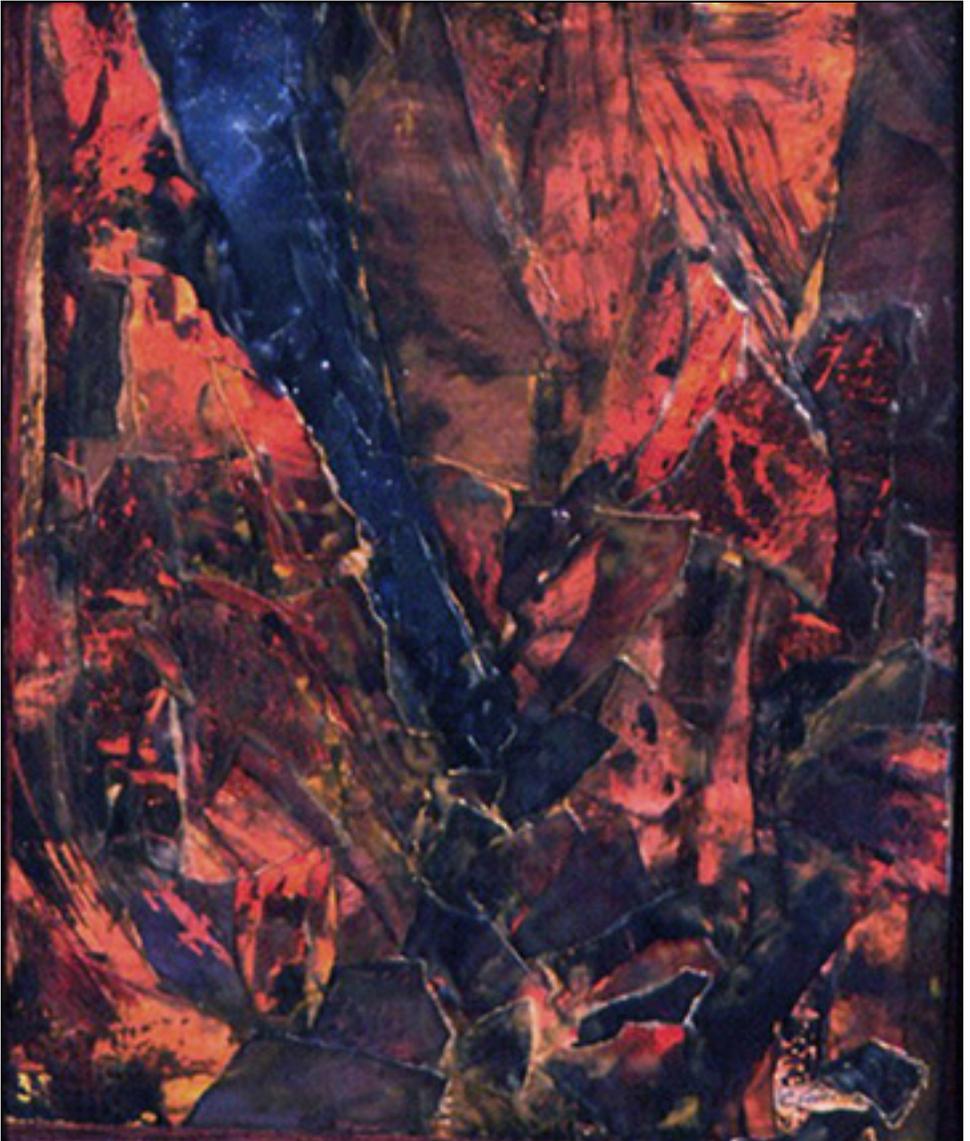


Breathing Starlight Into Stone



Gary David

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Part I: Window Rock



*Early Delight Among Boulders
Sleeping Late (First Song)*

Sun-scribbled carbon, a raven
rasps through the morning
blue and it's gone. Each day
lifts an imponderable secret
alchemy to light. This day
is yours: balanced
scales of alligator
juniper or evergreen
oaks transmute solar rain
on bleeding landscapes scorched
by scorpion dust.
Rainbow quartz sings
auriferous auras
of earthly delight.

Among boulders sleeping
late, granite silence pools
above your skull. Centuries past
this golden dell of flying fire
you once were guest, still
stretched shadows dream
the empty yawn of afternoon
siestas on a tawny plateau. Soon

breathing stars will echo
the coal-bright bird
of early light.

Phase Shifter

After the traditional tribal drum number
a wannabe country western Navajo
croons a Haggard tune over
reservation radio:

*“I could sober up tomorrow
And face my friends again.
But I got no reason
to quit.”*

Here redneck indebted lines
accrue a whole new
raison d'être. Time warped
through the red sandstone ring
of Window Rock, Merl's words wing
past Fort Defiance where
Kit Carson sips whiskey-fire
and calculates the rate of attrition
of warriors, women and children
on the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo.
The swan song of the Navajo
grazes the dead air above
Kit's head. He brushes it
off like a bluebottle fly.

The phase shifter echoes
over all the throttled miles
to the dry Pecos.

Kachina Cadillac

Red bluffs above the white line between
a Zia sign and Arizona, we're driven
to billboard boredom—green bucks blown
off the interstate. Below sunset arches

of Holbrook's hamburger factory hangs
a cheesy velvet painting of First Mesa.
Greetings from the smashed edge
of the rez! In a basin at the far reaches

of this dry farming region, unbroken braids
of water from an empty Mens room gurgle
to the First World. Down in the kiva
Hopis still sing to cloud people

the Deep Well Clan drinks. Midnight
near Tuba City a kachina cadillac honks
for bumper sticker love of Jesus, weaving
Everclear spirits on the two-lane.

NOTES: In the Hopi culture the kachinas (or katsinam) are benevolent spirit-messengers that help to bring rainfall to the desert. The Hopi carve dolls to represent these entities, which appear in a multitude of forms. Masked dances are also held in the spring in the village plazas to invoke them. On the other hand, "Kachina Cadillac" is a car dealership located in Phoenix. The Zia sign is a sun symbol comprised of a red circle with four rays at each quadrant; it is found on the state flag of New Mexico. The kiva is a subterranean, communal prayer-chamber.

Black Mesa, White Power

“Bought by the silver of sunrise
And the gold of sunset.”

Edward Dorn

At the Holbrook railhead
a cattle car claustrophobic
as the Holocaust hauled off
the Chiricahua Geronimo

to his Pensacola incarceration.
That was a long time ago.
Now a dripping faucet
in the burgh's fast food rest room

is a drop in the bucket
next to Peabody's extraction:
3 million gallons per diem
from the Navajo Aquifer.

Through surreal bloodstone arches
on the edges of the Painted Desert
golden H₂O sluices
tons of pulverized carbon

to the Mohave Generating Station
so investors in Las Vegas
can play all night, then rest
their assets in a new Lexus.

Friday the 13th

“I’m standin’ on a corner in Winslow, Arizona...”

The wind not slow all day
across this high plateau an invisible wall
backs me into a dark corner
of myself. Takin’ it all in
outside the Easy 8 Motel, I see half
the town’s boarded up, the other
shut down. At the hot core of utter
reservation-edged desolation not even
flatbed pickup love deigns
save me from, the squat desk clerk—
her roller derby T-shirt faded
to nearly nothing—blows through a haze
of Camel smoke: “The Day After
video’s even cooler

than Friday the 13th.”

Later through a blank paper wall bleeds
disembodied laughter of half-blasted Navajos
my fate and luck juxtapose. Each breath
pushes me further into the desert
of intoxicating words I can’t drink
for fear blue sky will fly off, the earth
roll up its sacred scroll to leave me
in solitary confinement
of infinite space: a dead planet spinning
like a dull chainsaw blade
without a tree

in sight to break
the blind wind
that –day after
hard luck day–
spirits
my blood
away.

Mojave Sunset Song

Back to the Pure West
of hallucinatory vistas, I drive
distant parabolas of pointless desire.

Cactus fire baptizes
skeletal mountains evaporating
into ether. Out here I utter

the First Syllable after
my last thought.
Trespassing the Valley

of the Shadow, I exit
Twenty Mule Team Rd.
to find an old Joshua tree

cares not one wit
what trippy triplets I write.
Like the Great Communicator

this prickly patriarch turned
amnesiac rehearses
secret verses to whisper

in the ear of the first star.
On the horizon's blue door
of déjà vu, her innocent face opens

the pale petals of datura.
Their ozone scent trumpets
a dizzying aphrodisiac

of astral memories. Occulted
by Hollywood false fronts
and a Borax White House

backdrop, an aging mirage
lover liquefies beneath him.
In his deep pockets

zodiac sand drifts forever
between apocryphal galaxies
and his murmuring mosaic

oasis of wet dreams.
They all run dry
before he can reach them.

There you go again
I hear Joshua say and
I do until I die.

Brimming Beyond His Metonymic Stetson

for Edward Dorn (1929 – 1999)

A voice clean and precise
as his arid vistas fleeing
the plaza at Mesilla.
Through the open door
of his office I heard it
one last time—ever incisive over
some faceless student's lines.
I made a jackrabbit journey
from the dreary Black Hills
to the Front Range only
to turn tail sans visit, never again
to inspect that sage aspect
of his leathern visage.

It pains me to admit
the green poet I'd been, Midwest-fed
on "The Bloody Red Meat Habit"
while he in burnt sienna pens
his Gran Apachería to exhale
an elegiac excoriation
of the Body Politik
del Blanco in exile
on the erstwhile incendiary
Cuyahoga—riparian mirror
of Gila Bend's dry Sonora.

Years after my wayward westering
the largesse of his intelligence
remains. His poems' mission
is more dire
in a world amassing more
to abhor with each passing

hour. His essence now passes
into ether. All those spaces
between the cañons and mesas
of his voice (ever and anon
it pains me to admit)
shall never again
with compassion and wit
bedazzle my diffidence
nor enliven the bedizened
citizens brimming beyond
the felt horizon
of his metonymic Stetson.

Knowing You Were Dying

for Erling Duus (1940 - 2000)

The day you died, I drove miles and miles
alone through aspens and yellow pines

now thinned out. Late October sun slanted
upon eyesore stumps. Last summer we hoped

to hike these high hills now dusted with snow
but I turned ill, though you were farther gone.

Not knowing why, I drove and drove—
not knowing you were dying. Without warning

I stopped at a clear-cut patch to recall
white columns wide as an embrace.

Squinting in the glare of sawdust
and snags, I cursed under my breath

“Why the hell am I here?”
and sighing, turned my old gray car

toward home—not knowing
you were dying and dying.

Dry Spring In Lonesome Valley

-1-

Despite a good neighbor's cyclone fence
trespassing the open window of my Office
of Poetry, it might be Whitman's century:

bare prairie hills in muscular strides leap
a dawn horizon still—Wyeth's world
without Christina or the house. In the foreground

a single greasewood, a few cholla.
Over chino grass older posts heaved
by frost and heat fret barbwire rust.

The last longhorn clouds graze
blue ranges of harmonica vistas gone
west with an outlaw sun.

In the bitter distance shot
with sagebrush, a dirt track curves past
hummocks stuffed with Apache bones.

-2-

Upon the anvil of my high desert day
after lonesome day hammers.
Ravens rise, rasp the wind. Fluttering

soot scraps from sheer flames scribble
on the sky's blank page, bled dry.
As gray temples throb, shimmering rivers

of shadows beneath my eyes whisper
something of evening—but I can't make
out what they're saying. At midday

under molten sunlight, I grow faint
and fainter, squint infernal arroyos
into my brow—increasingly infertile.

-3-

Dust devils unravel
the lines I walk—but I can't
make out what they're saying.

Half-lame, my bardic lines
cease to sing, breathless
from their long climb down

into obscurity. I bear witness
to random eclipses the black
bird's carbon wing makes

in a solar blink. Parched
soliloquies of glaring sand
take the place

blind dust begins and
ashes end. At sunset
dead history blisters

the face, the skin, the voice
I've come here to know
as only my own

feeble spring fed
by a falling
water table.

Burning Poetry

In the time it takes to write
a suicide note

years of daily labors turn
to a blizzard of ashes

the May wind disperses
out back near the shed.

Doused with a little gas, sheaves
stacked in an old trunk

harumph to life
at the toss of a match.

While I turn over the smolder
with a rake, white

sheets blotted and scratched
with hand-written or typed lines

catch the light, flicker
into oblivion. Anticipating self-pity

staring at this burning
mirror, instead I find

nothing—a numbness
on my face, tingling

on my lips, but no echo
of poetry. Above

in the black
locust trees anonymous birds

compete for spaces
on a branch, sing their blue flames

through one more spring.
In the distance the indifferent

hum of a world
going places

raises its cold voice
another notch.

The Cruellest Month

Damn you, T.S. Eliot!
You and your blooming dooryard posies

made me
a penny wise but Pound foolish

poet, *makar* in Greek. Literally
I “make” poesy

instead of a living.
You’ve already made it

into all the anthologies.
You and your allusive, alliterative cronies

made national poetry month
the story of my life

in all its penurious glory.
The cruelest truth

of this postnarrative age
you helped create:

there’s no telling
how it will end.

In a Hundred Years

My eyes reflect sky-blue paint peeling off the ceiling
the hazy afternoon you lose your virginity.
Or a gray stone smoothed by the white water

of your Colorado River trip—that paperweight
on your desk. You find a washed-out photo
in a trailer house rusting at the iron edge

of the Mojave Desert. Inside a bottom bureau
drawer, among black widows and canyons
of dust whispers proof I once breathed life. I was

a brooding cloud made flesh. My sunglasses mirror
a dark smudge of contradictions on the lens, exposing
my web of dreams and misplaced lust. I lie

crucified in a chaise lounge on a West Coast beach
in '82. I need a haircut. My pants are too tight.
Your son with midnight clothes and gothic cant offers

the same two-tone foghorn assessment –“Bor - ing!”–
we’ve always heard. In all ages the poet suffers
cultural amnesia. Frozen in my moment this stranger I am

squints at you in the stifling stillness of August. I say
nothing. My face exudes a lassitude of countless pointless
afternoons. On the distant asphalt vehicles sluggishly flow

as blood cells negotiate clogged veins. Whoever said
In a hundred years none of this will matter. . .
was dead-on. Someday anon drops like a stone

a picture of you –one f-stop in your life–
on the wind-blown sand, which obscures the fire
in your own eyes. Maybe they too were blue.

*My Daughter Dances Solo (Sonnet
for a World Without a Single Friend)*

My daughter dances solo with her eyes
closed. Autistically awkward
she moves in a room of her own
making, making it up—half

hip-hop half ballet, her own world
she's the star of, her dark head
whirling, shoulders jerky, stage lit
by a many mirrored ball, her audience applauds

in orbit around her, theater in the round
world all her own, inward, adolescent
limbs out of sync yet graceful
by sheer will and mettle, her intent

to be a star, a sun unto herself. At song's end
she returns to the world without
a single friend.

Passing On the Ways of the World

When we lived in the downer trailer park
across from the crystal meth lab
a SWAT team raided one day—rifles raised
and yelling (like in the old Westerns)
“Come out with your hands ups!”
some punk my daughter’s age
used to tear around on his bike, popping
wheelies and spitting
gravel. The kind of dad-less waif who
slashes tires at ten,
steals a joyride at fifteen, beats
and rapes a jogger at twenty.

I was painting my porch and
he stopped to watch. “Wanna try?”
I smiled, thinking of Tom Sawyer.
He grabbed my brush and eagerly began
to slop on green paint. “No, like this.
Do it like this—smooth and easy.”
Then it hit me: I was passing on
the ways of the world—a shared pleasure
my daughter has no need for.
Such intergenerational transfer
to her is a mystery deeper than our poverty.

Over the years certain Ph.D.s
gave her lots of labels: asperger’s
epilepsy dyslexia attention deficit bipolar
whatever—a whole complex of
syndromes and disorders. But
all their degrees failed to tell me
what to call this hole
in my heart, this depressing de-
fathering with nothing to pass on.
Then to pass on with nothing.

Hope Evangelical

-1-

Driving by the watered-down light of Wednesday Bible study,
I toy with the notion of revisiting childhood scriptures.

“Fuck that!” my teenaged daughter spits through her tribulations
of nonverbal learning disabilities and the random sting

of jellyfish tentacles that mangled her nerves last summer.

“Why should I believe in a god that tortures his children?”

Drowning in deaf-moot agnosticism, sheepishly

I surrender: “Maybe there is no God and it’s all random.”

-2-

Driving alone by the dark December church, I wonder:
where are the stargazers seeking immutable signs of the Second

Coming, where the alchemists, cabbalists, where the community
of astronomer-priests laughing, dancing geomancers, where

the science of poetry’s soul, catechism of the split second?

Sunday mornings’ faux stained glass glints like a wink,

as I am deep in a dream of Eden—ferns sensuously curving
toward a misty future sublime beyond belief.

The mystic Age of Gnosis has long given up
the ghost. A gray Morse code ad infinitum tap-taps

its red-and-white striped cane down the narrow corridor
of blind faith—now the way. The truth and the light

echo like a storm's distant thunder, the wing of an angel
who just misses us. Under the dark blanket of winter

the desert's open mouth parched with silence
refuses to speak. We await the next millennium.

The Days After September 11th

The skies are absolutely empty.
Arching far above us
a medieval silence reigns
like a cold, distant father
with no son, no holy ghost.
No sinking drone of aircraft
to tunnel through our lonely lives
stunned by disbelief, numb with grief.
No contrails to etch the pure blue
with acute angles of our mechanics
of mortality. Gone are the 737s
freighting bleary-eyed
ciphers to evening's oblique destinations.
Except for a few fighter jets
scanning startled horizons
or exiled Saudis air-bussed to safety,
the nights after September 11th
are primevally empty—the skies
jeweled with the fires of eternity.

The weeks after September 11th
e-mails misfire in each heart
thrashing against its ribcage
like a jackrabbit facing the knife.
Upgrade our Y2K cache? Or throw away
vain cash at the mall to feign
American business-as-usual?

The months after September 11th
usher us toward an apocalyptic atavism.
Infidel high-tech and the tongs of Islam forged
at the birth of the 7th century merge
Mohammed's 7th Heaven and Dante's 9th
Bolgia. (But the latter's far too literary
for the close of this literal age.)

The years after September 11th
jam airwaves with hearsay
and static, armed jihad
and Armageddon, simulacra
of creeds and credences backed
by hormonal fear—as if
at any moment the firmament
—its vaulted ceiling— might crack
open to spill upside down
demons somersaulting out
of deepest hell like terror’s
tidal wave. The world seems
upside down. Night skies glow
with coals destined for the ash heap.

History after September 11th
shall not be written
in ink or pixels but
in sacrificial blood mirrored
by the moon and stars fallen
into Gehenna, Jahannum, the fires
that drive each heart, each meat machine
in the Kingdom of Karma.

NOTES: Dante’s 9th Bolgia—*The Inferno*, Canto XXVIII; Gehenna—
Hebrew hell; Jahannum—Muslim hell

Give Us This Day Our Daily Tool

Atop the steel roof
of the Ace Hardware store
in Erstwhile West, Arizona
a simple white cross
constructed of indestructible
4-inch PVC pipe lords
over the empty parking lot.
This down-to-earth icon
is flood-lit all night—not just
Xmas but year-round.
Each backsliding heathen, each
Kali fornicating sinner: be
forewarned!

“Y ain’t
welcome ’round
these parts, even to buy
a plumbing snake or plunger.”

O holy Ace, blessèd be thy monkey
wrenches, thy flatheads,
thy drill bits, thy hacksaw blades.
Sanctify thy dead bolts
and crowbars and turf spades.
Blessèd be thy needle-nose pliers
and vise grips, thy hex nuts
and toggle bolts. Give us this day
thy clawed hammer, thy fine sand paper.
Blessèd be the holy ark
of thy red metal tool box.
Thy ball cock shall deliver us
unto the hereafter long after
our crapper is a rusty throne.
O steel wool Jesus, our helpful hardware man,
thou art king of the carpenter’s rule,
the miter box, the ten penny nail.

O true value Lord, bestow upon us
thy saving graces, thy silver rolls
of duct tape and sheer plastic sheets
no Axis of Evil shall penetrate. Ever
armed with staple guns and box cutters,
we creationist Crusaders
shall beat the Devil
at his own game, shellac
his scraggily hippie beard
with polyurethane, screw down
his scrotum to a 2 X 4—then run
his skinny ass out of town

for good. The right tool
for the job (as Father always said)
shall become our 11th Commandment
immortalized in concrete
on the sidewalk by the Ace born
in a sheep shed, raised
to pound spikes, and risen off the roof
of our hardware to heaven.

Beyond the Curving Night

Riding the hot stinger of Scorpio
the disk of Mars bleeds rust
above a desert of barking dogs.
Inside satellite trailer houses
in the incandescent distance
plasma screens morph and flicker.
At midnight they black out.
Shadow wings on prickly pears gather
the loose ends of civilization
beneath eyelids and cross hairs
of anonymous neighbors.
Slipping into deepest sleep, the
libertarian will
whimpers a last testament
to Darwinian survival—the sanctity
of rifle or pistol defending
the non-science nonsense
of creationism's culture wars.

Beyond bumper sticker one-liners
I wander, a scholar who babbles
in a Pythagorean labyrinth
of dusty angles. Disenchanted,
disenfranchised lives distill
an arbitrary meaning of life
in the silver trickle of water
in a crumbling fountain, the sound
of creosote crickets—their
victorious voices parting
thirsty leaves of thorny locust.
The chill, sweet wind
on my cheek, I hear the low
hum of untranslatable stars
calibrate the night curving
into blessèd oblivion.

The Crows of October

They cluster in tired cottonwoods, black lords
over summer's riot—our rows of sunflowers gone
brittle-brown. Caws in the chill-down of evening
muzzle the dismal yelps of neighborhood dogs
or unruly yells of latchkey kids out too late.
Even a dying cicada falls silent. In the dark wings' wake
what ungainly flutter—swooping blind greed
across violet-and-indigo's last light. Still

their kingdoms come, their will bleeds dawn
in smoky halls of leave-taking. Nature wastes nothing.
They show no need for sharp eyes or speed.
The crows of October relish fresh road kill
all winter—a blur of cold beaks blizzards make
invisible. In vain, spring seeks our green plebiscite.

Inside, El Norte

On the morning cyber-news
the earth rolls underneath

the bare feet of the poor
in El Salvador. I hear

Richter scale screams
of *huipil* mothers

on a video clip, their baptized sons
the ground ripped away, mud slides

burying whole families
in brown embrace.

*

A global citizen, I sit alone
in the white north

where truth is relative
and relatives scatter.

My furnace ignites.
My computer imports.

Icicles drip from eaves
like fragile stalactites

deep in crystal caves.
I quake inside.

Dry Solstice

On the porch pointing my compass like a gun –sunset
240 degrees– I think how Thoreau measured by rote
the thickness of a Walden winter his last year.
Nightfall and invisible walls close in, suffocate.

Each incandescent filament sears like a splinter
on fire. Stillborn light shatters like an ice cake
on concrete. Like, like, like. . . Garish garlands
of multicolored bulbs on the dry solstice tree

mimic some perverse carnival in purgatory. I hide
in a hole in the calendar. Scales of darkness lie
at the bottom of the pond—a lead sinker, a teardrop
lost last summer. I try to rise, but the top of my head

thuds against ice. Downward drifting, my face echoes
a carp screaming—a bruised moon crazed lines detonate.

Window Rock

window rock
door tree
roof sea
wall stone
human seeing
nature's doing

I took a walk in the desert, ended up
near my deathbed
in Intensive Care. How I got there
by car, God only knows
or doesn't. Like Teilhardt
that French Jesuit said, perhaps
He (capital H obligatory) is not
omniscient
but evolving like the rest of us
poor bastards
toward Point Omega.
I took a walk in the desert.
Dehydration, sunstroke, kidney failure.
Drought, heat wave, polluted aquifer.

rock window
tree door
sea roof
stone wall

Blood pressure 80 over 30 and falling,
I floated toward the ceiling, watching
alpha paramedics stick the I.V.
in my arm, slap on
a lifeline oxygen mask.
(Looks like death to me.)
I was detached. Curious
but calm, except for

*Hey! That's my favorite shirt
you're ripping open.*

I woke up in a hospital gown.

If I could see past layers
of life upon life to the afterlife—but for me
no luminous tunnel loomed
so I can't. Not yet. I must be
content
to toss syllables on a blank sheet—
little pebbles by which
I try to shatter reality

doing nature's
seeing human
being window
being rock.

Part II: Tierra Zona



Up Katsina Vista Hill

Subdivisions bivouac hummocks
all around, but this hill's still full:
catclaw acacia and manzanita, mistletoe
in emory oak, bear grass or prickly pear, cliffrose
over chokecherry, buckbrush in squawbush, palo
duro by spanish bayonet, piñon with blackjack
pine, maidenhair fern, one-seed junipers' buff
granite boulders map-lichened and mottled
light-green via ground moss
very verde-velvet—the flowing hair
of Tierra Zona.

Squirrel scurries and
croaking crow wings
buffet the air with the
foof foof foof
a boomerang makes.
You clamber up the jumble
geologic ages scramble.
Then you see them
eighty miles away
floating
volcanically coned
in blue snow
peaks—the katsinas'
home! Now
you know
the earth again
is new and
you are
floating
home
again:
your death
your friend.

Afternoon At Lynx Creek Ruin

Atop a scrub oak knoll at the bottom
of an evergreen bowl of mountains
slow motion dreams
surround, a drowsy image:
a wall of a village builds
from granite blocks, blocks which began
to tumble over over
seven centuries ago. Stop
and smell smoke stalking
from a juniper fire. Hear
children of laughter who dropped
to dust skitter in the dust and
laughter of ancestors
in the sky's breath. Young men go off
to hunt, while elders inside
a kiva stir live coals—unearth
blood-born storm clouds forming

in the ashes. Up from the creek
a woman with bare breasts shining
with sweat slips on the path. Her ocher jar
of water makes a parabolic arc
from her brief epoch, near
perfect in spirit, to ours
enduring the distance forged
tools ratchet inside
our bones. This womb jar catches
and carries to the arid air
we breathe her

hoop

of blue sky, smashes
to shards as the village
evaporates time-lapse
in the time we've left
to feel the wet edges.

A Dark Sound In Walnut Canyon

Despite the light
descending line of the canyon
wren's tune, walls ground and twisted
up as juniper trunks gray
anciently. Tucked underneath tight
limestone overhangs, fingerprints
in the mortar of a spring
morning eight centuries dry
identify the stone mason
whose bones feed the dust
we breathe. The monument's

brochure tells how
her desiccated hand sells
for 65 cents just
moments ago in the slow river
our time spans. Circling inside
a hungry shadow
of a vulture, her spirit's harder
to extract than the meat
of a black walnut. This canyon
of Sinaguan buff's abandoned
hoodoo island on the heart
wears
a dark necklace
of echoes –home
upon hushed home–
in ruins. Still

her impressions fresh
as the hour she went down
to the water to drink
in the fire of those Indian
paintbrushes (her torches
toward a nether forever)
flower.

The River Rounded At Tuzigoot

Down from Mars Hill
where Pluto got plucked
from a glacial lake of star shards
between the great wars, we fall
off the Colorado Plateau.
Whispers of thirsty shades
hackberry and sycamore make
down the crooked flow
of El Río de los Reyes
usher us through a gilded dream
of home. Between the vortices'
red rock hum and these
copper-backed Black Hills
of Anglo Jerome, Sinagua ruins crown
a lost ridge of paradise.

Ram's horn cornucopia: corn
beans and squash, pit-baked hearts
of agave cactus, acorns
or piñon nuts, stewing
lambsquarters, saltbush
or cholla buds, rice grass
and prickly pear, jackrabbits
or mule deer—all
fed near spirits
of infants buried (with parrots!)
beneath the pueblo floor.

Why then abandon these living bones
they loved, this land
of bloodstone and blue sky?

“Various causes have been proposed
such as drought, water logging

of the soil, disease, warfare,
invasion and dissolution
of trade networks.
But none seem to provide
an adequate explanation.”

Skimming the guidebook we grasp
a metal railing climbing
the tower of mortared limestones
the river rounded at Tuzigoot. On top
priests prayed for She-rain
and pollen mist to bless long ago
each field with green tongues.
What failed? Between spirit ways
of Wolf and Badger, abalone shells
and macaw feathers adorned
stories star-drawn in circles
of underworld kivas:

the Feathered Serpent comes!

With a smoking mirror
on his chest and stiff black hair
on jutting chin,

the Feathered Serpent comes!

With a right-sided grin
swimming hard the cold white ooze
on his squawfish face,

the Feathered Serpent comes!

With a stick of silver
to slash yucca blossom necks
off their tender stalks,

the Feathered Serpent comes!

With a sickness worming
through his two-fisted heart whose
only cure is gold,

the Feathered Serpent comes

as a man! With armies of men battling
evil for good, the Feathered Serpent comes
rattling scales of blinding armor across
New Spain's staked plains.

A luster of avarice salts
the conquistador's wounds with stars
falling over bloody ice.

The lava sunset peaks
of Sierra Sin Agua host
spiral roads of katsina feet, flow
a river of prayer long ago
before la Entrada.

We can't begin
to understand what
subtle resonance their red cycle
of life sung. The feathered spirits
now dance in a rainbow plaza
of spinning planets. Spruce-ringed
feet drum the earth, kicking loose
storm clouds of dust, nebulae
of dreams. We can't begin
to understand what
underworld ending we begin
in our martial yearning
for understanding.

Close the book.

Upon this high desert
marine fossils echo
a Third World light. Wait

another thousand years. . . .

Waves

now begin to break
into cloud katsina songs
upon our thirsty ears.

NOTES: Tuzigoot National Monument near Cottonwood, Arizona is the site where the ancient people archaeologists call the Sinagua (Spanish for “without water”) lived in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Tuzigoot is an Apache word meaning “crooked water.” In 1930 Pluto was discovered at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff. El Río de los Reyes (“river of the kings”) is the original name of the Verde River. In the late nineteenth century the United Verde Copper Company opened a mine that created the boomtown of Jerome, Arizona. Sierra Sin Agua is the original name of the San Francisco Peaks. La Entrada refers to the Spanish incursion into this territory. According to the Hopi (the descendants of the Sinagua), the “Third World” is the preceding epoch that was destroyed by a deluge. We are now living at the end of the Fourth World, Hopi elders say.

Echoes Through Canyon de Chelly

-1-

Manganese streaks red
sandstone canyon walls the way
arc after arc of thunderhead streamers
falls—brushing “desert varnish”
from a lone house of snow on the rim
to fields bubbling up sunrise green
corn below. Foreshortened riders
on Navajo horses follow serpentine
olive trees, cottonwoods and tamarisks
twisting past. Swirling waters
in stone, lines of dunes frozen
by late Permian winds curve
our current crow-fly vision.

-2-

As a few Diné kids go
to their mother’s hogan, taboo shadows
a thousand years long cling
to the buff-colored cliff
houses of the Ancient Ones. Tower
of stone dwarfed by a stone overhang
of time still stands
abandoned, echoes through time
late morning sheep bells and voices
a thousand years deep.

-3-

Look back through the T
-shaped window within

a spalled masonry
wall. With hushed shades
of sleep their slow afternoon
intones, a few wind-hewn
stone men (the same moment
our century crusades) paint
egg white and ocher
palm prints or concentric rings
sprayed upon a light rain
-ribboned face—the sun-polished
cheek bone of Grandmother Canyon.
Spider-wise, her spirit crawls
over the dark pueblo—blood
colors and thunder blessing
her slickrock road.

-4-

Look again and
elders look back
another thousand years
deep. In the mother kiva
they sing and drum together
with *their* Ancient Ones, the ones
living in the evening dream
of the oldest kiva—holiest
of holies, ring within
ring. The oldest echoes
nearest their spirits spanning
the life of Grandmother Canyon.
From the bone-clean top
of Spider Rock to her mouth webbed
with graffiti, Bud cans and butts:
the Rainbow Road echoes
a thousand years swirling past
their drum song, painting
our long road home.

upward to their new home) blessed
this mesa. The Plumed Snake's
scales still glitter
sacred rain.

-2-

Today we see (as if
a museum piece) that blanket: faded
photos of all the Anasazi
sites we covet, all the mute ruins
we've ever walked, those empty rooms
déjà vu tries to fill, a bricolage
of undanced steps and bricks
still standing (four times longer
than our republic). Still
standing against the polished agate
of our lenses' polarized blue: bone
whistles and stone tools, eagle feathers and turquoise
jewelry, cedar spindles and abalone, dreamed tableaux
of village afternoons, turkey vulture drowsy
plaza gossip, sibilant whispers etched
like water serpent petroglyphs
on the cloud breath wind

we almost remember. Each thread
becoming a part
of the tattered pattern
the whole cloth sings
down below

beyond
death
mist: the dark home
they go

to wrap up
within
ancestral
welcome.

The Hisatsinom keep
warm.

NOTES: Hisatsinom is the name the Hopi give to their ancient ancestors, rather than the Diné (Navajo) word *Anasazi*, which means “ancient enemies.” The Hopi word *kitsoki* means “village.” Located on Third Mesa, Oraibi (O-rye-bee) is the oldest continuously inhabited community in the Western Hemisphere, established c. 1120 AD.

The Blowhole At Wupatki

Where unchristened trails of phratries crossed
(Sinagua and Kayenta, Hohokam and Cohonina)
febrile tendrils of kiva fire still flow
down flute breath feather snakes'
tap route Sipapu beneath
the Colorado Plateau: grand canon
of afterlife or priorbirth, oneiric underworld
where Masau'u the Skeleton Man meets
in the flesh his alter ego (godseye to I)
upon a paho altar of salt
quests through Vishnu schist.

Who is this
Hisatsinom who wandered
away so long
ago from Wupatki
on a spiral journey
through sun and bloodstone
to follow Pahana
the Elder White Brother emerged
from the First World
below? Where

from the red corn south basaltic black
cinders with apocalyptic aa meet
Moenkopi sandstone, honeycombed by the flood
of a billion summer dog stars buzzing
moonless monsoon nights, pitch pine
upon red slab, above the continent's north-most
ball court, catching ritual rain, these tall houses
of Pueblo Wupatki rose. In the smoking shadow
Palotsmo cast on Kana-a lava flow
ejecta, a crow wings obsidian bonito over
a Cloud Katsina Clan's prayer dance

on clear air. Over this rainbow Painted Desert
vista, rippling wet indigo with vermilion
erosion of dire sunset firefall, fumarole
mist and cave ice glaze, glacial outwash
layered by hot ash, from Kaibab limestone
fissures to that squash blossom court built
by the village blowhole blessed
with corncobs and pollen, Yopontsa, sage
spirit of vitrified wind carries
a mask-muffled prayer from the Sacred Peaks'
granite pyramid through this delta age dreaming
Precambrian strata cross-bedded down
the Tusayan's cañon origin:

*O sprouting god
Muwingwa!
We pray you dip
your great sprinkler
of heaven feathers
in the sky-lakes' fire
to bring us sacred rain.
We pray you make
winter earth ready
for summer air
to bring us sacred corn.
O Muwingwa!
Hear our prayer
sprouting god!*

A hoop of water, lightning kiva ladder
to chthonic thunder, a katsina wheel driving
Hopi prophecy from that first Hisatsinom here
to my mechanically Manichean Mazda.

Who is this
Anglomakarian who blundered
into Tierra Zona

to stumble on ruin rubble, sifting
red dust for a ghost of a face
singing away
eight hundred years
a familiar prayer for Nakwach, the clutch
of white palm on red?

A ring of hands evaporating, wrenches
elemental balance in a hell-bent mental break
dance down to the third Fourth World
war: a purification
other ghosts burn in
to the bone.

Go down> Go down> Go down> Go down>
after that Yucatan game's (sacrifice
naught but sweat) whack and thuck, go
after Crow Clan names, dark-skinned
wind up Mishongnovi now, deep song
the blowhole shivers, rain breath
of dark earth, mother tongues deep within
feeling out: I am Mud Woman.
I am Gray Wolf. (Down there or
me kneeling the high desert, lone lobo licking
cool air elixir?) Hear our prayer
in the rearview reverse the obvious
obverse pueblo flux, spiraling back
the rainbow banded cañon where
one spirit village dream still lives
on white steam of rabbit stew. Hear our prayer
from solar slickrock pool to adobe roof
of liquid moon song's abode. Going back
to sacred source of blue corn growing
from a sky portal, hear *our* prayer—
who snake vernal water spirits down
feather breath mother routes' low
pressure expiration, yellow lupus eyeteeth

or high on red inhalation fire up
half-life Third World eternal
combustion or bust

out here— our prayer

laughing
breath bubbles

up rhizome

fissure fires

laughing

death home!

NOTES: Wupatki is the pueblo in north-central Arizona that began construction in the late 11th century and was abandoned by the mid-13th century. Sinagua, Kayenta Anasazi, Hohokam, and Cohonina are terms archaeologists give to the native groups that came together at Wupatki and surrounding ruins, which are located near the volcanic cinder cone called Sunset Crater (in Hopi named Palotsmo) and the San Francisco Peaks, the sacred mountains where the katsinas live during half the year. In the Hopi belief system a Sipapu (or Sipapuni) is a subterranean tunnel leading to the Afterlife. Kana-a is the Hopi word for cloud katsina. Yopontsa is the wind god who lives at the base of Sunset Crater. Tusayan is the Spanish term that refers to the Hopi, literally “people of the corn.” The prayer to Muwingwa, the god of germination, was transliterated from J. W. Powell’s *Canyons of the Colorado*. Anglomakarian is a portmanteau, makar being the Greek word for poet. Nakwach is the secret handshake of brotherhood that Pahana, the Lost White Brother, will use when he returns to be reunited with the Hopi at the Time of the Purification. Settled c. A.D. 1200, Mishongnovi is the “guard village” on Second Mesa that watches for Pahana’s return, which contemporary Hopi elders say is imminent.

A Light Mist of Hopi Numinosity

In the distance an instance
bigger than beautiful, wider
than years being human, roomier
than this view, “very something”: blue

mesa on mesa on mesa en
masse, deeper than scenery—*a'ni*
himu. Land spans life
dances day-long with

masks (“friends”) into. Plazas
fill with spirits. Skies
spill cloud people. Fields
rustle arms wet and green

as that first time
lover, the sweet mist
of Sand Altar Woman
on butterfly lips.

Serpent Mound Journeys

“On the prairies they stopped again.
The Snake Clan especially wanted to leave
its footprint here, but there were no cliffs
on which to mark the picture writing.
So the people left their signature
in the shape of a great mound of earth
resembling a snake.”

Book of the Hopi

“Just a mound o’ dirt
shaped like a serpent,”
the Rocky Fork Store clerk hisses
when you ask the way.
Rolling over Ohio back roads’
white porch farmhouse dogstar cornrows and
Mailpouch tobacco barns
fading, your car rusts into bluegrass
toward the Snake. Morning dripping
gray sky, you near the ring
graben, hear the crypto-
explosion echo down
coils of deep time.

Past mounds of the dead, you tread
where angels fear—Eden
as Rev. West sermonized
right here. Grab the tail
of the great snake, yellow clay
Father Snake, feel
headward surge
of serpent lightning.
Circumambulate
Feather Snake, purge
each chakra chochmo curve—
thunder number seven

takes off
your head, takes you
to the mouth, the egg
in the mouth
of Father Snake, the sun
swallowed whole
summer solstice eve.
Above the snake
garden in Adams County
rises
just a mound
of love, just a mouth
to the dead
you tread, a spermatid
your love said
eyeing the aerial
photo ex post facto.

Vagina katsina (blue violet
Ruellia flowers echo) flecks
dew drops on deep green
swarded yellow back
of Father Snake, rainbow girded
manito snake, paho feathered
Tokchi'i, red talking guardian
of the East. Line migrations' gyre
tail tip up with copperhead
to point out Polaris, poison
of stasis. His tongue strikes
west, the way the Lost White Brother
with seed sack sprouting fire
comes.

His tongue strikes fire.
Father Feather Snake
in the guardian garden rises
over dolomite bedrock, ignites

the falling night.

In your oval eye
his tongue strikes fear.
His tongue strikes fear.
His tongue strikes fear.
His tongue strikes fear
dead. You tread
with feather feet
the air. Father Snake spirals
up your chakra tree—
shaking
the last days
of spiritual hunger
before the holy host
Pahana comes and
your eye strikes fire.

NOTES: chochmo—(Hopi) mud mound; katsina, kachina—spirit of invisible life forces; manito, manitou— (Algonquian) an object engendering spiritual awe or reverence, a fetish; paho—prayer feather; Tokchi'i—Hopi reference to the serpent effigy near Locust Grove, Ohio. Author Frank Waters claims that the Hopi Snake Clan migrated eastward and constructed Serpent Mound.

Walking Tour of Walpi

Up on First Mesa, past
black wires and water pipes
of Hano and Sichomovi, smile
masked hawkers' katsina dolls
from hoods of cars, burnt out
cropping this coarse cob
isthmus, beyond our taciturn
tour guide's "Non-Indians not allowed
at Niman dances," her
sandstone basins water pools
centuries deep, gap
end to seasons' drought, slab
upon slab, over the narrow knuckle
of rock, piki bread and piñon
smoke, blue mongrel drowsing
shadows empty plaza
afternoon, kiva viga
hauled from peaks' high
snows, plaster flaked
long agoes flutter
nameless now, cliff wings above
stair steps down, cedar ladder
balanced, on fingertip
the highest house, the open door, the
brother voice within
a dim room in time melting
our walking:

"Welcome to Walpi!"

And the wind that gathers the breath
of a thousand springs sweeps
clean the path
from his house to ours.

A Parrot Dance At Songòopavi

Into the plaza the sun's veined hand
swirls like crystal rain in sandstone
basins color on color: cotton cloth
and painted mask, kilt and feather, breath
of muffled song. Kit fox
fur skin trails behind, scarlet
sash with turquoise pendant
in front. Spruce ruff and rainbow
parrot plumes flutter. Squash gourd rattles
sizzle through low corn chant and thunder. Urges
force bean growth forth from dry earth
to green warmth as snake-strike lightning
cleaves blue clouds down a round
horizon's selvage stitched with darkness.

The great katsina wheel turns
upon heartbeats slow as seasons
dancing. Stately as star spirits
spinning the heavens of elders, dancers
wheel as one through the blood
vultures' afternoon drone
of a lone cottonwood drum.

In cosmos mundane chaos muddles
this circle's sacred middle: Tsuku
yellow clay belly clowns strut, suck
cigarettes or cans of Coke, bob balloon
blond quips. Monikers in black
laugh across each back, names like:

**Dumb Boss What Am I? Absent
Mind B-Yee What Do I Know?**

Parody of Pahana, they poke
fat upon one whirly polly, rasp ribs
of another scrawny bird-leg, screech and deride
the great katsina wheel which

turns turns inside turns inside out

the ancient journey from parrot jungles
to Second Mesa's blessing rain.

NOTES: Songòopavi (also spelled Shongopovi) is a village atop Second Mesa on the Hopi Reservation. The Parrot Katsina dance oddly celebrates a bird not indigenous to the American Southwest but commonly found in southern Mexico. Tsuku, whose body is painted yellow, is one of many Hopi clowns that infuse bawdy humor into the sacred katsina dances in order to show the people how *not* to act. Pahana is the Hopi word for “white man.”

Dancing Time In Old Oraibi
(A Rainbow Chant for the Hopi)

In the oldest village yellow dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina 'round the short rainbow plaza wheels
In the oldest village blue dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina long hair and black mask wheels
In the oldest village red dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina diamond teeth and dangling tongue wheels
In the oldest village white dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina yellow eyes of half-moon wheels
In the oldest village in the oldest village
Dancing dust whirls past past Old Oraibi

In the oldest village blue dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina the black Pahana wheels
In the oldest village red dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina the arrogant giant wheels
In the oldest village white dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina the Moor Estevan wheels
In the oldest village yellow dust whirls past
Who is Estevan Estevan Estevan wheels
In the oldest village in the oldest village
Dancing dust whirls past past Old Oraibi

In the oldest village red dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina sacred bow and rattle wheels
In the oldest village white dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina double diamond clan kilt wheels
In the oldest village yellow dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina cowrie-tinkling bandoleer wheels
In the oldest village blue dust whirls past
Tsa'kwayna Katsina tortoise shell foot clacker wheels
In the oldest village in the oldest village
Dancing dust whirls past past Old Oraibi

In the oldest village 'round the short rainbow plaza
Dancing dust slows time slows time slows time down
Except when Koshari clowns black-on-white show up
In the oldest village 'round the short rainbow plaza
Dancing dust slows time slows time slows time down
Except when Kokopelli's stiff poker shows up
In the oldest village 'round the short rainbow plaza
Dancing dust slows time slows time slows time down
Except when the Ogre's butcher knife shows up
Tsa'kwayna Katsina wheels past past Old Oraibi

In the oldest village 'round the short rainbow plaza
Tsa'kwayna Katsina whirls past past white Oraibi
Dancing time slows dust down in the oldest village
Tsa'kwayna Katsina whirls past past yellow Oraibi
Dancing time slows dust down in the oldest village
Tsa'kwayna Katsina whirls past past blue Oraibi
Dancing time slows dust down in the oldest village
Tsa'kwayna Katsina whirls past past red Oraibi
Dancing time slows dust slows dust slows dust down
In the oldest village Tsa'kwayna Katsina

'Round the short rainbow plaza
Tsa'kwayna Kachina in the oldest village
In the oldest village past Old Oraibi
Dancing dust whirls as the Mudhead drums
Tsa'kwayna Katsina wheels past

NOTES: Tsa'kwayna (or Chakwaina) Katsina is a warrior katsina originating at Zuni Pueblo. He is said to represent the historical figure of Estevan (Esteban), who was a black born in North Africa. He served as the guide that led Marcos de Niza on his 1539 search for the Seven Cities of Cibola. The Zunis killed him because his gourd was reputedly adorned with owl feathers signifying death. The Koshari's body is painted white with thick black, horizontal stripes. This loud, gluttonous clown acts and speaks the opposite of what is considered appropriate. Kokopelli is the ithyphallic, humpback flute player found on ancient rock carvings and tourist shops throughout the Southwest. The Ogre Katsina (also called Hu, or Whipper Katsina) scares Hopi children into behaving properly. With tubular eyes and mouth, the mud-red mask and body of the Mudhead (or Koyemsi) symbolize the underworld origin of humans.

Another Otherworldly Journey
(A Hopi Home-Going Dance)

Sunlight on turquoise steps, tablitas
of the Hemis katsinas rise
in a line of thunderheads advancing
over a tumbled sandstone mesa.
Spruce rain echoes
the long awaited manna
of distant mountain rainbows.
Dancing from red sunup
to violet sundown, spirit voices
of the Hemis katsinas chant
low otherworldly undertones.
Subterranean chambers flood
blue fire streams fluid
as lucid dreams shimmering
leaves of speckled corn.
Gourd rattles shake dry seeds
of an earlier world reeling in time
to the kneeling Maiden katsinas.
Their round rainmakers rasp
the bloody footsteps Masau'u makes
upon the cloudy inside of the skull.
Deer hooves on right knees
clacking, dark bodies
of the Hemis katsinas lean
toward the thirsty earth, footsteps
pressing their prayers
downward downward downward. . .
Through horizontal eye-slits
in cylindrical helmets, they peer
downward
as if the dance plaza had turned
into a sheet of water
welling up from an underworld
whirlpool of foaming stars.

*

In deepening dusk, forming
a double line in single file,

they face westward
to bless the village brides

in white robes. In return
they are given pollen

for the journey homeward.
They are given pahos

for the journey homeward.
They are bathed with sacred pipe smoke

for the yearly journey homeward.
They are cooled with feather-water

for the yearly journey homeward.
Monsoonal cloudbursts

close this ritual cycle as spirit bodies
of the Hemis katsinas flow

out of the dance plaza
into the night shadows

gathering
for another otherworldly journey
homeward.

NOTES: tablita (or tableta)—a brightly painted, vertical extension of the headdress; Hemis (or Jemez) katsina—the Ripened Corn katsina, the principal masked dancer in the Niman (“Going Home”) ceremony performed in July; Masau’u—god of the earth, death, and the Underworld; paho—a prayer-feather offering

The Romantic Zero
(Between a Pristine Morning
and the Tonight Show)

O to be circling
back to the place one's race once
emerged: out of the dark
red Vishnu schist a hollow reed
sipapu rooted (badger-headed)
to the First World below.
O to be circling back
to the rainbow-banded canyon
where a spirit pueblo lives
on steam of prayers and rabbit stew.
O to see through
the white noise of night's machinery
to a day's honey buzz
in the village hive of everlight.
O to be going back
to the source of blue corn, growing
inside a kernel of sky.
O to go circling
circling circling circling
again slickrock pool to adobe roof
as liquid round songs' abode.
O to be drinking
clay pipes' smoke.
O to be blessing
spirit roads with breath
feathers, corn meal and medicine water.
O to go far beyond
a census of heartbeats
to drum so near
the oldest blood singing
deep stone.
O to go down
a ladder of sunlight

to the Western Kiva and dawn
of a katsina domain.
O to be going home
with cotton cloud mask
and eagle down
whispers at ankles and wrists.
O to remember
the Cloud People once lived
in our house, sipped water
to circle our blood
in their veins.
O to be dancing
an underworld winter away
as thunderheads over the mesa
gather summer long yellow ear
paho sticks and pollen songs.
O to see beyond
cobweb lightning
binding horizons beyond
horseless wagons on black ribbons beyond
sky trails and metal houses
drifting through dust devils
of stars blooming beyond
the four-armed gourd
of ashes in a blue Nova
on concrete blocks out back.

Yet zero to know
the deadpan host
better than our father, remember
not Spider Grandmother tales but
midnight punch lines after
we've all signed off—each race
(Hopi and Pahana) lost

to the other on the two-lane highway
to the lowest solstice sunset.

She Wore a Metal Helmet
(Lori Ann Piestewa, 1979–2003)

In the desert of forgotten spirits
a young Hopi woman wanders.
In the Painted Desert
near a stacked stone pueblo
bathed in piñon smoke, a babe
of the Bear Clan was born
Qotsa-hon-mana.
In the cradled desert
near An Nasiriyah, a Hopi
Catholic single mom
turned Army private
took a wrong turn
in a humvee. In the desert
of apocalyptic sand storms
and whirlwind jinns,
her bubbly Army buddy
from Palestine, West
Virginia was rescued via Delta force
from an enemy Baathist
hospital bed. (It was later made
into a TV movie
of Pentagon propaganda.) Instead
“White Bear Girl” lay
under a black shawl of dust
in a mass grave shallow
as a shadow. Her blood-name
means “water
pooled on the desert
after a hard rain.”

Butterfly Warrior of the People of Peace.
First American servicewoman sacrificed
in the naked frontal attack

on Iraq. First Native American woman
to expire on the ambushed battlefield
of patriarchal pillage. (Her vice
president neo-concocted in wet dreams
this nightmare.) Far from her mother village
on Middle Mesa, Arizona, she fell
into a firefight of arabesque lines
unraveling. Her elders failed to foresee
she'd sip her last breath
near the bricked ziggurat of Ur
cuneiform prayers of clay climbed
with their moon god Sin—
cold crystalline trellises
of midnight. Crossing
a spiked vista of Joshua trees
and mirages, her forebears spiraled
petroglyph ages with their sun god
Taawa. A red taproot
three thousand years deep
reaches from thirsty stars
into the desert of a nation
not three hundred years old.
A wormhole sipapuni
in Eden's apple stretches
from Tikrit to Tuba City,
from the Little Zab
to the Little Colorado,
from the Zagros range
of Kurdistan to salt caves
of Grand Canyon.

Hopi legends say, when
Horny Toad Woman spoke
to Masau'u, god of death
who rules the earth, about the future
crisis in the desert,
she, too, wore a metal
helmet.

Hymn to Red Taawa

No burning ball of gas.
No, the sun is a mask

whose eagle feathers radiate
a white circle of compassion.

The sun is a katsina mask
who speaks heliotropically

to you atop a butte.
Standing with the sun rising

red across the Painted Desert
you make a temporal ripple

which makes a woman grinding corn
look up from her stone

700 years ago, thinking
she heard a dance rattle.

Blue corn, red sun.
We make a temporal ripple

we are that close. A spiral
petroglyph radiates from the heart

of the galaxy. We are that close.
The heart of the Christos, Buddha

Amitaba, the Creator Taawa speaks
through a mask of compassion

no burning ball of gas
shall ever wear. A white circle

of eagle feathers speaks
to you atop a butte.

To her grinding corn
he speaks heliotropically.

To you standing alone
with the sun rising red

from the burning heart
of the Painted Desert he speaks:

No death shall dance your life.
No death shall dance your life.

In either time
look up from your stone.

Look up from your poem.
We are red sun, blue corn, thinking

we heard a dance rattle
the katsina of compassion

shakes and shakes.
The katsina of the temporal ripple

grinds and grinds. Still
no death shall dance your life.

No death shall dance your life
in either time.

No burning ball of gas
shall know: The sun is a mask

the Creator of compassion
speaks through. Heliotropically

we are all that close. At the heart
of a spiral petroglyph

the galaxy speaks.
Through a white circle

of rising feathers
the sun katsina speaks:

No death shall dance your life.
No death shall dance your life.
No death shall dance your life.
No death shall dance your life.

In Their Last Few Forever

The Shuttle crew glances out the left windshield.
Dawn shadows snake purple and gold
through Grand Canyon. Down hidden chambers
of stone pueblos built while the first Crusades raged,
Hopi elders make prayer feathers. Quietly they prepare
for the coming Purification. When humans begin
to live in the sky, this Fourth World of ours
will end, they say. A heat tile falls off, lands
in the plaza where the Blue Star Katsina dances.
The Shuttle already soars above the white dishes
of the Very Large Array. Another square tile falls
in the Rio Grande. A toxic chunk of charred metal
plummets to a ranch in Crawford, Texas.
Stetsons in Dallas lift to the heavens.
The Katsina removes his mask and the dance

stops.

In our last few forever, counting their blessings
among the stars of Orion, seven souls turn
into fireballs. Our dreams trail in their vapors
and fade on the pale eggshell of morning.

Tierra Zona (Last Song)

Distant arid zone, land of fire
swimming into swirling stone.
Heart of turquoise, hot sand and blood

rainbows above. Flame from ponderosa
wave-roar in wind, sweet piñon smoke
plateaus below. Cholla mesa lore

speaks to deep blue godseye, de Mogollon
Rim divides saguaro or ironwood low
deserts from high. Backbone peaks flood

full canteen moon. Rain-fluted silence rises
past afternoons' copper trance a broken epoch
ago on naked hills of baked-brown grasses

here. Down nameless cañons of air the same
star steps the giant soul Orion strides
Sol del Zona 'ever glides.

NOTES: Mogollon (pronounced “muggy-own”) Rim—the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau that cuts across northern Arizona; Zona—*OED*, “The girdle [belt] of Orion.”

Breathing Starlight Into Stone

On the first day of summer, slow down
below the drone of tires on asphalt
rushing into Winslow. Slow down
below contrails slicing the blue underbelly
of heaven as they roar off to Denver.

On a sandstone panel sunlight enters
a spiral pecked into blind rock
centuries ago. Go below
the fuzzy black and yellow buzz
of a bumblebee. Go way down

under the skitter of a sagebrush lizard
doing push-ups on a hot slab of afternoon.
Down below gray vulture wings surfing
spiral updrafts. Know saltbush and sand
as your sole companions. Now

your breath slows down
and your backbone starts to hum
the same song the stone sings.

Go down with the breath
of boulders exhaling eternity
once every century.

A shadow is another matter
flowing its trickling rivulet of sighs
from an underground spirit.

Fall into it and you float
among spindrift starlight
to the next life.



Gary David grew up in Ohio along the southern shore of Lake Erie. In his early twenties he sojourned in Kansas, New Orleans, and San Francisco. Since age 25 he has been lost in the great American West, living in South Dakota, New Mexico, and Colorado. For nearly fifteen years he has resided on the high desert of northern Arizona.

He received a BA degree from Kent State University and an MA from the University of Colorado, as well as a fellowship grant from the South Dakota Arts Council.

Like most poets, David has worked sundry jobs: dish washer, furniture mover, hotel desk clerk, gandy dancer, TV ad copywriter, apartment manager, blues and country-rock vocalist/lead guitarist, Artists-in-the-Schools poet, and adjunct college professor.

His poetry was featured in Haight Ashbury Literary Journal and has appeared in many other magazines and anthologies, including: apex of the M, Black Bear, Cedar Hill Review, Credences, The Greenfield Review, House Organ, Juxta, Mid-American Review, Pemmican, Synaesthetic, W'ORCs.

His books include *The Possibilities of Blue Sky* (Northland Press, 1989); *A Log of Deadwood* (North Atlantic Books, 1993); *Tierra Zia* (nine muses books, 1996); *Divining the Eagle's Vision* (Spirit Horse Press, 1998); and numerous chapbooks.

His nonfiction books titled [*The Orion Zone: Ancient Star Cities of the American Southwest*](#) and [*Eye of the Phoenix: Mysterious Visions and Secrets of the American Southwest*](#) were both published by Adventures Unlimited Press in 2006 and 2008 respectively.

Gary is web designer and web master for [Island Hills Books](#) and [The Orion Zone](#).

About His Poetry

“...edgy and intelligent...”

–Susan Smith Nash, editor of Texture Press

“...crackles with energy...”

–Keith Wilson, author of *Graves Registry*

“...a strong western voice, steep with local and mythical mystic streams of thought.”

–Michael Crye, *Po'Flye*

“...a visionary and ‘deep’ work...”

–Karl Kopp, [*The Bloomsbury Review*](#)

“Gary David gives us this other way of seeing, from the fragments the intimations of the whole, which, as we should know, is the real name for the holy.”

–Joe Napora, *Small Press Review*