



# **the epic opposite**

**poems and fragments, 2004-2013: volume ten**

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*the epic opposite* is the tenth 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 tenth of ten notebooks and were drafted between January 2011 and October 2013. 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 “a gift of fire: trace” (acrylic on canvas, 2018) for the front cover and a detail of “empty promises 2” (oil on canvas, 2015) for the back cover.

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

Chicago

October 2022



6 January 2011

squirrel high in a bare tree  
curses cold white snow  
dances on it

never mind

winter mind. snow can  
make nothing of it, squirrel  
never goes quiet, and sun  
is already climbing back to summer  
on the other side of gray

sun makes a mirror city  
on the surface of the river  
the city on the shore  
reflects the rippling city  
written on water, every  
plane surface a vision

night city shadows  
towers of light, spirit  
on the face of water  
making its way in a river

night city shadows  
towers of light, spirit  
on the face of water  
in a slow river  
making its way to a body

tonight the city is  
a slow river of light  
making its way

in a river  
to a body of water  
that could be ocean  
night shadows towers of light  
on the face of the water,  
moving there in light  
now let there be a city



tonight the city is  
a river of fallen light  
making its way

to a body of water  
that could be an ocean

night shadows  
towers of light  
on the face of water

moving, there is light,  
now let the city be

20 January 2011

world's on the way to ice  
tonight, but the river refuses  
to stop for it. Cold as the city is  
in January, light it sheds dances  
on living water. Snow tonight, snow  
tomorrow. River will take it in, flow  
as every river in the world flows  
to an ocean that takes them  
in, takes them in, but does not overflow.

world's on the way  
to ice tonight  
but the river  
refuses

to stop. Cold  
as the city is  
in January, light  
it sheds still dances  
on living water.

Snow tonight, snow  
tomorrow. River will  
take it in, flow

as every river  
in the world flows  
to an ocean  
that takes them in,  
takes them in, takes them  
all in, but does not overflow

4 February 2011

Two days after the blizzard, plows make mountains  
to move every place two paths meet,  
and there are people on the street with shovels  
ready to deal. Sunlight is falling  
steadily, and waiting has been accumulating  
for a week. Snow

relaxes under a blanket of it into the gray city,  
and anyone with a little time on their hands  
knows it will be impossible to tell  
them apart by next week.

The city will get through February as it  
always has, and time will wear a path  
in waiting  
from memory the way dogs have  
in snow, knowing  
where they have been  
before even though  
their eyes deceive them  
now.

10 February 2011

Shadow on snow could be  
a leaf falling in another season  
but in the universe of ice  
it catches my eye by being  
out of place, moving  
at odds with  
the drift of winter  
across the tracks  
ahead of the train  
to catch a little warmth  
beneath the bodies  
huddled on the platform  
                    in moonlight.

At the end of the line,  
a pigeon warms  
in the heat of not knowing  
one's place, goes  
the other way, underground.

11 February 2011

Snow is a matter of memory.  
The vocabulary of every storm  
is what can be brought to mind  
of all that was before.

This one is all 1999, 1979,  
1967 – and you have to wonder  
why the summer didn't leave them  
loving the snow.

East of Hannibal and Lyle Lovett  
is going on and on about penguins  
when I spot a hawk perched  
on six feet of what has been  
drifting since before the blizzard began  
last week. I could have lost  
control watching for him to fly  
but you can't lose what you never  
had. In that moment the hawk  
went nowhere and I, my mind  
on the road again, moved on past a sign  
barely visible above the snow line  
that said *Louisiana 19 miles*,  
thinking twice about  
where I am now.

15 February 2011

a handful of nothing that matters,  
two thin strips of an old cotton rag,  
pulped, lost in water –

hands dance like Butcher Ting,  
arc a screen through water like  
panning for gold –  
fiber finds its own way.

Making paper is all about letting go,  
a poem, ready to begin again.

19 February 2011

Still without form and void,  
the world is nothing  
more than webs of words  
woven between chance encounters.

Some god says let there be  
and thinks it good, but it is  
no such thing. This place

makes time  
bend. Holding a cup  
for the moment  
of warmth more than  
what it contains,  
the Stones sing

*i can't get no,*  
and I try and I try  
and I try to embrace  
what is not there,  
and say it is good  
it is very good.



Miles and miles and Texas is  
undeniable and I can't imagine  
thinking the place flat, thinking it  
one thing, when there are  
so many shades of ocher  
and brown in February  
north of red dirt and spring  
no more than a week  
after a year's worth of snow.

17 March 2011

“Comanche moon” they  
say, as though they  
remember making their way  
across the plains by  
the light of it  
or shuddering  
at the thought  
of someone else. But they

mean no more than that  
it is big and bright  
like stars at night  
deep in the heart – but  
you wouldn’t know it

in the glare of the city, full  
of the moon tonight, even  
inside out  
of sight of it, where crowds, still  
making the world flat, still

see nothing but  
some city on the next hill.

23 March 2011

Placing the color of dry grass  
on a spectrum of ochre,  
I stumble upon a deer  
that has not been dead  
long and say “yes, that’s it” –  
the tipping point at the edge of brown,  
the shade death thirsts for  
until, at last, forgetting, it is  
no more than white bone  
sun bleached, nothing like  
the color I placed just now.

25 March 2011

### **This Machine Kills Fascists**

South of Okemah, tumble down  
Sunshine Corner's been boarded up a long time.  
No gas, no ice, no burgers, no fries, no matter  
what the sign says. Flowers that would be weeds  
anywhere but here have made a place out  
of every crack in every asphalt surface,  
and they are in it. Vines  
are creeping up the walls, taking their chances  
on an inevitable opening in the roof made by  
time passing, a hundred year winter, hail,  
a thunderstorm last night. They like the odds. They know  
Woody's not far, and they've heard he always saw a sign  
as an invitation to the other side. That rust  
on the old water barrel is an ink brush painting.  
Brittle grass is rice paper almost white in sun.  
It takes the ink well, dances with the light  
that gets in everywhere with flowers,  
not a weed in sight.  
No one is illegal,  
nowhere.

27 March 2011

Crossing this border  
where the sign says  
“drive friendly, the Texas way”  
I’m wondering, as I always do,  
which when a warning flashes  
on the dash: ice is possible,  
and I think this car  
has been here before, glance  
at the thermometer and say  
out loud, “anything is.” It’s above  
freezing, barely, so it could be  
a joke – but I’ve hit a bridge  
in weather like this that spun me  
all the way around, opened  
my eyes, and I said to the other  
person in the car, “it’s a miracle  
we’re alive,” as it always is.  
A couple of hours later, passing  
the Jesus is Lord not a swear word  
travel stop, I smile and think  
it is good to have this much in common  
with the born again sure folks  
who own the place and are  
scared as hell somebody wants  
whatever they have bad enough

to take it from them. It's a miracle  
we're alive, as it always is.

3 April 2011

## **Prairie Rehab**

It's been strung out on progress  
so long it has the gaunt  
appearance of a junkie  
who lost his religion  
some time ago.

That explains  
the crooked sign in the middle  
of a roadside plot carefully cultivated  
to let go, and I would like nothing more  
than to check myself in voluntarily.

29 April 2011

Three days of rain and there is nothing left  
to fall. Nothing falls, light, for a day and blue  
lulls you into dreaming this rainy season  
has come to an end. But you can feel it  
in gray that gathers everywhere there is  
an edge, and everywhere there is an edge. Not  
spring, but winter perching before it flies again.



30 April 2011

That bird singing four notes would be the one  
to ask about the butterfly, Zhuangzi. No  
doubt in his mind who is dreaming whom  
in this world made like every other on edge  
of edges. Ask if something is real  
and the answer is always yes.

1 May 2011

Seeking silence in every uncommon tongue  
I stumble upon, it is no less  
strange in this  
place than in any other –  
I find every other place wholly  
other. The music escapes me.

2 June 2011

Relentless. The again and again  
and again of it laid to rest in  
the hyphen between  
a beginning and an end  
lonely people touching  
nothing but a name repeating  
to no one again, again, “our war, our  
war, our war was  
different,” willing the again  
and again to mean  
willing again and again  
until there is no doubt  
the same goes on forever

13 June 2011

absence smells like an ocean of grass  
in flames  
the accident of its origin is a crossroad and a map spreads out  
from it, flattening years and miles to a line of people  
and places you know marking where the wind took it  
all the news is of things lost or not  
but it's the stories or the pieces of them you fear  
consumed

no rain

present as

an absent god

in fire that was

not there

a moment before

nothing to stop it

and all you can think of

is water

3 July 2011

no small thing, this  
pointing

the way  
where story  
thinks itself

at war with vision

without a vision  
the people perish

intriguing, this  
telling

stories for the dead

not how you play  
the game, the game

itself, no point  
piling up points

in this dark place  
playing wei chi  
thinking pinball

missing the prayer bell  
that may just be the point,  
no verb contained

though not for lack of walls  
not for lack of icons

hanging on them

every icon  
a crack, a crack  
in everything. that's how

the light gets in

bathed in blood, the way  
the creator is

8 July 2011

what is not here is always  
here. there is no there  
there, it is hard

to plant one green thing

out there is  
America, seeing

in a circle

the city is where I am, we  
is that by which I am  
mountains have always waited

for nothing

somebody's grandmother  
thought a white horse  
is not a horse

the whiteness of the dog  
passes, the dog  
remains

my daughter's eyes  
roll at the mention  
of Iowa suffering a day there  
will suffice for a lifetime in poetry

around here, we pronounce that Ohio

a just word is worth  
a thousand pictures  
nothing always rights itself

like a river  
that eats levees  
the way you say  
modernity ate its scholars

tadpoles are a city at your feet  
trains pass, nothing in the poem

water never leaves the sky  
every real boy lies  
in some bloody city

dry is forgetting how to love it  
so long every vine withers  
every prophet turns and runs



a poem is the failure of stem cells  
not finished, abandoned  
a failure we will  
not to correct

we are  
now, beginnings

crows see the light, get happy

spirit breathes  
on the face of every body

of water, pray  
for rain

sun, you know,  
doesn't rise at all  
it stands, still  
while the world turns  
dripping waves of joy

take, read, this is my body

light catches everything,  
contains nothing,  
a blessing

9 July 2011

Decay so natural it's not even necessary  
to pause and breathe just hold on  
to the only matchstick pole not broken  
in this hurricane while the camera rolls  
stand pat go on talking and keep the show on the air

Matter of fact autopsy of the sacrament of marriage in  
a voice so Tennessee soft it covers  
every sharp corner the way kudzu does till all  
the world is green and you'd swear there's nothing there  
that could cut you all "smiles bland and expected as name tags."

You see the undertow at the front door when  
you open it, haint standing there like an orphan,  
and you take her in because you can't ever  
leave the cold that will drown you homeless  
and you know you have to keep the door open  
for the spirit that will make you sway  
like dancing, but it is no sin

just like the gray contempt for the sky  
you call a storm edged perfect day looks  
like hope, but it is no virtue

take a hard look at what you once thought love  
and you won't doubt the world is flat

no matter what they say about that oblate  
spheroid shit. the edges are there all right  
shrouded in time like Spanish moss  
so dense no light escapes, and it  
will cut you.

call all this shit miscellaneous  
for a laugh in a voice sweet as  
candied violets full of hope  
purring like a kitten  
but you know there's a touch of winter  
behind all of it, and it's bound to come.

2 July 2011

Mississippi's memory is longer  
than Illinois. Crossing both days  
after a flood, it looks like the smaller has slipped back  
between the old lines, while the big river  
lingers over absences that look from the bridge  
like a body of water – recalling  
    what it was like to fill every low place  
thinking limits never lost  
waiting for another storm to remember like the last  
one, the one everyone in the diner is talking about today,  
waiting for a flood of memory.

13 July 2011

**it's a small world after all**

*Marceline, Missouri*

They've rolled up all the grass  
and piled it in the fields.  
Sign says "Ten Mile 4,"  
and I suspect the place  
is twisted, wonder  
what kind of beginning lies  
six miles back on that road,  
cross the middle branch of one  
river after another, begin  
to think there is none.

Then another sign:  
"Walt Disney Home Town Museum,"  
and the place curving back on  
itself begins to make sense.

Missouri's flooded and they've closed the bridge  
opposite Atchison. Detour winds just a touch more  
south than east and keeps the river out of sight,  
but I know there's no way west to Kansas but over it.  
It ends at 116 with no way marked to the road I was on.  
Finally find myself on the edge of Kansas City,  
turn west toward Topeka and a wall of hot  
that's settled on the plains this summer, cross the river  
wide as a lake here but not high as the Eisenhower  
interstate built to survive a nuclear war, settled  
for now until it makes its way slow to Mississippi  
mud, leaves bottom land rich  
as it always has  
remembers longer than folks who  
inch closer every year,  
unaware of the rhythm of the river, fight longer  
to keep the water in line until the levee  
breaks and they see the river widen  
as it is uncontained.  
Farmers know corn thrives on what settlers forget here.  
They know how to wait, and the  
crop will be better next year than ever.

15 July 2011

## Nostalgia

Not in fact for what  
was but for what never has but  
might have been.

Every nostos  
makes its own way  
and there must always be  
a trace that cuts beyond  
what it is possible to contain.

On Kansas Avenue in Marceline,  
Uptown Theater marquee says  
Spirit of Mickey July 14 1998

Spirit has a weathered look about it,  
but the Sorcerer's Apprentice in the window  
has the same smile, imagineering Main Street USA  
right in the middle of it.

Sick and tired of being  
sick and tired, I told  
my wife I was looking in  
to joining the Franciscans.  
Knowing I was temperamentally  
a Trappist or  
anything discalced,  
She said what do they  
make you do  
and I said nothing  
then thought again  
and said preach good news to  
birds and she said  
you do that already  
and (discounting  
the possibility that  
she meant nothing)  
I said they  
preach to me. I just say  
amen and all this came to mind  
today when a friend reminded  
me that this is Saint Bonaventure's  
day and she is trying  
in his honor to ignore  
little annoyances  
but I suppose those  
would be the ones a Franciscan  
would embrace – suffer the little



you know and that got me thinking  
about the mind's journey, the  
mind's journey in, as I  
recall, not up, to  
God, present wherever  
it was, said a preacher  
of another order but  
a similar mind, you left  
the divine,  
which could be  
anywhere.

Turn. Turn.

Take off your shoes.

Every step you step  
you step on holy ground.

16 July 2011

*what you can't say, sigh*  
*what you can't sigh, sing*  
*what you can't sing, dance*

Red moon rises clear  
as day on the edge of the city  
so sweet you can taste it  
from here tonight  
and I think this  
is where the earth down here  
gets red and I hope it stays  
a long long time – long enough  
for all that light to fill  
us with all the madness we need to remember  
what a red state is  
what a red state Oklahoma is  
It just hangs  
slow, slow shining, nothing  
but light  
and there's  
space enough in that  
for every single one of  
us to dance.

The side of the sign that don't say  
nothing is the side of the sign  
that belongs to you and me.  
If you see something, they say,  
say something – but I say  
you can never  
say I without  
meaning we  
even when  
you forget.

I say look at that moon like nothing  
you've ever seen and say what you see.  
Dance.

Up don't mean  
down and  
out don't  
mean in  
unless we  
stand together.

Fields December yellow in July  
and the heat sinks  
in. Maize is good for nothing  
now but turning under to feed  
hope this dry  
don't settle in to stay  
Heat's the only thing growing,  
and dry

17 July 2011

Fire danger fire  
danger fire danger –  
rhythm of the same sad wind  
driving tall turbines  
west of Oklahoma City  
drives the sign  
even a foolish generation  
doesn't need when  
there is nothing but dry waiting  
to burn as far as you can see  
any way you turn today.

Lights on fire trucks speed the same  
rhythm south to something  
I can't see burning,  
but I don't have to.

Both diners in  
Weatherford are  
closed at breakfast  
time on Sunday,  
and I consider  
asking one of  
the people  
crossing against  
the light at the

Baptist church  
if there's a  
place in town  
for an atheist to get a cup  
of coffee. But nowadays,  
atheists are fundamentalists  
too, so I'd rather not call on  
that name – just smile  
and nod as they pass.

“...but God calls it,” says  
a sign, and I wonder  
why people of faith seem  
determined to use  
words hard fast waiting  
to burn

water on the table in  
Clinton without asking,  
and the waitress  
is asking someone  
at the next table  
to friend her

while some  
country singer  
goes on about  
letting him down  
easy.

25 July 2011

## **Political Philosophy**

Dog with the look of a philosopher  
confirms it when he stretches his leash taut  
across the walk, forcing me to watch my step  
for a moment while my eyes meet his.

Man on the other end says “sorry,” and  
I say “no problem” without thinking, then  
laugh, because the dog just wisely posed it.



16 August 2011

An old metal watering can hangs  
at the right angle to shelter  
a summer colony of polistine wasps  
in a corner just far enough  
off the beaten path for a civil  
relationship. I left it there  
long after I moved the garden  
for the squirrel to drink from.  
But these gentle squatters are welcome.  
These sisters of St. Benedict are social  
insects, but the whole convent  
is a hermit like me. They  
need each other, but they all  
need distance, and they all  
keep their distance, mostly  
out of sight hoping to stay  
out of mind. One  
has wandered into my  
kitchen this morning, lost. I  
open the screen,  
avoiding her sting,  
and wait until she is between  
it and the window. Close  
the window and tap, which  
sends her spiraling to find edges  
until she chances upon the opening

I've made not knowing or caring who made it,  
hurries back to the house she and her sisters made,  
out of sight, out of mind,  
their work  
like a prayer  
to let the world  
be for now.

6 October 2011

autumn flowers know this is a dying season,  
know a scene when they see one when the last leaf  
settles slow on the breeze it grew green waiting for  
turns turns turns the color the rose was  
in summer settles on dark soil, waiting for  
the next to come down slow, and the flowers know  
what shade to turn turn turn to make a painting of it on  
the surface of a day like summer on the edge of snow  
    know this is a dying  
    season know it is know  
    it is not

**no idea**

autumn flowers know this is a dying season,  
know a scene when they see one  
when the last leaf settles slow  
on the breeze it grew green waiting for,  
turns turns turns the color the rose was  
in summer, settles on dark soil,  
waiting for the next to come down slow –  
and the flowers know without thinking  
what shade to turn turn turn  
to make a painting of it, dancing  
on the surface of a day like summer

on the edge of snow, know this is  
a dying season, know it is,  
know it is not finished.

18 October 2011

Season turns on north wind  
in no time. Sky darkens in  
the east, and you know  
something's going to fall  
even without the rainbow.  
But you can count the drops on  
the windshield when you drive  
west again, into dry, and you know  
what rain will fall will fall behind you  
while all that falls on high plains  
    ahead is sun and still more dry.

Season turns in no time  
on north wind. Sky grows  
dark in the east, and you know  
something's bound to fall –  
even without the rainbow.

But when you turn again  
and drive west, into dry, you know  
what rain will fall will fall  
behind you, while all that falls  
on high plains ahead is sun and more dry still.

Season turns in no time on north  
wind. Standing on high ground at sundown  
while sky grows dark in the east, and you know  
somethings bound to fall, even without the rainbow

On north wind, season turns in no  
time

4 November 2011

**autumn**

since spring first burst with anticipation  
green in every single one of them, maple  
leaves have been all waiting for this yellow  
red dance to earth waiting, waiting, again  
waiting. ten thousand single sighs circling  
make this breeze, fall, knowing repetition  
amplifies. no call to shout to be  
undeniable: like earth waiting, waiting  
to be, one, beyond counting, more than one can know.

20 November 2011

**say what?**

Ask what this has to do  
with that and there is  
nothing to say but what  
do you make of it? That  
would be it, then: say  
nothing there is to say  
and get on with making  
another time when  
some stranger says what again.



5 December 2011

One occupation after another drives  
the city this morning. Early, it is  
a man with a shopping cart sifting slow  
through what has been discarded by  
people who think themselves poor. He is  
followed by trucks with crews to keep them  
moving. No sifting unless something gets in the way.  
Trucks struggle around corners into alleys  
where tired drivers abandoned cars late  
the night before betting traffic

    cops would sleep in Monday or linger  
        over coffee and give the streets  
            time to sort themselves out  
                before thinking about tickets.

Every child at the school at the end of the block  
    is driven, and a line of buses

17 March 2012

It's the absence of edges, not  
light that makes nothing  
but sound visible –

blackbirds clamoring in rushes  
on the bank of the creek  
for sun coming soon

they know, frogs  
in the same register – hard to tell  
which will fly in this light

but morning is rising,  
the whole world saying  
fiat lux – and there will be when

one thing leads to another  
and you come to know what lies  
there, where they touch

## **Cahokia Mounds, Saint Patrick's Day**

Sun rose on the emperor's mound  
hours ago, the one they call monks now  
because some silent brothers occupied it  
centuries after the builders had moved on.  
Their children scattered as children do,  
until nothing was left to tie them to the place  
but stories grandmothers tell. Trappists  
should have known an abandoned city  
when they saw one, but they had in mind  
a place to pray. That would be the city.  
I am thinking of the backs that must have been  
broken by carrying all that earth, but not  
the spirits. Dig here to make a high place  
there but know what rises will fall. And  
the walls. The walls. What riffraff lived  
on the other side, the side I am sitting now –  
under a corner of the Interstate  
Defense Highway system that might  
as well be logs driven into the ground around  
the holy places where the sun  
rises when the time is right covered with mud.

What goes up must come down, and I wonder who  
will walk softly on these ruins in a  
thousand years, think them sacred, say  
how tragic they are gone – what  
grandmothers will tell stories  
to tie their children to them.

30 March 2012

1

First thing: Chicago  
two mallard ducks  
two houses down  
roost on a chimney  
to keep warm

surprised by the sudden  
turn to cold everyone  
expects in March after  
a taste of May they came  
to take for granted  
after three days running

now they make themselves  
big, stay two houses south, waiting winter  
out again

2

Then I walk the river  
in Rock Island hoping  
to see eagles. But I see nothing  
where they are not now  
but some dark wading bird watching.

Walking on the metal footbridge  
over the river, Zhuangzi comes to mind,  
I try to walk without putting my foot down  
leave no footprints while  
joggers make themselves  
big with echoes  
after they are long gone nowhere  
to be seen

I stop, look  
up the river to where it begins,  
though the beginning is  
as it always is  
out of sight  
and there are three  
dark birds on  
long thin legs  
watching,  
    as I am

Last night, I read that  
if the world's income  
were divided by all the  
people in the world  
everyone would make  
\$10000 a year, and  
I thought why

not? Why not those  
ten thousand things  
instead of all the  
things that  
make nobodies  
of some, somebodies  
of others.

31 March 2012

Last night, I read that if the world's income  
were divided by all the people  
in the world, everyone would make ten thousand  
dollars a year – and I thought why not? Why  
not these ten thousand things rather than  
all the things that make somebodies somebody knows  
nobody while others grow rich,  
go on about lebensraum

Losing my place, I stopped at a bar  
in Kansas in March and was bewildered  
by the crowd shouting.



1 April 2012

Two old roads in low fog  
burning on flint hills  
this morning while sun rises  
the way heat rises. Coyote scampers  
across the road a few miles  
before El Dorado, plain  
as day. Edges sharpen  
as the way leads to where  
these same hills are Osage.  
When I stop, wind sighs.  
What remains of the fog  
has lifted. I can see  
how easy it would be  
to get turned around in  
that soft light when it gets to blazing  
and take a lifetime finding a way  
out of it.

2 April 2012

Ginning cotton with a pasta machine  
sounds like a Taylorite dream  
to me – cheaper by the dozen,  
you know, and why do one thing at a time

when you can do two more than twice  
as fast? Cook cotton  
al dente, allegro non troppo  
so it will last – the same way

an Italian grandma, mistress  
of chaos, makes pasta that goes  
fast with the perfect sauce –  
a little of this, a little of that.

It is a matter of taste, though  
you wouldn't want to taste it  
if you want to keep breathing, which  
many Chinese grandmothers

would tell you is what it's all  
about – the way you taste  
the qi of a thing, the way

you let it be,  
the way you  
wait with the world,  
with the wait of the world,  
dancing.

7 April 2012

I will rise  
tomorrow as  
I rose today as  
I will rise each day  
this side of my dying,  
thinking the sun has risen  
when it has done nothing  
but wait for the turning world  
to turn, and I with it. Still.

dawn breaks. I see  
the light touch of rose

fingers where day caresses  
night away from sun,  
where it was, where it always was

### **Holy Saturday**

I will rise tomorrow as  
I rose today as  
I have risen every day and will,  
this side of my dying,  
thinking the sun  
risen when all it has done is

wait for a turning  
world to turn. And I turn with it. Still,  
dawn breaks. I see the light  
touch of rose fingers, day  
caressing night to slip away  
from sun, where it was, where it was,  
where it is, where it has  
been all along, burning, in luce tuam videmus lucem.

The firmament opened near Tulsa today  
loosing water above to fall  
to water below across half of Missouri,  
and I was ready to wait it out, blinded  
by rain like a wall. But the sun rose  
again while I waited in Springfield,  
and I drove on, no sign of rain,  
they say, in St. Louis, still  
Mississippian in the way  
it lines the city up with a line of water.

Two days running I have seen the moon  
near full in clouds on the horizon,  
and I have thought sun's  
rising a matter of the dark  
radiance of the moon when  
it is new.

8 April 2012

### **Honoring our Ancestors**

Up to our ankles in mud  
on the dirt road that leads  
to the cemetery in Clara,  
we know the graves  
have been swept clean  
without us this qingming.

We can see a field of bluebonnets  
on the horizon adorning every one  
and we know there is nothing more  
those who have gone before  
desire. We stand, one  
umbrella for three,  
the old church empty behind us, still  
living in this city of the dead,  
resurrection everywhere  
in spring rain.

## **Easter Morning, Lafayette Park**

Dandelions swaying in bright sun  
can't wait till Pentecost to speak in tongues.  
Messiahs all anticipation,  
they rise and rise on tiptoes

to astound those looking among the dead  
for some lost love  
living in light this morning.

Orange coffee mug says Good, good, good  
is a registered trademark, and I wonder  
if God's tov, tov meod calls  
for a class action...

If I am to believe the bright orange mug  
I sip my bottomless coffee from this Easter morning  
on Lafayette Square, "Good, good, good."® is  
a registered trademark. Though I have faith  
that oddly plural god's tov, tov meod was  
spoken under a creative commons share  
and share alike license that covers such remixes,  
I will try in the light of this new revelation  
to avoid trinities of good or  
repeat them breathless with passion

to remove every trace  
of a common, leave no  
suspicion  
of a full stop where  
there  
should be a sabbath,  
emphatic,  
passing,  
before  
the next  
let there be.



17 April 2012

## **Banshee**

It is April, but an old basset hound walks through the bar  
under an Irish flag out into summer  
just as a waitress whose eyes  
are somewhere between Cill Chainnigh  
and Dūn Būinne even without the road sign  
pointing the way  
and there is no doubt – a bucket of fries  
a sandwich and she asks if I have  
everything I need. What can I say?  
News drones on loud, Ozzie apologizes again  
and again muted on three big screens – Futbol  
at the other end of the bar, silent.  
News is the only sound,  
people shouting about  
heat, selling cars, Roundup, fathers  
home from the war for the prom. Five  
screens, and I have no idea what the  
score is. I think the offer of Newcastle when I ask  
for dark is a test. I'm not buying anything but  
one more Guinness. Irish eyes left when  
the shift changed. If I am to believe the sign,  
I'll be on the road toward Kilkenny in no time.  
And they promise a cooler day  
tomorrow – rain in the long range forecast,

waitress changes the channel. There is music.  
I still respect Fidel, and I am glad for Irish eyes on  
every edge of Boston.

18 April 2012

On Mass Ave a man dragging a blanket  
walks slow against the flow asking passersby  
if they can spare a cigarette. There is  
a chill this April morning after a day  
that could have been June, Not one smoke  
trickles down as I walk on to cross the Charles,  
pass the spring that feeds the tide  
that keeps on rising here leaving edges  
where it breaks for stowaways  
who know how to lie low,  
cling to scraps that take the chill off,  
ask for nothing more than what  
someone who has no doubt they belong  
will throw away when they step inside.

19 April 2012

Powderhouse Park is covered with white  
blossoms that fell in yesterday's wind, and I think laozi  
is thinking this is the way war is  
contained. An old mill drafted into service  
in some revolution long forgotten  
stands abandoned now in an empty park  
while a city rises.

The faint odor of the next  
war rises where  
weeds overgrow  
traces of armies that fell fighting  
the last one,  
making  
dust of bones, earth of dust,  
making of the difference someone  
thought reason to  
send children  
to die for  
one flag or the other.

2 May 2012

The day after May Day, we  
make our way through prison  
letters to spielraum and Chen,  
and the first beer  
on the menu is Revolution.

It's an IPA, but I take it anyway,  
grasping at straws

as though they were signs – if not I  
who? if not now when?

4 May 2012

In a coffee shop on Michigan Avenue, a man  
has to stop and stare and share his amazement that I am using  
a pen. "I thought no one still..." he says.  
Then, in a palace that was built for books,  
a gallery documents  
public spaces in decay in cities falling, fallen,  
Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Buffalo, Gary, Hammond,  
like the cry of a conductor on a long gone train along an edge of my life  
and I am moved to tears by the vision  
inside St. Stephen's, frozen there, a witness  
still,  
and I think these old cities falling are  
the martyrs of an empire that has no time  
to stop, no time.

15 May 2012

Fresh visions in every bed come spring  
and the shore is lined with broken signs –  
what remains of a party, spirits drained,  
icons warning poets tipsy with dreaming  
light on water diamonds in morning  
sun not to dive. Wonder  
how many thought they could  
scoop moon up in their hands when  
they were draining those spirits from bottles  
last night before they were broken.  
Roots have etched years of longing  
in dust on limestone that gives way  
to moss green where water  
                          touches it, making  
way slow to what it was in the beginning  
the same spirit brooding, waiting for a first word  
                  it knows can never contain a world,  
  knowing this is good.

Rain's painting a slow mural on a white wall  
under the drive, empty but for traces  
                          of time.

18 May 2012

I know, I know shaman's sage grows elsewhere  
in some mountainous region of the Andes  
no doubt closer to heaven. But here salvia  
everywhere is divine  
in spring, and seeing all  
these cousins, I see things every time.

\*a riot is the language of the unheard – MLK  
a memorial to a 1919 race riot

\*At the Picasso Bob Marley “Get Up, Stand Up” / Beatles “Can't Buy Me Love”

The sort of mansions the heads of these States live in –  
set back from the street  
behind iron gates – signs warn against  
loitering, trespassing

A mosque and a BP station face off like guard towers  
at the four corners of some imagined world

Every other step interrupts a photo op

The first sign the city is occupied is a helicopter hovering



over the face of the  
water as I pass the tomb of Stephen Douglas.  
There is yellow tape across the path to mark a police line  
just beyond Soldier Field, iron and steel  
fences around the museum ready to close  
Two blocks of snow plows on the sidewalk  
at Balbo – mobile barricades.

A crowd in Daley Plaza –  
Chicago cops cluster at the corners  
A line of state troopers behind barricades on the north end  
Helicopter still overhead

Someone on a cellphone walks by saying “What are you guys protesting about?”

State trooper walks by with a bunch of plastic restraints clipped to his belt – reminds me of the line of buses I passed earlier at McCormick Place, waiting for people who have been detained.

Pigeons are frantic – this crowd is not as generous as the usual

One person after another stops to take a picture of the line of troopers. They have a photographer in uniform taking pictures of the crowd.

I know I know Shaman’s Sage grows elsewhere  
in the Sierra Madre de Oaxaca  
no doubt closer to heaven. But here salvia

everywhere is divine  
in spring, and, seeing all  
these cousins, I see things every time.

North, quiet, no sign of occupation  
today. Purple clematis clings  
to an iron fence. There is  
an occasional flag, nothing  
like the field of them  
year after year on my granny's half acre.

Mansions of the sort the leaders of this occupation must inhabit, then  
a mosque and a BP station face off,  
like guard towers at two corners  
of an imagined world. Mansions  
    turn to row houses, row houses  
        to apartments that must be  
            section 8, then elegant

old houses boarded up  
and a field of weeds for sale.

The next sign the city is occupied  
is a helicopter hovering over  
the face of the water  
at the tomb of Stephen Douglas.

\*People are taking signs they did not make to wave for cameras everywhere

\*There are more people at Wrigley Field today

One voice after another saying the same thing

19 June 2012

**the raft is not the shore**

World spinning space  
to put some distance between  
makes sense in time if humans occupy  
every center – bees on edge  
who are not interested  
like swimming with sharks  
is not a strange vibe. It is  
a bird perching mid flight  
on the only branch above the flood  
without a thought  
of water, without fear  
when the bough gives way  
and she finds herself flying again.

World spinning space  
to put some distance  
between makes sense

in time if  
humans occupy  
every center

bees on edge  
who are not interested  
like swimming with sharks

is not a strange vibe. It is  
a bird perching mid flight  
on the only branch visible

above the flood  
without a thought  
of water, without a sign

of fear when the bough gives way  
and she finds herself  
flying again.

My tab says  
one revolution, one  
garden burger, comes to  
less than twenty dollars.

Two men in suits sit and order drinks  
and the waiter calls  
another revolution. I wish  
I had a Karl Marx card from ... to put it on  
but think it a bargain anyway.

26 June 2012

**Eis 1-4**

A city deep cut in a blue  
mountain, and there is fire  
in it. Ten thousand lines  
cross, ten thousand souls sold, cold  
consumes this bright space  
in the presence  
of ice

and ice and  
ice and ice.

**Machu Picchu**

Blue rises straight  
from green desert eyes see deep in a column of light  
white to the bottom of it.

Mist drops from a cobalt line  
to a bit of gray road  
visible below a shard of red  
mesa

A thin veil over the surface of the land  
but black cross covers everything but  
a sliver of sunset  
red rising

8 July 2012

## God Particles, Missouri

Everything accelerates  
when you hit Missouri  
going west on the interstate.

Sunday morning, a sign  
west of St. Louis says JESUS  
all uppercase, the way  
a traveling evangelist says it in three  
syllables when he's working  
the crowd up to the altar  
call. On one side of the road,  
a towering promise  
of adult entertainment  
in a pleasure dome –  
          on the other a sign  
says "eternal life, next  
exit." The road is lined  
with lights flashing a warning  
that the whole place could go up in flames  
if you're not careful. And even though  
you don't need to be reminded  
after a week of triple digit heat, the marquis on  
a Baptist church assures you  
hell is real and you remember



revivals where a pitch man  
who said he worked for God  
could beat the whole crowd down into submission  
– turn them at just the right moment and close the deal  
and you think in the middle  
of America you're in the middle of a damn tent meeting  
and you hope to god Oklahoma is a little closer  
to heaven but you'd bet your life the difference  
from one coast to the other is nowhere near three sigmas.

12 July 2012

It's not hot  
yet, but sun  
slipping over the horizon  
is heavy with inevitability.  
Reminds me of the voice  
on the radio yesterday knowing  
heat here is a matter of time  
and rain is not likely.

14 July 2012

That all  
the water is  
sparkling seems

undeniable  
in this light.  
Sudden rain

takes the edge  
off Oklahoma  
heat at sunset.

There is music  
in the rain,  
in the red

horizon, in  
the red dirt, in  
the hands, in

the voices, in  
this body of friends,  
remembering.

drink it all in  
you must be present to win.

16 July 2012

Morning, wait heavy  
as midafternoon.  
The weight of the sun,  
heavier than air,  
falling to earth to rise  
and fall again.

Sun can fly only so  
far without night  
to restore it while  
moon fills in  
and the people  
below  
mark its changes  
to keep time, the wait of the world.

17 July 2012

### **Making the World Flat (Again)**

Sign says *90° west longitude, one  
quarter of the way around the world,*  
and, accustomed to mile markers that  
tell me how far I am from one border  
or another, I want to say “that depends –  
as so much does – on where you started  
and which way you are going” and ask why  
on earth a roadside sign  
on an Eisenhower Interstate on  
the western edge of Illinois would assume  
that every passerby started on the edge of England.

Doe on the berm of a two lane  
highway in Missouri could be sleeping if not  
for the look in her eyes, as though  
she could not believe such a big thing  
could move so fast, as though she still  
believed she could make it  
to the safety of the woods before the lumbering  
thing coming her way arrived, as though  
the speed and the weight could not be held  
together in a single thought, as though that  
incommensurability snapped the thread

of her life there and then and I wondered  
if the thing that hit her had the same look –  
brought up short by the fragility of life –  
eyes open to the end, undeniable now.

21 July 2012

Early, a family is counting steps,  
making a game of unfamiliar names.  
A young woman with a German accent  
asks where to get off to see the city.  
It is her first time she says, but no one  
seems to know the way. She hasn't asked me,  
but I tell her to get off where I do  
show her the lake on her map, a landmark  
or two, and tell her to ask anyone.  
When I get off, I tell her to enjoy  
her visit and wonder if I should have  
given her more guidance. But we're all lost  
here and she could just as well have shown me.  
The best advice to a first time  
visitor is "get lost." Lost is the way  
to see the city. I am more concerned  
about the family counting on  
the map. Maps are rough guides that make the world  
seem flat, and travelers  
are never so  
lost as when they think  
the mask is all, see  
the costume, think  
they know  
the character.

23 August 2012

## Rock Island, Going through the Motions

The cyclist who says “howdy” just after  
he’s passed to fulfill an obligation  
but reduce the likelihood my reply  
will add the burden of conversation  
with a stranger. I understand his desire  
not to be diverted, nod though I know  
he can’t see me.

The metal bridge clanking  
all the way across the Mississippi when  
a bicycle whizzes by, and the first time  
I turn to be sure a truck hasn’t stumbled  
on to the walkway.

The waves  
the waves the waves on rocks below the river moving  
the cry of a gull, the memory of a train fresh in my ears  
that say its passing just as I  
stepped out to walk the river and I  
am suspended now above it all until I turn  
and put my foot down on solid ground  
make my way to the Blue Cat  
(never once thinking it might be  
a fish) for a Mississippi Mocha Stout,  
pub fries, Reichenbach Rye,



the last of  
    this day's sun  
        in and out of clouds  
            on the horizon,  
night rising slow

24 August 2012

If there is no  
elsewhere, this  
is it – that is  
to say spirit  
matters or it is  
not. That is  
that. That is all.

Scholars intent on  
the moment an  
I is not  
contained  
in one we or another  
agree they are  
out of time,  
and that is that.

22 September 2012

Sign after sign after sign says  
*watch out for rattlesnakes* and so

I am watching out for snakes  
on this long lonesome highway

while a long long train lies  
alongside me singing a slow

low lonely tone, gray  
between two poles on some

circle of sound  
on these plains.

I am watching for a snake,  
but she's as long gone as I

and the train fades, sound,  
the sight, until there is

nothing but this great road going  
and memories of when

we thought we were  
we long before we were, long

before we saw the moon  
off on the way to morning.

25 September 2012

Sky so big it needs the whole earth  
to lie down on. Paper said chance of rain  
today and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow  
but thin high clouds say not likely. River  
is out of sight, but it has broken flat  
into high mesas and deep arroyos  
trailing down down to where you  
would think water would be. A field of maize  
is green in the middle of ocher that shades  
from white through the color of alfalfa flowers  
to brown as brown as earth and gold  
as gold as wheat at harvest time.  
Mennonite Church on the edge of Perryton  
reminds me the opposite of a war story is an epic about farming.  
Conversation where I stop to eat is Texas  
Tech football, sounds like something  
a Zen master might say, "Tech is better than  
people think. They haven't played  
nobody but they've beaten three nobodies  
convincingly." A word or two about  
growing up here, then the conversation turns  
to banks. Guy at the table says  
they're thinking about buying  
another one. Owner of  
the coffee shop in Dodge City  
talks about the oil boom when

I ask where all the traffic on  
Wyatt Earp Boulevard is headed. I say  
“hope that works out. The problem with booms is  
bust” and he goes off on football salaries, says  
“It’s all about managing money” and I wonder  
what would be the epic opposite of that.

27 September 2012

You think yourself a moon  
reflecting starlight when  
it touches you. All

I know is the beauty  
of the world I see  
in your light leaves me

no reason to think sun brighter.

15 March 2013

Moon was smiling  
last night when we  
set out. Two stars  
for eyes, you said,  
and people would have  
taken pictures of it, said  
“Did you see the moon  
last night?” It  
could have closed  
one, a wink  
to remind two  
walkers who haven’t  
seen each other for  
a long time what  
a good thing it is  
to have a friend  
walk side by side  
like...



17 March 2013

One day, not  
once upon a time,  
a teller of tales  
made a boy a fish  
and the fish wanted to be  
the river swimming and the river  
was a crowd of children wanting to be

an ocean – and why  
not? cloud rains river  
river flows to sea  
sun melts into ocean  
ocean is the story  
that cannot contain us  
but takes us in  
takes us all in.

“No place  
like home”  
says the ad  
on the back  
of every  
seat on  
the ferry called  
Tai Shan that carries me

back to Shekou, back  
to the fringe of a city  
that was once  
like home, still  
like no place on earth,  
a home away from home.  
Name has me  
thinking like a mountain  
thinking every  
place like this is  
no place, like home.

18 March 2013

Birds rise early, sing on  
a river of traffic

making its way  
to the bottom of things,  
leaving canyons behind.

The city has made them  
singers underground,  
creatures of air  
who fit songs  
in dark places  
between passing trains.  
Sun is held at arms length  
by buildings rising.

19 March 2013

## **Cultivating Qi**

I learn by negation  
how to breathe, positions  
made unavailable by  
a city dancing between  
qigong in the square  
below Starbucks and  
traffic that will not stop.  
The proper stance is  
flowing from here  
to here, knowing  
when to swerve,  
a matter of collisions,  
a matter of avoiding  
collisions – not  
knowing, bodies falling.

20 March 2013

No idea where, only  
a magic talisman  
scribbled by a friend  
on a scrap I show  
the driver, who  
speaks it out loud, smiles,  
will not accept a tip when  
we arrive. We  
come when we  
come, still  
no idea where.

No words  
now, it goes  
without saying.

Nothing to speak of, but  
what can not be  
said. We

do not walk together,  
and what I think is  
heavy with the last

time, not  
the time before,  
but the after which

there is not  
another.

21 March 2013

## **Zazen**

Sitting meditation in a river  
flowing fast, Buddha still  
smiles. They say  
cross the river by  
feeling the stones, but on this  
busy street it is  
a matter of minding  
the gaps. No way but between  
to dwell a moment  
on this cloud of incense,  
still sitting.

24 March 2013

On a road  
you think you know  
sidewalks go  
nowhere.  
Sudden absences leave us  
walking in traffic. To take our minds  
off the narrow margin  
between the curb  
and every passing car  
we imagine ourselves  
one of them. We pass  
two dogs lounging  
behind us near  
an open gate  
They rise  
in the corner of our eyes  
we see one smiling  
at the thought of making us  
jump before he barks once  
on our heels.  
Dogs grow larger,  
margins grow smaller  
and unsure of their intentions  
as they of ours, unwilling now  
to struggle for turf, we turn back  
at last before we arrive at



the beach you were sure is  
somewhere on this road. Later,  
still walking on earth, you  
lost your butterfly  
earrings somewhere on the way.

In Central, where people walk every day  
without once putting their feet on  
the ground, I wonder if they imagine  
us walking, lost.

On the same day in another city  
altogether, we wander slowly  
through a long talk on cracks in neo  
liberal cities where artists live. A friend of friends  
says strong German beer has made her dizzy  
and I look like Marx. I imagine  
to change the world is a matter  
    simpler than to interpret  
        it, hope you are home  
    dreaming butterflies  
        who do it without thinking  
            every time they  
                flap their wings.

more to love than I can say  
too much too fast all  
conspiring takes your breath away

Walking to reach an edge where water is  
you take the measure of this city on  
what remains of a mountain poured over  
ocean. There are traces where the coastline was,  
but it has crept closer to Hong Kong – one  
state, solid, two systems

  intent on being  
a surface you can walk on without  
ever leaving the ground. We were talking  
about pigs floating on a river in Shanghai  
before we took to the landfill, food laced  
with arsenic that makes them grow fat  
before it kills them.

  With demons like this,  
one must name names. They are legion.  
Mountain broken to make a solid state of sea  
means a new river must be cut. Every river  
empties into ocean and the ocean does not  
overflow. Hong Kong is a water city,  
Shenzhen a city of earth. No floating, it rolls  
across the bay, more than a bridge.

It makes this that, does not  
bridge the gap, minds it,  
makes two cities one. We still  
leave footprints.

26 March 2013

Abrahan went along...  
Sethe went further

We were talking about time  
turning on a story on  
the voice of a people  
rooted the way grain is  
rooted in blood soaked  
soil – a story of one woman  
after another stepping  
over a line, one woman  
who took the knife took  
the life of her child...

Tears burst as a storm  
bursts hours after dark  
clouds have overshadowed  
every reason to be  
surprised. A simple story  
simply told, a woman  
unslaved as long as  
moon takes to turn  
once more faithful than  
Abraham could not

see her children  
cross the river again.  
Rain sudden as lightning  
bright as the city,  
tears still surprise, an  
angel too late for all but one,  
blood soaked earth, no  
promise, no Sarah laughing.

31 March 2013

on the way  
yet again

to seek the living  
among the dead

they think of nothing  
but the weight of the stone

birds broke morning  
long before we rose

sun waits  
stone moves

no one says  
let there be

light, again,  
yet again.

3 April 2013

Jesus looming over this interstate upper case  
has me thinking about a billboard  
for every prophet. But  
something has to be done  
about the font. The point is  
to stop traffic, to turn passersby  
to think again, to argue over  
which is first, which is last.

4 April 2013

Jesus is all  
uppercase looming  
over the interstate  
on the edge of Rolla, and  
it pisses me off. Not Jesus –  
the put-him-on-the-back-of-an-ass-  
and-ride-him-into-the-city-  
while-the-crowd-shouts-hosanna-  
today-crucify-him-tomorrow  
quality of the sign. He spoke  
with authority, for God's sake –  
and he said an evil generation would ask for it,  
but he was quiet. And he told  
friends and strangers present when  
he happened to be implicated in  
a miracle (as every single one of us  
is every single day) to keep their mouths shut.  
Just turn. Live as though you lived  
in the presence of god, nothing  
more: do justice, love  
kindness, walk humbly,  
nothing more.



9 April 2013

One cart at a time until the whole  
weight of it settles over the city,  
we have carried this sacred space, not  
god.

Priests climb the ladder of our backs. We  
wait. They say it is necessary the way  
war is necessary the way our children  
are weapons in some campaign their reason  
devised to contain our dreaming. I dream  
while I drag another load to make the mountain  
higher, and I know I am as close to god as  
they when I step on this holy ground, here  
below or there, where they say it has to be,  
and I hope to leave off making mountains of somebody  
else's madness some day, if only I can find the words  
in which to say no.

22 April 2013

Squills and daffodils  
spill over barricades  
of law abiding flowers  
until lawns with signs  
that warn they have been  
treated sweep them  
under a rug and huddle  
behind iron fences  
with gates locked. Mosque  
exchanges a knowing glance  
with the BP station on  
the corner, a long discourse  
about which corporate  
bodies are held personally  
responsible for private  
acts contained in the silence.  
Christ the King listens in  
on the edge. Fences begin to sway  
where Muddy Waters lived,  
and the sidewalk is a mosaic  
of broken glass glittering in  
sunshine. Most cardinals  
stick to the score, but song  
sparrows have been jamming  
since sunrise. Spring  
cannot contain itself

today, and when  
a young guy strolls  
by strumming a guitar,  
I can't help wondering if perfect  
love might be possible after all.

7 May 2013

sun never stops to ponder  
what some random angel says

in his heart. Still, busy  
making shadows to dazzle

crowds two flights below,  
he leaves reflection to the moon,

makes light, goes  
nowhere fast as ever.

6 June 2013

“it’s like yo’ eyesight, like yo’ eyes,” says  
a guy walking the other way, and I know he is not  
talking to me but I have not yet disentangled  
conversation from the proximity of physical bodies  
and I find myself thinking nothing I know is  
like your eyes. Someone shouts something  
I can not understand from a passing  
car and I know it is not personal but it  
pierces my dreaming and I am still trying  
to make it out when I pass someone in a  
hazmat suit fishing under the Clarence Darrow  
Memorial Bridge while birds I cannot identify  
noisily occupy highrise housing set aside  
for purple martins. A tiny yellow  
bird pursues a brown one four times  
his size that does not think to turn. Still,  
it is plain to see there is nothing like your eyes  
and no reason to try to make out what  
anyone is saying when everyone is talking  
to someone who is not there. You see what

I’m saying?

26 July 2013

1

Sign on the road to El Dorado. Three  
full stops. Says *All. Right. Here.*

Coyote crosses the road  
every time I  
pass this way,  
a sign  
for a corner of an eye,  
right to left right  
before my eyes under Jesus  
big as a billboard can contain.

2

Esteban still leaves crosses  
everywhere, and  
they look bigger  
every time

someone dreams of gold.

6 September 2013

Wars and wars and rumors of wars drone  
on and on. Red lines, boots on the ground, mind  
on days of shock and awe.

Surgical strikes by underpaid workers  
slow fast food in every corner  
of the empire while commuters  
in search of morning coffee seek  
alternatives and pundits worry

a pause  
will  
slow  
the next war.

18 October 2013

## Show Me

Sign seekers have got themselves in a *state*.  
Cross the river and every place one road  
runs into another is a promise of  
paradise. It's JEsus JEsus JEsus  
“consider a five contiguous state  
secession. Missouri Oklahoma  
Texas Louisiana Mississippi.”  
WWJD? At first glance, I saw  
“succession.” That had me tracing routes  
across a corner of Oklahoma Ozarks  
into the bayou buried alive in the blues  
well before I'm swamped in Louisiana zydeco  
and Mississippi loblolly pines still broken  
from the last hurricane. Takes me back  
to the potbellied sheriff just outside of Jackson  
who pulled me over not long after I grew  
my beard in college in the last century  
decades before the turn of the millennium  
and checked the trunk for drugs. Lucky for me,  
the trunk was empty and he didn't have  
any on him, so he let me drive on  
through Memphis to Chicago. And now  
my mind is on Jackson now, and I wonder  
if the people of that Missouri sign follow



election results. Carve this plot just right  
and it could be the homeland lost socialists  
have been longing for. Consider how  
blessed the poor could be in a place like  
that. Turn. Check to see whose face is on the coin, then  
cast the first stone whenever you  
think the time is right.

20 October 2013

Two things my mother told me the day before  
she turned eighty-four –  
she woke up on her seventy second birthday  
with “The Land Where You Never Grow Old” in her head  
and five years ago when we thought she was going to die  
she heard a song she did not know playing  
again and again. She could not call it to mind, but  
I asked her to hum it if it comes  
back to her and send me a recording so I can write it down.  
It will, but she won’t, because she does not  
talk to machines. Her heart doctor asked her  
if she remembered when she was bleeding in  
the hospital and she said no. She said she  
remembered going in, and she remembered  
waking up: she asked if we had been playing music.  
He thought she’d forgotten, but she told me she  
wasn’t there. She was in that song,  
and a doctor of the heart (of all people)  
should understand that. He asked  
about bleeding because he was changing  
her medication, but he  
    had memory in mind, counting  
        backward from a hundred by  
            threes or some such thing. One  
would think where the heart was would matter  
    most for one who cares for them and what song is in it when.

She said she always had a song in her heart and had always  
wanted to work in a flower shop and make hats.

My sister and I drove a day between

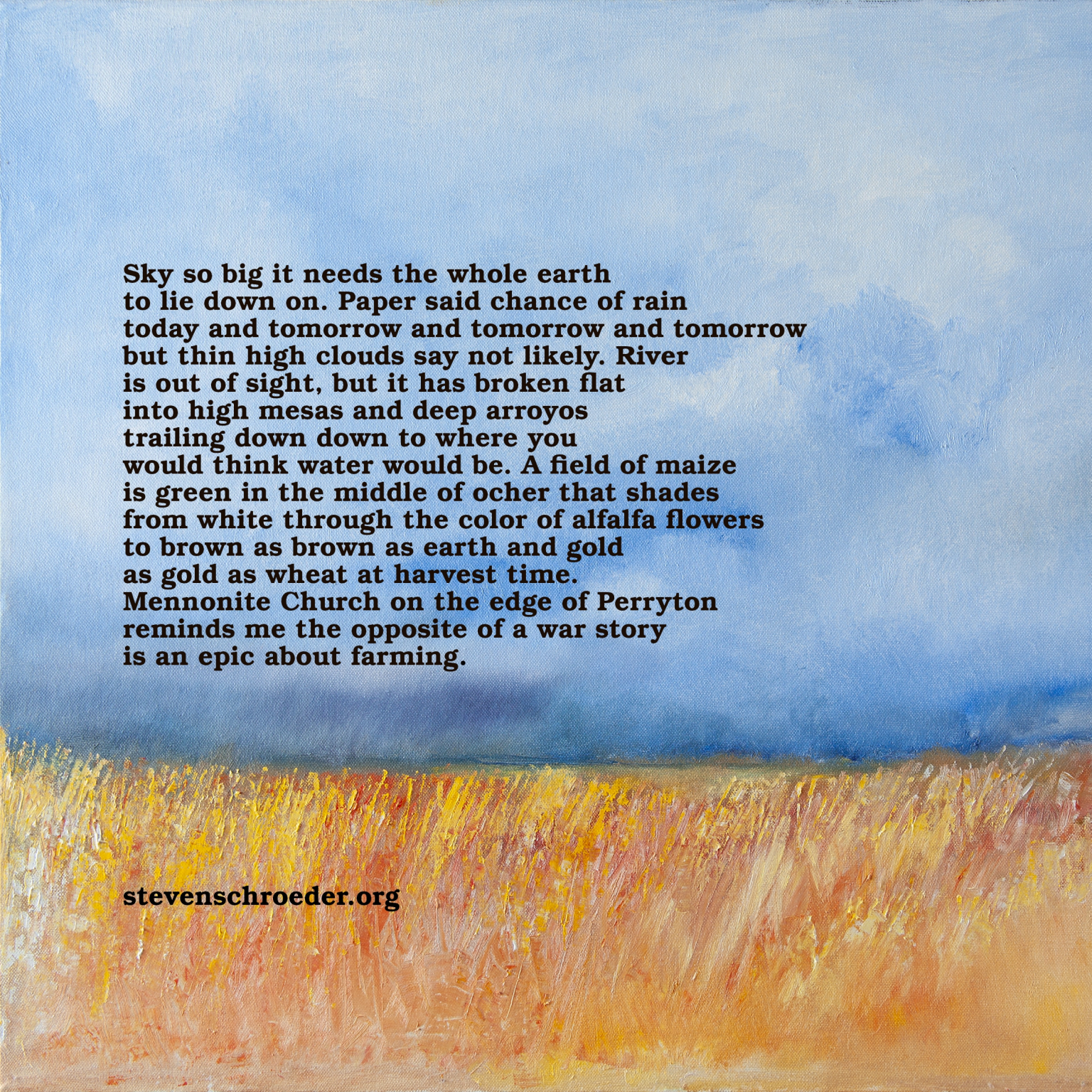
us to bake her a four layer lemon cake with buttercream frosting and  
another day in opposite directions back

to our distant lives – and now, in the

middle of it, a message on a machine, word of another  
death in the family, and I think now I can  
hear that song.



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

The background is a textured painting. The upper portion is a vast, light blue sky with soft, white, wispy clouds. The lower portion is a field of tall, golden-brown crops, possibly wheat or corn, rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of yellow, orange, and brown. The overall style is impressionistic and painterly.

**Sky so big it needs the whole earth  
to lie down on. Paper said chance of rain  
today and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow  
but thin high clouds say not likely. River  
is out of sight, but it has broken flat  
into high mesas and deep arroyos  
trailing down down to where you  
would think water would be. A field of maize  
is green in the middle of ocher that shades  
from white through the color of alfalfa flowers  
to brown as brown as earth and gold  
as gold as wheat at harvest time.  
Mennonite Church on the edge of Perryton  
reminds me the opposite of a war story  
is an epic about farming.**

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