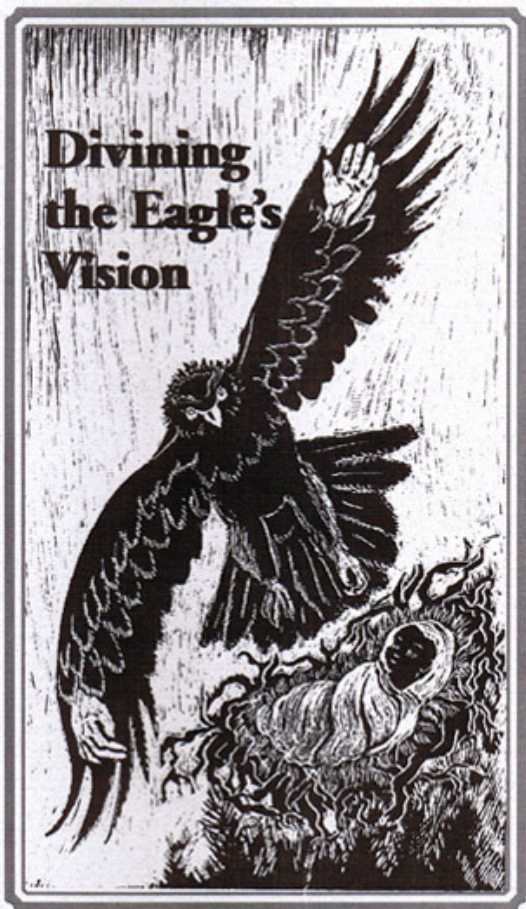


**Divining  
the Eagle's  
Vision**



Gary David

**Divining**  
**the Eagle's Vision**

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*Spirit Horse Press 1998*

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Library of Congress Number

ISBN 1-882191-04-8

I would like to thank the editors of the following magazines in which some of these poems appeared, often in earlier versions:

*Akwekon Literary Journal (Akwasasne Notes), Black Bear, Cedar Hill Review, Exit 13, Haight Ashbury Literary Journal, The Longneck, Option, Pemmican, Poetry Motel, The Redneck Review of Literature, Sagebrush Scholar, Spirit Horse, Swamp Root, Synaesthetic, Whole Notes, Winter 4, W'ORCs, and Wyoming: the Hub of the Wheel.*

Cover art by Dawn Senior

Spirit Horse Press  
810 First Avenue N.E.  
East Grand Forks, MN 56721

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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 *Haight 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*