

The Buffalo Hunt

Alan Steinle

Note: The North American “buffalo” is technically a bison. This poem was based on a buffalo hunt that George Catlin witnessed and wrote about in 1832. You can read his account at this page: <https://shannonselin.com/2019/01/buffalo-hunt-history/>

A lone scout had returned, and he passed on the word:
He had seen in the distance a buffalo herd.

It was dawn and the sky was beginning to glow,
and each man in the tribe took his arrows and bow.

And they mounted their horses—each person astride,
and the fully armed hunters all started to ride.

And they searched for the herd of the buffaloes there,
to encircle the beasts that were still not aware.

And they formed a big circle upon the green grass,
and they closed up the circle so nothing could pass.

Then the buffaloes smelled all their enemies there,
and they panicked and tried to escape from the snare.

And they started to run as a group at their foes,
but the hunters shot arrows at hearts with their bows.

And the beasts were alarmed and they started to turn,
and the herd of the buffaloes started to churn.

There was dust on the ground and more dust in the air,
and the buffaloes groaned and left blood everywhere.

Though some beasts broke on through and they started to flee,
they began to turn round—they were scared to be free.

For it wasn't familiar to live on their own,
and it didn't feel right to go off all alone.

And the grief that they felt for their cousins who'd died
would not let them depart—they returned to their side.

So the hunters were able to slay all the beasts
and prepare with the others the greatest of feasts.

And the women and children arrived to prepare
all the carcasses lying around here and there.

They would dry all the flesh and make cups from the horns,
and the bones and the hides were not pieces to scorn.

Coda

*When the settlers arrived to make homes on the plain,
they would shoot at the buffaloes, ending their reign.*

*But the buffaloes live now without a big foe,
and on lands they're protected, so numbers can grow.*

The Buffalo Hunt

An explanation of the meter or rhythm

This poem was written in anapestic tetrameter, which is a fancy way of saying that there are 12 syllables in each line and that every 3rd syllable is stressed. In the following lines, I underlined the stressed syllables to show you what to stress when you read the poem out loud. You should be able to hear a galloping rhythm.

A lone scout had returned, and he passed on the word:
He had seen in the distance a buffalo herd.

It was dawn and the sky was beginning to glow,
and each man in the tribe took his arrows and bow.