

Blood Run

Free Verse Play

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Free Verse Play

EARTHWORKS BY

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE



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*This volume is dedicated
In Memory of the Original Citizens alongside the Big Sioux River
In the former City known today as Blood Run*

* * * * *

*And to everyone working to preserve and protect
Sacred sites, sites of Indigenous civilizations,
Humanity, humaneness, humanness—
The lands, plants, creatures, people, life.*

*This volume is dedicated to the mound builders of many nations and to
the memory of trade between Pan-American Indigenous peoples with the
prayer that one day the routes, camaraderie, will flow free between all
again without impediments by oppressive restrictions or regimes.*

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Introduction

by Margaret Noori

Miisko Bmaapto

What defines a place with blood invoked in her name? How does blood run—in cycles, perhaps, from one life into another, masked by a ghostly powder chipped one speck at a time from the silken side of a granite boulder? Stones, like bones, speak with an elemental voice, an ethereal timeless hum at a pitch some never recognize, but resonant enough to guide the souls of others. Allison Hedge Coke challenges readers to attune themselves to this place, Blood Run. She teaches us that this is a place on earth exactly like no other and yet very much like many other sacred sites. She teaches us, this place, Blood Run.

It has a name now, given by the nation that surrounds it—Blood Run National Historic Landmark Site. It has a location on the maps made by today's mapmakers, located on both sides of the Big Sioux River in western Lyon County, Iowa and eastern Lincoln County, South Dakota, south of Gitchie Manitou State Park, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile south of county road A18. It has a size measured by the mathematics of modern man. The main portion of the site extends over at least 650 acres. Judging from a few projectile points recovered from the surface, the site is "pre-historic," as defined by historians of today. It is said the site extends back in time to as early as 8,505 years ago. Archaeological evidence suggests that the heaviest years of use may have been between 1675 and 1705 A.D., when it was occupied by as many as 10,000 individuals, trading and interacting in social and ceremonial

activities, sharing an Oneota cultural tradition. These are odd parameters. Would the Oneota consider their ancestors “pre-historic” or merely the mothers and fathers of mothers and fathers of mothers and fathers on into eternity? Would the population be counted only in living souls? What would they make of the separation between “B.C.” and “A.D.”? And best of all, what would someone who speaks any of the Algonquian languages think of a location point “south of Gitche Manitou,” literally a place just “south of God?” Sacred sites throughout the country embody similar cultural issues. They stand in contrast to contemporary ways of knowing and understanding this life and the one that follows.

The words in this book were put down by Allison Hedge Coke, but they speak of something more than one person alone can own or contain. These poems are personal, intimate and yet meant for all eternity and all ears. They are bits quarried from another academy, a school of holistic philosophy that encompasses both the past and the present. This book is not a delicate act of nature worship or revelation of shamanic secrets. These are poems in which the stones, the trees, and the community speak clearly about life, industriousness, work, patience, mortality and birth. These are stories of cupmarks in granite, bends in the river, gently-shaped earthenware, harvested beans, fish bones, bison hides . . . carefully laid remains . . . invisible souls perceived.

This is a book of accusation and promise. Blood Run is unique among Oneota sites because of the documented 176 mounds. Approximately 80 mounds are still visible on the surface. These mounds were engineered of carefully selected stone and soil, tightly packed, designed to resist the intrusion of the ages. Some mounds are still over six feet high and measure 80 feet in diameter, solemn sentinels into the future. Stories tell of an earthen serpent, but it may have been destroyed by railroad construction. These mounds are

holy places that have been violated, excavated, desecrated and described in archaeological reports.

As farmers, developers, and state boards of tourism debate what to do with Blood Run, they ignore what Blood Run can do for them. They note that to preserve the entire Blood Run site and its 'visual environment' would require protection of approximately 2,340 acres. So in 1987 the Iowa State Historical Society, in cooperation with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, purchased 230 acres of the site. How is it that we can choose to remember and honor one tenth of her, this place called Blood Run? Plans for the site include prairie restoration, building an interpretive center and creating a trail system. It is a step too small but better than no step at all. If we honor the past and listen to its voices in a way not clouded by our own times and troubles, we may learn to see beyond the present. The message of Blood Run is as simple and as complicated as that. There are ancestors and there are descendants and there are those who recognize the rights of both and those who continue steal from either one as needed. The poems of Blood Run are cupmarks, small indentations on the surface of our souls, invocations that cannot be ignored. Allison says it all when she writes, "no human should dismantle prayer." A prayer, words offered to someone, someplace, something beyond our comprehension should not be interrupted. By writing this book, she begins the mending of a rent in the fabric of sacred spaces on earth.

MARGARET NOORI

Foreword

Previous to European colonization and conquest efforts and some might say despite of it, trade flourished between Indigenous peoples of the Americas for perhaps as long as time earmarked humankind. Evidence of continual trade throughout the Western Hemisphere, including art, symbolic items, and practical tools, was well cached in the multitude of mound cities puckering vast portions of this continent, some still incredibly existing after decades of continual and intentional desecration, disfigurement, and dismantling by looters, grave robbers and Manifest Destiny driven anti-eco agriculturalists. Though surely there were times of upheaval and/or harmonious discord for Indigenous Americans, these long-developed relations also ensured survival during eras of doubt, for traditional Native rural and urban livelihood.

Traditionally, when a separate nation of Indigenous people needed to take refuge or safe harbor, a host tribe might accept wampum, or other symbolic gift, and adopt them as a sister/brother nation then provide protection for them while helping them to sustain themselves and providing humanitarian aid. This was an archetypal practice even amid former foes and enemies of war (including prisoners of war). Thus the likelihood of peace prevailed and most nations enjoyed the security of blanket protection, aid and assistance from related peoples, whether by blood or agreement. In so much, nations that enjoyed helping one another sustain themselves also traded amongst each other and engaged in trade relationships with numerous additional nations outside these pacts.

Throughways, whether by river or beaten path, were so extensive it has been said that practically all roadways in the hemisphere, including the now far overdeveloped United States, previously served these trading and adoptive relationships. Likewise, language systems were shaped and evolved from core, or root, languages to allow ease in trade; including the distinguished trade language spoken in the south-eastern area of what is today called the United States: Mobilian. Such systems ensured survival of individual nations equally as well as confederated, regional and the broader Indigenous Americas.

Blood Run is such a place, one of significant trade, once a great city.

In a time where so much devastation is occurring to Indigenous peoples, with impending danger in Colombia and many other Latin American countries; the continent environmentally endangered from the Arctic Circle down; where coral reefs are dying and polar bear drowning; where power mongers consider drilling through glaciers in Chile; deforest to conquer; where the largest human threat is commercialization of oil, coal, ore; where the Nukak are today facing what Indigenous people faced at this mound city less than three hundred years ago; this memory is a significant reminder of these civilizations at their peak and how critically important it is to preserve cultures, climates, architectural ruins, and sacred sites as they exist. It is imperative.

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE

Author Note

Oneota designates an Indigenous building culture on the Midwest Prairie Peninsula, sometimes the term is translated as a large group of peoples; other times translated to Place of a Rock. It is noted (State of Iowa Parks Bureau) as Algonquian, having been lifted from a former name of the Upper Iowa River.

In the scope of humanity, the beginning of the 18th century is not long ago. Eastern Indigenous Nations were already entering into treaty with England at the time maps and census counts were first being made of this heavily populated and thriving prairie city by French traders and Voyagers passing through. Yet, in the genocidal oppression of millions of Indigenous peoples, the very cities which only pre-dated European resettlement, or destruction, have been classified as ancient regardless of population periods.

Technically, in this case, Blood Run qualifies as both. The settlement dates back over 8,500 years ago and was definitely dwelled within until the encroachment. Artisans here created copper works, pottery, stoneworks, and great earthworks built for burial, civic, ceremonial and symbolic purposes.

Upon the first European encounters, as many as 400 mounds existed in upward to 2300 acres. 276 mounds were surveyed in 1883 over 1,200 acres. Later only 176 were mapped still visible. Due mostly to looting and physical removal, and later to cropping directly on top of the mounds, now perhaps less than 80, thoroughly diminished, mounds remain. The desecration by non-Natives has been immense and immensely unnecessary.

Strangely, though Native people were living in the city when European people arrived and traded with them, and despite the fact that Natives were still using the site during the development of the United States, Euro-Americans, for the most part, refused to believe that the same Indigenous people populating the region built the mounds. Publications dating from the 1800s to only a short time ago written by Euro-North Americans declared the mounds were built by a people who had come and gone. Unfortunately, for the early scholars, they missed any opportunity they had of actually researching the history accurately by ignoring the facts (and people) in front of them in earlier days and were relatively late in understanding the local Aboriginal myths are not only metaphorical moral story, but actual history of literal places and lives belonging to these very places. Such as this place, Blood Run.

This manuscript is dedicated to the original peoples of Blood Run site area, including: Ho-Chunk, Otoe, Ioway, Kansa, Omaha, Missouri, Quapaw, Osage, Ponca, Arikara, Dakota and Cheyenne Nations.

Blood Run

For Travis

I

Dawning

Before Next Dawning

Before Next Dawning's vermillion rise, for tens of hundreds of
years, life was
as it was, life itself, for thousands upon thousands,
across Horizon where plumed, feathered ones danced
skyward,
tiny ones crawled beneath long grass, raised by summer
heat.
Upon Earth's surface thundered thousands upon thousands;
hooves, feet.
Doves warbled, crickets chirped, elk whistled. Sun rose, fell

In the midst, a trading place, settlement,
six cultures, bands, tribes, ten thousand People, families
entwined.
This was a place where a traveler might rest, take water, elk
meat, catfish,
delight in warm company after weariness. A place of peace,
place of Wáwan.

Marking worldly occurrence, as all People do,
structures, from gathered earth hauled in baskets,
strategically placed, forming designs—animal, geometric—rose
reverent.
As People passed, significantly honored with mounds, knolls
of their own, they became part of this landscape Immortal.

Medicine boulders, from past settlement, carried, implements
sharpened,
etched in accordance, cosmology principles, changes—
Rendering fine pink granite
dust to make red, or ghost-white face paint for mourning, and
on so.

The People lived as they were told—hunting, fishing, farming—
worked with one another as cities do.
Prayed together and alone, as People tend to do.
The government steadily worked for common good of all
citizens
as all governments are supposed to. Eventually a cosmopolis,
where
they lived, prospered, sometimes traveling River
to other settlements for trade, to import, export goods.
Sometimes settling in, relishing afternoon Sun—easy.
This is the way it was and The People
were sure would always be.

Stories began circulating
a coming of a new kind.
Stories common as combing hair,
preparing food, water, ritual.
Keeping track, counting experience,
instruction, education, social event,
as Story existed around entire Mother Earth. But,
these Stories foretold terror, unthinkable, whiskered
beasts of men who thought nothing of putting end to life—
woman, child—The People. Strange men
without families who came in night,
siccing war dogs, sounding monstrous weaponry,
killing without touching, without arrow, spear.
At a time when to touch an enemy
gave greater valor than ending life.

The Stories told of Strangers coming, hordes in
boats arriving upon Land's watery eastern edge.
Disasters drifting their journeys' wake.
Once Story relayed entire families sleeping peacefully
waiting for dawn, incinerated in Night by the new kind.

Eagle bone whistlers sounded prayers, warnings.
Whirling blackbirds, heckling crows considered insect clouds
rising from peculiar domestics—alarming.

There was proof. Strange blankets,
with saturated color, weave not of prairies,
plains, not of buffalo hair, nor dog hair,
nor any plant ever worked here before.
These blankets preceded the coming through trade
amongst all The People living upon Turtle Shell
compromising the Northern body, this Hemisphere spanning
from the Arctic to Antarctic where some hundred
million People were already so securely home, before this
dawning.

First, when blankets came,
The People were mesmerized, soon coveted daily wear.
Presage foretold soon revealed through odd illness.
Not like any infirmity had ever blistered
upon The People until this time.
Plagues of great magnitudes, where

thousands upon thousands succumbed, relentless wrath.

Marks fell upon the earth—the Strangers' powers.
Power of death without touch,
without seeing odd instruments throwing fiery,
pellets into Human Beings from distance away.
Power without resounding instruments.
A grave mark fresh upon Earth.
A scar, revealing itself through papules, vesicles, pustules,
umblication, crusting—pockmarking People. Killing power.
No roots, herbs, no bear grease, nor deer medicines proved
effective to fight its course. Souls released like Spring
cottonwood billowing, samaras soaring—

Disease unleashed upon This World from Variola blankets
traded upon contact, sealed trunk hoarded, strategically
removed from bodies, from victims in The Lands Across Waters
far, far away. Brought here, they wrote, to make colonization
easy task. Lain over, like laying strange spread, making dead.

Task proven
in other escapades of Stranger mankind. Germ warfares.
Not the first ever practiced on Mother Earth's face,
yet the first collusion here and The People who had always
been
soon were almost lost. Those surviving vowed to
remember what had been before,
ensure their children's children never forget
hosts of ancestors preceding them, building their world.

This is world history. This gorgeous settlement
nettled with bluestem, red grass—Blood Run.
Pitted pink granite testament to thriving culture
of time before New Dawn, before new disease,
new ways, iron blades, guns, money—
Before sacred horse returned, carried them seasonally further
away from home.
Before lands were overrun in Strangers, settling in, erasing,
erasing.
Before time when world erupted in natural life interruption.
Somehow, miraculously, this place still boulders Horizon.
Yes, this is a story of Blood Run, of sudden
regional mound culture departure. It is a story.

Facing renewed plague fears, newly imagined
deliberate unleashing of Smallpox, let us not
erase what has happened here before. Let us
remember men, women, children, sacred infants
who succumbed to such disease spread by

approaching new mankind,
who certainly appeared terroristic
upon thick grasses, natural prairies, plains. Upon
original inhabitants as hide counts trace.

Let us count, how often we witness sacred sites demolished,
toppled during yet another overthrow. Hear my plea.
We silently witness desecration, many cultures'
sacred sites, east, just as the world witnesses gravel pits,
golf courses, housing, saloons, cafes erected upon Indigenous
Peoples' graves
without regard to Great Grandmothers, Great Grandfathers
who sleep here in this land puckered with soil
carried in many, many wound, coiled, woven baskets,
by dozens and dozens of hands working in unison
for common good in building earthworks, effigy,
community civic sculpture, structure, safe barrier bound by
earth, taking in the bones of The People upon their untimely
passing.

Sun pulls blue up from Darkening Land,
raises the lid each dawn over these same ruins,
this great civilization of time ago,
Over the ageless prairie glistening river, streams.
It is in this dawning consciousness is raised. A chance.
An age for man to now reflect respectfully
upon another man's glory. Yet,
testament in danger still, monstrous machines,
bulldozing scars upon soil,
lifting the earth's very skin up,
barring her bones, bones
of her People for raking, then smothering her
breath with concrete, brick, mortar—

Never more allowing her to freely breathe.

May she breathe again.

May she breathe.

May the revealed find refuge.

May the revealed find peace.

May she breathe.

May she breathe again.

May the revealed find delivery.

May the revealed find hope

May she breathe again.

May she breathe.

May the revealed find hope.

May the revealed find delivery

May she breathe.

May she breathe again.

May the revealed find peace.

May the revealed find refuge.

May she breathe again.

May she breathe.

May she breathe.

May she breathe again.

II

Origin

River

I remember the living
building earthworks all along my banks,

for eons before the Changeling.

First Story, then pressure.
Pox narrowly preceding his dreadfulness.

His presence, reckless squander.

My People began to row, then walk,
then ride, to maintain lifeblood, sustenance,
elsewhere upon the mother. In their leaving,

leaving me offerings to care for
those they had to leave behind.

The others, Changeling summoned,
mostly respected only themselves.

Not generations lain out before them.
Not sculptural works, nor practical.
Not mare's tails above, nor horsetail within me.

Yet dare claim me, harnessed, bridled,
as if I were not betrothed.

When from my wellspring
to my journey's foot

my cherished rest along me still,
for their attendance, my watchful pace—devoted.

Clan Sister

I have come to pray
I have come to sing
to dance before you

Call you to rise
again, to enormity
behind pulsars.
To the universe.
To Stars.

I remember when we
laid upon our mother,
followed starry lead
each night here.

We welcomed
their motion,
twinkle.
Crossed worlds
under, above mirrored
in eight-point stars.

Now, I pierce earth with
hawk feathers
upright, standing on
quill point, barb.

Line the old paths,
paths of spiritualness.
Guide you here
as do the stars
each crossing.

Though I lead you here,
allow you privy,
dare not exploit entry.

Memory

Wrapped in doe albino
heads held as if racked fully.
Eyes peeking through
two-fingered split space.

Sentries stand nightly,
strong in summer starlight,
among chest-high tall grass,

Surrounded in big bluestem,
little bluestem, switchgrass,
fever leaf, fever stem, mint,
butterfly weed, breathing root,
goldenrod, pasque flower,
deer medicine purple-bloomed—
positioned amid plenty.

Above mounded ridge,
shouldering circular planet.
Securing Horizon's distant edges,
ledges premising reason, discord.

Scanning the entire universe
for movement,
for pathways of planets,
for arrivals from the east.

For those arriving.

Horizon

Turtle-headed guards linger on entryways.

Stone circles sign space,
await return of those who complete
with care, with pine-poled hide,
fully beaded, quilled,
circumference symbolically painted.

Or, bark lodge roofs held taut,
grounded in river rock ellipses.

Earth lodges perpetually lingering, caches
filled with paintbrush, roots, curative tea,
Corn, Squash, Beans, sustaining sisters—Sunflower.

Allies here laid stones,
designed eagles, thunderbirds, falcons, serpents
on prairie; patterned dance, stone, clay, copper.

Though treasured lost lie here entombed,
in near distance hollows belie scaffolding
once raised to usher neighboring
loved ones on final journeys home.

To the place that is in everything,
spark existing here,
where I wait unflinching,
spanning relations of all you know,
knowing dawns come, go—
knowing.

The Mounds

Rising from earth-black, rich-fresh soil
lifted, hauled for multitudes in woven baskets
piled one on top of another, again, again, laid down
upon overlaying ground base, allowing drainage, for long-term care,
until we appear as small, circular, sloping hills to untrained eyes beholding.

Here, the earth is sanctified, sacrament caressed.
Created by cultural duty, by love for The People.
Prepared to preserve proper burial of loved, cherished.
Of those who lived in honor, in respect for Mother Earth, they
rose from, returned to remain encased in our earthly wombs sheltered.

Lain precise in accordance; constellation rise, cyclic phenomena, lunar cycle,
solar event; in the manner of being positioned relevant to all that was—will be.
Measured by line, multidimensional, geometrical design, envisioned, embraced, made form
from rope lines calculating paths, fiery loved ones guiding us here in this world from far beyond.

Ceremonial Mound

Altars raised from flatland
where The People might together praise
what holds the unending universe intact.

Platforms allow dignity admired, extolled.
Positioning measure far above mortal reach.

Higher than common ground
Favorable to kindred unearthly.

Climb upon my table, my bone plate.
From here, you can touch the clouds.
From here clouds embrace.

You can diagram the phases
of Sun, Moon from my ledges.

People, climb me together,
eyes to Sky; feet on Earth.

When elevated, even bold break.
Safer sending sentinels who know their purpose.

The lifting may swell loose humility, place.
Touch clouds, witness, breathe, behold, leave offerings.

Return to The People, humbled.
In this way. In this way.

Burial Mound

Keeper of Stories—
legacies of Life.

Solutions to unknowns
within my venter.

No one has known me
for these hundred years,

yet those who know me
know my form Immortal.

I, dwell sculpted
loved, by a People of Creation

Wise men, blessed children, mothers of stars
slumber in perpetuum, the seat of my mass.

Morning Star

So quickshot across Sky Vault.
they think me imagined.
My shawl fringes Earth
each dawn before Sun breaks Horizon.

Call to me each passing.
In the fleeting dawn await,
I will float you through
appearing peril.

Through me the world awakens.