Eagles Nest

Mount Powell

we embrace beauty, humility

see how small we stand

under these lifted peaks

we bow to our troubled past

map a new course

restore order, one letter at a time, and

a light returns to the Shining Mountains

Guyselman Mountain

Peak O

Peak N

Peak L

Mount Solitude

we renounce excess and contempt for life¹

here we are, scattered like so many sticks,²

mountain people, not too civil ourselves³

I'm a woman with a hobby⁴

and you're singing to hold the world together⁵,

and one line at a time

a light returns to the Shining Mountains

¹ Gore killed thousands of wild animals for sport during his two year vacation in the American West.

² In the Ute creation story, Coyote opens a bag of sticks Creator gave him, and finds people inside who are scattered across the land.

³ General William T. Sherman wrote to President Ulysses S. Grant explaining his rationale for signing the order expelling the Utes: "Both races cannot use this country in common and one or the other must withdraw. We cannot withdraw without checking the natural progress of Civilization."

⁴ Poet Helen Hunt Jackson was one of the few vocal opponents of the government's treatment of the Utes and other tribes. She called herself "a woman with a hobby".

⁵ Brigham Young proposed removing the Utes to an area of eastern Utah he described as "one vast 'contiguity of waste,' and measurably valueless, except for nomadic purposes, hunting grounds for Indians, and to hold the world together."

Keller Mountain
Mount Valhalla
Snow Peak
Hail Peak
we respond with responsibility⁶
choose pine boughs over a brass bed⁷
decide what should fade:⁸
arrogance, ignorance, hubris
we strike a match and
a light returns to the Shining Mountains

Mount Silverthorne
Rain Peak
East Thorn
Red Peak
we sing a protecting ring
welcoming in every skunk,⁹
every displaced person,
resettling the balance,
shifting it one ounce closer to
conserve than destruct
holding a small space where
a light returns to the Shining Mountains

⁶ Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel gives this advice on dealing with unspeakable tragedy: "There is a response in responsibility."

⁷ Gore traveled with a massive quantity of luggage including a brass bed for camping.

⁸ One missionary wrote, "...humanely speaking, there seems to be no better destiny in store for them [Native Americans], than to fade away before the white man."

⁹ At one point the Colorado legislature narrowly defeated An Act for the Destruction of Indians and Skunks, which would have set bounties for both dead skunks and Native American scalps.

Buffalo Mountain

Pacific Peak

Tenmile Peak

Peak 1

we have so far to travel

so many wrongs to right

so few days allotted each

how can we get to Green Leaf from Captain Jack?¹⁰

we say a new name, filled with reverence, and

a light returns to the Shining Mountains

Father Dyer

Peak 9

Peak 7

Peak 10

Peak 8

Mount Helen

we make a new bow

toward skillful

toward conscious

toward Sun Dance endurance and Bear Dance thunder¹¹

we say Nuche, The People,¹²

trade gor (dung) for scinan (shine)¹³

our gaze lifts and

a light returns to the Shining Mountains

now it's your turn

to reshuffle the letters

order them to reflect what you love

it's not too late to make a new way,

write a new legend that ends in Towaoc

= It Is Good.¹⁴

¹⁰ The last armed resistance by the Utes was led by Nicaagat, Green Leaf, who Anglos called Captain Jack.

¹¹ These are the two main Ute ceremonial dances.

¹² Nuche is what the Utes call themselves, meaning The People.

¹³ Gore is derived from the Old English "gor" meaning "dung", while shine is derived from the Old English "scinan" meaning "shine".

¹⁴ Towaoc is the capital of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and it means "It Is Good".

Much of this information comes from *"The Utes Must Go!": American Expansion and the Removal of a People* by Peter R. Decker.

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