

## FIFTH CANTO: HOW TO BUILD AN IGLOO / INTO HISTORY

Before blindness struck the Isle of Chios there was Baffin Island  
and the tambour pulsebeat of a race of gods sterner than Olympus,  
before Homer could drink to the sea with his eyes full of the dark  
    wine of his song, the same sun was singing here  
    up north in the pinched eyes of men against the cold.

Bone rattle and lyre – two voices to the same heart, but the wind  
is harsher here and sculpts the frozen plains for one season only.

MAP THE COLD AGAINST THE STARS AND DRAW A CIRCLE IN THE SNOW

Who knows how often those whalers crossed the white desert of  
winter, leaving no tracks, following no tracks but those the stars  
    burn into the circling sky, or such as hares' paws might brush  
across the crisp canvas of an October day at the pole. Goggle-eyed  
they travelled by the scent and snort of blood against the icy sun  
until night overwhelmed them and there at the centre of a dream  
they built their homes into hives of light and endured the silence.

CUT WINDBLOWN SNOW TO  
VAULT THE DARK CIRCLES IN SQUARES

When to the south and east of their imaginable world sunbaked  
blocks of stone were heaved and fitted into Agamemnon's tomb  
the men of Dorset mastered an architecture of the spheres so perfect  
Pythagoras would've envied them. While Europe's academics debated  
truth, the Inuit carved his space from slabs of windbaked snowblown  
marble so elementary it preserved the body's heat beyond Acropolis,  
Coliseum, Chartres, and Neuschwanstein against the interstellar blast.

CHOP A SNOW CIRCLE IN  
SQUARES WITH ANTLER BLADE AND RAISE  
A SPIRAL TO HOLD THE DARK HARD AGAINST THE WIND

A simple form, always changing, but never changed, rising  
    like a blister on the frostbitten face of this raw land  
    or springing up like some arctic mushroom winter pushes  
etiolated from the frozen ground, or conjured briskly as blizzards  
flute upon the long night, an albino snake with monstrous scales  
    coiling about the fire in the stone strangling the dark wind  
    closing in on the victim conjurer – the hunter and his knife.

RAISE SPIRALS OF SNOW  
GEOMETRICALLY AGAINST THE RIGID WIND  
THAT IS YOUR ONLY SCAFFOLDING AND CARVE A DOME  
OUT OF THE DARK THE SOAPSTONE HEAT THE HEART THE HEARTH

Nomads of the north moving from igloo to igloo to celebrate  
their silver jubilee of centuries long ago and still their shadows

are cut down and cast in the snow by a sickle moon  
from month to month – survival is both feat and feast:  
eyes thin as the light a vernal equinox affords dawn  
the hunter lures softly scrapes the ice with whalebone paw  
and waits hunched over the flame in his heart waits poised –

STAND UP ON THE WIND'S  
SCAFFOLDING IN THE CENTRE OF THE FLAME  
AND ROUNDLY DRAW WHITE SQUARES ON THE BLACK  
WALL OF NIGHT LIKE SHAMAN SPELLS TO CIRCUMSCRIBE EVIL TILL  
UNDER THE DOME THE BLUBBER BURNS AND LIGHTS THE DIM EYE OF ICE

– waits till through the ice-hole the sea comes up to snort  
then he buries his harpoon deep in a breath of blood.  
Death waits for its victims disguised at the edge of life's crater  
pounces as the air erupts into winter pure and absolute  
and severs the jugular in a moment of utter peace. Thus survivors  
survive – and they hauled their generations on sled and sleigh  
across the tundra's northern lights home to a midnight sun.

CUT DEEP INTO WINTER'S  
QUICK BRIGHT FLESH AND SCOOP OUT  
A HEMISPHERE OF DARKNESS TO BUILD A STAR  
VAULT NORTH INTO THE WIND TO BEAR THE BURDEN  
OF THIS ARCTIC SPAN OF NIGHT ARCHED BLACK OVER A GEODE  
OF SNOW CRYSTALLIZING BLUBBER BURNING STONE CARVING ICELIGHT

In kayak and in numiak they braved and battled seas and whales  
more furious than a nightmare, challenged icebergs with a paddle  
when far away Ulysses set mighty sail for a more equal foe.  
The men of Dorset gave way to those of Thule who defeated  
Thorfinn when Europe's kings lay sodden in their castles.  
Water is the wine of the north and castles here are built  
to a blueprint the soapstone lamp designs upon the air.  
Where blood turns solid when the flame lacks food life  
carves its defences from bone – knife, bolas, arrowhead,  
harpoon shaft, wolf bait and gorge. Epic beyond any Homer,  
written firmly between the lines in the women's faces  
frozen into the sky with their bite gone their teeth worn  
away chewing skins chewing time against death by freezing.

SQUARETHE  
CIRCLE IN  
THE SNOW