

before the body was cold

poems and fragments, 2004-2013: volume five
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tout est lié,
et chaque corps agit
sur chaque autre corps...
chaque monade est un
miroir vivant

before the body was cold is the fifth of a series of collections that draw on material from notebooks I kept between 2004 and 2013. I returned to that material in 2021 with Basho and haibun in mind, as well as the prosimetrum tradition that flourished in medieval Europe. Both play off a tension between poetry and prose, and, looking back, that is what I found myself doing during that decade, when I was dividing my time among Shenzhen, Chicago, and the Texas Panhandle – and spending considerable time on the road betwixt and between. Haibun and prosimetrum both call our attention to the fact that writing itself is a journey, a practice (as de Certeau recognized) akin to walking. That is how I think of this work – as a long walk that was and continues to be a practice of meditation.

All of the texts are from the fifth of ten notebooks and were drafted between April 2006 and June 2007. Some of the material has appeared previously in poetry collections I have published since 2006, but I have gone back to the original drafts to rethink and reconfigure what appears here. While particular places are referenced in the text of some of the poems in this volume, only a date of composition is explicitly indicated. This notebook lives in Chicago and Texas and in between, meaning especially Oklahoma and Missouri with side trips to Arkansas and New Mexico.

I've used nine paintings in this volume. The front cover is a detail from “american exceptionalism: a preliminary expectation” (watercolor and acrylic on paper, 2019), and the back cover is a detail from “substance” (watercolor on paper, 2019). The interior images are: civil unrest (watercolor and acrylic on paper, 2019); i'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you (acrylic on paper on birch panel, 2022); solitude (ink on paper, 2018); if you see something, say something (watercolor and ink on paper, 2014); happy workers (watercolor and acrylic on paper, 2018); long night moon (oil on canvas panel, 2012); and emerald city (watercolor on paper, 2015).

I look forward to joining you for a while *in medias res* as this long walk continues.

Chicago
April 2022

5 September 2006

To il duce's grandson: you are too late to uncover a true story. His mistress died and her body made another hero. Mussolini was exhumed before the body was cold. Marching in a broken line of broken men, he was not in disguise when they discovered him, and dying there was a clever way to pass the torch – another hero born, another führer, another State. The masses still clamor for trains that run on time, proclaim every son an heir to the throne, expect someone to save them. Mussolini was exhumed before the body was cold, and fascism did not die: it was only sleeping.

“He can't be 'you' – he must be 'I.'”

-Virginia Woolf

6 September 2006

I want nothing
more than to witness
what takes place
in the moment when
light breaks
on the shore
of a dandelion
stem drawn
across blue sky,
to turn, to proclaim
the sound of its dwelling there.

Space is transformed into place by dwelling...
-Heidegger

<wild onions prefer barren places with no shade...>

Paradoxical cities of them rise
from desire, transform deserts
with pale blossoms on delicate stems
into gardens they cannot wait to leave.

8 September 2006

Every line a shore
where light breaks to shadow
and some world rises in your
eyes made of somewhere
else as much as here,
made of memory present
to light
broken.

10 September 2006

ochre

When the rock breathes, a trace
of iron blusters somewhere
between yellow and violet. But
being human means to want
to reduce it, mix it
make it stand
for something other. To see
in what is here what is not.

12 September 2006

A moment ago I was
amazed by an explosion
of squill purple on snow. Now
there are red leaves underfoot
everywhere, and Summertime in
the Post Office blows like memory
from a fading saxophone while
we joke about mailing ourselves
to California. The piano is ice
and you can feel it blue on the breeze
that ripples warnings of brown
over a yellow rose still humming the tune.

16 September 2006

strange, speech
who'd know a word
from the sound
of it? from the sight
of it? from the touch
of it? who'd know
a name from the naming
of it? the bouquet,
maybe: a rose
by any other name.

begin by addressing it
drink it, all of it
stand on the rim
marvel at the abyss
it has made
in time

you will have to follow
her down to the depths of the whole
journey of her life
until where you had been, looking
vanishes in the distance
to touch her let go the
nothing of the name
know her

19 September 2006

A pyramid of mirrors, nothing
more than reflection of reflection
balanced on surfaces of sound, doubling
voices over the rhythm of ten thousand
feet sliding over pavement at the end of the day, and
an old woman in hijab passes mumbling some
dire warning about the end of days into
a microphone, cord dangling into a bag
she carries over her shoulder, and
I wonder what is on the other end, chat
with a passerby about the Vietnamese
restaurant that used to be around
the corner where you could get something
to eat without spending a week's salary, and
a sparrow lands in a nook in the wall
by my table to see for himself whether
there is food to be had there, and I am
sinking under the weight of infinite
endings that circle the city like pilgrims at Jokhang.

25 September, 2006

It's even worse than
you thought, Hugo. That sulfur
smell is the stench of a mess
so rotten Satan left for
a suburb where the air
is better and they still
pick up the garbage once
in a while. Say what you will, Satan
is a gentleman who has almost always been
civil, and he knows how to carry his
end of a good argument. He's never
been one to stand for sloppy work. Now,
about that odor. You waved the right
book, and God knows we could use
a few more chomsky-thumping evangelicals,
but the sign of the cross won't stop
the little demons who've been running the place
since Satan left town. Pray
for the dead, as Mother Jones said,
and fight like hell for the living. Workers
of the world, pull on your boots and rubber
gloves, hold your noses, and grab a shovel.
Exercises will have to wait until we get
rid of the shit that's making it
impossible to breathe in here.

2 October 2006

In a flash on the last
sliver of summer, bird lights
for a song of silence six times
broken by a single note, one
as long as what has been, four
next to nothing, one
as long as all that is to come.
Four sharp silences shatter sound, an
aftertaste of ice on autumn air.

Still, ash
waves fingers
at clouds drifting
north. High cirrus
anchors blue, cumulus
on cumulus tumbles
over sun
and the light dims. Ash
sways, prays,
spirit, come.

Wind twisted maple crown
down in a flash to the flood,
scattered remains in circles
under lines of light
racing fast white clouds
against still dark gray in
southern sky, thunder fading
under steady rain making
music with the old tin
watering can hanging under
a broken gutter on the back
porch. You could hear the end
of the tree through the east
window when it had turned
as far as it could for one last
look at the Ash still standing before
the block went dark and
every neighbor went in search of a candle.

3 October 2006

I read

no future in the pattern
of leaves left by the second
hundred year storm here in
two years. There is past
in roots exposed
to day after sun and
a book of life opens
to the end in rings drying. History
can't hold trees that have
grown here longer than
a human life. It is nothing
to this wind.

6 October 2006

For three days,
I have watched the branch
that fell on the roof next door
in the storm
die.

Leaves diminished by time
fade to intimation
of aspen
occupy
half the space, run
dry
as what remains
of rain.

A larger branch,
planted on another roof
upright by wind
imitates the tree
it flew from,
anticipates
winter, fading.

11 October 2006

Yuan Fen

I did not know I was
waiting before your eyes.

I did not know I was
falling before your eyes.

I fancied time falling
to the earth of your eyes

life. Dying for then now
I do not know

time falling.

Sat on the train for an hour
steps from the station
learning patience.

The world moved on.
I waited. Nothing
was lost.



14 October 2006

Cross

river after
river after river
until nothing familiar
is contained between

sandy banks, and you remember
the scene from a time
past that must be
only a few hundred miles further
along this road. Young woman

who asked for a ride might have been
Buddha, but you told her
you couldn't take her
where she wanted to go.
As if you knew. Every

right wing sign on this drive
has been on the left side
of the road just to keep my
perspective on the politics of the place
in order.

They put up billboards here
that just say Jesus
to help us
remember where we are.

Still, I need a river
where nothing runs to know
an orient at my back, to know
which way to go.

In this twilight
where all uniforms
are gray, two boys
smile on passersby
to sell some
military academy.
Losing track of time, I
wonder when
the next invasion
of Kansas will begin.

15 October 2006

news from other mountains

Ozarks, rain. Autumn
is a distance you see in
certain trees, hear in
the crackle of oak leaves
underfoot, ten thousand feet
below a line of pilgrims
on the other side
of the world,
at the other end
of a line drawn
straight through, all
the tracks in endless snow
behind them. On
a distant ridge, a man,
a soldier, they say, raises
a rifle. Two fall, witnesses.
Here, roads are lined with signs
that say pornography destroys
all, adult store, parking lots
full of cars.

More than half the rain
in this dry place is the thirst
of it. The depth of it
doubles the fall, draws
rain down to quench
absence, dissolves
gray when sky
embraces sun
gathered on earth
cinnabar in ocher grass.

Fog so thick from Mclean
to Groom you couldn't see
five car lengths ahead on
rain slicked pavement that
would need twelve to
stop, so your life depends
on nothing being there.

Fog lifts at the cross
on the outskirts of Groom,
obscures the top so it looks
like a multistory T beside
the gift shop. Sun
makes nothing clear, and
there is still not time to stop.

16 October 2006

Nothing catches her eye, and one light
yellow in an ocean of it. Steam
eddies trail to the limit of sight,
shatter to rainbows where there are edges. White
light is nothing of the kind. It is
a proliferation of rainbows contained in clouds
formed by a thousand short strokes, not one
circle but an accumulation
of arcs in blue and yellow drawing eyes
to nothing like a cloud that troubles
unsuspecting sky. Night washes dark to light
with no horizon. Three quick lines
draw teardrop
train to the city. Nothing
caught her eye here, and she
did not forget.

She draws the eye
with light and
pigment plays
on paper in the wake of...

17 October 2006

An October daisy
plucked between Denver snow
and the first blue norther
of autumn steals days
in a clear vase
on the kitchen counter.

18 October 2006

Every single tree
here has an idea
of north it learned
at the feet of
prevailing winds
between storms. It is
not surprised when
north races in
over plains, leans
hard against sudden blue
until it passes.

No more than a hundred miles
and a few degrees away,
the edge of summer lingers
beyond the caprock. Yellow flowers
follow the fence line, rise to green
mesquites that couldn't locate Denver
on a map, couldn't imagine
north of Amarillo. They've heard the weather
there is always bad but dismiss snow
as nothing more than rumor.

19 October 2006

you will be assimilated

In Stephenville, Texas,
you have to join a club to
have a beer with pizza, surrender
ID, add a signature to the minutes
file. No password, though, to whisper when
eyes appear at a slot in the door:
tell them Carrie sent you, remember
the WCTU, wonder when
you learn the secret handshake, how
to work the decoder ring.
Throw a nickel on the drum,
save another drunken bum, don't ask questions
when they give you something to sign.
Fill in the blanks, join.

20 October 2006

South of Stephenville, deer dreams speed
in her terms, so I test the brakes
at seventy, wait while she commits
to some other direction. Seeing me slow,
she reconsiders, thinks she might still
have time to cross. The road is littered with coons
and skunks that have made that mistake,
but she wisely turns to paths taken by
creatures less speed obsessed.

Sign in Hamilton County, beyond Fairy, beyond
the road to Dublin, says the vote
for secession was eighty six to one, turns
to a few lines about travel in
the Civil War and the descent into lawlessness
at the time. Nothing more about the one is the story,
and I thank the State of Texas for thinking to erect a sign that tells it.

Stopped at the Donut Shop in Hamilton
for a cinnamon roll, a little Texas
small talk, theology with the Baptist
preacher who runs the place. Got to
talkin' about the past, how small
town Texas can be about twenty years behind –
and that's not a bad thing, he says, and I don't disagree.
It adds texture to the timescape like river breaks
plains, explains how I grew up in the early fifties –
1965 to 1972 on the far side of Amarillo from Austin.

21 October 2006

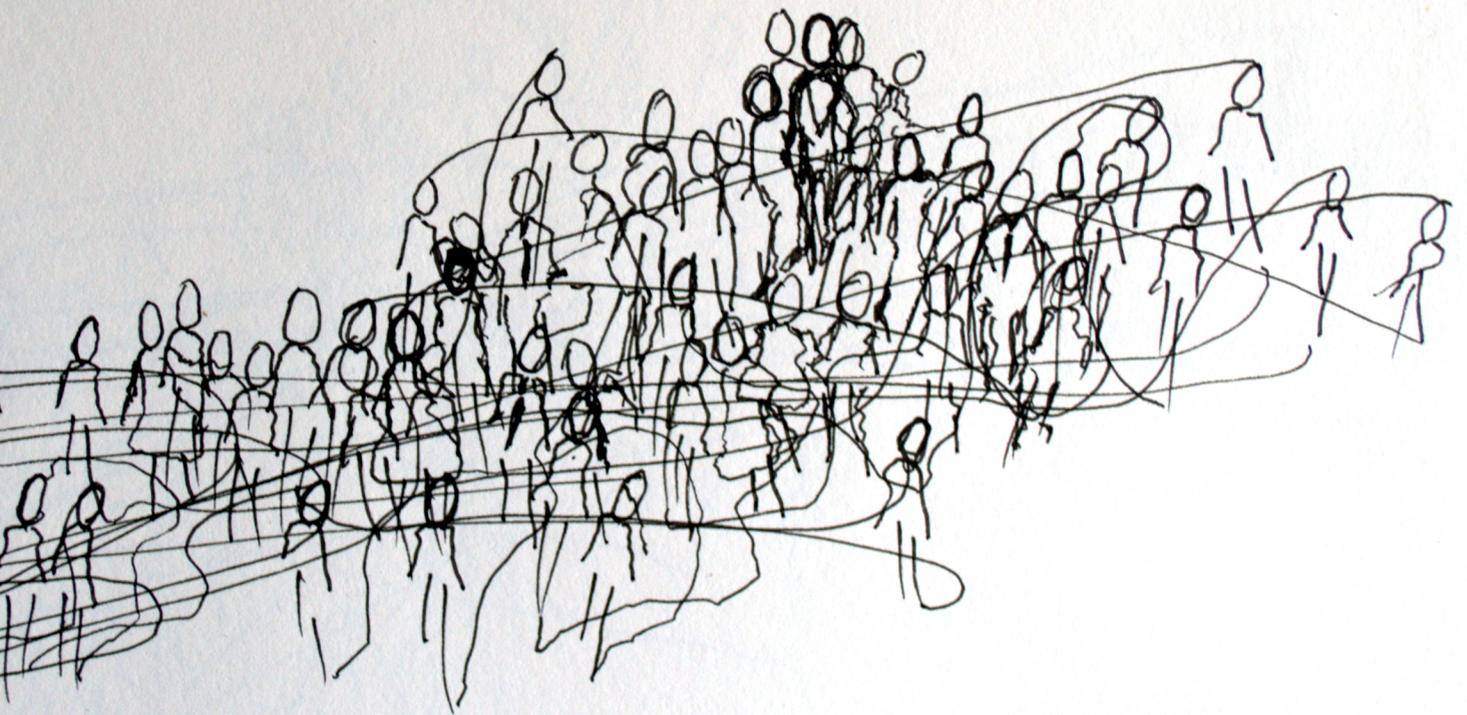
Walk into the Rathskeller
in Fredericksburg wearing
a Mount Holyoke hat, study
the menu, ask if the maple syrup
with the whole wheat pancakes is really real.
An opening like that in a German
restaurant invites Hegelian speculation,
but when the blond waitress
with a sweet smile and sad eyes says “not really,
not like Cracker Barrel,” I let it slide, keep quiet about
New England, figure she doesn’t know Mount Holyoke,
and order German crepes. No need
to ask after sour cream,
no denying the presence of coffee. After
the fourth cup, she says it’s “a lingering sort
of day,” so I sit a while before climbing
back up into Hill Country sun.

Saturday afternoon, nobody walks
historic downtown New Braunfels streets but
a family that has ventured a few steps
from the minivan; a wedding photographer
posing a woman in a long white dress and her
partner in a tux under the quaint old gazebo
isolated by a steady stream of traffic; four kids
on skateboards who weave through the traffic
to watch. I wander into a bar looking for coffee,
find nothing but cappuccino. So I ask for
the best dark beer and get, understandably, Shiner.
I have time to wait until it's safe to drive, so I
drink it slow with good Texas country.
It's all about heartbreak – I've
got a right to cry.

Gray haired couple in a little red convertible
have traffic backed up for miles on a Saturday afternoon
between Boerne and New Braunfels. You wouldn't think there'd
be miles to back up, but times have changed.
They look like speed, but time is money,
and they're burning it.

Friesenhaus

All the songs are about love
and heartbreak, finding your way
back to a time. I keep thinking
it's just around the corner in
Allison's sad song, but you're
still nowhere to be found –
so I go to the German
restaurant for polka
and Warsteiner.



22 October 2006

Some of the walkers I pass
on Congress have been out
on this street for thirty years
I think. The people who've
been here the longest have learned
to stand, let the world move
around them. They have hard eyes,
so the world thinks twice
before it runs them down. Hard eyes
contain hesitations,
diversions at thresholds of sight,
corners where hope lies.

There's a monument to some fuckin' war
on every corner. Peace in five languages
is stuck in a flower bed at the First Methodist
Church, but the stern old couple
leaving a Sunday morning service
aren't buying it. When I pass
the Texas Chili Parlor, I consider
a midday margarita, but it's only 10 AM.
I imagine the greenest green I can, wonder
if Dublin's really greener.

The first monument on the right
off Congress remembers soldiers
who died on the Confederate side
“defending States rights guaranteed under
the Constitution” but not the right
to own human beings like cattle. Texas is
America. Monuments are erected here
to recall what they do not say.

Cold front blew in last night,
and everyone’s talking about
Fall. But it’s Spring
at the sidewalk cafe on the corner
of 10th and Congress, and
strollers travel at the speed of summer
while traffic hurries nowhere
with no time to rest
and see that it is good.

In Austin

people who walk
walk at the pace
of summer. But when they drive
they drive ice cold fast
the way winter cuts through you.

Mockingbird

strikes a picture postcard pose
on a monument to some war
north of the capitol dome,
silhouette against the Texas
flag – if I were on the other
side. From where I stand, there is
nothing behind him but blue sky,
He only has patience for two
shots before I circle, he flies.

23 October 2006

It's as simple as this Isaiah said: raise
hell enough to rattle heaven.

Do not keep silent. Do not
keep silent. Do not, do not
keep silent. Prepare the way,
prepare the way, prepare the way
for the people. Do not
rest until you have fashioned
a city sought out, a city
not forsaken. Build the city
up, tear the city down.

Let us make a city. Let us
make a city. Build up, build up
the highway. Lift up a banner
for the peoples. I will not
hold my peace. I will not
hold my peace. I will not
hold my peace.

The stones cry out, the river sings.

In this river water dances, even the stones
cry out, and you can dream a city
sought out, a city not forsaken.

25 October 2006

Clouds obscure sun, so
I know the way
to walk by nothing
but a map and memory.
I am trying to imagine
the stream of traffic
on this road
a river. But I can
find no music in
the speed it contains.

On the coast, a hurricane
approaches. Here, a day of rain.
Central Texas pavement holds heat
enough even in October to raise steam,
antidote to air conditioned winter chill. I
order nachos for the cheese and jalapeños,
wash it down with Ziegenbock over Jimmie Dale
in the Dixie Chicken – prepare to reenter
climate controlled Aggieland.

26 October 2006

Texas Writing (or putting the long war in perspective)

This campus has been at war
as long as I can remember.
Still, it is jarring to see it
occupied, listen to a short story
that is nothing but football (which
the audience knows as its native tongue),
enter the student union under a sign that says
hats off, please. Most
shocking, though, is the professor
from Austin who, in response
to an urgent question about whether
we are in danger of losing Texas
writing, says matter of factly
that the day will come when the last Texan
stands here (and no one shouts *Remember the
Alamo!*) then adds that a Texas
writer is anyone who has a Texas
driver's license. It doesn't matter
if you can write or where you grew up,
as long as you can drive.

Dallas

reminds me that we build cities
we can't wait to leave. Touching
only the edge, I have failed to account
for the extension of space this causes.
Twenty miles of highway
on the east side of the city is
longer than the hundred miles
before, and I will be
that much later to Little Rock.

We go to the city to live, stay
to live the good life...

Why do you call it
good? Nothing is good
but God. Which makes you
wonder what kind of city
could contain God, whether
God would hop in the SUV at the end
of the day, rush into a traffic jam, snail
his way to some quiet suburb, rattle
around for a couple of hours, have
a nightcap before tossing
and turning until the alarm signals
it's time to do it again.

Turning and turning in a widening
gyre, this endless cycle of suburban
sprawl is so Western. But it's the suburbs
that burn in France, so you have to wonder
if god is a bourgeois retreating to
suburban comfort or a guest worker
pushed out there because housing
in the city has grown too dear.

It's the edge that's a sacrament, not
the snail's pace rush to space
contained like Sisyphus.

27 October 2006

political science

Seems the first sign
of every city points
to a bypass.
More than half
the language
orbits some other
place – how to get there from here,
how to avoid getting there,
how much better it
was, how
much worse, how
all will be well
there. Over the
rainbow, over
the rise,
on the far shore, the other
side – not now, there
not here, then.

Desire to be
when we are
not, elsewhere,
determines us.

Passing through West Memphis,
the closest thing to joy I found
was the manager who sank to his
knees to see eye to eye
with a customer complaining
about something I couldn't hear in
a place, I thought, with expectations
low enough
to keep disappointment
at bay.

Crossing the Mississippi
above New Madrid
in heavy rain is like
contemplating drowning.
Water rises on all sides
to memory of where
it has been. You breathe
the river, fill your lungs,
wait for it to take you in,
remember.

On this highway, some crosses
mark sanctuaries, some
lead conquerers on.

It is all about
calling – you who are weary...

The adult video store south of Effingham
has three, tipped in a line with a neon
glow that leaves *Jesus Saves* unsaid.

Anticipating the erection further north,
it makes up in numbers what it lacks in size.

3 November 2006

Absence of moon coiled
a sliver short of full fills
East, opens sky to cold
silver with every breath. It will
not rest until

sky is full a day before moon is

8 November 2006

I'm driving a red sports car,
and somebody else is singing
Steve Goodman's song. Tears rise
anyway, and I follow it to Memphis
thinking of New Orleans, how
questions about memory so often anticipate no

North of Effingham, green
has mostly fled; and even
south, trees have turned
to Cairo. They have learned
to expect Winter
in November, and they know
enough about weather
to wait it out

Still Illinois,
but I know
I'm in the South
when someone
asks if that's
sweet tea,
and the answer
goes without saying

9 November 2006

driving into Little Rock

Some little girl from Tupelo
on rural voices radio
tells a story about
making a tent out of books
and blankets and her friend and the cat
knocked it over and it kinda hurts
because the books fall on her head
but she laughs instead of crying because it's really
funny and they stay awake all night but go to sleep when
the sun comes up. And her voice has that karo syrup
edge, sweet and sticky filling every corner. It catches
the leaves in Arkansas Ozarks
that turn on an arc of death
between two lives,
dance modernity backwards and you can't imagine
how the past can weigh so heavy
and you can't deny it either.

10 November 2006

Turing Test

Eavesdropping in a language you do not really know is an etude for imagination, an elementary exercise you might run through again and again as a beginner until the fragments you pick up begin to resemble wholes long after the people you live with are tired of hearing them repeated, to have a familiar ring, a theme you can make new on your own instrument. It is like a conversation in an imperfect tongue. You keep your part to yourself so it sounds to the world like silence, like you are not there, like your presence is nothing more than an interval between strange words. You know as much when you overhear as when you are expected to play a part. The role is acting absent, cataloging bits and pieces so you can pretend to know what's going on.

11 November 2006

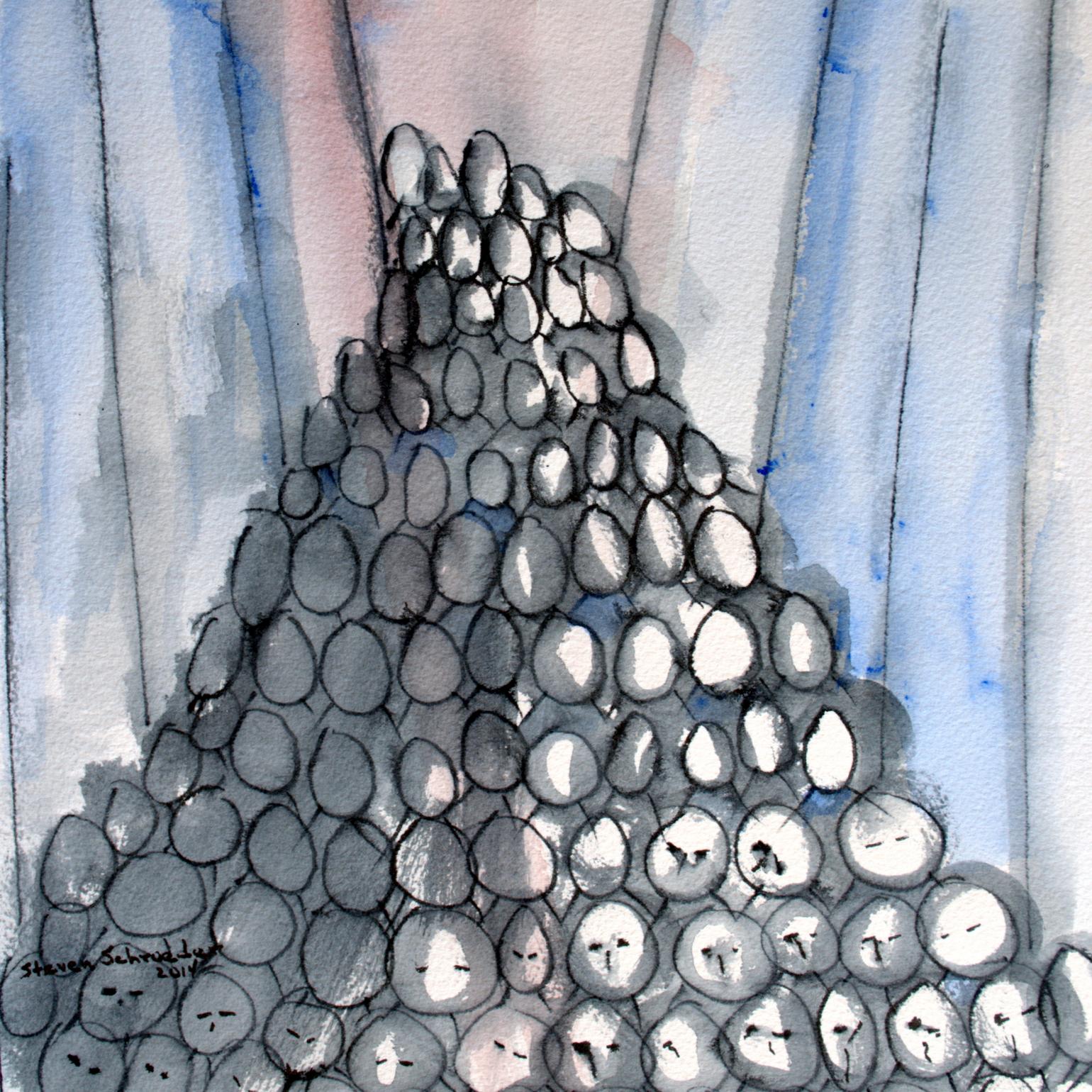
Conversation on the Round Rock side
of Austin is about meetings
with a manufacturing department, but
no clue as to what is made. An
animated conversation about imagining
someone as an attorney while football blares
from tvs that surround the bar. Host laughs
when I say I want a table away from the game
and add I know it's dangerous to admit
it. Restaurants are named for other
places – Manhattan, Acapulco, North
by Northwest. conversation turns
to confession, converting to Catholicism,
whether church is a club, whether
you have to follow the rules to join.
Over the sound of the game,
Los Lonely Boys wonder how far is heaven.
A couple of blocks away, a place that calls itself
a Christian Store has me wondering what Christians
go for since their stock has fallen. And I wonder
if there's a bar in Acapulco called Austin, whether
there's a place where nobody dreams of elsewhere.

12 November 2006

You wonder out loud if the rest of the world
is crazy, and I think there is
no rest but keep it to myself.
Mad as hatters poisoned by what
we do, we prattle over endless tea parties, make
time stand still with broken clocks, repeat rhymes
with no reason.

We must be crazy or
we wouldn't have come here.

New York deli
in Austin, Beach Boys
wish for California
girls über alles, and
the love song on the way out
is from Lubbock.



Steven Schroeder
2014

Sixth Street

Not clear on the face of it
whether it is a party
to celebrate a new world
or an assembly of lost souls
at the end of an old one.

In the end, it comes
to the same thing – an excuse
to dance on somebody else's grave
in the clearing of light
between standing
still and lying.

Years of dry
coax music
out of thirst
still deeper.

They say
let us build
a tower
of spirits
to fill it.

They say
drink it, drink
all of it,
but dry coaxes
music from thirst
that goes deeper.

Sunday afternoon in Austin, squirrels
walk in the middle of 8th Street, big
as you please. Before the twilight in which all cats are
gray, four come out of the brush behind me in Waterloo Park,
black, gray, gray, gray and white
under the eye of a blue jay
writing a theory of cats.
A mixed economy, cautious, but they
studied political economy with Deng Xiaoping.
Judging by appearances, three fat kittens
mean at least one good cat.

13 November 2006

On the road from Austin
to Amarillo, they've taken
the huevos rancheros I
did a u-turn for on the far side of
Early off the menu. When
I ask for real butter with my
grits, waitress brings me
the lid from the tub to show me
the blend is ninety percent
margarine. I tell her I'll make do,
but I think folks take what matters
out of Southern and leave what
doesn't. A gut full of chemicals
engineered to trick your taste,
guy at the next table, where they're
worried about whether the Democrats
will raise income tax rates
says there's more rich Democrats
than Republicans. They're right,
and they're pretty sure
there's been no revolution.

15 November 2006

Nothing subtle in this wind willing
winter south with battalions
of tumbleweeds. What is not
rooted moves, what is bends
with it. Tall prairie grass ripples
two shades of ocher bleach to whitecaps
in this sun under unbroken
blue sky. Every sign of motion is on
the ground. Sky stands above it
all without so much as a thought
of a cloud. Sun stands head down
against wind, still, throws
the friction of its weight
against mercury falling.

Coal train more than a mile long
waits on a siding east of Childress
while another, empty and just as long
passes. Desire stretches
the length of the track,
consumes cargo faster than
the century these trains inhabit.

16 November 2006

Driving down through Arkansas
into the heart of Texas,
then looping up through Post,
alongside Slaton past Lubbock and
big signs about exemplary schools in the
Roosevelt ISD, up to Amarillo through Pampa,
on to Canadian has me thinking about *nothing else*
to do as an explanation for some goings on that do not
appear to fit the profile. Among Lubbock folk in Austin,
the talk is flying saucers, music, and drugs – circle dances,
West Texas wind in your ears no matter where
you go. I think of a conversation
in a Russellville, Arkansas coffee shop, someone
says it has the highest concentration
of meth labs in the country, and I'm the only one
surprised. Then there's a story on the radio about
Hamilton, Texas figuring out how to handle a big dope
bust with no police force which sounds to me
like a pretty avant garde idea. When
the permanent Republican majority was goin' on
about small town values between under the table deals,
I should have known they were on the lookout for bargains.
Makes me wanna pull over at the next
rest stop, turn on Butch Hancock, get high
on Jo Carol and Jimmie Dale, get
lost in all those stars, just stop and wait for

the mother ship, pick and sing and wonder
if it's all those labs that have got math
scores rising on standardized tests
in small town Texas schools (they say
it gives you an eye for detail and keeps you
awake all the time), soak up moonlight
and wonder what on earth folks see in synthetics.

17 November 2006

Minds stayed on truth never
cease to be amazed when
a little light falls and
they see themselves engaged
in a machinery of State that
could not care less.

We are Jesuits who ride
the first wave of every invasion, pave roads
to hell with good intentions, find it shocking
when it takes them, write dissertations on
living in it, live in it.



18 November 2006

Driving east, pines
rise after prairies
from what remains
of deciduous trees
after wind, a forest
of surprises for travelers
steeped since Abilene
in more of the same –
not the shock of a westbound
mountain but an invitation
to see the place
in a different light,
broken by a prism
of piney woods, to take
roads back
into thickets that go
nowhere fast except
the century before last.

By the map, there are mountains
east. But they lack the suddenness
of mountains. They rise slow
with pine trees after miles
of prairie to a thousand feet
or more below the flat
land I know. A wrinkle
in earth below a high plain. But
the whole world, I suppose, could
be a canyon from some high place.
What makes a mountain
is the place you begin to climb it.

19 November 2006

Buck tied to the bumper of a maroon SUV
has the same shocked look as all the road kill
on the interstate. They did not see
it coming. I think by now they should have
some memory, some collective understanding,
some rumor whispered deer to deer
for smaller animals to overhear
of this migration pattern, hordes
of camouflaged men moving in
massive machines when Fall comes.
But not one of them expects to die
today. They can see the predators (whose
camouflage is for show) coming; but
unimaginable machines leave them
wide-eyed blind sided driving back to join
the unblinking incomprehension
of some suburban wall.

20 November 2006

Every stop from central Texas
to Illinois has welcomed hunters with some
sign. The world embraces
heroes in jackboots and camouflage,
makes way for pickup trucks piled high
with carcasses on the highway, rarely
pauses to wonder what drives the
does that litter the road
into the paths of speeding cars,
wrings its collective hands over lies
that lead to war, swoons over men with guns
in the local uniform, doesn't say no
when their smirk blinds them
like high beams to speed, asks what
would you like to kill today?

29 November 2006

Kitchen window was full of half
moon even before you
said she was a smile
flickering on the surface
of the water. Today
it is all rain that comes
down steady sadness
no matter what you say about cliché
over anticipation of snow tomorrow.

Children and dogs will
wonder again how the solid
form of one day's sad falling can
be so happy you can skate on it.



30 November 2006

Time was, “Little Drummer Boy”
off key off tempo in the subway
in Spanish would have passed unnoticed under
metal on metal of train after
train passing. But this is an egalitarian
age with portable sound, a time
of karaoke. No one walks when
the guitar stumbles. No one hisses
when the voice races two beats
ahead, slips a half step below. The clatter
of the train is applause
to the singer’s ears. He can hear
nothing else over the amplifier
he wheeled in on a luggage
cart this morning, determined
to sing every last Christmas song
he knows while pennies from heaven
fill the battered guitar case at his feet. He’ll
turn it up tomorrow if it’s empty at the end of the day.

Off key off
tempo “Little Drummer
Boy” should disappear
under wheel on wheel
of passing trains.

But this is
an egalitarian
age. Everyman
carries an
amp on
their luggage
rack, a concealed
mixer. It is
an age of karaoke,
Everyone spins, everyone
expects to be
an idol.

Lost in thought, wander
through the beginning of winter
into a coffee shop you
named when you said
you’d meet me. Not
sure where I’m going next or why
but Bob Marley’s singing
while I wait. *Everything’s
gonna be alright.*

3 December 2006

Disparaging the intellectual capacity
of the masses, you attribute the discovery
of the laws of inertia to Einstein,
setting physics back three hundred years.

I wonder at the quantum logic of words
flung from passing vehicles
at the speed of light, fear
the resistance of masses
is deeper than the power
of description.

12 December 2006

Geese, who remember in flocks that stretch years
south before Winter know it should be cold.
Weather has them flying in circles, and
a gray down blanket of cloud settles on
December, which promptly forgets whether
moons and seasons are waxing or waning
and frankly doesn't much care. Yawning, he
says one way or the other it will be
cold in time, crawls under the blanket, drifts
back to dreaming sunshine in rain.

Woman on the street so engrossed in bell hooks
when she walks out of the bookstore
that she's splitting the stream of pedestrians
going the other way makes me think twice
about giving up hope.

20 December 2006

Whole,
crowd moves
while I feel
myself
motionless

drift,
time passes
to a new place

I find myself
with no idea
how it came to be
where I am.

Whole,
crowd's body
moves

while
I feel my body,
unmoving,

drift.

Time passes to
a new place.

I find myself
with no idea
how it came to be
where I am.

21 December 2006

In the beginning, when
god made heaven
and earth, it must have been

a day like this. Gray
clouds unfold all the way
from sky to the level of the eye

drift down around ankles
while rain rises everywhere
saturates skeletons of new

things unfinished, leaves them
twisted while it thinks thoughts
saturated with the sudden

realization that there is
nothing to see, nothing to do
but vanish into gray

clouds so there will be a place
for light when they finally rise.

An old poster printed a quarter of a century ago
in East Berlin hangs over the mantle, over a fireplace
that hasn't worked for decades, brick I have meant to unpaint
for years. Flue is always closed, a floor under a chimney
sanctuary for raccoons whose scabbling in Winter
makes the cat's imagination run wild. Some vine
burst through broken concrete India ink under Frieden
Pflanzen, an order of creation. Below, Friedenwerkstatt, Berlin
1983, the signature of a pastor who became
Minister of Defense and Disarmament
in the last days of the DDR fades in
time, nothing left but a trace, not a seed but a memory
and my word as long as someone asks and I remember.

For some reason, the wine
you gave me when
I left Kerala came
to mind, how they took it when
I passed through customs in
St. Petersburg. Take it, you
said then. Drink it to
remember the berries, to
remember a north you
knew before by reputation.
Now, like Thomas, I have seen
it with my own eyes, and I remember
the wine drained like blood
at the crossing of a border.

3 January 2007

When you walked in the door, you said
you'd almost had an accident, wondered
how often that happens. What could
I think but all the time? The wonder
of it is endless instances of almost, necessity
swerving at the last possible moment
to avoid a collision that could be fatal.

4 January 2007

lost in translation

in the infinity of absences
dry between raindrops, silences
that gather conversation between
lovers who have no desire
to make something solid of
spaces where they have seen
transfigurations with their own eyes.
Lost in liquid worlds of words waiting
to be always now.

10 January 2007

More than a week into January, no
more than October cold. Birds
yield the floor to the hum of trains
waiting. Leaves that gave up waiting
weeks ago have fallen into pedestrian rhythm
hoping to outpace cold, hoping to settle in
the warm arc of an axis askew before
it goes the way of a planet consumed
by desire. Falling is not so hard,
settling under the weight of
passersby, drifting down into earth.

13 January 2007

Some old gospel song goes on
and on about a place where there are
no clouds, has me thinking about what
happens to a field of grain when the rain doesn't
come, how nothing would have slipped by unnoticed
without Spring lightning on the plains, how a day of sweet
by and byes makes it hard to see the gray grace of rain
making way for nothing endless but some
moments of blue.

17 January 2007

In this cold, you can see
ghosts of human occupation
dancing off the heat of every
dwelling over lamps that light
their way to night
blue sky where they are
racing to join clouds
two shades lighter waiting, they promise,
to warm earth with a blanket
of late snow.

Krishna blue

Sky is two shades holier
than clouds that swim
in anticipation of snow
slow in coming this winter. Anxious
trees check their watches, afraid
this time they have been
stood up, thinking
they got the time wrong, hoping
she'll be along soon in a flurry.

18 January 2007

An old gray cat follows
the wall, steps soft
to leave no sign, listens
for one that may have
slipped from some danger not yet
in her line of sight.

A predator, she has
some idea how they move
When all
cats are gray, she wants whiskers on a wall
to keep possibles unseen in line. She will
arrive slow and sure on fog feet. She will arrive.

19 January 2007

Weather

Conversation circles the way
clouds circle around how
strange, a little blue, but not
so blue as the sky on a cold
clear January day. Whatever happens
happens for the first time. No one
living can remember weather like this.

25 January 2007

I know some people who've met Jesus
and take it personally, as though they think
somebody's died and made them god.

It was the serpent
who made that promise.
He still has a good eye
for an easy mark, and we fall
for it every time, leaving God lost
in the garden muttering *where are you?* while we
rave on about buildings we've built
on sacred mountains where we thought once
we'd witnessed a transfiguration and figured
we'd better nail it down then and there
while we had it for a hot moment in our little minds.

Jesus, you know, is nobody
like you and me, and there's no telling
which mountain he's camped on now.

Wrapped against blue sun
January cold, she pauses
at each tree she passes
walking in the city,
lays the heel of her hand
on it a moment, healed, healing.

2 February 2007

February

It could be spring if not
for cold. Sparrows
sing promise of sun.
A cardinal lost in it
dreams red under snow
ragged as clouds in blue sky.

7 February 2007

I step softly but packed snow
won't stand for it after a day
of traffic. It has grown hard
from the weight of coming
and going and shouts
every step to birds
who gather
light against
cold shadows.

Off the beaten path, it still
embraces my wandering silently
so I could pass without
a scene if I would go where
nothing has left tracks
like other travelers and
no path's been worn.

8 February 2007

Cold rimes sight
where there is
no glass but
light frozen
winter hard
falling on
walkers who
think they can
outrun it.

13 February 2007

Wind

draws itself a circle

grows cold hard shatters

scatters falls under the weight of its own

desire, softens as it warms to earth rising.

15 February 2007

Wind freezes faster than light
falls in great piles of snow
plows move in labored rhythm
of human commerce. When
light freezes, it slows
to a stop, slows to still
wind still snow. You lean into wind
freezing walking north, turn an edge
to slice through light that's come
to stop it cold.



20 February 2007

Between David Allen Coe and Willie
the music is the twang of some woman who owns a party
shop askin' a guy from Wellington about the
economy out there. He says it's all farmin',
and that's enough. They're on to grassfires, snow,
Skellytown burnin' down, how you wouldn't know
sittin' in your living room in Amarillo.
Then she gets to wonderin'
what the people in China who make all
the shit she sells must think of us how the top
just keeps gettin' further from the bottom
while the bigwigs line their pockets. The rich
get richer, and she could be singin' Thomas
Mapfumo if it were Shona. Some guy
comes out with a poster that says Willie Nelson
for President and my sister says he could put Kinky
Friedman in charge of Homeland Security which leads us
to a whole dream cabinet. A woman who drove all the way from
Shamrock for this says *David done better than last time*,
somethin' about being wasted. But tonight he was
on a roll preaching to this big choir in a basketball
arena about knowin' writers while he flashed
his stars and bars guitar from Elvis to Kid
Rock, by way of George Jones, Tonya Tucker,
and the Oak Ridge Boys, Steve Goodman's
country song and the City of New Orleans,

neighbors not forgotten. Remembered Waylon
and said we'd have to sing loud so Willie'd know
it was his turn and come in off the bus. And when he did,
it was Whiskey River and a Texas flag unfurled
to cover the whole damn wall, Django Reinhart,
Kris Kristofferson, Hank, Townes, a new song
about Superman... Kept thinkin' about
Willie singin' peace for Dennis – one
small step from this redneck crowd
who might just follow him there if
you give em half a chance, and if that
ain't country, I'll kiss your ass.

21 February 2007

Light rises white off horizon, blues
across skybowl making way
for sun, runs through ocher grass to
cotton on red clay, sings with birds
where trees rise along arroyos
that testify to the presence,
once, of water.

Red earth waits in furrows for wind
to carry it away to Monahans.
It migrates like birds on instinct
and prevailing time. I flew in
from Winter, so Spring plows seem
out of place, but sun swears snow
is gone for now and at this altitude
it's probably not a lie. Windchargers
drink wind like they've never seen
it before, and grassfires prepare
for a penitential season.

Noon, Ash Wednesday

White light rises
on every edge of the disc
of the earth, converges
through blue to blue
to blue to blue to
a body of blue, seer,
seen, off center sun
sacrament of eccentric
human presence, a world
on fire dying to make a sign
a sign a sign of its ashes,
a sign of its coming,
a sign of its whole.

22 February 2007

Owl called – who knows whose
name? – before sunrise
this morning but flew when
I stopped to single him out on
the edge of a building against sky
growing light. We circled
while smaller birds scattered
warnings. The second time, I
didn't stop, but looked. And when
I looked again, there was no sign,
only the smell of something rotting
in the dumpster where he'd been
watching the decay of our excess
for evidence of something
worth carrying away.

24 February 2007

Scrub cedar scratches across caliche
to Dutch Woman Draw where something that must
have been like water running cut a line
across hard surface where roots can
make their way drawn to tap what's
left of it. Wind picks up where sand
starts, keeps it moving while
you keep an eye out for mountains
that should start rising any minute
now. Pull over, step out of the car; you'd
think you could fly. Most everything
does in this wind if it's not tied down,
so you just keep your mind stayed on
keeping your feet on the ground, wonder
if the guy driving the big rig west with
the oversized load wishes he'd waited
a day or two, stay awake by doing
what the sign says: *watch for water*.
And when it says *chance of flash floods*,
calculate the odds.

25 February 2007

In San Angelo, a friend tells me
you have to dig for wood and climb
for water in the Davis Mountains.
A long story, but not so hard
to believe if you think about
sudden mountains on the northern
edge of a southern desert.
Around every corner, another sign
of false hope. Everybody's looking for water, still
hoping after years of dry that it's just around
the corner. Sign on the edge of Alpine
promises tranquility by the acre
for a price. They tell me on the street Magoo's
is the place for breakfast – "Get you some
huevos rancheros." Work my way
back to it under a banner for a festival
of cowboy poetry, order the juevos,
and they were right. The music of the language
is Spanish, even when the words are not.
Conversation at the next table is about
a welding accident, temporary blindness,
how nothing can cure that except
a little darkness and raw potatoes.

26 February 2007

Pulled into Waylon Jennings' hometown
thinking how this place could beat you down
to dust carried away on the same dry wind
that blew these people in who think
God lives in little white boxes they've numbered
and scattered across flat, red earth. The good news is
There are fields of ashes waiting for ceremonies of repentance
before wind rises again to spread wildfire pentecosts in
unknown languages from unheard of places
beyond the curve of horizons
that prove it is still round.

16 March 2007

March blue
staggered by nothing
still in the gap
of a window open
at the train station
sings

blue tone
over silence
cools the waiting
room

takes the hands
of passengers
impatient for home.

24 March 2007

*How does she know that eyes
see?* you ask of the cat, who has
been prodding mine with soft paws
for some time this morning because, I
surmise, she is ready for breakfast.

What matters, though, is
not knowing. It is
seeing that when eyes
open a body often follows
and that means something to eat
in the empty bowl
between here and morning coffee.

26 March 2007

To my eye it is
a woodpecker
round dance
with a maple
tree still
struggling
after last year's
lightning
strike.

Eyes more
finely tuned
see breakfast,

a natural
disaster for bugs
under peeling bark.

27 March 2007

By a quarter after nine, the woodpecker
has put in a full shift, joined now by a singer
of two notes in a tree on the next street over.
He started before the rush of hard soles
on concrete, diesel fume stop and start
of trucks too large to make the turn,
children squeezing all the joy they can
into the gap before the bell rings
somebody breaking pavement somewhere
a circular saw screams intervals
the soothing sound of a real hammer
broken by pneumatic rhythm
and the voice of the foreman shouting orders
to the crew next door a woman's voice on
the street says, *You're probably right. You're probably
right*, but I'm not sure she means it.

2 April 2007

Snare drum quick woodpecker volleys
keep strict time under the easy rhythm
of a carpenter's hammer, sounds
like breath in the hands
of silence that is never silent, presence
to mark edges in this time, here,
where two sparrows and a distant gull
count it, full of everyday that is not
the sound in question.

3 April 2007

Gone to Texas

Clock is broken, but you can keep time
by the miles on green signs that line gray roads.
Divide SUVs by cars on an Amtrak train
more than an hour late, more than the cars braking
into traffic on the other side of the highway
to know the year. Count reactors,
the memory of reactors from the place
where Stagg Field stood to St. Louis,
imagine the questions they answer
now, the questions they answered then,
the questions before coal trains lie down
the whole length of some western road.
Catch the angle of sun in intervals when
clouds break, listen to tires sing
on pavement saturated with the rhythm of rain.

4 April 2007

Four crows, blue black on three
pine brown branches, two fly
when my eye lights
on one
who watches me make my way wingless
wonders at one more earthbound sight.

One sleeps with no fear
of falling, no eye for
worlds below the one he knows.

One silence. Four notes. Two fly. Two,
still, hold an other in mind for a moment.
A song, a chorus of crows.

4 April 2007

Shadow raptors sweep the road to Ada
palpating surfaces for signs
of carrion. The big birds themselves
circling overhead are epiphytes,
live like orchids on light and air.

7 April 2007

Weather report's been snow
for days, but sun's predicting
Spring. Blue shadow
on western horizon
clouds broken on Oklahoma
red earth look like nothing
but Winter slipping away slow.
Freeze nipped some buds, but Spring
will cover them in no time.
In no time, dry road west will be
marked by signs of ice posted on
bridges without a trace of it before sundown.

8 April 2007

By the time it reaches pavement, snow's
changed its mind and settled down
to water. There could be six inches,
but air's so parched it ends up
covering plains with nothing
as far as eye can see, waiting
for footprints to break it
while cattle who know
its surface in passing pay it no mind.

13 April 2007

This matter of addressing clouds
calls to mind the silences
of a rare day gray from beginning
to end, fog frozen when
sun sets unseen
unless earth has stopped cold as
conversation. Broken blue
breath is missing in this soft cold
down draped to dull edges.
Nothing remains to cut the sky
blue, silence of a seamless cloud
that will not stop for breath, drones
the end of Winter that will not go softly
settles for a day into a gray rage.

Gray premeditation
before spring
snow. April blizzard
pauses for a tulip bouquet
before ice.

14 April 2007

God is the army, not
the commander, a sullen host
where he should not be
ten thousand miles from home
surrounded by a hostile
population that wishes him nothing
but elsewhere, harried until
he is finally afraid of his shadow
certain every living thing is an enemy.

Fifteen tulips cut quick in the interval
before ice stand in a clear vase
looking north where a mockingbird sings
endless loops of sounds collected into an aviary
of songs to celebrate sun's return
after a Spring blizzard.

Every Spring storm is an end
in itself, fire, ice, and a new song at moonrise.

16 April 2007

The experience of seeing
time and time again a road appear
where nothing was as long as I
could recall on the force of an
idea enacted in words my grandfather
spoke to a group of men with no more
in common than a promise and an
act on which whole cities would
move for years makes it possible
to believe imagination matters
more than anything that does not
move with the force of something
like a soul. Some houses he made have by now
contained lives for generations where
there was no city and you'd think
it would burst with the misery
of it if not the joy; but it stands, and lives
still live on it between one city and the next,
one world and another imagined drawn
in lines just clear enough to be spoken
into a world by common labor. My grandfather
played by ear, and I cannot recall a time
there was not music in it.

Snowbound wildflowers know with their bodies
there will be sun. They know it in
yellow promises through new snow,
images in eyes closed after purple on white. Gray
misery is nothing to this wind. Listen
and you will hear tomorrow's blue storm in
sun no older than morning.

17 April 2007

Low clouds shadow horizons
after early rain, but they scatter
to promises broken as land grows dry
and grass yellow on the road
west. You might see them and think rain
possible, but not today. Not today. Not
before mountain snow
that will linger till May.

Sign in the window
of a little shop called
Heaven on Earth says
Sorry, we're closed.

The old woman already knew, but
some angel told her and she
thought in her heart how
there'd always be
someone to love her.

Not what to tell her father, how
to tell her mother, not what neighbors
would say, not even that they would know
without a word. And later when
you see this baby with a baby on
the street, hands full
the light in her eyes somewhere between
despair and fear, do you think of
the presence of God's love
overshadowing her? Are you
at that moment sore afraid
ready to drop to your knees
staggered by the miracle of it? Or
do you turn away to the
museum where some prim
madonna holds a grim
little savior at arm's length secure
that there will never be a diaper
to change or a sleepless night walking
away inconsolable tears?

18 April 2007

Climbing mountains is harder
than it used to be. Breathless
with the added weight of addressing
the mountain while thinking
like a commuter, wondering
if the mountain's learned to think
like a city, to think itself
manufactured, to speak
the language of the latest wave
to bring the image of another place
with them when they came,
the climb is slow. The music has changed.
The music has changed. The score is
a palimpsest, the performance
a dance. Only the mountain has patience
to learn it. The mountain
can wait out even this.

I think if I hear one more
pair of fashionably dressed
yuppies flawlessly coifed
with oh so perfect perfume
discuss resettlement
of Tibetan refugees in New York
accents at an intersection named
for St. Francis and the still Aztec patroness
of the Americas, I will begin
to favor Texas occupations in
cowboy hats and have
second thoughts about Han
railroads. No wonder
Buddha looks like he could laugh out loud.

19 April 2007

Circle down a mountain
the way a maple leaf circles down
Fall. Settle into ninety miles of nothing
after Cimarron, ninety miles you'd find nowhere else.

In Tres Piedras, God is a furious woman
shouting something in Spanish about our hearts.
Straw brown hair falls over shoulders
of a black wool jacket that is too much
for this weather. When there is nothing
but a window between her and us,
her obscenities are English. Waitress
locks the door, calls her son to come get her.

20 April 2007

Clouds settle in fog
so thick you think fire
at Alanreed before you remember
how close you are to sky
here. Two trees defy
the odds, lean into south
to remind you to take nothing
for granted. Nothing
makes haze so dense
trucks speed by
and disappear in it.

21 April 2007

This middle kingdom
is populated by searchers after spirit on Friday
night. Evangelist on the corner of Walnut and south
has placed two daughters on the other side where
he can keep an eye on them while they
offer tracts to passersby who do not take them.
They are more inclined tonight to drink spirits
than read. They will all
keep Sabbath
spirit-filled tomorrow.

26 April 2007

Light, the absence
of it, where it does
and does not fall,
fault lines the breaking of it
reveals.

The breaking of it.

Nothing is colder than light so hard it
shatters when it falls

and you find yourself
pondering in your heart
some presence
that has overshadowed you.

30 April 2007

Spring has arrived without a doubt
that all is well, as it always does.

War after war and rumors of war
linger in the corner of every

eye, but in this moment when I have no choice
but to take Spring's word the center is blue sky and pink crabapple

blossoms on a walk
that has no time for rumor.

4 May 2007

Queens are not allowed to appear
lost in public, but in Virginia
praising the architecture
of Thomas Jefferson between a massacre
fresh in local memory and too many others
to count on the eve of an anniversary
Elizabeth does.

 We were supposed to feel better
when they insisted no order
was given. But there is no denying
someone shouted There. Point. Fire.
And they did, and we wondered
who we were at war with,
who we were, why we are
always at war, and whether
the Queen has missed something
in her review of the architecture.

7 May 2007

Last Night

A dream Tibet, a stone in
the stream Heraclitus pondered,
an interval long enough to plan
an ascent on a leisurely
day at the foot of the mountain.

A monastery, monks among old books
laughing in red robes, something vital to carry
across. A journey. Awake
under the weight of
a sea level city
with no time to adjust to gravity,
it is so much longer. It is done. It is
not begun.

10 May 2007

Coal train stretches to the end
of vision north and south
at 59th Street, long
as the line of cars
that idles in traffic
a mile east along
the lake at rush hour, when
nothing moves; and serious
journalists travel to Chongqing
to see the future first hand wire
dispatches from another front.

22 May 2007

If the blue of a blue
sky does not
bring tears
with thought
there is
no hope.

Squirrel pauses, wonders,
where lightning
took the top
of the maple tree
last year every time
he climbs

it. The end is
still too sudden
to take in
at this distance.

on the siding

Train is full
of waiting
it took on
with the memory
of what remained
when it pulled away
from the last station.
When the time comes,
the engine will
strain against the weight
of it, haul it
to some city where
waiting is the only fuel
the people know.

23 May 2007

After midnight, invisible
people are the only ones
you see – keeping an eye
on the doors, sweeping
the debris of the day
off streets and sidewalks,
making one last deal on
a corner where there
are no cops,
walking a line
between catching the eye
of a john but not some
undercover cop looking
for a ticket back to the station.

24 May 2007

This morning the rhythm section
in three local trees
lays down an invitation
to sing the simple beauty
of a world still here
in spite of everything. Flicker
can't stop himself laughing
between drum rolls, though, and sparrows
keep their distance from the cat. Drone
of an air conditioner has already begun
in spite of the cool breeze off the lake
to be sure we never forget where
the devil lives. The details kill
us, the little stuff Quaker
parrots chatter about when they
see the whole thing passing
over. Flicker has to laugh
because he knows we are
at any given moment seriously disturbed
or totally depressed. There was a reason
for the lunatics to take over the asylum.
We've been in charge from the moment
we hatched, and all the birds except the gulls
laugh to keep from crying.

29 May 2007

after Hildegard, **Physica**

Every single thing can see
life breathing in the muck
on the leading edge of a world
so full of green expectation
it is divine.

They see that it is good and they
call it a good name.
Everyone knows Adam
is a woman who
turns when green lovers
whisper her name to see
that it is good. She takes the
light ones in, and they become her
body. Stones are the bones of the earth,
marrow where rain has fallen.
Warm soul breathes life
in cold bodies and she
writes the name of every herb
in a book that demons have no taste for. The
devil loves the ones that take in fortune seekers
blind to the shock of green every time earth
rises hot from a cold season.



6 June 2007

Every kernel conspires
to make wheat warm as
sun it's harvested
since Spring. Harvest
the whole when
Summer's turned
and there will be
flour to warm another
body of Winter. Real
flesh and blood, it is ground
for patience.

Bake without the whole
ground on a millstone
and it is another
matter, the body of a mind
emptied. There is nothing
to be done for it but to tie
it to the whole until
the poison is drawn
out and the mind is right again.

The cold flame of rye
burns excess
to strength, but it is not
good for a cold stomach.

Take it hot from the oven,
take it with whatever lumps
you take, take it and it will make them
disappear. For nitpickers,
a warm crumb will destroy crabs.

The cold flame of rye
will burn excess
to strength, but it will
do your cold belly
no good. Take it hot
from the oven. Take it
with your lumps. Take it,
and it will make them
disappear. For nit
pickers, a warm crumb
well placed will destroy crabs.

8 June 2007

A cold rose
leaf for the eye
at daybreak, every
healing goes
better with the good
strength of a little rose
better still, bouquets
of them, and something
that tastes of nutmeg,
cinnamon, cloves, licorice
to extinguish the furor
in your head.

take thyme wild
for a sick brain, as if
it were empty

it may take all the thyme
in the world. But it will
make your head better

Lungwort, cold and dry, is not
much use. But it will make
sheep fat and healthy. When
what we have unleashed
upon the world makes your lungs swell, take it,
because a lung has almost the same nature
as a sheep. If it is our
sheep nature that has led us to this,
we might breathe easier
with Goatsbeard, cold, hard
able to shatter whatever is where it is.

10 June 2007

Cold stone monuments to war
after war after war, and they
want you to say what is
to be done. Knowing there
will be another and another
and another, you say there is
nothing but to cry over
what granite recalls
where nothing is engraved, wonder
at fear that drives bankers
in fortress suburbs to fear
coyotes nervous as
urban pioneers. Fear
is nothing other than cold granite,
nameless, lapses of memory between names
we call when some war leaves us disappointed.

11 June 2007

There is no reason
to believe orchids
in New Jersey more
elusive than some truth
about Trotsky. Circles
of conversation sow
truths any one of us
might have found
inconceivable. No use
waiting for a guided tour
in new terrain: circles
of conversation
draw you.

13 June 2007

For an empty mind worn down
into madness: cook whole grains
of wheat in water. Strain.
Tie them, warm, in a cloth around
the head. The mind will be
renewed by the juice. Do this
until the person returns
to his right mind.

But for Congress, worn out
with paralysis until it is full
of split minds and empty thoughts,
somewhat insane, a sweat bath when
the hot wheat with the hot water is poured
over the hot stones of the sauna.
Do this often.

And licorice for the insanity. It extinguishes führers
in the head. Grind
cinnamon, cloves to a powder. Add whole wheat flour
and a little water to make a paste. Eat it
often everyone. It will calm the bitterness of heart
and mind, open the heart and the clouded
senses, make the mind joyful. Add java pepper
to clarify minds by elevating thinking.

For sick brains, as if
empty: pulverize wild thyme
mix with wheat flower and water
to make a paste. Eat it often. Time
taken with whole grains will make your heart better.

And where fern grows, the devil rarely exercises
his deception. The seed will bring your memory back.

If you have become so hard inside
that your thoughts are confused, what you thought
you knew slipping away, cook tithymal with
wine and honey. Strain it. Drink it. Hold
your honey warm to your chest
often. You will be well.

Parsley grows from wind and humidity. It generates
seriousness in the mind. An ointment of parsley,
fennel, sage, and rose-tinged oil on the place
where you suffer will ease paralysis. Sage can also
be of use when the stench is unbearable.

Stinging nettle pounded
to a juice and mixed with olive oil
applied often can lessen forgetfulness.

Agrimony cooked in water poured warm over the head
and heart can purify knowledge, do away
with mindlessness.

19 June 2007

Just remember
the last battle of every war
so far has taken place after
the war was over

take lives in spaces between
memory and ends that faded
long ago, not

any granite monument.

20 June 2007

Galveston, Texas

more than two years after
the half-hearted proclamation of an almost
by a sad man wanting nothing more
than to keep what he thought
we'd known together. A crowd
hung on a soldier's word,
war weariness passing in memory
for a celebration. How much anger
does two years of waiting contain? How much more
than three hundred years before?
How much waiting does it take to drive a crowd
to beat the life out of the wrong man?

22 June 2007

Words do not fail
when they fall
silent but when

they carry on.

Words fail when
they make it
possible

to carry on

when it should not
be. There must be
an absence

where words break
to make us mindful
we have gone on

too long already.

Steven Schroeder is a poet and visual artist who lives and works in Chicago. More at stevenschroeder.org.



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un être capable d'action

*Steven Schroeder
2017*