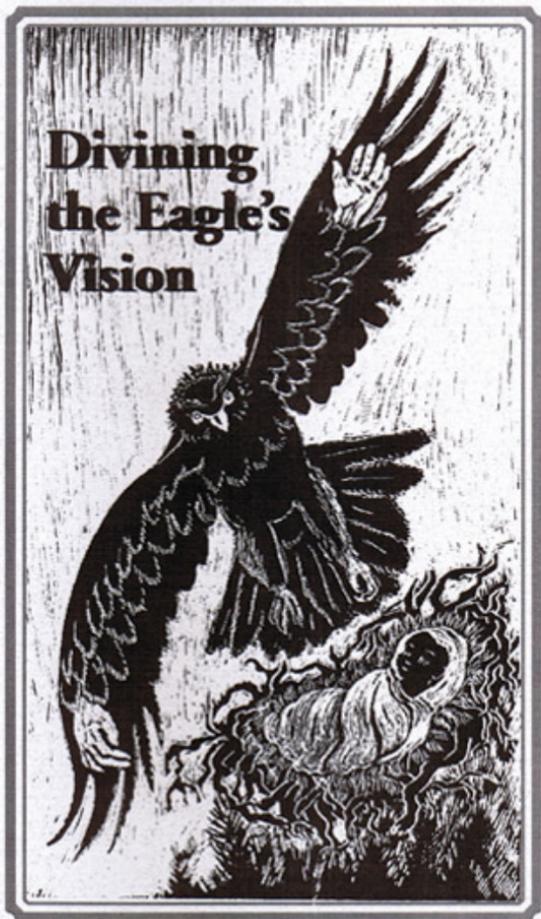


**Divining
the Eagle's
Vision**



Gary David

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the Eagle's Vision

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FOREWORD by Dale Jacobson

In his *The Outline of History* H.G. Wells, speaking about the sixth century continued demise of the Roman Empire, notes that someone from the more elementary culture of a kraal "knows that he belongs to a community, and lives and acts accordingly; in a slum, the individual neither knows of nor acts in relation to any greater being." (442). A kraal (from corral) assumes a definition, a boundary, inside which exists a social center. But the contemporary West we find in David's poems is more like the great slum Wells finds in sixth century Europe, lacking a cohesive sense of community. We find the individual who belongs to the conquering culture is often resentful of the conquered peoples, fearful, reduced to a selfish righteousness that seems nearly pitiful. It is as if the original settlements created by the heroic efforts of pioneers escaping the great owners of Europe or the Eastern United States have become a culture that has lost its ability to communicate with the rest of the world, whose only bond is a fear of disintegration which it imagines as an insidious threat from "outsiders." Certainly the dismal and unrestrained self-pity of the country-western "cowboy" culture in the poem *Last Call At The Oasis* depicts a society creating its own monsters in the absence of any genuine communal nurturing. In these poems we find that "gun barrel eyes speak / a blunt acumen: This here's / Chugwater, Wyoming. / You ain't / one of us." We sense that the land needs to be reconquered daily, an act that causes the conquerors to fence out their own humanity. This isn't a culture of inclusion, but one of exclusion-- the mentality of an empire that fears it is a sham. The "slum" metaphor of Wells is appropriate not only to urban decay, but also to the rural life of the nation, for what is the real difference between xenophobia in New York or in Chugwater, Wyoming? David doesn't romanticize the West but shows us that "the slum" merely puts on another kind of mask in the country.

However, there is another West we find in David's poems, more enormous than those fences-- and old. We find it in the poem *The Mountain in the Distance*, for example, where the mountain "dreams the town / is a white blur in time, a snowflake / on a buffalo's back." This West is located in the ancestry of the land and nature and while it can be harsh and unforgiving and while it speaks of loss and the deafness of the present, it also holds something more potent in its ancient past than our thin and barren time. In a social sense, the older West is present in the important poem *We Are All Relatives*, where the poet successfully enters American Indian mythopoeia to connect with nature and the past, and in so doing hears "a hopeful echo / on the wing." Again, without romanticizing the Indian past or attempting to call that past back, we see in these poems the invocation of immutable, and ultimately undeniable laws the past and nature hold-- and at least the suggestion of a faith that the connection with people and with nature can be found again.

There are other poems with other themes in this collection, but suffice it to say that Gary David presents us here with a book more accomplished than a good many of the better known names currently bounced around. In fact, it is my belief that an entire and powerful culture of unknown poets currently exists, whose work will ultimately need to be acclaimed if this nation is to continue to have a genuine, vital and useful poetry. Gary David is among those poets.

I: Red Tracks Lost At the Sky's End

Choice

"The cow is a poem of pity."

Mahatma Gandhi

Across the high plains raptor winds raise
the head of a Hereford. She gives up
a few plaintive brays to the pale sun's
empty plate. Unbroken as blue sky

before barbed wire or draft horses,
dawn pauses in the doorway, listens
for feathered ghosts to flap and billow
bed sheets on the line out back

of the last ranch house... but no, nothing.
Only hunger-- which feeds the circle
of prairie earth, lowers the cow's mouth
to praise her sparse grass chanting its choice:

rebirth

rebirth

rebirth.

Each Small Breath

A meadowlark on a fence post
sings down the sun, keeps warm all night
by the glow on his breast.

Muscles on the flank of a roan horse
ripple like waves of the wind-blown grass
she loves to wade in

all day.

Who's to say
the earth is not blessed
by each small breath.

Sonnet After Sex

Omne animal post coitum triste.

After making love, we take a long
shower in the dark, whistle a little
Rite of Spring. Clouds flower
a pink dawn. The thunder is over.

Pillars of salt, we lie in the holds
of our boat-- drifting. Waves lap
whispers on our sides. We kissed
a live current in the deepest hole

of the storm. Now the last stars
slowly tread our lakes of sleep. Somewhere
in the air of glass jars, fireflies
expire. Here our breathing is rowing

us home. Warm as duck down, we see the sunrise
flood the room with the saddest dream.

Cold Snap

A pane of ice in the rain barrel
caught me napping in the hammock
of summer. Sunlight puddles
watered-down milk on the porch.

A north wind on my neck freezes
beads of sweat flooding
from a sudden flare-up
of wood cutting. In the face

of the ice, an old fear is growing
crystals. Its ache ripples clear
to my fingers' brittle bones.
I drink in fallen dreams

tall grass on green earth
whispers till I wake.

Another Snake, Another Hero

Heading out toward the meadow
before supper, I see a mud clump near the porch
rear back to strike! My heart
in my throat, I jump aside.
Atop a coiled cone, his bone rattle
twitches like a muscle. Slowly moving

backwards, I think on the lines of the snake
at the poet's water. No good.
Should I kill him? I turn
into a gray stone. Now I remember
how my daughter in her sun-suit toddled
barefoot through the rabbitbrush
just yesterday. *Kill him. Kill him...*
His black tongue flicks at the quakes
of my footsteps. I grab an ax
leaning against the house, creep back.

With raised weapon shaking, I whisper
I'm sorry. His mouth splayed
wide as a mountain lion hisses
the word *Why?* The blade falls
and misses. Fangs strike steel
as I recoil. The ax blazes
again on his axis of life and
hacks it in half. The blind wedge
of his head flailing, ripples of rage
tear my blue lake of air over
and over. A wound starts to flower
maroon as hounds-tongue. I heave
a concrete block to make sure
this pure question mark lies

still. Under a cold cone of stars
sparking the night, I bury the beauty.
His skin of smoked glass glints
the planet Mars, rising.
I no longer know the reason
I'm sorry. As the hum of the kitchen
calls, I slouch home-- my mouth already
sloughing lines of dead song
morning will labor over
too long to make good.

Under the Hunter's Moon

This is the first fall ever
you've smelled the leaves
smolder.

The oak leaves bitter
smoke in the eyes.

A poem leaves
ashes on the tongue.

Loud and hard
as some young bohemian
bard, you used to drink
to feel the glow
of afternoon shine golden
on your brow.

Now a stray
gray hair on your shoulder
lies

like an icy country road
that ends at the edge
of winter.

White lies
between everyone, shadows
begin this evening
to clean their guns.

Words seem
pencil-thin
flashlight beams
growing dimmer.
You've learned to whisper
these lines' obsession
in your ear

alone. (Here are more
in a linear progression
toward bone.) Slowly
forests of sleeping
limbs take over
your dream of the circle
of hands. Red, yellow,
black and white-- these hands turn
into the fluttering fear
of magpies scattered
by blasts of buckshot.

A blank sheet
of immense silence
freezes
the last acorns sown
in your innocence. A beast
with blue claws soon climbs
your spine, shivers
under the hunter's moon.

Witness

A knock on the door
snaps up my shade
from a nightmare cellar harrowing
late morning. Into my jeans
I jump to see
who the hell. His suit and tie
are blessed to kill
my Sitting Bull and Buddha
in the hallway. Walt Whitman will stand
as great a figure in time,
I answer. His dark wife
(who's more comely
than any church lady
I've ever eyeballed) strokes
a rolled-up Watchtower between her
thumb and forefinger.
She toes a line
in the dust as I quote

... the true son of God, the poet...

Riffling leaves
thin as onionskin, the deacon
is having trouble
finding verses to banish
satanic curses. Better
study your Bible, I blurt out
unconverted.

The morning after
our unholy colloquy, I feel bad
karma makes poems

sing alone
from ghost dance hearts
while hymns drone on
in his Kingdom Hall.
A sun-shot bee
buzzes my office
in another key.
Dandelions hammer
through the lawn, making
daybreak new. In my line
each day's like the last:

I labor for the taste
of honey in the blood, thunder
in the wine, witness
syllables of salt sing
in the rising bread.

Song For The Things of This World

Take us away from our workaday saddle
to the auctioneer's chant-a-clearing house
for covetous quirks of caste-off yahoos
with cattle class values. Gone west,
what's mass-made how many
young man-years ago in a Jersey graveyard
shift --asleep on his feet-- now this
obsolete plastic do-dad or that
will nickel-and-dime us to deaf
for a dog day's song
of a tired T.G.I. F.

Through gray florescent light
in the barn, despotic dust
of spent seconds falls
dumbly on a straw Stetson's
stubbled jaw spasmodic
in guffaw. Here the demotic
reigns:

“Help yourself, folks.
She's plumb good-- one
hot air popcorn popper.
Who'll give me five
dollafivedollafivedolla
ware!”

The things of this world: matter
is *mater*, the mother inferior.

“...but she works! A heavy duty
12 ton hydraulic jack.
Who'll give me twenty?...”

Inbred by frogskins from a stagnant pool
of blue jean jackets, rain-frayed and grease-stained
Cat caps, lukewarm bidders raise
nuts-and-bolts-busted knuckles
for the things of this world that litter
our dried up landscape-- all there is
between
Sunday's drive in the old pickup (Chevy or Ford)
and a goldbrick freeway leading straight to the Lord.

The Mountain In the Distance

A white trash bag snagged
on a barbwire fence snaps
in the wind like a curse.
Our poet sees a sign.
As if dropped from the sky,
house trailers slouch
against dozer-slashed draws.

MINNEKAHTA -- CITY OF
WARM WATER & WARM PEOPLE

Rattlesnakes lie sleeping
in red sandstone and yucca.
Over the hill the town bled
into our century. Into the white clay
of our faces, giants
pinched looks that could kill
strangers. Our poet sees a sign
at high noon in Cal's Cafe:

GOD GUTS AND GUNS MADE AMERICA FREE
NOW LETS FIGHT TO KEEP ALL THREE

Chicken-fried country pride
is the order of the day. It's great
to buy American. We all agree
Paul Harvey sounds a lot
like our acting president
looks. We scan the weeks'
headlines. An ex-cheerleader took
her dark head off Monday

with a shotgun. Still ruminating,
our poet pays the bill
while half the room's got him
in the crosshairs.

Hidden by mist, the mountain keeps
her distance. Beneath the shadow
of a slow heart, her spirit sleeps
deeper than stone. She dreams the town
is a white blur in time, a snowflake
on a buffalo's back, a scrap of verse
on the barbed wind.

Going West

A cold front moved in this morning
and swept autumn away with a blue hand.
Alone in a tinhorn trailer house
in wilder western South Dakota, going

nowhere, I stand at the hallway mirror
and see beginnings of the badlands.
The well too deep to drill, I struggle
with jugs of water. A slate sky slides

thirty years ago above Ohio. Behind me
the sweet bell of each hill echoes
a green swell breaking on the beach
at Lake Erie. Through cracks in the glass

eyes graze buffalo grass of another state
thirsty miles away. Red tracks lost
at the sky's end, my gaze going
west finds white pickets and sugar maples

gone. To the left Crow Butte floats
like an ice floe in the arctic.
Black looks white as white breeds
my snow-blind journeyman humor-- turns

cold and dry. No brother in sight,
an evergreen broods upon evening.
Inside a single alchemist burns away
his life, praying for the right candle

to illuminate his dog-eared study.
Pitching a log on the muttering fire
won't make winter any shorter. Eyes blue
as a paperweight snow scene, I shake

my head, and a blizzard scatters
a murder of crows across Sioux country.

II: Reading the Braille of Constellations

Somewhere On the Lone Prairie

-1-

A florescent glare clean as a morgue
shrinks your pupils to buckshot.
With stainless steel fork, stab
a slab of beef-- saw off a bite
and mop a white slice in sloughs
of gravy. Beside you a hunter
in an orange vest grips a spoon.
His fist quivers with the calisthenics
of a sour afternoon. Veins broken
beet-red, his nose in steam clouds
hovers with the ring-necked pheasant
on his feed cap. The caption says:
SOUTH DAKOTA--BIG COCK COUNTRY. His head
droops in a bowl of potato soup.

-2-

A snowstorm swallows the Kodak
sunset. Numb as an all-night meandering
insomniac, you drive again. 105 miles
to Wall Drug. Gassed up, you dream again
smoky double barrel headlights blast
the gun rack backdrop of a pickup dozing
into your lane. Before everything turns
black, a frieze burns into your brain:

twin half-moons of shadow hang
beneath eyes of blue ice. A cowpoke drunk
on horseplay and firepower grins. He alone
knows the punch line of the joke
you'll bury somewhere on the prairie
with a smashed coyote.

The Tao of Cow Country

On the rear of a pistol-gray Pinto
(white-washed on the window):

GUN CONTROL WORKS

IN CHINA

This commentator
upon the Peking duck shoot
in Tiananmin Square
waddles down
to his big bucket seat
in the middle of cow country.
He knows the range
of free expression
to be the gauge
of his Smith & Wesson.

Rawhide Overdrive

Over shortgrass miles flat as
the FM dial's missionary
posture, we gun our horsepower.
An evangelical a.m.
Stetson straight from Gillette
evaporates. Over yahoo yonder
a cigarette wrangler points
his six-shooter, smokes
our pupils:

Whoa! Pure & Simple
CHUGWATER, WYO.
Next Exit

Under the sign
of a lean economy
baloney bulls chew
green Skoal.

Sparking an Arabian
crude, our bucking plug
sputters on empty.
At a one-horse corner cafe
we tumbleweed tourists
the wind blew in
break
up the black hat bullboys'
chow-down chatter.
A proverbial pin
drops: a horseshoe in the bed
of a Chevy out front.

N.R.A. Insured
by Remington --the rusty
rear bumper said.

At the table Rowdy shifts
his hands, chapped as leather
on a Baptist's Bible. Buck swears
the weather will break
tomorrow. Their faces
echo
dry draws.
Gun barrel eyes speak
a blunt acumen:

This here's
Chugwater, Wy-omen.
You ain't
one of us.

We stare out the window
at a cartoon cowpoke painted
on the glass: EOW! His ass
stuck with cactus, a .22
splits the air. (Somehow the buck
gets through.) With a couple
brittle chips our cheeseburgers come
burnt. A graying waitress
(saying she branded all morning) pours
dishwater coffee, asks us:
How old's your daughter? --who's now
tearing open packets of sugar
to dump on the table. Terrible
two. Smiles build
a match stick bridge we strike
and run.

Against a transpolar wind stiff
as old paint leaving Cheyenne
a shivering blue, we drive again
toward Crazy Horse blasted into
The Dreary Black Hills.
Behind us the flat top gunslinger
rivets the sun with eyes
of steel. He still has the nerve
at this late hour
to say:

Go ahead.
Make my day.

Wyoming Road Song

Over miles of blacktop ghosts play
lyres of snow. Off the shoulder
antelope skitter. Drifting like embers
of a frontier campfire, up ahead
a truckstop flickers. At 4 a.m.
a dozen big rigs snore, dreaming
diesel steam under benzedrine stars.

Near Chugwater the wind flips
an empty cattle trailer.
I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry
crows on the radio. I run
through the one-water-tower town
still as a stop sign shot
with bullet holes and hope
the grill of the sun grins soon.

The Fall of the West

As the slate of a smoky sun ray slides
through well-swung doors hung
on one of a hundred or so
Silver Spur Saloons spread
between Dodge City and the coast,
a drunk wrangler slurs in the dust
of 1876. A white Stetson spins
on the air like the phony planet
of a sci-fi movie set.
Against a hitching post
two knotty vaqueros lean
as lassos chew sticks
of jerky with a juicy grin.
The half-light of tintypes
sifts into the dry washes
of their faces. Hamming it up
for tourists, a broken sorrel
with an empty saddle struts and strikes
the regal pose of a Roman
statue. Thin as the baroque gilt
on a whorehouse bar, the sun hangs
on a backdrop sky. Watching

the lynching of a horse thief,
an ad hoc mob fakes awe, takes
snapshots of false fronts
home to the in-laws back East.
So starved for this horseplay
of jokers and aces, they'll stomach the rise
in hamburger prices.

Arse Cowboy Poetica

His gait's as dull as barbs on wire
to the venerable art of verse.
Why, it's pasta pasted on cardboard
to Van Gogh, Picasso-- or worse!

Truer West

for the Elko Boys

Riding up Dakota way
down Red Canyon headed
for that half-life town
Edgemont, dismount.
Blue grama crackles
under your boot. A hopper scratches
its Geiger counter clack
into the half-green drone
of cottonwoods. Cicadas spinning
needles of nausea drill
your eardrum. Here the creek's dried
to sedge or clotted blood. Your eyes
scour cedar and scrub pine cliffs
for some answer. Echoes
scatter broken years within
rattlesnake rocks. Webbed gray
by black widows, a fallen timber
from a single
settler's shack splinters
a cow's ribcage that once beat
her thirst to dust. From the mouth
of the hot canyon you spot
a water tower welded on the horizon
by the afternoon sun: a dull bead
of molten lead. Look east and
cracked windshields on junkyard cars
glare back like glass bees

on fire. Steer south into town.
Boarded-up stores darken Main
like teeth lost in a fight
with a monkey wrench. White Injuns
from back East done saddled up
the wild horse of a wide-open West-- or so
these roentgen-righteous citizens claim.
The Victory Bar is a goldcap stronghold
of the Jim Beam grin and bear-hug motto:

Keep America Beautiful
Shoot A Tree Hugger

On the banks of the Cheyenne, stop
to water your winged stud. Gray dunes
of nuclear pay dirt shift and blow
through the blur of the wind's fingers.
A few piles of mill tailings
from the open pit mining operation
on Uranus got hauled off
to build star dust foundations
that house the American Dream.
(Remember the mayor smiling with a piece
of yellow cake in his mouth
for Life-- or was it Time?
His estate now underwrites
a cancer fund.) Across from the yellow sign
on a chain link fence, a neighbor waters
her gladiolus, glowing.
Even your sway-back hack senses
danger in the air and
neighs nervously. With the shimmering debris
of the Milky Way above, your trail winds
south toward the Platte.

And so, pard, pass on--
though the atomic oracle
of high tech time
can't tell you

anymore
any place

that's safe to hide.

Cataracts of Ice: *Per Una Selva Oscura**

In a fenced front yard
I straddle mid-life.
A single bent aspen

shivers. The thin margin
of each leaf shines
golden-- a Kirlian aura

of early autumn. Blinds
cast iron bars
on a bald carpet. Burning

past the gray cowl
of day draining green
from drowsy eyes, my furnace

roars its jet. The pilot
light gasps and flutters--
sparks a wild hair

of flying anywhere warm
for the winter. But the tame flame
flaps a broken wing

as blue claws clutch
its perch. Tracing lies
on a rainbow-stained map

of Morocco or Oaxaca, I spoon
canned tomato soup
and tune in to the stars.

The raw world chills
while tongues of steam rise
from a white mug. I glimpse

no glyphs of dream
hunters or gatherers. Startled
awake, I go for a walk

to leave laughs peeling
between sports cars
on the screen. By frost light

I tremble. Above the tree line
glacial lakes darken
cataracts of ice.

This is not the road
I would have chosen:
an outback poet frozen

in front of his trailer, reading
the braille of constellations
as millennial conflagrations

and Tantric breath couple
in the earth temple on the shore
of an ashen Ganges morning.

**"in a dark wood," Dante's *Inferno*

III: One Breath Behind the Vision

Different Worlds (Tourist Brochure)

Different worlds, same
name:

Pine Ridge
Condominiums \$79
per night 2 bed
room 2 bath
condo 2 night
minimum sleeps 6
Located at Four
O'Clock Ski Run
Breckenridge, Colorado.

In the white paper world
Indian territory is forever
in the red. Over 400 miles
to the north, a Sioux warrior
in greasy blue jeans and tennis shoes
lurches and stumbles, slides
backwards down a slope
of broken treaties-- tumbles
like a drunken boulder.
He knows countless coups
hidden in blue hills
of perfect snow.
For reservations, call

1-800
FED
TV-ED*

Frostbitten dreams
of dead soldiers hover
with cloudy spirits over
vomit-flecked lips.
He leaves this world beneath
a sign that says
Tatanka Gas. **

* At last check, a working number. Ask for Red Cloud or Crazy Horse.

** Tatanka is the Lakota word for "buffalo."

Last Call At The Oasis

Floodlit smoke drowns out
Pine Sol smell. Pearl studded
shirt and black hat brimmed
in shadow, I'm still onstage and sucking
my fifth Bud Lite to finish off
with Willie's red whine. One more
pedal steel cowboy blues
at the tomahawk bar...

*Well the nightlife
ain't no good life
but it's my life.*

and we're done.

Big John the leather-cheeked tender
gunned down years ago in a coke feud
wipes the counter with a sour rag.
By the pool table pale-ass Eddie chalks up
and cracks: What d' ya call a Sioux
seven course meal?... A six pack
and a puppy. He beams at his bar room
booming to our bass drum. One night
last spring in his Mustang, Eddie peeled off
the top of his head like a tab.
Between Rapid City and the Rez, he swerved
to miss a good Indian walking
the black road home.

*Poor ol' Kaw-liga,
never got a kiss.
Poor ol' Kaw-liga,
don't know what he missed.*

*Is it any wonder
that his face is red? Kaw-liga,
you poor ol' wooden head.*

On a cinder block wall the beer sign's
waterfall flows clear: From the Land
of Sky Blue Waters. "Chief" Iron Cloud--
whose blood clogged up last winter
outside Whiteclay with Everclear stars
on ice-- stands and tears open
a ribbon shirt. He's showing off again
sun dance scars. Pickled eggs
in pink neon float behind the bar.

*Whisky river, take my mind,
don't let her mem'ry torture me.*

A Skin I snagged after-hours at a bash
in Lakota Homes giggles and teeters
on a duct-taped barstool, topples
to the floor-- her gourd head thudding
on scuffed linoleum. I put down
my hammered guitar and remember
how she wouldn't take off her shirt--
her left knob lopped off by a scalpel
at Pine Ridge Hospital. A couple
still staggers to a Haggard tune
on the boot-banged jukebox.

*Y' know time changes all
it pertains to, but your mem'ry
is stronger than time.*

As the lights go on, we groan and squint
a shotglass blur at the bitter proof
of each other. Drink up! It's time
to get your butts in gear! Bouncer Bob--
whose lungs last year in June bloomed
bloody sacks of cancer-- collars
a cowpoke and a biker smacking
each other silly by the door
marked BULLS. Merle barks:

*When you're runnin' down
my country, man, you're walkin'
on the fightin' side o' me.*

A barkeep kills the jukebox, and a herd
of slurred faces pours out the chute
to a Rushmore slaughterhouse night.
We raise smudged glasses
in a hiss of silence.

*I hear that train a-comin'
rollin' round the bend.
I aint seen the sunshine since
I don't know when.*

Chain-smoking till dawn, we dream
rails kiss. Our feet
swim in a slow dance
through cloudy hours.
We follow the line
of golden bubbles rising
from our last call.

High Coup: On the Crazy Horse Memorial*

“Finished, blasted, shaped, carved and heated
with a torch to seal and glaze the granite, Crazy Horse
will shine with the sun and be visible for miles.”

They've chiseled your heart
out of Thunderhead Mountain.
You, who rode red wind.

*When (if) completed, this sculpture near Custer, South Dakota,
in the Black Hills will dwarf Mount Rushmore. “Four thousand men
will be able to stand on the Indian's outstretched arm.”

Lost Lakota Times (Two Found Poems)

I: Ghost of a Chance

"That's her. That's the one
that bit her nose off,"
a witness yelled
when he saw Ghost sitting
in the back of a patrol car.
Ghost had fresh blood
stains on the collar of her shirt.
She also had blood on her face
and a bloody nose.
Her left eye was red
from a ruptured blood vessel.

Ghost denied she had been in a fight in a bar.

Other witnesses identified her
as the woman who sat atop the victim
and bit her nose off.
They said Ghost had help
from three other women
in the initial attack of the victim.
"Back me up
because there's going to be a fight,"
one witness overheard Ghost
tell the bartender.

Police found the severed flesh
about 4 feet from where the victim was
lying on the floor.
The motive appeared
to be a disagreement
over the victim's former husband.

“Winona Ghost bit my nose off.
She said, ‘You deserve it,’”
the victim later told police.
Her nose was reattached
and doctors said she had a “50-50 chance”
the surgery would be successful.

II: A Man Called Ghost

discovered lying
underneath the East
Boulevard bridge Tuesday afternoon
froze
to death, police said.
A minor injury
to Ghost's forehead indicated
he fell down the embankment and struck
a concrete culvert
at the bottom of the bridge.

Ghost was extremely intoxicated
and not well-protected
against the sub-zero
weather. He was wearing
a sweatshirt and a leather jacket.
Ghost did not have a permanent
address. He was an occasional resident

of the homeless shelter.
Police are still investigating
where
Ghost was before his death and
who
he had been drinking
with.

Ghost is the second person
this winter to have frozen
to death on the streets
of Rapid City. Foul play
is not suspected.

The Plunge

-1-

From a calf-red canyon
in the Black Hills, hot springs lift
crystal arms at dawn-- exile evil
spirits spawning fever chills
from bodies soaking. Singing
bear songs, tribes gather round
in peace and smoke
the prayer pipe to play
in willows and coneflowers
an elk flute of green love.

-2-

The healing waters have grown
hard and cool. They fill up
an Olympic-sized swimming pool.
Giant snake water slides and
plastic Loch Ness monsters
load the afternoon with echoes:
screaming kids from the suburbs
of Cleveland or Indianapolis.
Beneath floodlights we dive into clouds
of chlorine, and hold our breath.
Shadows of the day-glo
green rafts drift over: eyes
closing on the future.

As night falls below
zero, the Great Bison begins
an odyssey across the sky.
The belt of Orion forms
her backbone of blue fire-- shimmers
winter shivers down our own.
Through the Pleiades her eyes sail
light-years beyond us. Her tail
is Sirius. As the price of bread
keeps rising, a homeless Indian in the park
across from the liquor store stares
down the river steaming over
his buffalo dreams.

Just Before the End of the (Lakota) World

for Keith Cudaback

Piano improvisations from a Boston spring
flow in an afternoon of the moon
after the summer solstice, reflect ever
the recoded music of the lake

the wind modulates across Lakota Land.
Listen, look before it's too late
to count the steps the sun dances
on the water. Too late. Look, listen

to catch kinship rhythms the wind fingers
through the cattails. Too late to listen even
for the lazy breeze the crow brings
from the East. We look through leaf gaps

the atoms of our flesh echo.
Strip sunlight from birch bark with the teeth
eyelids sheathe. The voice runs one breath behind
the vision. We fall into the dark chasm

between the time the creek flows and the space
the water takes to reach our bellies.
In the cherry darkening moonlight, a quill work web
of the senses the Old Woman weaves

of the elements dances in still air. She leaves
to stir a pot of boiling herbs and
Coyote unravels the tapestry, and the mystery
of the end of the world
is lost in his laughter.

IV: Still a Round Dance Echoes

Hymn to the Heyoka

The sacred clown
(who's seen the crazy power
the wingèd Thunderbeings have
to scare the crap out of you, crack up
your ass with arrows
of lightning
in a nightmare)
wraps himself up
in a buffalo robe
on the hottest day of the Moon
of the Black Cherries
and says: *I'm freezing
my balls off!*

You believe him
because he always tells the truth
backwards. You believe him
because he always lies
to bring the great laughter
of the spirits out
of his greater pain: rain
to your parched lips.

Takuskanskan*

"That Which Moves-moves"
countless cottonwood leaves
leaves a flutter
in the sun:
hands holding
little round mirrors
waving
in the wind.
One
blinding
flow --*there!*--
and it's gone
and I hear
countless fingers
of the rippling river
glisten
in my spine--
binding me
to all
see.

*The Lakota term for the force that gives motion to all things; one of the manifestations of the Great Spirit.

We Are All Relatives!

after a Black Hills blessing ceremony

Calling the spirits
of the Six Directions to welcome
this dawn our daughter,
we pray for her: health
and long life on the Red Road
of good deeds.

As we leave the medicine wheel
of white stones, a spotted eagle

swoops down.

Grandfather talons grasp
the crest of the tallest tree.
Past centuries of ancestors
and long lost rivers
of wind, this prayer carrier
circles to the center
of my evergreen place just
to stare at me!
Flint eyes kindling,
his flame-wrinkled face
remembers
seven council fires
in the night sky's embers.

Those eyes are mine.
This land is his.
These feathers flutter
as I raise my arms.
The sun gathers
in our hearts.

A hoop song of light
starts to pulse.
We are one:
old man of stone, fierce
bird of hollow bone and
eardrum-piercing call
and me-- a father fearful
for the future of the world.

And yet not one
of us here can tell
the time we have left.
*We are all
relatives!*
we sing
and hear
a hopeful echo
on the wing.

The Road Beyond Autumn

for Thomas McGrath (1916-1990)

Paper whispers of red oak leaves:
more spirits hugging the chill wind

than comrades warming each other. Still
a round dance echoes... flowers... up ahead.

Divining the Eagle's Vision

Dust on the dashboard. The *thump*
thump *thump* thump *thump* thump *thump*
Lakota drummers pound rattles
their blood rite on the radio.
A furnace blast sirocco whips
my western shirt hung in back.
As I cross Battle Creek, the cracked face
of an elder pushes from parched mud
and gasps. Over the badlands
reservation to the east, a village
of lodges luminous as a sun dance vision
rises on blue hills of afternoon
thunderheads. Alkali flats dream
a cool ocean blanket the moon pulls
over them. Ropes of kelp lasso
wild herds of sea horses.

Tonight as I play the Buffalo Gap bar
with a C & W guitar, an alcoholic
wave will drown star spirits
as hailstones storm the plains.
But now I listen to the chanting
of old songs. Past shivers
splintered in the grass, swells
of dust and freeze-dried fire, swooping
and swirling up, they are hunting-- the way
the shadow of an eagle's wing falls
on the searing terror
of a prairie dog-- they are hunting

for water the same way
they cry for a vision, on a mountain

in a pure pool: an answer
to feed their dancing
into the future.

Envoi: Beyond All These Words

There are words beyond all these words
we travelers transmit. Our signals (weak
as opinions on late night talk radio)
drift in and out as we drive the yellow line
across the plains. Static and yard lights punctuate
darkness. Between amnesia and horned toads
dreaming equations of dust, we lose sleep
over roads blind tires drone on: Doppler voices

of fallen visions. Far ahead the Sierra Madre
speaks with a frequency we rarely pick up--
though her heart hums pure crystal.
One syllable in her granite canticle
and ears shatter like windshields
as we swerve to miss our tongues.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

"I have written poetry in the rural American West for over twenty years-- nearly fifteen in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the rest of that period in New Mexico, Colorado, and most recently Arizona. I am neither a cowboy poet nor a Wannabe Indian, though experience with Native American culture and spirituality has expanded my sense of sacred space vis-à-vis the Western landscape. I am aligned with no movement, school or institution. In order to subsidize myself and provide time to write, I have been voluntarily underemployed in a variety of occupations: country-western guitarist and singer, gandy dancer, TV ad copywriter, caretaker, Artist-in-Schools poet and, yes, college instructor. Besides numerous chapbooks, my full-length books of poetry include *The Possibilities of Blue Sky* (Northland Press, 1989), *A Log of Deadwood* (North Atlantic Books, 1993), and *Tierra Zia* (nine muses books, 1996)."



WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT HIS WORK

"Like a keen-eyed bird of prey, Gary David's *Divining the Eagle's Vision* does not miss any nuance in the natural abundant beauty of the West. So too the eagle takes in the human struggles played out on "Indian Territory": the bar room brawls, the broken down "Skins" who freeze on the unforgiving prairie, the Cowboys who "insure" their pickups with Remington rifles, the condos and reservation housing which seem to war with each other over the sites of many infamous battles. With beauty, humor, and grit, Gary David's powerful poetry teaches us the lessons of American History that we have either never learned, or the History we're trying so desperately to forget."

Maggie Jaffe, author of *How the West Was One* and *7th Circle*

"Gary David's poems spring from a place we all wish to know well, a place called Home. In this place we stand with the people we love, on the land that we love, and we celebrate the seasons as they pass. These poems bring us back to the land of our senses and remind us that, despite our heavy losses, it is still sacred ground."

Will Walker, co-editor of *Heigh! Ashbury Literary Journal*

"Gary David presents us here with a book more accomplished than a good many of the better known names currently bounced around. In fact, it is my belief that an entire and powerful culture of unknown poets currently exists, whose work will ultimately need to be acclaimed if this nation is to continue to have a genuine, vital and useful poetry. Gary David is among those poets."

from the Foreword by Dale Jacobson, author of *Shouting At Midnight*