

**solitude is another matter**

poems and fragments, 2004-2013: volume nine  
steven schroeder



Steven Schroeder  
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*solitude is another matter* is the ninth 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 ninth of ten notebooks and were drafted between February and November 2010. 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.

I've used two paintings in this volume: a detail of “if you see something, say something” (watercolor and ink on paper, 2014) for the front cover and “the last day of winter” (acrylic on canvas, 2018) for the back cover.

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

Chicago  
September 2022



4 February 2010

Ice breaks near the north bank of the river  
and water moves fast in the space it makes  
so you think Heraclitus had it right:  
no second step before the river is new.  
But where ice remains, every step is  
the same as the last – hard and fast, this  
is water you can put your weight on,  
water that will not give, water  
solid as the river bank, water  
so hard a city could stand on it.

10 February 2010

Snow wet as a slow slow kiss clings to each branch by morning. Pine and snow are lovers who swear they will never part even though they know sun is already parting curtains of low clouds, a peeping tom whose twisted vision is a virus. Stricken, the fever will melt their embrace.

14 February 2010

### **Ozarks, February**

Water on the face of rock  
slows to ice in February,  
but it does not stop.

Time stands,  
but it does not  
stand still.

### **Missouri, February**

Traveling west today means  
driving deeper into winter.  
These old mountains look cold,  
but they break the wind  
that would turn it all to ice  
on open plains. I will  
climb to flat land later,  
and I wonder if this slow  
fall will turn cold enough to stop.

15 February 2010

**gospel**

a single daisy for a stern father  
she knows he will bend to lift his little girl  
whose toes can't help dancing  
over the pearly gate

16 February 2010

Emily could never be at home  
in a paradise that is nothing  
but Sunday. It is too much  
like waiting for a place that is  
always elsewhere, no robins  
allowed, the only daisies cut and bound  
in vases of bright flowers  
on some cold Presbyterian altar, between  
memory and anticipation, elsewhere and gone,  
between a still volcano, a quiet earthquake,  
a prose closet where the brain spins  
poetry, where mind goes, present  
all along.

17 February 2010

Flat earth is nothing more than an other line  
where the plane of the land intersects the plane of the sky  
and they recede to a blue vanishing point so pale  
it is almost white. Sun is seven circles above the line  
from blue white through five shades of yellow to white hot  
that falls as cold light on the last of the snow below,  
white like the center of the sun.

**for Emily**

A Bodhisattva of compassion,  
she went to paradise. But when  
she found it prose, she turned  
to embrace the little girl  
with dancing toes who lost count of snowflakes.  
She knew there was still time to learn  
to pirouette. It's the going,  
not the gone that counts and no reason  
to go until everybody goes  
when every poem is a dance  
and every Spring daisy a resurrection.

20 February 2010

Weather is falling today, and from the way  
blue has been rising in the north all morning  
I imagine when it falls it will fall  
as snow if I am north enough by then.

21 February 2010

All the fog of yesterday is falling today as rain on these Oklahoma hills still the color of dry though they are darker now than my memory. And every atom of all of it holds something of you. Rain dances on the roof, splashes off the windshield but you pass through, and I am drenched. Every part of me, bursting with you, is still hungry for more. I make my way through yesterday falling, and I know I am not alone. Car in the ditch, lights flashing, driver lost control when he could no longer see through what was falling then. The only light was in the rear view mirror, nothing but a wall ahead, no way, no way. And when his mind turned to avoid a collision with what he thought he saw, he was lost. The car, stranded, flashing a warning like a lighthouse on a rocky shore, seems undamaged, so I hope the driver walked away, eyes open, still blinking in the light of some yesterday.

21 February 2010

Storm's tumbling down  
on a line that intersects with mine  
and it has a ragged leading edge, so  
I've been in and out of rain all morning  
as long as the temperature holds above freezing.

Anticipating snow, I am reminded  
a blizzard is more wind and waiting...

of many minds  
like thirteen blackbirds  
in three trees with nothing  
to say, saying  
nothing. No  
one

one gives rise to two  
two gives rise to three  
three gives rise to ten thousand  
things. Never mind.  
be

a door to many mysteries

26 February 2010

Snow falling today  
has come up the way  
I did three days ago,  
and seeing it cover tracks  
takes me back to miles of sky  
tracing a thin red line  
where earth embraced it.

Here it is contained in  
instants between  
verticals, horizontal  
no more than  
an expectation  
beyond the point  
where rail lines  
rising visible through  
white snow intersect  
where vision is exhausted,  
so much closer than home.

High bright moon  
hours before nightfall  
Full but for blue  
that has nibbled  
the last quarter away  
leaving the whole  
anticipating night  
imaging snow yesterday

2 March 2010

It is the beginning of March,  
and cardinals have assembled  
to shout true slogans from a Spring manifesto  
in the face of the power of lingering snow.  
You you you, they say, you  
have nothing to lose but the cold mind of winter  
Sing a summer song with us  
and you will see a world rise new.

3 March 2010

Good grape wine lights up the night  
guitar plays till we're told to fight  
don't laugh at us if we're all dead drunk  
just one more wave sent off to die

Hashish glows in a night that's black  
we'll dance to the oud till the next attack  
don't laugh when we stumble stoned in the sand  
when you fight their wars know you ain't coming back

5 March 2010

Tolstoy is  
Anna, you say.  
And my mind goes  
to the poem,  
to the fine line between  
the saint and every other  
fallen soul in a world full of souls  
falling. One fall is the same as  
an other, always coming  
to rest in the same world, always  
falling again as though there might be another,  
always casting stones, never  
more than a stone's throw  
    from being the target.  
With all the stones being cast,  
you'd think the world  
mostly sinless. No wonder  
Leo fell in love with Anna,  
the character who wrote his whole life  
from the still point where he met her, where  
she drove him out of his mind.

Why quote Paul's quote instead of Deuteronomy? We prefer a human voice to the voice of god.

20 March 2010

Rain and mercury falling  
on the leading edge of the storm,  
ice is only a matter of time.

Driving west, every blue norther  
I've ever met is on my mind  
as I pull into another

hoping for the traction  
a layer of snow will mean  
on ice that has been building  
all morning.

Wind rising  
will make the blizzard,  
but the falling makes the going slow.

In Missouri, sign on the Oklahoma border promises "loose slots," and I don't know whether to think that good or bad. I think loose change, loose screws, loose morals, loose knots, loose analogies, loose leaf tea, loose women, get loose, loose as a goose, let loose, hang loose, let loose the dogs of war, and, loosely speaking, I think timing is everything – that and what you are looking for where and when.

23 March 2010

An army of 400 foot tall crosses  
rises on a long mesa beyond  
the Double Mountain fork of the Brazos  
river, blades whirling – could be a mass  
crucifixion, a sign to cut  
the legs from under a revolution –  
power droning one truth on and on, amongst  
billboards with messages signed by God,  
to die for the sins of the world is nothing

unusual. What church do you believe  
the world will make of it this time?

24 March 2010

Oklahoma red clay  
makes snow cherry vanilla  
the day after. Snow  
is still now, not  
falling. The world is slow,  
waiting for a thaw  
two days behind  
the storm out of the west.

25 March 2010

Ontological biscuits, epistemological jam, numinous butter, the *ding an sich*, is phenomenal. Never forget when they offer margarine with grits or pancakes with maple flavored syrup *man ist was man isst* – nothing more, nothing less.

29 March 2010

Green Frog in Jacksboro is  
almost fifty years out of the way,  
but I stop for the breakfast special  
and for the sake of old times – a stone's throw  
from Possum Kingdom where my grandpa and the Brazos  
River conspired (I used to think the two of them  
alone) to make a lake and stories  
I still believe with all my heart,  
never mind the waitress (who  
could have been one of the pretty girls  
he flirted with when we stopped here  
years ago) telling me the cinnamon rolls  
are frozen not homemade and  
an egg would be better for me  
anyway. I always try  
to put this place in Decatur.  
Memory refreshed, I'm good  
for another fifty years and the drive  
to Archer City.

18 April 2010

Morning drumming interrupted  
by a squabble of birds, flicker  
who has nested in a half dead tree,

coaxing a hollow from the lightning damaged  
trunk day after day for a week. Today a black capped chickadee  
challenges his claim, where you might expect a starling.

They strut and strut around the trunk, cutting heads.

Feathers fly  
when they  
drop breast to breast,  
thinking themselves large, talons  
lethal. It goes on all morning,  
this incurable assertion of  
mine in a dying tree  
hard as any  
space to imagine worth fighting over.

24 April 2010

Weather report says  
rain with a few rumbles  
of thunder,

has me thinking

West Side Story,  
young clouds  
showing their true colors,  
hair slicked back, switchblades open.

Somebody's singing his heart out  
about a girl named Maria,  
and they're all dancing. No  
blood. A song, a dance, a torrent  
of innuendo. No  
umbrella. Just imagine  
what will come of it.

27 April 2010

Cat physicists  
think outside boxes  
opening: two states  
in which curiosity  
could kill a cat,

the only thing between  
dead and alive an act  
and a conjunction. Dead  
to the world alive or dead,  
they like the odds, dream  
a moment awake  
to the surprise of some human  
who wanted to be sure.

28 April 2010

Crowds with a look in their eye  
that would make you think  
everyone of them had seen  
the whole horror of the last century,

like they were all burned  
by every fire, survivors,  
every one of them absent-mindedly  
bearing all the sins of the world, not one

addressing an absent god, forsaken,  
no expectation of forgiveness  
for what they have done  
for what they have left undone,  
for hearts broken that cannot love whole,  
for what they do not know. For what they do.

4 May 2010

Slow as the whole  
world in a glance, all  
that follows is a dance  
with death more  
like falling than you can imagine.

Birds rise sometime  
before I, memories. They  
insist there was  
a world before you, that I  
could be (because I have been)  
where you are not. Today  
the song sounds like nothing  
I want to know. But it is  
undeniable this is  
where I am  
this morning, sad

but true.

5 May 2010

The viscosity of this crowd rises  
with the saturation of the air. Skin  
no longer divides one body from an  
other, and every angle is an  
exercise in futility. One molecule of love  
is as likely to will a direction at odds  
with a volcano as a solitary  
walker against the grain of this city.

6 May 2010

Man on the footbridge  
shakes two fingers at a helicopter  
settling into the ferry terminal from Macao as though  
it has transgressed some  
rule he knows by heart. It may be  
the sound of a war he recalls  
from childhood – or  
he may be counting  
something I cannot see. Perhaps it is  
nothing, which, as

laozi (who knows and so does not  
speak) reminds anyone who reads  
the thought for today  
scrawled on the Sheung Wan Pacific Coffee  
chalkboard in the same hand as today's special brew  
is what makes it possible for a clay pot  
to hold things we think good to eat, not  
the clay, not the pot, nothing.

7 May 2010

**Kun lam**

twenty four dark rocks break water,  
a line steps from sand shore  
drawn by the sound of water  
repeating itself

                    crane finds  
the high point, a rock  
graying to white above the surface,  
eyes the world, flies, eyes close

rocks are almost black where water  
touches them, rise to gray  
in light, creep through white and red  
on shore, hold green things dreaming  
before they move on. crane  
settles, eye open, move slow  
all at once like rock,  
clouds think better of rain,  
leave air dark as rocks  
in the hands of water,  
nothing falls but expectation

this doing  
in remembrance –  
not standing  
in, but the thing  
itself standing, real  
presence of the past  
makes present pale  
peopled by ghosts, none real  
as another present elsewhere

12 May 2010

every city a body of dreams  
crossing, every crossing a place  
to cut a deal. every deal  
a soul sold. every soul a dream  
peopled by ghosts, a city of the living,  
a city of the dead, a city of the unborn, every city  
teeming with dreamers dreaming dreams.  
the question is never did you  
sell your soul? the question is what did you  
get for it? and why in a city of souls sold  
so long ago doesn't everyone play the guitar  
like Robert Johnson?

13 May 2010

city calls attention  
to its own form, no idea

a poem, lost in translation,  
no there there, wander

far as you imagine  
possible, find yourself where

you thought you were  
in the first place

14 May 2010

small dog at the end of his rope stops  
steps beyond a buddha shrine, steps  
before a cross in the shadow of a casino losing  
his religion, no stomach for this  
gambling economy, going nowhere,  
leash taut, teaching  
the walker on the other end to stand  
still in a stream that does not think it possible  
to stop, losing his religion, there is nothing in this crowd  
but to walk into nowhere, no less nothing  
in city lights than the middle of nowhere,  
nothing doing, no calculating odds, no counting  
cards, no dice.

17 May 2010

A shock of yellow in  
a pattern of leaves  
brittling on pavement  
stones. Black veined  
wings folded, butterfly  
rustles among dry leaves  
steps from pedestrians  
who walk between cars  
in traffic, dancing a death  
wish together. I walk through  
two morning dances  
for a cup of coffee,  
thinking the city is  
skin deep, brittle as  
a butterfly still in morning sun  
already mid-afternoon hot.

18 May 2010

City brittle as leaves that have dried  
in days of sun since the day  
they flew for a moment imagining  
themselves free, then coming to rest in this  
morning ritual of gathering around the broom, scattering,  
gathering again – a heartbeat, this city of dry leaves:  
it bursts over and over and over  
again to keep the blood moving,  
    to keep what the city breathes flowing,  
to feed its dry life, brittle in unbearable light,  
crumbling under every step, remembering  
what it was like to shimmer in wind at the  
    top of a tall tree.

20 May 2010

Time is  
money  
efficiency is  
life. empty  
talk destroys  
practical work. Not  
everyone, you  
say, needs poetry. No  
news is good news.  
No news in  
poetry, but what is  
found there, what is found there  
what is found there, lost  
in translation

Purge poetry, empty  
talk of music, soulless  
world will forget how to sigh.  
What use will these  
child machines  
you are turning  
out in one five year plan  
after another...

21 May 2010

There is no place  
but this  
place. Time  
circles into it,  
makes a hole  
its own shape,  
fills it, all of it,  
no shadow of difference,  
is before was,  
no before to slip  
back to, no after  
to aspire to, only  
this, this, all this, no  
time for that, all  
the time in the world  
in this place, now.

A cluster of orange flames melt in midday  
sun to liquid yellow edges. They run  
through intervals of blue sky to straight green  
lines that fall like water

with the grain

of the universe

they are drawn on, like water on the face of

rock

until

you'd swear it was a crowd of women

holding more than

half the sky on parasols rippling

like waves, or flowers rising from rock

beside the walk. At the bottom

of the page,

green pools so lines appear to rise like stalks

to bright flowers from broad leaves,

a garden rising where light falls,

brush kissing the page once for every flower,

painting by stepping away from every kiss,

even when it wants to linger. Long slow kisses are

spectacular blossoms, red where the brush

pivots, orange where it turns through yellow.

Brush turns the way the world turns, slow –

no need to hurry.

we have all the time in the world.

21 May 2010

As is our habit, we will  
make new lives that begin  
now with absences, people who are not  
here, peopled by those who are. We may call  
this forgetting, but there is no denying the real  
presence of all who have been here but  
are elsewhere now

22 May 2010

The Buddha nature of three  
small sparrows is not  
lost in the shadows of ten

thousand casinos here. They  
live on the excess, not  
the kindness of strangers.

And the strung out blues man from Chicago,  
Buddha himself, sucking on the sweetest thing  
he can find before seven in the morning,

before he lets last night go  
wants to shake hands again and again  
because he wants to touch a world he knows,

and he is glad to find a touch of home  
in the way I say Chicago. When I tell him  
I have to run, he says walk.

We laugh. I promise.

24 May 2010

here, now, one  
thing after  
another

another  
here, now an  
other before

one thing or  
the other  
all together

now, then,  
again

every moment is  
in every moment. all  
is once and for  
all, nothing more

not this  
then that  
this this this  
only this

this all began with you  
wondering whether we  
might not be

better off without language  
having learned sometimes to follow  
your thinking out loud

I think we  
might be

but no promises  
only yes,

now we  
are, for  
now, no more

know? no  
way. know

nothing. nothing  
doing. that is all.

2 June 2010

Even if you were not there  
you hear the sound of last night's rain  
when you see roses battered,  
peonies at prayer in every garden

Pink and red petals carpet  
damp earth primed for  
resurrection. A brother's blood  
cries out from the ground,  
a reminder that  
the sound of a  
murder always arrives  
before you see  
the light,  
the time  
between a  
measure of distance. Can't say  
whether we are waiting

now or mourning what we thought  
we had before the storm blew in

Sparrow lights six inches from my morning  
pastry, demanding her share while  
a crowd gathers some steps away.  
But she is too shy to take the crumbs  
I drop at my feet, homage to her  
admirable chutzpah.

A deep breath before she flies in  
and what was hers alone is the center of a mob.

3 June 2010

every person on the street at ten  
this morning is talking, but no  
two to each other

I do not think of art in  
this age of replication, but of thou  
in worlds of chatter

no one has ever been more alone than  
one of these monads with a cellphone window  
but solitude is another matter

every man is an island  
entire in himself, but no  
*ich* now, no *du* here

nothing more than windows on webs of desire

4 June 2010

three days of rain and a flurry of mushrooms  
spring from wet grass next door the way  
a surprise springs from nowhere

takes place where some thing perfectly predictable in retrospect  
happens unannounced, here, now, where no where was

see? there – that's it

7 June 2010

I am learning to embrace the absence  
where you were in the lifetime  
we lived together for a moment once

I know your heart there

still

thinking it is climbing stairs  
that stopped it beating  
when it is the memory of it breaking

the silence between  
we need to live  
to catch our breath again

10 June 2010

no stepping twice into this  
same city always otherwise

stands of morning mushrooms linger  
after rain, shards of light

break across the walk until  
a bed of roses startling pink

spring from them to lean  
into a line of the whole

dazzling sun on the lake  
touching the shore of the city

like a lover coaxing it  
to climax, always

a surprise, always  
the first, always one

step, not one  
step at a time

13 June 2010

going up in flames is  
such a pretentious way  
to die, Empedocles –

as though your carcass  
would transform that indifferent fire  
into a light to enlighten nations.

Aetna is nothing more than a place  
and a time where a fire  
already perfect brings to mind

the fact that you were always ashes.  
Coughing up those sandals was  
a perfect joke.

You cannot vanish without a trace.  
The shoes at the door will be enough  
to make believers

think you are at home in that fire.  
Your desire not to be immortal  
but to be thought

immortal never changes.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,

Aetna knows those empty sandals

contain all there ever was of you.

18 June 2010

Mushrooms linger  
three days after  
rain, real

presence out of place  
in dazzling sun  
of dark

days, of secrets  
waiting unspoken  
for pregnant moments

to be born

At the next table, chatter  
about google keywords mapping  
a flu pandemic

better than the CDC.  
Private conversation audible  
to the end of the block

as I walk away, unthinkable,  
but what if Microsoft bought Google  
ten years down the line?

They have everything.  
vital to our life everyday  
replaced the library  
the Library of Congress  
they should...

22 June 2010

Memory fails and there is  
no way to tell  
waxing from waning  
moon. But there is  
no denying it is  
more than half full  
opposite sun  
as night falls.

The women racing to catch the el  
shout *I love you* to someone  
they are leaving. One  
mutters *we have to stop*  
*doing that*, and it makes you  
want to ask if she  
means racing to catch the train,  
shouting *I love you*, or leaving.

Someone standing  
in the sudden absence  
where they were who does not know  
if the moon is coming or going  
tonight hopes it is leaving  
but cannot deny she is gone.

14 July 2010

in sticky slow summer  
light, one could almost be  
forgiven for thinking  
three sigmas sufficient  
to confirm a god particle  
the same size and shape as  
the hole in the story one has heard  
ten thousand times or more  
stranger things leave tracks every day  
in sweet drinks left uncovered  
at every sidewalk cafe,  
and no one says a word  
about margins of error.  
fish it out  
and finish the drink, never  
mind the sorrows that have  
drowned in it.

meeting, parting, going,  
coming, no matter, no  
body needs to be told, always  
coming, never come, life goes  
on. it takes a strong memory  
to forget, to remember parting  
before the act, to let go  
before the embrace. no.  
body needs to be told  
no body forgets

20 July 2010

it would be a mistake to assume  
the man sleeping steps from the path is  
homeless. he appears to be  
at home where he is, without a care  
in the world

half a block before, jewels glittered,  
but you knew they were glass  
without scratching a mirror

the music in  
a woman's voice  
saying i'm just sayin'  
catches sunlight, sparkles

and the rabbit in broad daylight  
under a stand of evergreens  
did not for a moment believe himself

invisible. he sat motionless  
so the city would disappear, meaning  
he would not have to be, because  
your I would not be there to see him,  
no matter what you thought. it's all  
in your head, and  
he has nothing  
to be afraid of

2 August 2010

**creating an accident**

nothing ( is made  
from ( nothing, and  
the making of ( it matters

more than ( anything  
you can ( imagine. think  
nothing ( of it,

and I ( imagine  
no one will ( give it  
a second ( thought. these

things happen, ( you know  
just one more ( thing, not  
the end of the ( world.

10 August 2010

Two wasps dance circles three stories  
above ground, rising on heat the way  
air rises when sun warms it. They  
could be dancing for ancestors burned because  
my grandmother wouldn't have them nesting  
in the hollow pipe that held the end of her clothesline  
opposite the low branch of a struggling tree.  
The hollow was a perfect place to hide  
until Grandpa stuffed it with newspaper  
and put his lighter to it, ahead of his time in killing  
without poison when he could. Or they could be  
dancing on the grave of enemies who will not survive  
this rising heat, who never learn to dance  
on nothing, take what comes, refuse the gift of fire

that will consume them.

But knowing nothing other than the dark present  
of a sheltered space, they never remembered  
the absent

fire.

10 September 2010

**why look for the living among the dead?**

winter keeps an eye on the calendar  
here, makes its presence known  
when the page turns on September

a hint of chill under  
autumn wind, not  
time just yet

to settle. harvest  
time is right for a new year

spring is easy, but this  
is the right time  
to begin

to begin – a gentle  
reminder of cold  
death, gather

grain for flour.  
take, eat, but not  
all of it

what does not  
feed you now will  
rise come spring

14 September 2010

after three months of dry,  
trees surrender to fall,  
stripped bare weeks before  
you'd expect it

steps on dry leaves  
sing winter.  
walkers lean in to the chill music

21 September 2010

to Coyote

You must have heard me call  
your name when I stopped on the street  
in Santa Fe to introduce Ganesha  
to a friend as that trickster, luck –  
and then again to call to mind  
the fear every empire feels when  
a sharp eye on a ragged edge  
makes it hard to deny what is  
always out of control.

Thank you for singing last night,  
for crossing my path  
where the road turned south  
this morning, for  
a nod, a glance, for seeing  
    eye to eye  
        in that one moment.

28 October 2010

## Illinois

Field planted in October is true black  
dirt. Six shades of ocher grass remembers  
prairie before it was broken, knows what seems to be  
one truth is a complex composition that balances  
a whole spectrum so it can hold the light  
to hold a new crop in come spring.

You can see blue and red and yellow  
on the edges

where the sky cuts it where the fence  
cuts it where the plow cut it, dying

to begin again. A few stray  
stalks stand the day after the first hard freeze,  
thinking reeds that do not have

the memory of grass –

just enough to keep green in mind when the winter  
wraps every color it can imagine in cold

so bright it could leave you blind waiting  
for the day after the last one.

Earth rolls north  
while river stands fast, stretched across  
the middle of the middle of the continent. Sometimes it shudders  
at the river's touch, steps back and is immersed  
in it. They call this a flood, a memory of water,  
but it is earth

lost in the river's caress.

It carries all the delta it can  
in its hands. Blues slip through  
red to make the corn sweet,  
and it settles into some idea of north,  
fluid, an island,  
like earth on water.

29 October 2010

**big river**

Never mind frost. Yellow  
mums rise sparking  
in morning sun

on the river,  
spill over rocks  
to embrace it,

dance on water, still  
at the center of the turning world

Half moon froze  
                    last night.  
Shattered by sunrise, it scattered  
          over the face of  
                    morning

30 October 2010

A week after the first killing frost, leaves  
on the Mississippi have turned to a muddy river  
waiting to be bottomland on the far side of winter.

A few sturdy souls, still yellow, are fool's gold.

The black dirt  
these leaves will be  
is the city Coronado was looking for

5 November 2010

**losing a mind, fall**

From the rough center of the tree yellow  
wanders through green to the end of the branch  
like a mind lost  
until there is nothing, the poem  
where the end of the mind stops blue in sun  
cold

    red brown trunk gives way  
to green leaves clinging to one last branch  
yellow turns it to the end, sky  
nothing to do but fly

or fall for it

11 November 2010

November asters sway in gentle breeze  
like princes of the Church  
hoping some spirit will settle – fingers  
silently caressing what is not yet there.

They could learn a thing or two from common sparrows  
who have been speaking in tongues  
since sunrise.

Their only power  
lies in knowing  
they have wings

and a great wind  
to hold them  
when  
the bough  
gives way

28 November 2010

Fat squirrel in Bughouse Square  
feasts on birdseed piled high  
under a sign that says “Do not  
feed the pigeons.” No  
anarchist, he has no doubt  
the seeds were intended for him –  
and being civic minded,  
he expects to eat them all  
so there will be no danger of a bird turning  
the kind soul who left them  
into a scofflaw. He keeps his eyes  
on the sign that says “Curb your dog,” knowing  
that, too, is for him, knowing  
dogs uncurbed can give squirrels hell.  
His sister on the far side of the park  
don’t need no stinkin’ soapbox, gives  
every passerby an earful so they  
won’t forget what this  
square was made for.

Steven Schroeder is a poet and visual artist who lives and works in Chicago. More at [stevenschroeder.org](http://stevenschroeder.org).

every person on the street at ten  
this morning is talking, but no  
two to each other

I do not think of art in  
this age of replication, but of thou  
in worlds of chatter

no one has ever been more alone than  
one of these monads with a cellphone window  
but solitude is another matter

every man is an island  
entire in himself, but no  
*ich* now, no *du* here

nothing more than windows on webs of desire

[stevenschroeder.org](http://stevenschroeder.org)