

Poetry Series

**Steven Federle**  
**- poems -**

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# Steven Federle(1951)

Read the poems and you will have an idea of me.

# A Different Wisdom

the tree must come down.

no matter that its limbs and leaves  
hold the universe in sway,

and green life rages through bending wood.

it leans too close to the fence  
by the west wind  
brought too low.

the tree must

come

down.

Steven Federle

# A Good Day

I called today  
and heard the sharp alarms  
ring by his bed,

but you said  
it was a good day.

He was awake and  
though gagged raspy with tubes  
again humor filled his sly eyes.  
He Laughed at the irony  
that he, of all people,  
should be rendered  
speechless.

So through your speakerphone  
I spoke to him,  
uttering my limp, encouraging words  
into the silent, empty air.

But you said he had heard  
and with his eyes smiled,  
happy to once more  
be part of the conversation.

After we ended the call  
I felt your cheer; not quite hope,  
But not despair.

Steven Federle

# A Moment

She starts and stares  
into high ceiling shadows,  
alarmed by what? A sound?  
Slight movement, breeze wafting  
past the open door?

I look,  
but poor human eyes see nothing  
beyond smudged spectacles.

So I stroke her flowing fur  
And reassured, she shuts sentient eyes,  
trusting feline sense, and purrs.

Steven Federle

# A Prophecy

The cities of England burn  
with the rage of youth -  
nothing to gain  
and nothing to lose.

Blitzkrieg rains incinerate  
shops and schools  
give cover  
as they rush through  
gaping windows.

“so why not go get your own?  
a penny’s worth, a purse,  
a watch,  
designer jeans  
you know  
loot”

“nearly one million school leavers  
and graduates  
out of work,  
a generation lost  
to worklessness.”

So sirens wail as batons flail  
like v-bombs launched  
at the nation’s children

denied,  
cut-back  
forgotten

The story of our  
strangled civilization  
will be written on the back  
of bloodied balance sheets

until a new order prevails  
in the cities of England, France,

America...

the few rich  
and the many poor.

Steven Federle

# A Simple Question

'While I am asking questions which You do not answer, You ask me a question which is so simple that I cannot answer. I do not even understand the question.'  
Thomas Merton, A Merton Reader,

'And He continued by questioning them, 'But who do you say that I am? " Mark 8: 29

Clear day  
golden sky  
gives way to  
black clouds  
and I ask,  
'why? '

It's a child's question.

Within cities  
hard edges, pavements  
grey receive the red  
tide, heads fall  
and lives split open,  
spill into  
gutters fill,  
sewers, fill  
the sea,  
and like a  
persistent child  
I ask 'why? '

In the morning  
through bright  
windows I see how  
spring leans  
to summer, timid  
leaves open wide  
glow in silver light  
and green fire  
fills the wood,



and by this beauty  
silenced,  
I hear  
in tones  
beyond my hearing  
a simple question;

'who? '

but I cannot answer;

I do not  
know.

Steven Federle

# A Theory Of Everything

The machine lurches  
scattering matter through  
the expanding void.

With galaxies, stars, and dust,  
we glide wondering across  
this this vast black balloon,  
this every-day universe.

Yet microns away, mirror-wise,  
our image turns.  
With our dark twin  
we slouch towards breathless  
equilibrium.

In epoch attraction,  
our fabrics collide.  
Thus are born  
new worlds without end,

and the cosmic machine  
grinds on and on  
through vacuous eternity.

Steven Federle

# A Warm Morning

In morning's hush  
heat builds,  
leaves glitter.

Into pure silver  
dissolves the shade.

Birds are calling  
winging it  
to high, dark eves,  
any place  
where the tattered night  
may hide

and seek retreat  
from day's clear,  
searing eye.

Steven Federle

# A Windy Day

We live in the land  
of the western wind.

Sit silent and still  
under dancing leaves.  
See how it fills  
the savage trees  
with whispered passion,  
strokes rough wood,  
enraptures  
tender stems.

□

Steven Federle

# Abaude: City Rain

City rain falls down  
gutters, steep canyon walls, to  
chasms passionless.

No rushing life, no  
dark soil can restore grey pave-  
ment to muddy joy.

Steven Federle

# Abaude: Morning Rain

Living trees, grass rising  
from dark cool soil

Roses, like blood from a wound  
rise above a common weed.

Its fugitive life persists  
evading my brutal hands.

November rains  
provoke darker green

Dim clouds pour  
solemn waterfalls

Holy tears renew  
the life of our dark world.

Steven Federle

# Abaude: Night Into Morning

We lie under high arched windows  
awake in the deep winter night  
and gaze on the tallest trees  
glazed in silver light.

They reach up to the radiant moon,  
their fingers spread bare and plain,  
raised in silent prayer  
after December's cold, hard rain.

Your face is bathed in these holy rays,  
and I fight sleep; I cannot turn away  
from truth so deep as the moon beaming  
through our wintering trees ardently streaming.

But I close my eyes for a moment, then see  
dawn drawing azure from night's darkest seed,  
and the trees' golden limbs rising on high  
to praise morning's vaulting blue sky.

So I arise and turning to you I see  
how night flows to dawn eternally  
and to the resurgent world restores  
the spring of our never-ending joy.

Steven Federle

# Abaude: The Morning-Dove

dawn fires  
the cold roses  
one-  
at-  
a-time,  
when, with  
planetary urge,  
all explode to  
vermillion  
conflagration.

Then the cherry tree,  
plain in  
drab leaf,  
erupts in  
emerald  
glory,

and high  
from the bright rooftop  
the mourning-dove  
sings  
her plaintive  
song of  
summer.

Steven Federle



# Abaude: Wake Up And See

Wake  
up  
and see  
how the sun  
lights the top-most leaves  
sets astir the delta breeze, shrugs  
off night and drives darkness down into the flashing sea!

Steven Federle

# Abaude: Your Eyes

“In an age where there is much talk about ‘being yourself,’ I reserve to myself the right to forget about being myself.” Thomas Merton

When I look into the mirror  
I see the perfect mime,  
moving left or right, mimicing  
my vanity as I comb thinning hair,  
check wrinkled skin for new blemish,  
try figure out who I am;

but when I look into your eyes  
I see long drives, mountain roads  
rising to clouds, ocean mist  
washing clean the highest pines  
as the eastern sky  
grows bright with  
morning.

Your eyes  
enfold me.

Like the rising sun,  
your love renews  
my aging day.

Steven Federle

# Abernathy Road Roundabout

Bronze angel, strong arms  
lifting the rainbow,  
you stand in the center.

Our fast cars veer around  
north, then east  
to shop, to school,  
to home

but we can't see  
what you see.

Even the truckers,  
who lumber down  
Abernathy Road  
and enter the circle  
with heady grapes  
ready for press, for barrel,  
for thick, green bottle

steer past you.

Our lives are scheduled over-full.  
We all have  
some place else to go

until unfulfilled,  
we return at last  
to our bright center,  
and in your embracing arms  
we rest.

Steven Federle

# Above Berkeley (For Connie)

Past stone houses  
Along the dangerous road  
We raced, top down  
Past the homes of the rich  
Laughing  
We flew into the night  
To the top

And when we stopped  
The marchwind still filled my hair  
And lifted my breath  
High above the bright city  
(its streets were constellations Carelessly glittering  
Diamonds  
Cast into black waters)

But walking past dark bulldozers  
Beyond the battered, red, warning sign  
Our laughter suddenly fell  
Startled by the silver presence  
Above the trees.

We climbed to the peak  
As a halo encircled the full moon.

Silenced at last  
We heard an almost-human cry.  
Nearly invisible, we saw them,  
The plaintive, grazing deer.

Steven Federle

# Abscissa Of The Soul

Thomas Merton, The New Man

Go beyond  
the surface  
of things,  
deeper  
than thin soil  
fecund  
in the rain,  
but dried to dust  
by the summer wind.

Dive head first  
into the darkness;  
have faith  
that someone  
will catch you,  
that you will  
splash into  
a warm sea,  
that a strong hand  
will reach out  
and save  
your life.

If you wait  
for proof  
you will find only  
a solid stone  
at your core.

Death  
is like that...  
facts dash  
your brains,  
bring you  
to the edge  
of nothing.

But faith  
will lift you  
beyond  
your limitations,  
will bear you up  
on golden wings,  
make of you  
the Royal Ordinate  
of time and space  
and you will dance  
to the music  
of the spheres,  
as without fear  
you reach out  
to your Beloved,  
the Abscissa  
of the soul.

Steven Federle

# Advent Song

In the cold, hard dome  
of December's sky,  
distant stars carelessly glide  
above our dark, bewildered lives

as we search heaven  
for one, perfect star,  
but despair that, for us,  
heaven's too far.

What gift can we give you,  
O Bethlehem's son,  
to help save the children  
of faithless Eve and bold Adam?

Steven Federle

# Advent Wreath

The pale sun, gliding low,  
refuses to rise into leaden  
grey skies, so bleak night  
inters our sinful souls.

Oh! break out the candles  
and place them around!  
See how their fires  
consume the dark ground.

Bouquet of flame!  
devour our sins,  
and ignite winter's night  
in holy conflagration.

Steven Federle



# Advice To A Madman

Look into the sun  
and you'll sear your brains.

Deep truth burns,  
sets tender nerves aflame.

Better to look  
at the dispossessed moon.

With reflected lies  
she'll comfort you.

Steven Federle

# Advice To Candidates

Everyone wants to  
be heard! Speak louder than the  
rest, fill raucous rooms

with your rancorous  
thunder, flail all resistance  
to the ground. Your lies

will win the night; but  
in the clear morning, be still.  
Listen as small birds

rest lightly on sway-  
ing branches. With piercing song  
they paint a new day.

Steven Federle

# After Blue Day

night rises  
from dark soil  
slowly filling  
the space between  
slender blades  
spreading its  
ink over windows,  
eaves, still trees  
until the earth  
becomes one  
with the  
stars.

Steven Federle

# After The Massacre

'The real point of the contemplative life has always been a deepening of faith so that our union with God is experienced.' Thomas Merton

Close to the ground  
there is darkness.

Deep shadows  
fill the spaces,

trunk to trunk.  
They cling,  
spread wide roots,  
hold on,  
resist  
the savage pull  
of night;

but higher geese  
shout praise  
as brightness lifts  
their strong wings.

Trees nod,  
and raise high branches  
to faithful God,

positive flame  
making bright  
hidden day.

Steven Federle

# After The Storm

Light surging down  
glistening lanes

gleaming torrents  
consuming the rain

the blazing sun  
floods the damp valley floor

from somber penumbra  
the bright star breaks forth

radiance shatters  
the storm's dark pall

The sun drowns dull night  
In its flashing flood-tide.

Steven Federle

## After Viewing Helnwein's Epiphany II

Enraptured  
mouths agape, they gaze  
on the child.

They don't see her ivory breasts.

Gleaming virginity  
eludes Aryan dreams  
as she presents them with their  
Destiny.

With shadowed arm,  
in the harsh glow of  
klieg-light,  
he teaches them to  
submit.

They cannot know  
how quickly falls  
night's  
blackest pall.

---

Gottfried Helnwein, Epiphany 2, deYoung Museum, San Francisco

Steven Federle

# Afternoon Moon

On this concrete pad,  
worn thin by time and rain,  
our two iron chairs  
stand empty and lifeless

when two blackbirds descend  
onto rusty iron arms, waiting  
in uneasy repose,  
glancing sharply,

their beaks parted, tasting  
the constant wind,  
and rise when they decide  
the time is perfect,

perfect like this brilliant  
California day and  
this endless

California sky

all morning-clouds blown  
east to Nevada, and all  
morning-fog pushed back  
to the crawling Pacific,

with nothing between us and  
the absolute universe  
but the truant moon,  
nearly transparent,

faded blue  
like my jeans,  
and washed out  
to perfection.

Steven Federle

# Air Show

Cloudless thunder  
splits the sky  
as white planes rise  
on red fire.

Vertically  
to apogee,  
they rocket  
then fall  
screaming  
back to ground-  
zero

to soar again in glory  
as the cheering crowd  
shrieks for more!

From my backyard,  
I see small birds reel,  
made awkward with fear  
when the fighter steeply banks  
just past my line  
of defiant trees.

The afterburner's thrust  
can both exhilarate  
and annihilate.

Proud simians,

faster than eagles  
dropping like  
thunderbolts,

we are perfect  
raptors -  
we are masters  
of gravity.





# America

Deep thunder shakes this warm July evening  
and lightning flashes over the waterfront  
filling the clear, starry sky with acrid clouds and glimmering rain  
falling to the water as children gaze  
in shock and awe,  
waiting for the next big one to explode.

False bombardment as celebration:

such fits my nation, founded in genocide and slavery,  
this nation baptized in the blood and tears  
of Navaho and Cherokee and all the tribes of the American holocaust  
a nation that devoured one quarter of its sons  
in four short, blood-soaked years; my nation  
a nation of efficient bigots and hungry hypocrites,  
giving the world Gettysburg and the Trail of Tears  
as models for problem-solving;  
a nation unlike any other, not able to live up to its promises  
because no other nation dares make such promises.

The bright violence of rockets' red glare lights our sky  
like the bold Declaration ignited the world, and thunder  
rocked mighty kings from complacent belief in their divine rights,  
rocked the people of Europe, thirsting for their own rights  
and land and a chance to pursue a little happiness;  
yes, rocked even distant Asia, deep in its ancient dream  
foolish men joyfully following the distant thunder  
to seek the fabled Golden Mountain.

The promise was made and broken and made yet again,  
and the anger of betrayal torched the cities of the sixties,  
and singed our hearts  
and in the redeeming pain of change  
made them a little less impure.  
Yes, we are imperfect,  
but we know our sins  
and pay for them over and over again,

and to remind ourselves of the debt yet unsatisfied,

every summer we celebrate in the only way fitting for such a nation;  
In the starry sky fiercely glowing with liberty  
and in the transcendent thunder of the Promise.

Steven Federle

# And Fell The Crane

rising high  
godlike I gazed  
from where cranes fly  
unconcerned, over  
the placid waters of  
the harbor of  
the world,

when, driven to madness  
it pierced  
my throat.

I burst  
and burned  
and to earth  
fell,

and fell  
too  
the crane.

Steven Federle

# And I'll Live Again

gaze upon my empty heart  
enthrall me with your song  
open my eyes, blinded by death  
and fill my soul with eternal breath

and I'll live again, though the others think I'm gone  
and I'll rise again, in this silent grave my faith is strong!

Oh, your touch I crave, forever  
in this cold, lonely grave;  
lift me with your living hands and  
I'll find my way to the promised land,

and I'll live again, though the others think I'm gone,  
and I'll rise again; in you I'll find my one, true home.

Steven Federle

# Angeles

Just before nightfall  
your new leaves  
softly sway  
in the cool delta breeze,  
your limbs glint  
in flames of  
a deeper shade  
where rough trunk rises  
from clambering vines,  
to violet fire.

Oh! Dance with the angels!

Dance with Lord  
of the Trees!

His breath will stir you to passion,  
His song will lull you  
to sacred sleep.

Steven Federle

# Angels

Angels rise to pure atmosphere  
and call us to share  
their freedom.

Hear how they sing  
living spring  
into our wintered world!

At last we rise  
redeemed  
to silver souls  
in golden  
light.

Steven Federle

## Anniversary (November 24)

The treasure of trees  
golden mounds  
on the green ground.

Urged by the morning sun  
yellow leaves  
coruscate in chilled air  
radiant  
with the afterglow of a summer  
well lived.

But thirty-two years ago  
the light died  
when dark death's hand  
seized your struggling heart.

We buried you,  
bright treasure,  
under still  
green grass.

The mud from your grave  
clung to our shoes  
as we wept our grief  
in bright puffs of white breath  
ascending like incense  
into the good sky.

And thirty-two years later  
I still choke on bitter sorrow.  
Tears  
still sting my eyes.

But looking through the bright window,  
I see in November's gold,  
a faint reflection  
of the enduring glory  
that lights your  
endless day.



Steven Federle

# Annular Eclipse

"The gate of heaven is everywhere." Thomas Merton

I can hear your soft breath,  
gentle strains of music

the easy breeze  
nudges the curtains

and peace flows  
across my skin  
like cool water.

But soon impatient dusk  
will overtake bright day

when the sun dims  
in the dark grip  
of eclipse, and ancient  
terror thrills even  
the most  
comprehending mind;

for this is when  
metaphore  
overtakes fact,

and unknown stars glint  
in the afternoon sky.

We never knew  
they were hanging so low,

diamonds in deep  
caverns,

new light!

Steven Federle

# Another Exorcist

John said to him, 'Master, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out devils in your name, and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me.' Mark 9: 38-39

We saw him  
down the road, exhorting,  
calling on Our Father  
to cast out crazy Satan,  
and for reference  
he gave your name!

When we told him to stop  
that he was not  
authorized  
and did not have the proper  
credentials

he replied that  
a spirit greater  
than we twelve  
guided his arms  
as he waved  
away the devil,

and he refused!

So, perplexed, we came to you,  
indignantly begged you  
to intercede, to cast this upstart  
heretic into the muddy waters  
from whence  
he undoubtedly arose.

But again you surprise!

'Do not try to stop him, ' you said.

And here's a lesson:

remember that neither we  
nor our apostolic descendants  
must ever think that you  
ever gave us exclusive rights  
to salvation.

We'll try to remember.

Steven Federle

# Answer To Prayer

Intervention given  
responses finally heard  
doubts all forgiven  
sickness finally cured.

Prayers we have raised  
for miracles here on Earth  
but at the end of the day  
only love can give birth

to our souls' calm acceptance  
of your holy will,  
for only in the eternal  
can the present be fulfilled.

So reconcile us to the mystery  
that surrounds our little lives.  
Open our eyes to see  
the brilliance of your living light

Steven Federle

# Anxious Day, Driven Leaves

Anxious day, driven leaves  
clinging to summer's  
bright new dream.

I'll let in the night,  
make wide the door.  
I don't fear the dark's  
clawing cold storm,

for you I hear singing  
passionately;  
your endless love's  
my constant need.

Steven Federle

# Ascension

"Deep contemplative silence communicates prayer." Thomas Merton

Your voice  
sings  
words  
suspended  
mid-flight  
like apples  
falling  
in a  
dream.

I hear  
my soul  
breathing,  
ascending  
to your  
voice.

Steven Federle

# Ash Wednesday

Earth tilts  
and winter passes.  
Now is the time  
for ashes.

Searing songs  
cremate the pain.  
Waving palms  
incinerate.

From dust unto dust  
we fall and rise,  
crying to God,  
we reach high

to paths  
of brighter trust.

Steven Federle



# Asphodel

Dry grass is shifting  
in chill autumn wind

soft hills once green  
are brown once again

I yearn for the rain,  
winter's blessing to fall

and spread wide white fields  
of asphodel.

Gray stones mark my  
resting place

deep in the earth  
where I lie by dark lakes,

but in winter I crave  
the fruit of the pail

Oh, spread wide bright fields  
of asphodel.

---

Author's Note: Asphodel, in Ancient Greek mythology, is a favored food of the dead and is often planted at grave-sites.

Steven Federle

# Assad Visits Homs

Those who love their own noise are impatient of everything else. ... Our noise, our business, our purposes, and all our fatuous statements about our purposes, our business, and our noise: these are the illusion.

Thomas Merton.

He came to visit today  
with cameras firmly fixed  
on his perfect  
hair.

He came with his selected throng  
to acknowledge their  
devotion  
as he surveyed his  
demolition.

Those old buildings were such a blight,  
rabid rats, full of the noise  
of rebellious children,

but now, city leveled, he can see  
how beautiful it all will be.

Bright new buildings soon will rise,  
and scrape death from the acrid sky;

and everything will be  
first rate!

....but just out of al Jazeera's frame  
black smoke pours over  
Baba Amr;

incinerated hopes;  
dark stain.

Steven Federle

# Assassin

Moving through dark  
shadowy trees,  
slumped center-frame,  
he walked awkwardly,  
mumbling  
his mad invective,  
ineffective rage until  
reaching the flag  
he vaporized  
into anger's  
flame.

That was his manifesto  
video  
you-tubed  
cabled  
into my reluctant eyes.

But I cannot turn away.

I must see how  
anger and madness,  
armed and dangerous  
shatters a mind,  
murders  
a judge's wisdom,  
a child's innocence.

Steven Federle

# At Caritas

I gaze  
through the undergrowth  
into deeper woods.

Redwoods rise,  
limbs link tree  
to brother tree,  
climbing high  
to the bright  
coastal fog.

Walking out  
I see the three,  
still as lawn ornaments,  
frozen in motion,  
stunned  
by my sudden form.

They stand and gaze  
and reassured  
by my stasis,

at last with lazy gait  
back they move  
into the nodding  
trees.

(3 May 2016)

Steven Federle

# At The Bird-Feeder

At the Bird-feeder

Rushing, pushing  
the sparrows shove;

pulsing wings  
beating the air,  
all for a bounty  
of unexpected feed!

When drops two doves.

Wings folded,  
they plaintively call;

the seed of plenty

gently falls.

Steven Federle

# At The Death Of A Young Girl

I see its raw fury clawing at her hands,  
Kissing her sallow face with lies so perfect on silk pillows,  
Concealing raw, gaping wounds inside, the insult  
The harsh silence, the enforced peace.  
I have seen all this before, this beast, this darkness, this indifference  
To waves of anguish washing through the room  
As her mother weeps, and her father strokes  
Her dark, perfect hair.  
I see her, and  
I know.

But what am I to say to their terror? These children  
Look at me, questioning ... after all,  
I am their teacher...  
But why did she die? , well, asthma... breath denied... but why?

I know this insistent knot, this question piercing my gut,  
And I want to hide in silence, but questions will not be denied,  
And I know their questions, all of them...  
So what am I to say to calm their red, flowing eyes,  
These, my poor, dark flowers, piercing me with their tears?

Faith.  
Yes, read the book to them...Lazarus found out... faith...  
Promises were made, now to be made good.  
Yes, faith... what else is there but  
Faith?  
And so we say the rosary,  
And we go on.

Steven Federle

# Atonement

'There must be a time when the man of prayer goes to pray as if it were the first time in his life he had ever prayed.' Thomas Merton

Grey mist  
rises and falls  
enfolding parched hills  
easing autumn's harsh pain

saturating the spreading valley  
with gathering rain  
and forgiveness.

Steven Federle

## Aubade: Autumn

Day and night  
our hearts beat,  
arteries, veins pulse  
breath swells our ardent lungs  
and we live!

Oh, hear how the morning dove moans  
in the pale early light;  
wander with me  
with open arms,  
embrace the radiant eye.

Our love grows  
as slowly  
we rise.

Steven Federle



## Aubade: Suisun Valley

'Love is not mere emotion or sentiment. It is the lucid and ardent response of the whole man.' Thomas Merton

Waves of grey light  
wash over our small valley.

Cool morning  
sea-born breeze prevails  
for now.

High-toned birds wait  
for the golden sun to ignite  
our swaying trees.

Only in the darker eves  
do I hear the mourning dove's  
steady moan.

In silver-blue tones,  
he bids his love

awake!

Steven Federle

# Aubade: Vale Of Tears

Morning fog  
caressed  
my winter tears

as unseen geese  
(noisy gaggle)  
crossed the opaque sky.

Things well hidden  
confuse  
my fragile faith,

so when bright, piercing rays  
broke through  
this lonely vale of tears

I thought it was only the sun  
not the golden light,  
desire of my fleeting years.

Steven Federle

# Aubade: Your Face

Starry lace wraps  
your sleeping face.

With passion  
I watch over you

like the moon  
drifting  
to secret  
rendezvous,

to the importunate sun,

who, with ardent speed,  
rises in-  
to the fiery  
east!

Steven Federle

# August

'This light shines in darkness, but unless God Himself draws us out of the darkness, we are not enlightened by Him, even though He be present.' Thomas Merton

soft summer wind  
murmuring trees  
distant train  
calling.

sun-washed patio,  
the house gleams  
in the after-  
glow of noon.

the chairs are  
waiting.

limbs lean to the  
ground,  
heavy with apples  
waiting,  
round,  
sweet velvet light,

all waiting.

Steven Federle

# August In The Vaca Mountains

“Everything must be elevated and transformed by the action of God, in love and faith.” Thomas Merton

August descends.

Gentle heat  
swoons on  
holy ground.

Death sweetly sings,  
in the scything wind,  
in shafts of  
shifting grass  
resplendent!

The harvest is ready,

Make full the granaries;  
make ready the land  
for winter's  
harsh hand.

Steven Federle

# Baptism

Rain falls  
peaceful, unceasing  
filling brimful  
the bright day.

Liquid shimmer  
glowing ocean  
softly silting soil  
like love  
filling full an empty soul,

O cleanse me  
as, trembling,  
sinful, I walk into  
your sacred font.

Steven Federle

# Beautiful Cellars

'No clock: only the Heart's blood. Only the word.'

'I think poetry must,  
I think it must,  
Stay open all night  
In beautiful cellars' Thomas Merton, A Book of Hours

High round windows  
over wide glass doors  
fill with night;

The world's gone to black,  
to void,  
to nothing.

Can you hear your whispering blood?  
- surge of surf, wind in dark trees  
alive - alive -

so arise now and go  
down the noisy steps  
to the beautiful cellar,

to the poetry.

Steven Federle

# Because We Are Loved

'...we come into being because we are loved and because we are meant to love others.'

Thomas Merton, Honorable Reader: Reflections on My Work

Deep inside  
my silent room,  
I gaze  
at nothing,

as beyond the door  
in trees glowing,  
green and glistening,  
birds sing, spring-  
mad, mated,  
passion-played!

The sun's rising  
and cradling  
Your risen  
world,

I emerge.

Steven Federle



# Before The Funeral

Mountains  
surround me.

Black ridges  
scrape the sky.

Raw lacerations.

Gone are the songs of  
hopeful winter birds,

gone to the mountains  
of the sun.

In the valley of the moon,  
bitter desolation.

Steven Federle

# Benediction

They came suddenly.  
First I heard brash honking,  
and then, craning my neck to the limit,  
I saw them, wide wings moving in perfect formation  
as powerfully they stroked the grey air, assertive necks stretched,  
like golden swimmers, low and big, they barely cleared  
tree-top and roof, but rapidly crossing my small  
portion of earth, soon clearing my eastern  
fence, the geese were gone to visit  
other neighbors; and wondering  
at my good fortune, I felt  
contentment and deeply  
peaceful, and I  
smiled.

Steven Federle

# Binary

Darkness and light  
day and night  
voices soar  
then fall.

A child falls  
and, laughing, rises to  
his mother's arms.

Rivers of youth  
cut canyons  
from ancient  
bones.

Steven Federle

# Birther

Sit in dark rooms  
as Fox news  
complains  
that the President  
is really from Mars.

He's hell-bent on preventing  
our Saturday-nights  
from being  
special.

We have the Constitutional right  
to carry death  
like a flask  
in our hip pockets.

But this foreigner  
wags his black finger  
and calmly spews  
sense  
like spit  
on our red necks.

So the plan is to wait  
patiently  
until the day  
all these bleeding hearts  
are dropped, one by one,  
by lone  
assassins,

and in the end,  
alone in our darkness,  
we...will...win.

Steven Federle

# Birthright

Winds blow  
off the delta,  
stir to breathy song  
flashing trees.

In soft sunlight  
jeweled birds  
hover low,  
sip red nectar  
from the slim cylinder  
by my empty chair.

Beneath the breeze  
leaves along the fence-line are still,  
and on the glowing ground  
potted geraniums wait  
in blazing stasis.

I know sea-borne storms  
soon will come,  
and leaves will fall,  
to die on the sodden  
winter ground;

for this  
is my birthright,  
my father's  
good gift.

Steven Federle

# Black Door

black door,  
impenetrable portal  
to the silent night,

when a sudden train rushes,  
filling the darkness  
with wailing desire,

and suddenly is gone.

Now only my fingers linger.  
pressing your giving flesh.

(10/18/2014)

Steven Federle

# Black Mountains

black  
mountains  
to sharp ridge  
rise, deeply piercing  
day's bleeding sky; overwhelming  
grave, pale victim, night.

Steven Federle

# Black Night

Black night  
engulfs my sight,  
stills to silence  
my failing breath.

Do you recall how,  
by fierce day consumed,  
passion's eye conveys  
love's light  
deep into our beating hearts?

Glance up!

Oh, stretch back your neck,  
raise  
your sleepy eyes  
and see how the tree,  
thrusting to sky dark branches,  
dons the starry cloak  
of night.

Steven Federle



# Black-Jay

Black-jay  
falls to verdant earth

searching  
living soil as

soft rain  
soothes the bitter truth

of being.

Steven Federle

# Blows The Wind

blows the wind  
by winter  
enthralled, trees  
shed at end  
of day, end  
of summer  
world fall filled,  
newly chilled,  
crescent moon  
disappears  
all too soon.

Steven Federle

# Blue Days

Blue Days

Blue days race  
to starry nights.

Candles plunge  
to panting dreams.

Power is brief.

The mounting sun  
with youthful strength  
lusts for noon's brightest heights,

but ennui runs deep and gently receives  
the sun's fading fire,  
night's growing pyre.

Steven Federle

# Born Again

"To be born again is not to become somebody else, but to become ourselves. "

Thomas Merton

Check in the mirror and  
see who's looking back.

Look deeply into your eyes  
and see the darkness  
of the center.

Your smirking self  
is not important.

Don't be swayed  
by glint of silver or grey;  
for age speaks no  
wisdom,

and even your scars,  
your hard-worn skin,  
creased and mortal  
means nothing

in the darkness  
of the center.

Steven Federle

# Breaking Silence

It is not speaking that breaks our silence,  
but the anxiety to be heard. Thomas Merton

\*\*\*

In chilled twilight swells  
the chorus overwhelming  
echoing passion,

half of water, half  
of leafy bank, the night they  
fill with lusty will,

persistent, straining  
these marshland poets converge,  
anxious to be heard.

Steven Federle

# Breech-Mender

I cried out for help  
and in the silence  
I heard a voice,  
like my voice  
but from deep in a dream,  
ringed in song and sleep.  
I heard Him declare,  
'yes, I am here.'

and so I cried,  
'Lord, I am deprived,  
have become  
the afflicted one  
you once saved! '

but He replied,  
'Be quiet. For  
In the silence  
of your soul  
I'll make  
a cool river flow.

Water-gardens will spring forth  
as I lift you, fortify you  
until with your strong arms  
I'll raise the shattered walls,  
mend the breaches  
that separate men,  
and restore to life  
the peaceful lanes  
for the innocent  
children of Homs  
to play.

REF: ISAIAH 58: 9-12

Steven Federle

# Bridge At Montezuma Slough

We drive to see  
where the twisted road will lead.

Salty river, winding slough,  
dark water  
rising to frothy cap  
slapping concrete pier,  
moon driven waves race  
back to beckoning bay.

Finally we must decide...  
Cross the low bridge  
or turn back.

But the flood is too close to the deck!

We feel tidal vibrations,  
basso profundo,  
rattle sub-sonic  
in our ears  
as together  
we face our fear,

and slowly cross,  
eyes always ahead  
til again we feel sure earth  
solid beneath our tread.

Steven Federle

# Bridge At Rio Vista

The bridge stands low  
over the swollen  
Sacramento,

black water,  
rushing to  
darker seas,

hypo-thermal,

sucking breath  
from the fallen,  
the overboard,

the suicide.

Its sturdy stanchions,  
hold fast,

give refuge  
from the maelstrom,

a way across

or a place  
to jump.

Steven Federle



# Bright Day

Glare,  
thin limbs,  
wind drifting,  
sun melting straw  
autumn's frost  
golden  
flares

Steven Federle

# Bright Morning

bright day, trees waving  
like summer, chill revealing  
winter lurks, waiting

Steven Federle

# Brittle Night

Brittle night pulls breath  
from tender lungs, drifting lives  
rise to star-bright sky.

Approach with care! By  
thin nets ensnared, love will  
cut to glassy tears.

Steven Federle

# Burial Day

Bright chill  
coiling clouds  
roiling coarse space  
welling  
heaving seas,

while naked  
free  
from death's  
empty pledge,  
at last  
I leap  
into the lucid  
air

Steven Federle

# Cain

The delicate action of grace in the soul is profoundly disturbed by all human violence. Passion, when it is inordinate, does violence to the spirit and its most dangerous violence is that in which we seem to find peace. Violence is not completely fatal until it ceases to disturb us. Thomas Merton. Thoughts in Solitude.

Like a delicate wind  
your grace shaped my infant soul  
filled my emptiness  
with angelic form

and I was beautiful  
and good

until, jealous for your love,  
I slew my brother.

Now I fear the abyss  
that opens beneath me  
the grave  
of my sin-withered soul.

and to you I pray  
forgive me! bring me back  
from the numbing peace  
of careless, empty  
days!

Steven Federle

# California Landscape

Up close, the hills are tan.  
Veins of dark oak fold to ridge  
where cows graze, ensnared  
by the glare of mid-summer's day.

Can you see how the wind ripples in  
tawny waves rising to where falcons wait  
watching for motion only they can see?

But beyond the golden ridge  
indigo mountains rise  
to pure blue of absolute sky.

You'll see no movement there,  
though I've heard how bounding deer  
will pause and scan the darker shades -  
and, hearing piercing cries, will tensely fly  
away from the famished lion's  
flashing eyes.

Steven Federle

# Camping At Lake Berryessa

My children slept  
on the thin vinyl floor  
while above our tent,  
just past the dark tree-line,  
the Milky Way glimmered  
like cool waves breaking  
on the black coast  
of the deep mountain sky.

All night  
the lake whispered softly  
under gentle western winds  
as egret and owl  
kept guardian eyes  
on the sleeping  
human shore.

While watching my sons sleep,  
I heard the low murmur  
of wild turkey and possum  
scuffling through dry dust and leaves,  
searching our campground for leftovers  
peanut butter crusts, hot dogs and beans,  
any careless, easy meal,

when I felt rolling pressure  
pushing insistently at base of our tent,  
and, alarmed, heard quick, powerful,  
exploratory snorts.

Holding my breath,  
I gazed into the deer's  
questioning,  
fearless eyes,

and wondered  
if we campers  
were part of this  
ancient community,

or welcomed,  
honored guests,

or simply curious,  
rude intruders.

Steven Federle



# Canticle

In the murmur of darkened trees,  
I hear your voice,  
I want to sing,

but grating words cannot contain  
gusty night wind's  
solemn praise.

In the hush of trembling leaf  
hosannas rise, rush  
home to Thee.

Steven Federle

# Capitol Corridor

The Capitol Corridor moves heavily through the dark,  
crossing the thinly guarded streets, blaring, berating  
impatient drivers waiting for flashing poles, sparking  
their rage as they glare at watches. The ground shakes,  
rolling earthquake, Cyclop's eye, headlight throbbing, crushing  
bright straight rails, pounding diesel relentlessly hauling  
into no-man's land, receding rails guarded only by brush  
and grassy grade and two white wooden crosses, with a basketball  
and a balloon for the lost children; caught in the sweep of flashing lights,  
they first saw the flash, then felt pain, and then blackness swallowed them  
whole,  
the suicide, the missed warning, the lost opportunity, the crying  
mother searching deserted tracks. But tonight nobody's here, no  
despairing child, drifting, desultory, home no longer an option; and so  
undeterred, the silver and blue train rolls heavily on to Sacramento.

Steven Federle

# Cathartes Aura

Walking to my car  
on a warm afternoon  
up on the high hillside lot  
close to the cliff drop,

I see rising beneath me  
the bird,  
wings spreading six feet,  
head naked and red as blood,  
white beak hooking invisible winds  
to fill the creamy hollow of under-feather,  
lifting on thermals  
before my eyes,

when two small blackbirds  
dive from unseen heights  
and viciously caw as they peck  
the black back.

Top guns, fighter aces;  
these lords of the open sky  
sharply turn as the heavy buzzard wheels  
through dark pines.

I clutch my keys  
and stay to watch the fight.  
I want to see how, with curling feathers  
and piercing rage  
these small beasts  
protect their living nest.

Steven Federle

# Caught In The Web

Caught in the web  
I cannot move.

Memory  
strains for depleted days  
like thunder raging  
in distant valleys.

I recall the squalls  
that shattered my sky,  
the rain that poured spite  
and held me in its  
violent thrall.

Yet  
I may not flee  
to what still may be  
though intently I peer into  
fading western air  
to find some sign  
of tomorrow's beauty  
or fear.

Thus Hope  
wavers and fails  
like a pithy stalk  
in a ceaseless gale.

Steven Federle

# Chemin De Jerusalem

I walk  
slowly  
seemingly without  
aim or  
direction  
gaze down  
to flowering tiles  
waver  
feel lost, yet  
see the way  
leads always  
to the  
center.

Steven Federle

# Cherry Blossoms On Palm Sunday

Windy day,  
undulant sun  
floods smooth cut of lawn

as cherry blossoms race  
and lightly fall upon  
my upturned face.

O, Sacrificial Tree!  
your bright glory cast  
to the clamant breeze and  
let fill your boughs  
with ordinary green.

Steven Federle

# Chiaroscuro

Bright leaves, tongues of flame  
holding slender twigs; those thin pillars  
resisting seductive breath of breeze,  
binding the tender leaves to more substantial limbs  
within the deep core of the whispering tree.

Even the setting sun  
cannot penetrate so deeply as this,  
where darker leaves  
stand in rapt attention  
as the night-clad trunk,  
solid and unmoving,  
dumbly regards neither  
retiring sun nor rising silver moon,  
but worships only  
the empty  
blue ether.

Steven Federle

# Child In A Pout

Child in a pout  
self-absorbed,  
all alone  
in anger he shouts  
"I'll run away  
from home!

I'll run away, run away  
far from my  
home."

(Enfold him deep  
in the dark  
of my eyes,  
sing him to sleep  
fill his dreams  
with my cries)

"Oh, I'll go with you, hurry!  
together, today!  
I'll follow you  
always to  
wherever you stray

and you never will ever  
again be alone,  
for wherever I am,  
there you're ever at  
home."

Steven Federle



# Chiron

Soon night will tie a knot  
through the silky cord of time;  
we'll gaze through gauzy windows  
as day to nothing subsides,

as fly the avenging furies  
through cimmerian skies,  
Chiron will teach us all  
the truth of all our lies.

-----

Author's note: KHEIRON (or Chiron) was the eldest and wisest of the Centaurs, a tribe of half-horse men. But unlike the rest of this tribe he was an immortal god. He was a great teacher who mentored many of the great heroes of myth including Jason, Peleus, and Akhilleus. Eventually, however, he passed away from the earth, after accidentally being wounded by Herakles with an arrow coated in Hydra-venom. The wound was incurable, and unbearably painful, so Kheiron voluntarily relinquished his immortality and died. However, instead of being consigned to Hades, he was given a place amongst the stars by Zeus as the constellation Saggiarius or Centaurus. (

Steven Federle

# Christian Burial

We cross the resilient lawn,  
stepping over flat stones,  
engraved names, lives  
encapsulated.

Under the corrugated tent  
on green folding chairs  
we pause  
as his bronze casket gleams  
golden in the shade,  
you faithfully standing  
by his side on this  
burial day.

Touching the cold metal  
one last time,  
I peer down  
to a new  
deeper place

and see how sharp angles,  
hard, cold walls rise from  
the dark concrete floor.

Like Lazarus he will wait  
under the tomb's heavy door  
for Christ the Lord  
to call him forth  
and at last free him  
from death's dark ties,  
raise him high  
into the living Easter light.

Steven Federle

# Christmas Eve, After Mass

The light from the tree  
throws gold on my  
dark wall.

Night lurks, but  
thin windows  
keep the wind at bay

as day flows faithfully  
to day.

So we wait

for the exuberant sun  
to spill reckless warmth  
over the grateful Earth.

Life is a prize,  
a gift of great value

gold given by the eastern king  
to the newborn  
child.

So receive it!

Your faith  
has saved you.

Steven Federle

# Christmas Star

"Kindled by a spark of divine love, the soul streaks heavenward in an act of intelligence as clear and direct as the rocket's trail of fire. Grace has released the deepest energies of our spirit and assists us to climb to new and unsuspected heights." Thomas Merton

in the high Texan sky  
contrail flaring,  
streaking, glaring  
thrall  
of fire!

Is this some love-struck soul,  
streaking heavenward  
seeking in unsuspected cities,  
a new home  
in the golden dome?

or does it fall,  
ever to heavy earth  
drag of weight,  
dross of  
mortal freight?

Steven Federle

# City Nocturne

'Where there is no peace, there is no light.' Thomas Merton. Honorable Reader:  
Reflections on My Work

I dwell in city nights  
hear cars cruising  
down streets  
streaming confusion  
whispering,  
boulevards of light  
stunted lanes,  
high-  
wire siren, stunned  
shot-  
finders, tense  
dispatchers rolling  
black and whites,  
ambulance  
coroner's wagon  
while laughing,  
from theatre emerging,  
from restaurant and bar  
unaware, we swarm  
through rivers of blood  
to black cars, crush  
of silent plush  
power windows up  
lock the doors  
and slowly drive  
through those  
shimmering  
terrible,  
beautiful  
streets.

Steven Federle

# Clarity

Yesterday  
the fog bound-up the dying world  
in white gauze,

but truth shred the fog,  
would not permit  
white lies,  
inconsequential slips  
to ease the passionate leaves'  
passage into night.

Righteous winds ripped  
the despairing leaves  
and sent them twisting joyfully  
high over my house,

to the yard  
several over.

I got my neighbor's leaves  
so it all  
worked out  
in the end.

Steven Federle

# Close By

close by,  
in this empty room  
I feel air lightly cross my lips,  
rush to rising lungs,  
mix with surging blood  
and lengthen my life  
for another breath.

Then I know how thin  
the line between am  
and has been.

But watching the sun decline  
through windows of time  
my wonder rises  
as stars fill my widening sight  
and I see how it will be  
in eternity.

Steven Federle

# Close To The Edge

close to the edge  
where day and night merge,  
marriage of land and sky  
not one thing or  
the other;

that's where faith hides -  
blushing bride, wayward child  
waiting to be found  
and taken  
home.

(15 May 2015)

Steven Federle



# Cold Mountain

close to the edge, cold  
mountain shreds fears, streams dying  
earth with living tears

Steven Federle

# Cold Sailing

Waves enfold waves.  
With rolling swell  
we rise and fall.

Through deafening static  
of storm-struck air  
I hear the rigging's  
ringing fear

as under the bridge  
titanic ships  
plow darker paths  
through  
shadowed bay.

With sails engorged,  
swiftly  
we fly away!

Steven Federle

# Communion

Alone, I look through my eyes  
and see the world  
as it is, as I think  
it is, as I want it  
to be:

bright mornings,  
shimmering lawns, trees glowing  
golden as night dissolves  
to glaring day.

I hear mourning doves,  
raucous crows, roar of lawn-mowers,  
distant whisper  
of traffic

and believe these proof  
that I alone can end the night  
of anxious dreams,  
with quick breath and  
eyes wide open.

But one day, stepping  
through terminal veils of pain,  
startled, pulling back the black curtain,  
in the unexpected rush of ecstasy  
I'll discover the truth:

my never-ending  
communion with  
You.

Steven Federle

# Confession

I'm an unworthy vessel,  
a rusty cup.

I foul your pure wine  
with my common  
corruption,

and yet  
unreasonably  
you fill me up again.

Brimful with your  
glittering love  
I become  
a golden chalice  
to hold your sacred  
blood.

Steven Federle

# Conscience

Deep in the dark  
of the wind-thrashed tree  
a rasping voice calls to me,  
demanding I see  
what I cannot see.

The tree's dark core  
deep shade obscures,  
and try as I might,  
I'm blinded by night  
descending.

Yet still it calls, insistent and  
shrill, when sudden silence  
my aching heart fills  
with cold  
apprehension.

Oh Lord, whom have I  
offended?

Steven Federle

# Consoling Martha

Her tears freely flow;  
a dam so brimful  
cannot contain  
such towering waves.

Wondering that  
my words fail  
to give peace,  
I reach out  
and take her trembling hands.

Tearful,  
I brush away  
all her  
bitter tears

Steven Federle

# Continuum

My breath rises  
to the edge of space  
and pauses  
at the nexus of perfection,

then falls,  
driven by waves of fire,  
by strong hands guided  
through dust and rain,  
through ice, through  
the shining  
vortex

to my upturned face  
where a single dropp dies  
and fills me with  
the storm's desire.

Steven Federle

# Convergence

restricted by this hard,  
grey road  
I speed past green scrub,

tenuous roots contending  
with hot, graveled earth  
for cool, deep waters.

Above the bleak plain I see,  
steeply rising in folding  
rock and rolling ridge,

shadowed mountains converge  
into liquid  
desert sky.

Steven Federle



# Crisis

I look for you in winter's light  
but your face I cannot see.

In spring I found you hidden high  
in the living green of the tallest tree.

But now in winter's still, grey sky  
for you with aching heart I seek.

Where have you gone? Oh, show me your face  
and rescue me from my barren faith.

Steven Federle

# Crows In A Stubble Field

Along the tracks  
in this field of straw,  
tawny stubble  
cut down by indifferent,  
efficient hands,

I see sentient crows,  
black shadows scrutinizing  
lifeless stalks  
like careful surveyors,  
reclaiming this savaged world,

when, blaring, the train  
shatters the air and scatters  
the redeeming birds  
into black angry clouds,  
cawing into the twilight sky.

Steven Federle

# Cry Aloud

A voice said, 'Cry aloud! '  
and I said, "But what shall I cry? "

Shall I sing to the people  
a song of spring,  
hills aflame with green,  
dry grass igniting  
with joy?

In darker days,  
when the high meadow fell fallow  
and flowers of the valley  
dried to dust,  
I thought you'd turned  
away, took your giving hands  
to other lands.

Despairing, I wept,  
stung by tears  
from angry Hell,  
and doubted  
your love.

Oh, forgive me, pity your child  
and make your enduring rain fall

on the riotous grass,  
on the bold crocus  
and passionate  
rose.

Steven Federle

# Curiosity

I'm waiting for summer to start.  
I want to see through emerald leaf  
how the young sun rises,  
how waking birds nod  
to the familiar sky  
and sing to life their bright day.

I'm curious.  
When will the stoic snail finish  
his pilgrimage  
into the cool shade  
of this airy fern?

And in blazing noon  
tell me  
if the fussing wren still  
flits or throws back  
feathered arms  
behind downy head  
to siesta.

But most I want to feel  
the precise moment  
when blushing sun  
spills his red life  
into the gentle arms  
of his dark love, night.

Steven Federle

# Daily Life

Life must provide a space of liberty, of silence, in which possibilities are allowed to surface and new choices become manifest. Thomas Merton

What I wear is pants. What I do is live. How I pray is breathe. Thomas Merton

Waking each morning, expelled from my space,

somebody  
else has taken my place!

So rising to join in the common fray  
compelled through the breathless, common day;

I stop,

and I choose,

and I breathe,

and I pray.

Steven Federle

# Dangerous Driving

Blue day too quickly ends  
consumed by foggy night.

Proceed with care  
or mesmerized by garish light,  
you'll quickly see how  
steel sharply grinds  
and tears at fragile flesh,

and, too surprised to scream,  
you'll fall into that empty space  
behind life's busy dream.

So keep control!  
Hold tightly the narrow wheel  
and never let it go.

Steven Federle

# Dappled Sky Horse

black veins at the source  
wide; narrow as limbs taper.  
gaps of dappled blue.

from the black earth, heat  
of life rising, flows up  
to the folded sky.

Steven Federle

# Dark Contemplation

"Contemplation cannot be taught. It cannot even be clearly explained. It can only be hinted at, suggested, pointed to, symbolized." Thomas Merton.  
New Seeds of Contemplation

Through seasons of pleasure  
and months of pain,  
morning birds calling;  
night's howling trains

oh, fall into dream's  
cold silent folds  
where unyielding truth  
nightly is told.

The morning star's rising  
through night's fading lace.  
Soon sun will be glaring;  
truth without grace.

Steven Federle



# Dark Mountains Rise

'I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day,  
playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of his earth;  
and I found delight in the human race' Proverbs 8: 22-31

dark mountains rise  
to meet the sun,  
as night drops  
to the western sea

skyward  
lifting joy to heaven

as dark waves clash  
washing clean the past —  
all pain fulfilled.

Steven Federle

# Dark Night Of The Soul

Black lie  
empty night  
mocks my weary faith,

when with burning heart  
I sink beneath  
a sea of  
fiery grace.

Free at last  
I rise to heaven  
chastened, and  
by God forgiven.

Steven Federle

# Day And Night

Bright shield, blue sky  
conceals the broad universe  
with brilliant ruse of  
solitude.

Jealous sun  
brooking no lesser lights,  
tells us  
that we're all alone.

Up to the sun  
you may cast your gaze,  
but hide your eyes  
with fingers splayed  
or dazzling day  
to inner darkness will fade.

But as the tyrant sun declines  
look up again, and you will find  
how luminescent night  
strips blue day's  
bright lie of "same"

and dagger stars  
pierce  
the milky silk  
of outer-space.

Steven Federle

# Daybreak

daybreak, still limbs lace  
to gray sky, wait for the next  
storm to shake open

morning, still sleeping  
shuttered windows conceal the  
cold face of daybreak.

Steven Federle

# Day's End

I fill this small space,  
coarse stone in the stream,  
as soft, summer winds  
gently shape me,

my rough lines smoothing,  
polishing dull skin,  
'til golden and gleaming  
I'm clean once again.

Steven Federle

# Day's Heat

The day's heat  
enfolds me,

green and gold-  
en lightly-slipping

rays pour through thin  
separations

in my rough-hewn  
fence,

and make crosses  
bright in  
the grass;

but the fog broods,  
rising white  
as death.

tonight  
will be  
cold.

Steven Federle

# Days Of Infamy

The day recedes into peaceful night  
spreading gentle darkness  
over wide California fields,

the flames of history  
nearly forgotten  
but for the ember glow  
In the wrinkled cobalt sky.

But we remember  
bloody days

when war-planes roared  
into the rising Pacific sun  
and ripped it  
in sanguine strips.

Bombs pierced polished decks,  
and amazed sailors dove  
into crimson waters,  
as the Rising Sun spread darkness  
Over half the globe

sixty-nine years ago...

... yet just say the date  
and silence fills any room.

We remember movies we've seen  
Of dive-bombers and chaos,  
heroes rising in fighters to  
stave off the improbable wave.

We see old men in service caps,  
Tossing wreaths into  
bright Hawaiian waters.

They weep  
as old wounds

again bleed.

They gaze into the sad eyes  
Of buddies who  
didn't make it.

And we think of our own losses,

Korea and Vietnam,  
torrents of blood  
flowing through fertile  
Asian valleys,

and the obscenity of 9-11,  
insurgency raping  
Iraq and  
Afghanistan,

and we ask, "When will it end? "

Nodding slowly,  
we know.

Steven Federle



# Death At Home

I entered the silent house  
and saw my sister in the kitchen,  
brooding over tepid dishwater, sipping beer,  
slipping away from her pain,  
as her sons, in the dusky back room,  
door ajar, stroked his hair and gazed  
in wonder at this spent, peaceful man,

and there I saw it,  
the detritus of cancer,  
spent oxygen bottles, bedpans,  
unused morphine patches,

and there I felt it,  
his quietus  
filling the room,  
thick, cutting, invisible  
insistent.

So silently I took my nephews  
back to the kitchen  
and together we wondered  
at how 64 years of living ends

on a gurney,  
in a shrouded bag,  
rolling roughly past your rosebushes,  
past your silent truck,  
past your whimpering dog,  
to a plain,  
white  
van.

Steven Federle

# Death Waits On The Shores Of Tripoli

He scans the desert night  
for apocalyptic stars  
and shrieks with delight  
when hurtling spears  
pierce pounding hearts.

Desert sands  
lust for blood;  
life declines  
to ancient dust.

Steven Federle

# Debate

The man of science said  
that in the beginning  
there was nothing,  
when  
obeying some quantum urge,  
suddenly everything  
emerged.

that was all...

that was just  
the way it happened... no need  
for God...just cold, hard  
cosmic law.

But the poet,  
hearing his breath  
rush deep within his lungs,  
feeling his heart pound in anticipation,  
says to his beloved,

"Ha! I found You! "

Steven Federle

# December Fog

Winding over fast roads  
through shrouded hills,  
we see the familiar valley  
disappear  
under a white sea,

human confusion  
dissolving  
into pure cloud.

over frozen white roofs  
beyond the veiled ridge  
the dark disc rises.

Black dawn  
breaks the long night

and spills dirty light  
over the waking city.

In the twilight sky  
shadow shapes  
fly in V  
over still trees,  
looking for rest,

any place to touch  
soft, giving ground  
and call it  
a nest.

Steven Federle

# Decline Of Day

Gentle breeze,  
swaying trees  
leaves  
golden-green.

Imperfect sphere  
sliding through day's  
perfect, blue air.

Ascends the moon  
stark and silver  
much too soon.

Steven Federle

# Deep In Grey

Deep in grey  
we wait  
as black night drops  
suddenly  
and completely.

At the end of our day,  
hope is measured  
one careful procedure  
at a time.

Night is not kind in winter.

Too early It comes,  
and stays too long,

brings fear,  
red eyes and stinging tears.

lit by red numbers  
night measures our lives  
one pulse at a time,  
in dim blue bars  
gleaming in the distant ceiling.

Clasping hands  
In the fading day's light  
we wait  
for one more

morning.

(28 Oct 2010)

Steven Federle

# Deep In My Core

Deep in my core  
beats my living heart.

Fighting through years  
of planetary rotation,  
gravity's transparent hand  
remanding quick blood  
to constricted veins,

how long can it so remain?

When will it  
grow still  
and let go my  
straining  
soul?

On that glorious day  
put me deep  
in the living earth,

and there at last  
will I feel  
the beating heart  
of God!

Steven Federle

# Delta Rain

Soft rain  
on dark oaks

Clustered green  
curving canyons rise  
to velvet crease.

Thick mists consume  
stoic cattle,  
slowly climbing  
verdant slopes.

Meadows gather  
new-born lakes.

Delta birds -  
grebe and pensive loon,  
goldeneye and pintail,  
ibis and snowy egret  
slowly wade.

With flashing beak  
they break  
black waters.

Steven Federle



# Demons

Lurking just behind me  
may be demons  
hideous, mis-shapen things  
creatures from hateful waters,  
horns and clutching claws  
waiting to carry me off,  
sinner that I am, to my  
just reward.

Maybe.

But more fearful by far  
than Satan and his kin,  
is the evil that lurks  
within.

Show me a man  
who is absolutely sure  
of his own saintly precision,  
and I'll show you  
a man in desperate need  
of exorcism.

Steven Federle

# Detachment

I live between two worlds.

On this substantial earth  
senses stir in morning wind  
eyes liven in golden light  
the noonday sun flares,  
arms, legs, back brushed with fire,  
fevered brow, I hear clanging bells  
the blare of trains, elephantine  
motion, sure and steady  
over the ungiving ground.

How shall I detach  
from this panoply, this  
pulsing world,  
rousing  
swirl of all-  
sense?

Yet  
when I pause  
and look into your eyes,  
your silence undoes me.

My soul twitches and sinks,  
blissful, drowning fish  
into the mystical  
ink of your  
eternal  
wish.

Steven Federle

# Diminished Vision

Dark lines dancing  
on the edge  
of distortion,

Slight things  
not really there  
darting just beyond  
my searching  
stare

when suddenly,  
sidelong glancing,  
I'm filled with  
fear.

Steven Federle

# Disasters Of War

Iron soldiers,  
astride their power,  
grip swords  
stand poised  
wait for the order  
to stain red  
the innocent earth

as women,  
naked bellies swollen,  
watch flashing steel  
steal away their children,

those  
who play  
at their bare feet

and those  
who yet swim  
in warmer pools.

Steven Federle

# Discontent

Late at night  
our trains pass through broad meadows.

We grip controls, heavy, uncertain, anxious  
about schedules,  
about stalled cars on tracks,  
about small children darting through the night,  
small children who dare steel wheels and blinding lights  
who dare death at our trembling hands;

we guide our trains  
probing the night  
along the measured way,

discontent,

without incident.

Steven Federle

# Distance Melts

Distance melts, sky fades  
dim glow of cloud-wrapped day; blank  
pages are waiting.

Doors open wide, cold  
winds rush inside - I'm a stone  
in dancing waters.

Beyond pale clouds, stars  
blaze in black silk of winter's  
sky, lighting my way.

My soul rises through  
dim limits; words soar to love-  
songs I sing to you.

Steven Federle

# Do Not Gaze Into The Night

“We do not see the Blinding One in black emptiness. He speaks to us gently; His light is one fullness and one Wisdom.” Thomas Merton

Do not gaze into the night.

He is not in the cold wind  
tearing at tender leaves.

No, nor does He live  
on the mountain of thunder

nor on the crashing shore  
where the surf pounds  
time on rocks as old  
rhythm itself;

You'll not  
find Him  
in the piercing cries  
of the children  
of Syria;

but in your own  
brilliant darkness  
washed clean  
by your tears

there you will find Him:  
gentle, and full,  
and wise.

Steven Federle

# Do You Want To Know God?

how can I forgive  
the man who  
consumes childhood  
like cheap wine

who hides behind priestly collars,  
wears his holiness like a  
circus costume,  
and fills young lives  
with piercing guilt?

Is there a man  
to whom you will not  
bend your brow?  
who, face-to-face at last  
sheds tears of sorrow,  
shocked to learn that  
in the end,  
indeed  
you are?

and if you forgive  
the man who pulled  
levers in Auschwitz,  
to release the gas  
that made holy martyrs  
by the millions,

if you give a second, third  
chance to the arrogant man  
who slayed the children  
of Norway  
because he fears Islam,

If you permit even the presence  
of the greatest of haters  
Der Feurhrer, Der Ubermensch,  
drawn, at last, like a moth, to your  
golden glow,



where is justice?

How can I forgive?

My cheeks bloodied  
shall I strive to be  
what I cannot be?

But if my vengeance  
becomes my god,  
then how could you ever  
forgive me?

Steven Federle

# Dolor

The sun has gone.

Night resumes its dark song  
longing for stars, reaching  
for the rapture of eternity.

You wait so far away,  
in your own private night;

I feel your fear trembling  
like fitful autumn wind  
rushing through my eyes,  
filling my garden  
with the spent leaves  
of youthful summer.

I know you wait in his dim room,  
curtain pulled, tv on,  
door discretely ajar  
as you watch him sleep.

I wish I could help,  
and pray  
the perfect prayer,  
conjure God out of the night  
and force the miracle of morning.

But God is silent,  
His will is not known,  
and my prayer  
impotent.

So I send you this poem,  
to sing you  
my tears.

I can offer nothing more  
than a brother's love.



# Don'T Let Go

&lt;/&gt;When brief day fades  
and darkness fills your life,  
don't let go.

In this sad land  
when cold rain falls  
and winter winds strip bare  
the green summer trees,  
hold fast my strong hand!

In the gray world  
when clouds conceal  
blithe stars, and even  
the brightening  
moon has  
failed,

don't ever let go!

Steven Federle

# Double

Crouching, dangerous.  
waving the bat  
over his glinting helmet,  
he waits,  
scanning the field  
for any weakness,  
any hole  
to fill  
with his power.

When the coiled arm pulls back  
and releases blinding fire  
down the narrow lane,

he swings.

The high arc,  
bright spot in the dark,  
decays and strikes  
just within  
right field's highest  
limit.

Resting at last,  
poised, hands on hips  
he surveys the game  
from a whole, new  
point-of-  
view.

Steven Federle

# Down A Bright Way

Close to the center,  
near to where silence  
fills my straining ears,  
where long years  
of searching end,

I find you waiting  
my old friend.  
You take my hand  
and in a glance  
know all.

Without a word  
down a bright way  
we walk.

Steven Federle

# Dry Lake

Rain lurks  
behind clouds  
too thin  
to send drops,  
puddles,  
surging waves.

flash floods go north,  
to green Seattle,  
easy landfall,  
where no resistance is  
ever given by  
sandy bottom or  
rocky shore.

There the ancient  
desert lies  
beneath tons  
of breathless redwood,  
dreaming of hot,  
days, dry  
winds.

Oh Emerald City,  
so unaware of the pain  
and joy of drought,  
endless blue days  
of aching sky,  
summer's  
harsh eye  
in January  
glaring

as slim clouds  
rush by  
hopeful  
of a shower,

only to evaporate  
to dusty twisters.

Steven Federle



# Early Rising

early rising, fresh  
sky night black, just brightening  
to early-bird's joy.

but still tired, eyes  
aching with sleep. I think I  
will go back to bed.

Steven Federle

## Ego - Trip

Locked inside  
where only I can be  
lonely cries echo,  
deafening me.

I peer through sockets  
through skull  
and soft flesh,  
blood coursing  
nerves enmesh

electric thoughts rocketing  
through bone-strapped brain,  
lightning revealing  
God's face once again.

With muttering thunder,  
the sad world declines  
back into empty  
personal night.

Steven Federle

# El Nino

fill your heart  
with rush of rain,

open palms  
to receive

new life  
for your heart  
of winter!

oh, see how  
the birds  
fiercely sing  
my love!

(5 January 2016)

Steven Federle

# Elegy For Jeanette

The moment you died  
I felt a breeze rise  
tussle of wind  
wild in the tumult  
of transformation.

Nothing is the same.  
since your soul  
broke through.

My eyes sting  
with tears  
with grief  
with the sharp seeds  
of ecstasy.

In the beautiful box  
you lay, wrinkled brow  
withered hands  
pampered  
by white silk,  
thrall to the embrace  
of never ending  
grace.

And so I leave you  
in this shadowed place.

Gaping and dumb,  
I can say nothing  
but 'fare thee well,  
oh great soul,  
and to heaven  
quickly flee! '

Steven Federle

# Elegy For Juliani

They found him today,  
the dirty canal washing his face,  
his lungs bursting full  
with watery breath.

Confusion and hatred  
coldly cast this child  
to the chilly turbid flow.

Another child died long ago  
and all the people wept  
to see young life so quickly swept  
into death's deep sleep,

and so they begged  
for a miracle. He said

"Wake up, little girl, "  
and startled, wide eyed and  
very hungry, she sat up.

Does sleepy Juliani  
hear a soothing voice say,  
"Wake up, little boy"?

Does he rise now to play  
in heaven's soft, new day?

Steven Federle

# Empty

Gloom infuses  
my desert soul.

I cannot see the stars tonight.

The moon refuses  
Night's lifeless void.

It swallows the sky  
and leaves us nothing but  
windy lies.

Steven Federle

# Empty (Winter)

empty

under the stream  
inhaling thick  
liquid  
panic

I reach above  
to where gloom  
dissolves to

shimmering sun.

Steven Federle

# Empty Spaces Terrify

From aimless seas  
mountains loom  
like clouds.

They call to us,  
weary sailors all,  
and promise  
soft sand, palm trees,  
and beautiful natives,  
lusting for new blood,

better than this interminable dance  
of crest with trough,  
azure fusing endlessly  
into the unbroken  
cerulean sea.

For, you see, we love enclosures,  
tight, soft places,  
cushions beneath our feet,  
shadowy corners,  
smoldering coals.

In dark rooms  
our eyes grow wide  
and summon forth  
mystic sight:

ethereal forms,

dancing light.

Steven Federle



# Enter The Sanctuary

To find love I must enter into the sanctuary where it is hidden, which is the mystery of God.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*:

Deep in the tangle of branch and leaf  
I move to the core, to the dark shaft  
that draws life up from the muddy ground

to blooms sprung to being  
by the ascendant sun,  
open, imbibing morning light  
like new wine, drunk with love.

Here I seek you  
in your green sanctuary,  
hiding, gleeful,  
anxious to be found.

Steven Federle

# Eucharist

Walking through the dusty grove  
we talked of death and empty graves  
when a stranger suddenly appeared.

He walked with us and asked why we trembled so.  
Amazed that he seemed not to know  
of the blood and pain in Jerusalem,  
we told him  
how dark the day became, how the sun slid down  
to shivering night  
when, broken, our friend was placed in the cave.

Rebuking us for our lack of faith,  
he explained how it was all foretold in the ancient books;  
from Adam to David, the inevitable grave  
insatiably claims  
corrupt humanity

until now.

We heard, eyes cast down,  
when at Emmaus he broke  
our common bread

and looking up, we saw Him.

His face was blazing like the sun!  
We blinked, and then he was gone,

but the bread remained.

Steven Federle

# Even The Wind

Even the wind  
in high, silent trees  
waits for motion.

Leaves hang, eager to drop  
into cold sunshine  
as empty chairs 'round the small table  
wait for the conversation to begin;

but fern and rose  
have nothing to say.  
Shadow fills this still  
autumn day.

Steven Federle

# Evening Meditation

Our apple tree is exuberant tonight,  
its white blossoms flare within emerald shades  
of our big cottonwoods,

and the flashing red finch descends  
busy among the bursting white flames,  
when suddenly, by a small boy enraptured,  
it poses as the guardian halcyon.

Love in April is like this,  
measured in flashes  
of red wings in trees  
and scored in lines of  
molten sunlight, pouring  
through our knotty fence  
into the silky darkness  
of our star drenched night

Steven Federle

# Evening Prayer

Wind stirs in expectation; it  
softly strokes my face.

The March sun reassures me,  
warms pale flesh  
through layers of thick sweater  
and winter coat.

Under indigo hills  
new grass flows,  
yellow and green,

as past distant ranges,  
to the sky-bright, rounded sea  
he flees and sends  
a gift of clouds,  
aflame  
in glory.

Peace to the grass of the fields!  
Peace  
to dark hills and drifting clouds,  
and to the sacrificial sun  
peace!

Steven Federle

# Evening Song

In the nearly dark tree  
out on the bright edge,  
he clings to tender leaves,  
rides the wind-swayed branch  
and sings.

Small bird,  
red as the falling sun,  
cries his evening song ...  
to tarried mate?  
to fading sky or  
guardian tree?

Drawn deep to darkest night,  
I cannot ken this creature's  
pure mind; but his breath  
leaves my raptured soul  
bereft.

Steven Federle

# Eventide

Glowing low through eastern pines  
suspended, self-contained,  
this perfect world gently refines  
the rough, red clouds  
of eventide.

Beneath the moon  
in throbbing streams, tremor  
in the vibrant night,  
green cloisters chant their lusty song  
glorious noise, rising antiphon.

Steven Federle

# Evolution

Sun rising  
flinging green fire  
on flashing leaves

as birds flit  
and call to each other  
ancient songs of  
lust, warning,  
hunger.

In twisting architecture  
they rise,  
sure-footed, fleet of wing,  
fearless,

while below I stand,  
neck craned,  
stiff with gazing.

Back to my room,  
I go - back to  
my comfortable cave,  
my simian  
roots.

Steven Federle



# Experience

I've seen how the darkness  
eases into new light.

The summer sun creases  
the wan and weary night.

I know of noon's ways,  
harsh rant of glaring rays  
haranguing to passion  
the giddy, fevered day.

Then keen delta breezes  
the painted sun consume  
and send vermilion fleece  
to greet the rising moon.

Steven Federle

# Eye Trouble

Close by flashes  
fill the night  
of my peripheral vision

what's nearly there  
just above my shoulder  
over my straining brow

I can see in a blink  
the paparazzi  
ducking into dark alleys  
patiently waiting for me to emerge  
smiling into innocent lamplight  
to trap me, like Princess Di  
with their flash

Steven Federle

# Failure

The leaves are falling too early!

Strewn, green and pliant,  
they drift to summer lawns  
to wither and die.

Oh, heavily falls failure when,  
not yet the season of death,  
impatient winds tear and shred,  
suck dry life's tender  
breath.

Steven Federle

# Faith

Faith  
is seeing my blood  
coursing through  
shut eyelids

and feeling  
blood pushing down  
into my arms and legs,

believing  
it will soon return  
to my darkly  
beating heart.

But faith is more than  
seeing  
or believing.

Faith shines  
like the cloistered sun  
concealed by thick  
autumn clouds.

Faith knows  
all my childish lies,  
and gently laughs  
at my innocence.

Faith stalks me,  
deep into my desert  
where, trembling,  
I wait for her famished arrow.

I love faith;  
in her passionate embrace  
I fall into my  
darkest night.

I fear faith;

slave to her lacerating truth  
reluctantly I walk  
into her relentless light.

Steven Federle

# Faith And Disobedience

When I heard how you raised  
the little girl who died,  
with searching hands  
I found you,  
and felt a strange new thirst  
for light,

So I begged  
for a miracle.

You asked me  
if I believed  
that you really could do  
such a thing,  
could illuminate  
my personal night.

Filled  
with inexplicable  
faith, I said  
yes!

and when you touched my eyes,  
I saw your face  
with a newborn's sight.

Lord, I cannot lock  
your love,  
inside my heart!  
my very sinews will burst!

So, disobedient in my praise,  
I shout it out  
through this bright, new day!

Steven Federle

# Fall Leaves

Wind-ripped leaves  
cover my yard

severed flesh, leathery  
fingers splayed  
grip the brick walkway.

Flush winter roses  
dropp petals,  
red shrouds cover  
glistening gold veins  
sundered  
from ravaged trees.

Yet the trees survive.

mimicking death's  
grey angularity  
oblivious to the wind,

nude limbs  
lean into the howling storm  
and dream of June breezes,  
singing green afternoons,  
the faithful thrush  
thrusting new life to flight.

But for now  
black clouds gather

the winter wind sings dirges  
for these sacrificial leaves  
nourishing the famished earth.

Steven Federle

# Fatal Night

deep in the night lights  
rise and fall, convulsing clouds  
fill the sky with death's

blighted breath, my heart  
thrills, my blood fails and leaves me  
undone, breathless and

blind, 'till in the dark  
your eyes ignite and lift me  
out of fatal night.

Steven Federle



# Fear The Night

tearful life  
drives you down to  
the hungry ground.

O, fear the night! for  
wild-eyed sleep  
will shroud your sight,  
buried deep.

Steven Federle

## February: After The Storm

clean and fresh  
and puddle-full,  
my soul shines,  
full of hope

with resurrection  
filled to full!

Steven Federle

# Feed The Fire

We will never be fully real until we let ourselves fall in love - either with another human person or with God. Thomas Merton

Close to you  
I see you breathe.  
Your sweet breath  
is all I need  
to feed the fire,  
living desire!

Steven Federle

# Fifteen Million

Earth reels to cold night  
yet everything  
stays  
the same.

I wait for morning  
when grey light  
might brighten  
somber skies.

Another day's lies.

I don't understand  
my sadness,  
for my life is good,  
full of love and rich in faith.

So why do these clouds  
hold me fast  
in this dark place?

I observe winter's brutal grip  
squeeze tender spring leaves  
and curse with frost new-flowering trees.

I understand how the wading white bird  
startled by blare of a frantic train  
might die from panic  
where she stands.

But mostly I see  
how ruin fills my nation's streets  
with yard-signs  
foreclosing  
on fifteen million  
dreams.

Steven Federle

# Fill Your Breath

with the warm delta breeze,  
whispering leaves, all power  
contained in a bit of green  
and a murmur of rain.

in the hot summer sun  
our fingers caress. I see  
in your eyes what  
I'll never forget.

Steven Federle

# Fill Your Life With Bright Morning

Fill your life with bright morning,  
breathe deeply the wave-kissed breeze  
and run until you no longer touch the earth.

Pay no attention to the darkness that lurks  
just beneath your feet, the swirling vortex  
pulling you down, drawing your singing blood  
into the unknown land. If you hear grieve  
the morning dove, say it's not for you he sings;

oh, fill your lungs with the pure,

cool hope of spring!

(23 March 2015)

Steven Federle

# Fire Within

Clouded vision,  
fog shrouded  
sightlessly glide  
through morning  
pale shades,  
searching  
for clearer light!

Oh blazing star!  
banish death's sight!

Clear clean  
the sharp edges  
of infinite right,

and emerge,  
O Fire  
within!

Steven Federle

# First Day Of Spring

doors open, ancient  
hinges grind, summer's sun grows  
immanent as love

as trees, bare, bending,  
tough and twisting as small buds  
prepare to explode.

Steven Federle



# First Flight

The young bird hops,  
into my open garage.

Head hunched  
it studies the veined floor  
like a map; lost traveler  
cast low from  
wooded heights,

and lifts to its mother  
a raspy cry.

Too early from the nest  
fearful of the sky,  
unsure of tender wings,  
not able to fly,  
it's helpless.

I want to hold it,  
feel its heart  
tremble in my gentle hands

return it  
to shredded nest,  
or,  
like a prayer,  
cast it high to heaven  
and watch it fly  
or fall,

but I do nothing.

when echoing its mother's call  
the youngster stumbles out the door  
and into the still street -

Breathless,  
I watch mother bird  
diving near

as the fledgling  
rises  
into familiar air.

Steven Federle

# First Flight (Merton)

grey dawn rising  
blaze of new light

purposeful, climbing,  
breath of new height,

sharp beak piercing  
song of first flight!

Steven Federle

# First Leaf

Rain seeps  
deep in the ground  
and rises up spidery vines,

spreading wide,  
reaching to where bud  
stretches to green

first leaf.

Famished,  
it swallows  
the sun.

Steven Federle

# First Rain

black spots  
on pavement gray

steps  
filled full,  
candescent day

overburdened sky  
no longer  
denied.

Steven Federle

## First Rain (2012)

first rain, wind driven,  
soaks my hair; into my face  
flies cold grace, fills the

narrow gutters, streets,  
eager fields, with life revives  
this gray winter world.

Steven Federle

## Flawed Haiku

clouds gather where none  
had been, promising rain, they  
scatter in vain

Steven Federle

# Flow

It flows  
over highways  
dripping down  
lamp-posts  
through gutters,  
pounding  
storm drains,  
filling  
narrow lanes,  
past dark houses,  
past high-tension  
wires, driving  
through  
constraining fence,  
unfettered  
it fills  
the green hills  
and rolls  
through folding slough, past  
low bridge and causeway,  
ever lower  
down to Suisun Bay,  
unstoppable  
like a swimmer's blood  
pulsing through throbbing vein,  
reaching for gate of gold  
to break free,  
to become  
one with  
One.

Steven Federle



# Fog At Dawn

"We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time...He is everywhere, He is in everything, and we cannot be without Him." Thomas Merton

Morning fog softens  
spreads through the bare trees, muffles  
the cries of the birds.

Edges blur, rounded  
fog, logic of cloud earthbound:  
faith betrayed and drowned.

Steven Federle

# Foggy Road

"...unity in love is one of the most characteristic works of the inner self, so that paradoxically the inner "I" is not only isolated but at the same time united with others on a higher plane, which is in fact the plane of spiritual solitude." Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*

+

in fog we walk  
down the glistening road

our steps ring  
like ice shattering

crystal souls, shards  
sharp and eager  
at last,  
to rise.

You look  
into my eyes  
and see  
nothing;

I look  
into your eyes  
and see  
everything,

as together  
we walk  
down the shimmering  
road.

Steven Federle

# Fog's Gone

Fog's gone, the sky rises  
to steaming heights  
sheds hot silver to gleaming bay  
thin lines of fire spreading  
through the blue, hazy day.

From this hill I see  
how space  
to white space fades  
and bold day strides to night.

Fog's back  
to block my hobbled sight.

Steven Federle

# For Love Alone

Occupy my whole life with the one thought and the one desire of love, that I may love not for the sake of merit, not for the sake of perfection, not for the sake of virtue, not for the sake of sanctity but for love alone. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*.

radiant vision  
brilliant interlude  
raging clouds sundered,  
sun-split storm;

soft rain falls  
through winter-bare trees,  
through fields of  
feral flowers,

God's world  
set afire  
for love alone

Steven Federle

# Fountain At San Damiano

Splashing like diamonds  
water fills the bowl  
spills to cool shallows  
to darting larvae,  
fetal tadpole.

A river falls  
drawing grace  
to darker pools  
where pensive koi  
deep waters  
peruse.

Steven Federle

# Fountain Of Fire

"Just as it is impossible for a man to see his face in troubled water, so too the soul, unless it be cleansed of alien thoughts." Thomas Merton

Closing in  
the ancient wind sweeps  
still waters, turns clarity  
to confusion, joy  
to primal fear.

I seek my face  
but see only a blush  
on the river's edge,  
red betrayal seeping  
from deep within,  
from a wound unseen.

Cleanse me, O Fountain of Fire,  
still my fears  
and again I'll see  
my face  
washed clean  
by grateful tears!

Steven Federle

# French Park Creek

Deep in the woods  
down the steep trench  
we call to each other -  
to the creek we descend

through green shadows rushing  
over shallow, smooth stones,  
to deeper, dark pools  
where love lies, alone.

Hand in warm hand  
we run, holding tight  
and laughing we fall  
to our own secret night.

Steven Federle

# From A Dark Room

"Our spirits were made for light, not for darkness." Thomas Merton

This dark room  
comforts me.

Tender eyes  
are safe here from  
the hot autumn wind.

Dark tears cleanse  
as I gaze out  
to the shimmering street  
where rises the sacred scent  
of yellow flowers,

heavy  
and sweet.

Steven Federle



# From Across The Meadow

From across the meadow  
that comes between the highway  
and our house, I can see the stand  
of tall trees marking our place  
on this wide earth.

They wave to us  
in the warm summer breeze,  
watch anxiously as we  
cross the busy tracks  
and make the wide turn,  
safe again,  
home -

and when we stroll  
through the green evening yard,  
inspecting rose and blushing tomato  
these guardian spirits  
patiently wait  
as the veil of crimson  
silently falls.

Steven Federle

# From This High Window

From this high window  
the invisible wind  
moves silent trees:  
motion without sound,  
dance without song.

Behind painted walls  
and heavy curtains,  
I cannot not hear  
the tumult,

but opening the heavy door,  
at last I hear the trees sing,  
stirred to passion  
by unseen hands  
waving branches  
swept up  
by the compelling wind,

and drawn outside,  
exposed and complete,  
finally I face the clear maelstrom,  
my own hair flying free,

and gaze at the trees,  
wild men  
dancing as they chant  
savage hymns  
to their howling god.

Steven Federle

# Fukushima

Twisted steel, writhing iron  
grasping girders  
bones of failure

but power  
still fills  
the empty spaces.

Before, it coursed through  
thin ribbons, through high wires  
tense in the fog.

But now, deep within the devastation  
efficient atoms hum in  
hot expectation

as delicate clouds  
drift  
toward the desperate city.

Steven Federle

# Gate Of Heaven

Through rolling green hills, in the bright winter dawn  
together we'll go to this wide winter lawn  
over trails anointed by generations of tears  
we'll bring your still heart and at last face our fears.

For this is the field of our lingering pain  
terminus for the somber parade  
bodies blessed, broken and dressed for the grave.

But then, when the living have gone to warm homes,  
you'll stay in this place under the bright, cold dome  
and wait 'neath the grass of this wind-swept plain  
for what will come next; your soul to rise once again.

For this is the field of our lingering pain  
terminus for the somber parade  
bodies blessed, broken and dressed for the grave.

Steven Federle

# Georgia Forest

This Georgia forest,  
is sundered  
by winding highway  
into green canyon walls.

Dark pines subsume  
the mid-day dusk;  
black trunks thrust  
into red forest floor

when, with sudden, golden shaft,  
the faithful sun splits  
its sullen core.

Steven Federle

## Glance Down

and see how new grass  
lifts green glory  
to absolute blue.

Look how swarming gnats  
dash in passion,  
vortex of life,  
swirling whirlpool  
in liquid light.

The jay waits  
on shadowed fence,  
as jeweled hummingbirds  
float  
in a sea of roses,  
nectar drunk,  
May-mad.

Steven Federle

# Gleams A Light

Gleams a light  
across the darkness  
casting waves of lace  
on my windowpane,

breaking night into colors  
that no night can understand

and consuming me  
with joy

when the invisible hand  
flips the switch  
and unbroken blackness  
fills endless space...

but I am content.

The memory  
is still warm  
in my soul.

Steven Federle

## Gleams A Light (Revised)

Across the darkness  
on my windowpane  
breaks waves of lace  
splits night to color  
that night cannot understand,  
bright hope ignites  
My soul's aflame  
'till the unseen hand  
breaks the link  
and night fills  
my sight again;  
yet I'm content  
for deep in my core  
the fire still shines  
and hope still soars.

Steven Federle



# Gloria

Sudden light  
flares in the eastern sky.

Bright clouds burst  
and consume the void  
with glory.

The newborn child,  
wrinkled and pink, warms  
in his mother's embrace

and waits for the stunned world  
to exhale.

Steven Federle

# Golden-Eyed Day

Golden-eyed day  
blazing through trees  
swaying,

mockingbirds and blue-jays  
clinging  
to dancing branches, singing

as a feathered form  
flashes darkly past  
and is gone in a blinking.

But silence remains,  
an empty chair  
waiting.

Steven Federle

# Good Friday

The day was filled with lash and thorn,  
hands lacerated by hammered nail  
til brain seared  
and pain pierced  
this great,  
bleeding  
soul.

Ancient grief still lingers on this  
sun-drenched, bird-filled day,  
as I wait in line to kiss  
the wood and  
remember.

Steven Federle

# Grace

dry earth  
shifting ever-down  
to lowest ground,  
dust sifting  
autumn's blight,  
to winter's,  
longest night,

until Grace  
unrequested, freely  
given, undeserved  
fills with unreserved life  
springs, white-water  
rising higher  
than could ever  
have been  
conceived!

Steven Federle

# Grace Prayer

Hail Mary  
full of grace  
you are  
filled with grace,  
with grace  
fill me  
in streams  
of yes  
draw me  
to where you are  
to where He is  
among wo-  
men,  
yes,  
among men  
blessed  
fruitful, grace-  
fully gliding  
through the  
dark veil  
at the hour  
of yes  
to my  
death,  
amen.

Steven Federle

# Graduation Dance

The gym was dim.

Red and white balloons  
glittered in the dusk  
while flashing lights writhed  
on the dark floor  
like enchanted water-snakes  
gliding through scented fog.

This was a celebration dance!

Eighth grade done at last,  
they stepped, hesitant, into the roiling  
teen-age sea, their synchronous, bobbing heads  
attuned to the be-bop rhythms of the city (not their city) ,  
and the lusty calls of the hood (not their hood) .

Smooth gym walls echoed the dj's mechanical angst  
endless, relentless beats, the racing heart of the machine,  
artificial sighs, nano-seconds long and gigabytes wide.

The boys, spinning on heads and leaping from hands and  
flailing legs, showed an athleticism  
never seen in PE,  
while the girls huddled in their own dark corner  
and planned their move;

their fashion walk,  
legs strutting ahead  
of swaying hips,  
heels clicking the hard, dark floor,  
as they stalked right up to the foul line

where boys were spinning and leaping  
through throbbing lights  
to the tribal, primal beat.

So the girls turned,  
hips flung in defiance,

and sashayed back to the wall,  
staring hard at the gaping boys  
over their swaying shoulders.

(28 May 2009)

Steven Federle

# Gravity

We walk secure, grounded, heavy, oblivious,  
safe from perplexing weightlessness,  
unlike Life Savers candies on Atlantis spinning theatrically  
as glittering Las Vegas floats beneath,  
or those rusty spherical droplets  
of Tang, humorlessly drifting over the Indian Ocean;  
we are safe even as Kubrick's treacherous computer,  
tenderly releases the cradled voyager to drift reeling away,  
receding, smaller and smaller, no longer a man,  
a fading star, and then just gone,  
unclaimed even by the false gravity  
of his mother-ship.

Yes, we are safe because she holds us tightly, binds  
us with unseen, loving coils, lest we range to adventures  
too high, too dangerous,  
too unnatural;  
the bungee jumper, skydiver, snowboarder, eventually all learn  
her love is costly,  
and even tired, timid professors shudder  
when top floor classrooms into basement labs fall;

then, with violent, jerking movement,  
her jealous love pulls us, prize seed all,  
into the deep, cool soil of newly furrowed cities,  
Chendgu, Port-au-Prince, Santiago, Christchurch,  
San Francisco,

and Gravity, jealous lover, finally claims us as her own when  
in the recesses of our graves we wait,  
germinal, for the static earth again  
ardently to quake.

Steven Federle



# Green Hills

Green hills,  
embroidered  
mist, rich  
rising ridge  
fog filled  
plunging fields  
cattle,  
black, weightless  
rise poised  
from bare bank  
grazing  
the grass of  
heaven

Steven Federle

# Grizzly Island Road

Soft sky, blue and white  
cloud swelling over low hills,  
and delta waters,  
twilight sloughs

calling to geese and egret,  
kingfisher and mallard  
to lounge in waving reeds  
as grazing cattle linger  
in verdant valley.

Like a river the road flows  
down to the sacred sea,  
to the deep, living stream  
of Earth.

Steven Federle

# Grounded

The afternoon breeze  
rushes through the top of my big tree;  
its canopy sways and sings in hushed tones  
as the declining sun ignites  
its outermost leaves  
with green fire.

Through swaying limbs  
I see brilliant summer sky  
promising stars beyond  
if only I can rise high enough  
to achieve black space;  
but I've never been there, never risen  
beyond this illusionary, flat world  
that confines my sight.

Never have I ascended that pillar of flame,  
pressed deeply against the astronaut's contoured seat,  
breathing noisily in helmeted glass,  
as computers glow reassuringly in darkness,  
promising that everything will work,  
and orbit will be achieved.

No, my space journeys are all interior.

Earth-bound, I am firmly cradled in my deep, leather chair,  
and only through my high, arched window  
view the nightly dance of wind and tree,  
of moon and rising stars.

Envious, I hear excited starlings, one to another,  
tell stories of daring flight  
through the good sky, high  
above this green,  
firm earth.

Steven Federle

# Hamza Al - Khatib

Hamza al-Khatib,  
smiled sweetly.

Was he thinking of school  
and soccer, or friends  
waiting to play  
when they caught him,

roughly hauled him into their white van  
took him to their station, and demanded  
confession  
from his glistening tears,  
from his tender face flushed  
with confusion and fear?

They would make of him  
an example  
of what happens to those  
who pursue happiness  
in Assad's Syria.

But you, weeping parents,  
you-tube us your tortured children's  
distorted faces, gaping chests  
torn arms, dishonored genitals.

Show us how  
Assad destroys your future.

O parents of Syria, rise up  
and send Assad  
to cower before heaven's gate

as Allah  
gently cradles  
your slaughtered  
children.



# Holy Days

These are my holy days  
when dark spirits inundate  
the mystic forest

and urge me with purling song  
into empty waters.

But I'll stop my descent  
Into somnolent night.

I see a new way to fight  
this terminal pain.

Looking into your eyes  
at last I confess  
your brighter path  
and joyfully say,  
Yes!

Steven Federle

# Holy Mountain

From this small mountain  
folded valleys glide  
to shining waters.

Flowing like quicksilver,  
dark rivers run free  
to the sun-drenched sea.

This is my holy mountain.

I seek your gentle voice  
where the small birds rest  
on thin branches.

See how their breath  
arouses the storm?

Fluttering wings  
can make shudder the world,  
to passion stir vast  
twisting winds.

Though I am small  
and dying,  
make of me  
a pillar of fire,

and I'll descend from these heights  
to flood the dark valleys  
with your living light.

Steven Federle

# Holy Saturday

Storms pass, winds subside  
life abides.

See how the cottonwoods trees  
spread new leaves,  
fill the blank sky with  
emerald sheen  
as waving vines praise  
the living spirit  
of spring,

for soon the shrouded sun will flame  
through constraining mists  
and in glory rise to complete  
this forgiven world  
and set it free.

Steven Federle



# Holy Spirit

I lift heavy legs and groping for glasses,  
stumble through my dark house  
to see if night will return the sky.

Aching for the new day  
I sip strong coffee  
and write.

Listen! Birdsong rings  
from dark trees.

Wise winter birds  
know that the world  
begins  
and ends  
with song.

With the rush of wings  
they teach me,  
how to capture the infant sun!

They show me  
how, with trill and vibrato,  
to end the dreary night.

They use breath and light  
to rise to heaven,  
and renew with love  
the face  
of the earth.

Steven Federle

# Hope

'Hope takes us entirely out of this world while we remain bodily in the midst of it. Our minds retain their clear views of what is good in creatures. Our wills remain chaste and solitary in the midst of all created beauty...' Thomas Merton, No Man Is An Island

Clear and whole,  
the moon waits,

patient,  
solitary self  
chastly gazing  
to the blazing east

to the new sun,  
the good day.

Steven Federle

# Hope At Sunset

Across the fading valley  
The silver bay shines,  
effulgent edge  
under twilight hills.

Confined  
flat waters  
cut a thin line  
beneath dark heights rising.

Saw-toothed ridges  
rip thin clouds  
to ragged strips  
the plunging sun ignites

into resplendent light  
of love  
for this sad, winter world.

Steven Federle

## How Beautiful (From Isaiah 52: 7)

How beautiful  
on the mountain  
are the feet of him  
who treads  
bright paths of  
freedom!

From winter's  
gray day he  
sings into being  
new life

peace  
and eternal  
light!

Steven Federle

# How Shall I Remember You?

How shall I remember you  
searching memory's dark, dry rooms?

Under high ceilings and dim attic lamps  
I hear only echoes of my childhood's lost past.

You're calling me outside, past the dark screen door  
onto the back porch, to watch the gathering evening storm,

and there I see the willow tree, dancing in the wind  
its long green leaves thrashing the sky, its supple branches bend

when following its sure, straight path, the lightning struck it down  
and, like all things ultimately, smashed it dying into the ground.

Although I've searched these dry, long years after both of you had died,  
my tears are done, I see the sun, and my flashing anger is now satisfied.

Steven Federle

# How To Die

Darkness looms  
on folded wings  
cold and undeniable.

But its flight stalls,  
as life rages on.

Red Infection flares  
in your pale blood,  
your tired heart savaged  
by thin assassins.

Should you go now  
into Dylan's good night  
where faint stars  
call softly to your wasted soul?

Yes

enter

the gentle void  
deeply breathe dark waters,  
and all your pain will drown  
in a sudden flood of

Nothing

No

Your

fierce soul shrinks  
from this gracious night;

You fight for bitter light.

Raw pain is better  
than vacuous rest

In death's stark nest.

Steven Federle

# Hummingbirds

hummingbirds dance

falling and rising  
high to the top  
of the apple tree,

to where I cannot reach.

Steven Federle



# Hunter's Hill

Above Columbus Parkway  
it rises to the east,  
creased with oak  
and dry grass,  
grazing cattle, bored,  
loitering horses,  
and the gliding hawk hunting  
in the rough granite  
and withered timber.

But hidden by high, jagged peaks,  
the mute Miwok headman observes  
the cattle and the hawk,  
and the swift automobile  
hissing  
down the smooth, black road  
below  
Hunter Hill.

## Author's Note:

the Miwok were the indigenous people of the northern part of the San Francisco Bay Area. They were nearly wiped out in the 19th century by diseases (mainly small pox) brought by the European settlers. Miwok descendents still live in this area, though.

My Miwok would be a ghost.

Steven Federle

# I Hear The Cars Race

I hear the cars race.

On the still night streets I hear it,  
the rush of combustion, confusion of speed.

Power can slip through young fingers  
like the leather leash of a big dog,  
slashing tender hands.

I pray that they can hold on  
or the beast will surely turn  
and crush them  
howling  
like a  
freight-train.

Steven Federle

# I Just Cut The Grass

I just cut the grass, and  
the cat is checking out my work.

She's critical, but helps out,  
grazing contentedly on  
sprigs of errant chaff  
that I missed in my hurry  
to finish. Clouds are gathering  
on this cold, Holy Saturday.

Now I tarry in my webbed chair,  
to sip a cold bottle of beer,  
and wonder how green  
the world has grown.

Knock-out roses pop  
(their vermillion tips shout  
in the more common green of fern and ivy)  
and red cherries fill the green cherry-tree.

Soon from shattered shells  
new birds will rise  
as mockingbirds fly  
to fill shrill beaks  
with cherries.

Steven Federle

# I, John

I, John, declare.

Listen!

Can you hear?

Open your eyes and see.

With outstretched hands reach and  
proclaim to the world of endless strife  
the Word of peace,  
eternal Life!

Steven Federle

# I'LI Fill The Sky

I'll fill the sky  
with my desire.

With heart of fire  
I'll scorch the pride  
that binds your fear,

with withering sun  
I'll quench with your tears,  
and shed my blood,  
a cleansing flood of  
never-  
ending love.

Steven Federle

## I'LI Wait

“Make ready for the face that speaks like lightning, uttering the new name of your exaltation deep in the vitals of your soul. Make ready for the Christ, Whose smile like lightning sets free the song of everlasting glory that now sleeps in your paper flesh, like dynamite.” Thomas Merton, A Book of Hours

I'll  
wait  
for that  
time when Your  
silence fills the world  
when even birds cannot conceive  
cannot dream of dawn; then my sallow skin will burst to  
flame, freedom's song will utter my name, and I will rise in glory through death's  
darkest vein!

Steven Federle

# Immanence

I know you stroll  
beyond Andromeda,  
gaze on the Magellanic Clouds,  
but I cannot see that far.  
I am stardust,  
to Earth fallen,

but I seek you in the autumn rain,  
hear you sing in the evening wind.  
Your breath my empty lungs increase,  
your smile shines forth  
from my darkened eyes,  
and my heart overflows  
with your sacred blood,

love spilling,  
Earth fulfilling.

Steven Federle

# Impasse

I listen for you to speak,  
to look me in the eye  
and simply tell me what  
it is that you want  
me to do,

but you're silent.

You're waiting for me  
to speak, to utter  
my love, sing  
my song to  
you.

We are at an impasse

when cold air fills  
my hungry lungs,

and exhaling at last  
I hear your song  
in my fleeing  
breath!

Steven Federle



# In Arching Waters

In arching waters  
the black bird dances  
with graceless step,  
head jerks, probing soft soil,  
penetrating wet grass  
when rearing back primitive eyes  
it raises ivory beak  
and offers a shining prize,  
living, writhing.  
captive  
to mother-sky.

Steven Federle

# In Contemplation Of Seeking

In my darkness I seek you  
through deep caverns I run;  
my dying flesh yearns for  
your fierce, piercing love.

Through darkness I see  
you're glowing so bright,  
but always receding,  
deeper than night.

I fear that I'll falter,  
betrayed by frail will  
when softly you whisper  
"my child, just be still."

Steven Federle

# In My Silence

In my silence I hear your song,  
gentle breezes  
filling tender leaves.

O feel my prayer,  
my failing despair.

In my darkness I feel your breath  
echoing my heart's  
steady beating,

O fill my emptiness,  
my dying,  
with eyes  
like stars

consuming night.

Steven Federle

# In The Cold

In the cold  
there's no room  
for old fears; tears  
that freeze on your  
cheeks are  
useless.

Lying under narrow eaves  
on porch or sidewalk grate  
waiting for sleep  
or death  
to ease your pain,

you cannot remember  
how you got this way;

for thought, like water,  
congeals to solid rock,  
and you can't  
even pray.

\*\*\*\*\*

Author's Note: Estimates of the numbers of homeless in the US today range from 200,000 to 500,000, many of whom are unsheltered children. This is a national disgrace.

\*\*\*\*\*

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&#1083; &#1100; &#1085; &#1099; &#1081; &#1087; &#1086; &#1079;  
&#1086; &#1088; .

Steven Federle

# In The Depth

in  
depth of  
distance, past□  
silent, wide fields, past  
concrete steps, rushing cars, trucks, lives  
unknown, stands the wood: still, closed, filled with what's possible!

Steven Federle

# In The End

In the end  
will my I rise  
like cranes flying  
through obdurate fog,  
keen eyes splitting the milky sky,  
swimming the windy sea  
to clearer air beyond  
high dawn's  
looming  
trees?

Steven Federle



# In The Human Community

in the human community  
laughter fills the air,  
deep voiced fathers, uncles,  
small children laughing, playing tag,  
playing hide  
and seek  
as birdsong pierces  
the opaque sky  
fills with ancient peace  
the resurrection-trees of resurgent spring  
in the human community.

Steven Federle

# In The Morning, Early

In the morning, early  
before the sun has cleared  
our neighbor's roof,  
we move through  
our morning chores:

You water your gardens  
and I feed my birds.

The rose, the morning glory,  
creeping higher  
up the blue trellis, reaching  
for the brightening sky;  
in the window-box  
the vinca bursting red,

as sparrow and finch tumble  
from the cherry tree

swarming in noisy congregation,  
fussing and quarreling, shoving  
for more seed -

rejoicing!

Steven Federle

# In The Territory Of The Gerasenes

From deep inside  
I heard them,  
howling hatred  
lashing me with my own hands  
gashing the rocky tombs  
with my own bloody feet.

Late at night  
they cursed and fought  
deep inside  
my aching skull.

I was their prisoner,  
and they were many...

But then I saw Him by the lake  
and my soul leapt  
even as Legion arose  
and with my ragged voice raged,  
"what will you do to us? "

My soul cried louder,  
"Save me! "

Hearing us both,  
He drove dark spirits  
from my unclean breast  
and into the beasts poor swine.  
Madness cast them  
into death's deep pit

but I could hear only  
silence.

Peace  
filled me.

My hand moved  
only when I commanded,

and what my eyes saw  
I clearly viewed.

The people of the village  
fearing a man who could  
compel demons,  
begged Him to leave.

Blind fools!  
If only they could see Him  
as I do.

As he was going, I begged to go too  
and stay forever in the light  
of his face.

But this grace  
was not  
for me alone

He told me to go  
and proclaim without fear  
how His love saved me  
from my soul's dark night,  
and led me here, into  
bright paradise,

Steven Federle

# In The Villages Round Caesarea Philippi

Oh, we are  
a faithless generation!

I saw the lying spirits  
ensnare my son  
and throw him into the mud, fouling  
his boy's mind with fetid waters,  
and unleashing to fiery panic  
his gibbering tongue,

but everyone shrugged and said,  
'nothing can be done.'

A faithless man, I prayed for faith

and He entered the fray,  
commanding to silence  
Satan's dubious claims,  
with His mighty prayer  
sending hell-ward howling  
all our false and golden  
gods,

and gave me back  
my son!

Steven Federle

# Incident

Out on the edge  
death staggers,

frail legs falter  
and fail,

but wait!  
light is arising,.

life resuming,  
breath prevails.

Steven Federle

# Inspiration

"Inspiration is a judgment on a deep level, somewhere down in the ground of our being." Thomas Merton

In the bright morning  
when I awake  
my soul arises  
from sleep's dark cave.

I'll not deny  
what it is  
that you see.

Just say what I am  
and, by you inspired,  
that will I be.

Steven Federle

# Instrument

Make me your  
hammer.

I'll pound  
the stubborn nails down  
til all boards become one.

Let me be a fierce nail,  
and I'll pierce your living flesh,  
number all your bones.

My rough hand will smooth  
away sin's sharp edge  
and bring low life's  
knot of corruption.

With gleaming blade  
will I open a wound  
pulsing joyfully in your side

to anoint with living blood  
the guilty hands  
of soldiers.

So use me, O builder,  
and build your house  
of many rooms.

Steven Federle



# Insurgent

'Only mercy can liberate us from the madness of our determination to be consistent - from the awful pattern of lusts, greeds, angers and hatreds which mix us up together like a mass of dough and thrust us all together into the oven.'

Thomas Merton, Raids on the Unspeakable

Thin lines restrain,  
sameness  
my breath contains,  
till I can no longer feel  
Your perfect pain!

Then will I become  
a silent ghost -  
tears in the night  
ache in their souls,  
their dream of fright.

Yes! make me Your angel  
of the seven plagues;  
with Your love  
We'll destroy bland fate.

Steven Federle

# Invitation

Come into my night;  
the darkness is so cold  
that sparrows flee  
my winter trees,

so I have closed  
my windows and my doors.  
I hoard my little warmth.

Crickets will not sing delight  
and stars no longer glimmer  
in winter's dreary night.

O come,  
O come, Emmanuel!

I am captive and dull.  
I cannot see the flashing stars  
that lurk beyond the cloud.

O come into my small house  
and my meager fire share.

O come, and bring fierce angels  
to cut away death's empty snare!

Steven Federle

# Invocation

O fill me  
with your breath.

My soul  
will dance  
like leaves  
glad in your breeze.

In green morning  
will I arise  
to sing your gladsome song.

O call me  
and I will  
rush to your side!

Deep in your holy wood,  
will we walk -  
you leading the way  
and I behind  
in your sacred shade.

Steven Federle

# It Happens

I can see it coming,  
small in the distance  
just a spot at first,

but I know  
it's coming for me  
sure-air, clear  
cross-hairs  
frame my soul,  
zero-in  
on my languid pen

til, joyfully I bolt  
for the house, tear  
through dark rooms,  
turn on my dim light,  
and breathlessly wait  
for the poem  
to strike.

Steven Federle

# I've Never Been Out To Sea

I've never been out to sea

though I've touched iridescent waves,  
flown over blue surf  
and played in safe, familiar bays  
with dog-eyed seals and  
wondering whales.

But gazing, just as the sun  
juts beyond night's edge,  
I see this curving ball, endless  
band of water held close  
to jealous core by clear bands  
of gravity, hurtling  
through the void,

My human eye, wrapped in  
spheres of bone and blood,  
follows earth's trajectory just  
ahead of the season, basks in  
the summer sun as it  
heats blue waters, casts high  
bright towers of  
cumulonimbus;  
for I am a child of the sea,  
and I can see out far  
and in deep.

Steven Federle

# Iwama Market

It looms, huge on Rockville Road  
between swaying eucalyptus  
and darkening fields,

unexpected hulk  
of a ruined past.

In better days  
girls danced and liquor poured  
through its open doors  
free as the western wind.

"Hold on tight, boy,  
or it'll knock you over! "

Back then it was "Bandana Lou's"  
disreputable,  
speak-  
easy,  
fun.

When the wind drops  
you can still hear them laughing  
through the easy chatter  
of honky-tonk.

Steven Federle

# Jesus Curses A Fig Tree

Today the apple tree unfurled its spring leaves,  
green flags waving in the western breeze,  
triumphant yet again over withering winter.

I see small apples, unripe bulbs,  
clusters of sweetness,  
promised, yet undefined;

imagination or memory  
is required to taste that fruit today,

but I'm not hungry  
and not on my way  
to the rapacious city.

I will wait.

Steven Federle

# Joshua Tree

As surely as God is trustworthy,  
His clouds will rise in the desert sky  
pillaring, muttering thunder  
while close by, hot winds  
blast the manzanita,  
throw bright mica  
at slick rock walls,  
and bend low  
the Joshua tree  
with His fiery  
breath.

We thought that all was lost,  
that God, once denied,  
would refuse to hear  
our thirsty prayer;

but know you this:  
His nature  
is all  
Yes.

Steven Federle



# Journey

Beneath me lies Denver,  
Thrall of stasis,  
Tenuous lines  
Fading to western chaos -  
A glint of light, then darkness

Dark mountains leap up at me  
Then fall back silently  
Into stony blue gorges.

High clouds brush my wings.  
I have captured the sun!  
Glittering, I release it.

Steven Federle

# Joy Fills The Night

Joy fills the night,  
sighs, breath  
faint as death,  
inward flies.

Oh, gaze into the night,

to the emptiness  
deep inside  
where bright salvation,  
silently resides.

(Sept 15,2014)

Steven Federle

# July Morning

sun shifts my shade  
to the left, to the back  
of my small  
circle.

a distant jet  
rises to pure blue.

hear its roar diminish  
from proud power  
to whisper  
to nothing.

silently  
I obey  
the sun.

Steven Federle

# Kentucky

Summer steam  
washes us clean  
like a warm bath

as we wade through young fields,  
new corn waist high  
to where blue sky  
meets the rustling green sea.

We navigate by dead-  
reckoning to the red barn.

Wary of snakes,  
with flailing stick you flush  
out the tall, quick hares.

Feathers flashing, quail  
burst heavenward at  
our clumsy approach,

but in the dark barn  
we find  
forgiveness.

God's own light streams down  
into fragrant stalls  
as their wise eyes  
regard us.

We reach out to touch.

They nod,  
first in warning,  
then with bright approval.

Steven Federle

# Khaki Hills

khaki hills,  
light-washed, bleached  
summer clean,  
slopes folded  
oaken-green

as a horse, mad  
in the morning mist,  
gallops and kicks  
at nothing.

Steven Federle

# Knowing

Knowing  
would be like  
dying  
over and  
over.

Seeing how it all will happen  
before it happens  
would be the final blight,  
a leaden pall falling  
on your joyful life.

So much better to live  
in ignorance,  
in hope that tomorrow  
will be better  
or at least the same  
as today.

Steven Federle

# Lake Country

Dark line, thin divide  
sky and lake face,  
gaze upon  
cloud and ripple,  
flush of fading sun,  
in cold depths unseen  
but deeply known,  
night  
stretching  
to ancient space.

Steven Federle

# Lament For A Cop

Helicopters hover, searching  
for the one who shot  
the man who served,

who held a thin shield  
between us and the chaos  
of violent minds, reckless desires  
born of poverty,  
ignorance,  
greed.

He coached our kids  
showed them how  
to hit three-pointers,  
be safe,  
live  
without fear.

Fearlessly, he pursued the robbers,  
slammed them to a firm  
stop, and followed them  
down an ally  
to his death.

How can our city,  
our state or country,  
our culture survive  
when ignorance wins  
and heroes die?

Steven Federle



# Lament For The Children Of Syria

I do not seek you  
where the children peer  
into the burning night;

fire, false dawn  
consumes their eyes,  
rages through thin skin.

I do not know  
where you go when  
the gas softly flows  
through the shelter;

have you left us here  
in this veil of tears, fear-  
full and alone?

Oh, where may I seek you  
but in this green shade  
of whitened bone?

Steven Federle

# Lands Unknown

soft days, warm nights, life  
flows into life, seasons melt  
to hazy light; hold fast

my love, and don't let  
go! for together we'll jour-  
ney to lands unknown.

Steven Federle

# Larry's Produce

The market rings with laughter.

In Spanish and German,  
Russian and a dozen other tongues  
weary children cry  
in the mid-morning sun

as old eyes, wise hands  
prod peach and mango  
mounded peas and beans  
looking for any flaw.

Finding none,  
they fill their bags  
with the fragrant gifts  
of this milk-  
and-honeyed  
land.

Steven Federle

# Late In The Day

late in the day  
the shadows grow

□

night rises, upwelling,  
overwhelming  
delicate myrtles -

roses drowning  
in the darkening tide

Steven Federle

# Lazarus Waiting

falling sun, life swarming  
in the liquid light  
as I gaze west, through trees,  
over houses, over slatted-fence,  
towards the waiting, unseen sea.

a foraging bird drops to my mown lawn  
(taking note of my still form)  
and pecks out her meal...and flies away.

My apple-tree bends towards heaven  
new leaves unfolding;  
surely it will be leaf-full by Easter!

so I'll wait for the world to turn  
yet another slight degree, for the lines  
of golden light to lengthen towards me  
and then end in night.

Steven Federle

# Lazy

Sweet summer breeze  
heavy ripe vines  
wine pouring,  
time slowly  
seaward  
flowing.

I write  
like there's  
nothing left  
in my half-  
empty glass.

now the wine's gone.  
day's too warm  
and much too  
long.

Steven Federle

# Leap Of Faith

You've decided  
that you want me,  
and so commanded  
flashing angels  
to invade my night,  
with my blind bliss  
to contend,

and weary with seraphic strife  
I gave in:

a pious moment  
here and there,  
a sign of the cross,  
a whispered prayer,

until, patient Father,  
in bright dreams you've called  
and led me high  
up your holy mountain  
promising  
that I will rise  
and never,  
never fall.

Steven Federle

# Levi Becomes Matthew

You call me out  
of my money hole  
and tell me to take you  
to my home?  
How can a rabbi like you,  
so well known,  
healer and  
Anointed One,  
come into my  
unclean house?  
But, please, come along,  
at any rate, and  
let me show you  
my tawdry place!  
All my friends see us  
on the stony road  
and ask to join  
my sinner's feast;  
but after dinner  
you gently teach  
your painful path  
to perfect  
peace.

Steven Federle



# Liar

Dark spirit  
seals my eyes,  
hides from me  
how wise trees  
recall lusty  
summer green.

He says  
they're dead,  
and when I die  
my pain will end  
with his dubious gift  
of nothingness.

But I don't believe  
this lie  
of passionless  
eternal night,

for in my core I feel  
tongues of flame,  
searing grace  
lifting me, like spring,  
from winter's grave!

Steven Federle

# Life

You breathe, and my lungs  
rise and fall like winter trees  
swaying, sure of spring,

like water-drops, cells  
twisting, galaxies pulsing  
with abundant life.

Steven Federle

# Life Itself

"It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active,  
fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder."  
Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Dark rain penetrates  
tender leaves, swell spirits, sparks  
dormant roots to life.

Like a god, Your star  
ascends; with wonder and grace  
shines Your mighty face!

Steven Federle

# Life...By Itself

Fill my day  
with soft breezes.

I hear the birds call;  
singing bees  
swarm  
with the pleasure  
of the sting.

Oh! let me breathe deeply  
the innocent air!

Minute by minute  
force my life  
through thin membranes,

for in the end  
sleep will lead me  
to bright seas, dreams  
of fading mist;

then  
fill it full  
with your love!

Steven Federle

# Light, Directly Infused

Rising from the sea  
death's veil  
overcomes me.

Brief day fails,  
fills the endless sky  
with stars,

wandering planets,  
moonbeams  
cold and bright -

holy spirit  
of faithful night.

Steven Federle

# Like Rising Flame

Like rising flame  
my love ignites  
the dawn  
as molten sky  
pours sacred gold  
to fill your  
folded valley  
and compel your love  
to conspire  
with my soul's  
hot desire.

Steven Federle

# Like Water

Like  
waters  
rushing in  
trees sing in the breeze,  
in the gale at the end of the  
world sun drops over the edge, spinning world straining to  
break free, by gravity held, trapped  
like me as night drops  
like water  
in the  
trees

Steven Federle

# Listen To That Darkness

'Oh, listen to that darkness, listen to that deep darkness, listen to those seas of darkness on whose shores we stand and die. Now can we have you, peace, now can we sleep in Your will, sweet God of peace? Now can we have Your Word and in Him rest? ' Thomas Merton, A Book of Hours.

+++++

I'll wait in this bright room.

Night rages, windows fade  
To none,

And trees bend, thrashed  
By your love-song.

For you I'll wait -  
Oh when, oh  
When  
Will you come?

Steven Federle



# Living Rosary

The children sit calmly  
their complacent voices  
monotone as a monk's chant.

They repeat the ancient words  
recalling grace and courage  
at the hour of death.

They really don't know  
about the terror  
and bliss of angelic visitation,

how a single greeting  
can change everything

in a single moment dash  
her young, pure heart  
into the Judean dirt,

while her soul, enraptured,  
soars high into the clear  
desert sky.

These are mysteries too deep  
for their supple, green minds.

But I feel  
in the rise and fall of their words,  
her gentle acceptance  
of the thrusting sword,

her transcendent smile  
as the whip  
tears across His tender skin,

the redemptive power of  
all undeserved suffering.

These good children do as they're told

and behave well, reverently reciting  
the millennial hope

on the bright gym floor,  
in their school-day  
morning prayer.

Steven Federle

# Lost Soul

Soul without light  
he screams in anger,

curses his mother  
for carving his dying flesh  
from her course blood.

His darkness is complete.

He will not see  
the sun  
though it streams golden  
through his open  
door.

A prisoner,  
he can only gaze  
on blighted shade; he cannot stray  
beyond the constrained  
cell of his narrow  
self.

Steven Federle

# Love And Living

'Life consists in learning to live on one's own, spontaneous, freewheeling: to do this one must recognize what is one's own - be familiar and at home with oneself.....The world is made up of people who are fully alive in it: that is, of the people who can be themselves in it and can enter into a living and fruitful relationship with each other in it.' Thomas Merton

What is mine,  
aging skin  
wraps my  
inner world

where hidden rivers  
course through veins,  
rapids throb  
with the  
urgent pulse of  
me.

Me,  
my brain  
snaps commands  
at the speed of light,  
compels my hands  
to type living  
words,

eyes send  
sight  
to prove the truth  
of my  
being

here as I wait  
and watch  
for you to finish  
your warm  
bath.

Laughing,

I see  
that I live  
in you  
and you in  
me.

Steven Federle

# Love In Spring

My arms reach out  
to embrace green hills,  
to hold heart-close  
spring's pulsing thrill.

With passion flush,  
and grateful tears  
I gaze on the forest  
for I know you are near!

I can hear your song  
in the sea-borne breeze.  
Your golden voice fills  
green lilting trees.

Oh give me more wine!  
Your grape and your vine,  
make the night sublime  
with spring's sweet life,

eternally bounding  
from boundless time.

Steven Federle

# Love In The Afternoon

“Love affects more than our thinking and our behavior toward those we love. It transforms our entire life.” Thomas Merton.

I wish  
we could live  
forever,

our bodies throbbing  
with endless desire,  
rising higher  
with inexorable fire!

Then, would I love you,  
unceasingly, like the sun  
embracing with eternal light  
the constant moon,  
beloved wife.

Steven Federle

# Lovesong

I will be there always  
even though you don't know me.

My life will shine in your eyes,  
O child of my child.

With your small, quick breaths  
I will breathe again,  
and when you cry  
my faithful heart will again break.

So look for me in the still, high trees;  
the green brilliance of the winking sun  
will be our secret signal.

You don't know me, but  
your soul, your golden love,  
your fears and hopes  
I will keep safe in my heart,

and in the soft wind will I sing to you  
O beautiful child.  
I will guard you  
as you play.

Look up at dancing spring clouds  
and shout your joy skyward  
to me!

(8 December 2010)

Steven Federle



# Lux In Tenebris Lucet

"Lux in tenebris lucet et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt. (The Light shines in darkness and the darkness has not understood it.) " Thomas Merton

she lies, broken,  
by steel needles  
pierced.  
dried blood caked  
under translucent tape,  
her chest slightly rising  
and falling

almost motionless

but for her searching eyes  
seeking light  
in the darkness.

Steven Federle

# Magnificat

The poor still wait  
for bolted doors to open  
hunger to be filled  
and concern to replace  
the deep scorn

of the rich, who believe  
God is on their side,  
who offer golden chalices  
and cathedrals of crystal  
to purchase  
eternal life

with God, who remembers  
the poor  
will fill their every  
need  
but send away the rich  
with nothing

no things to carry  
in their powerful, sleek cars  
to their empty houses  
silent houses  
stony, soulless  
mansions,  
nothing  
but their names  
on fine marble  
engraved,

yet the poor watch  
and still wait.

Steven Federle

# March

cries  
pierce,  
birdsongs  
rise and fall,  
from tree to nodding  
tree, calling high between winter-  
bare limbs, deep among buds long hidden, nearly ready.

Steven Federle

# March Rain

March rain, thick mists drip  
from grey branches, glowing grass,  
rising like fire.

Buds bursting in slow  
motion, unclenched, learn to trust  
that green spring will stay.

Steven Federle

# Marshall

I heard the game was tough, and they lost,  
despairing in muddy jerseys,  
turf jutting from face guards and heavy cleats.

Sweat-stained and sore, they showered,  
and the camaraderie of the locker room  
broke through the stern silence with boyish laughter, and  
weekend plans made, they climbed into the chartered bus  
and drove slowly through the misty night  
to the airport, to go home, back to West Virginia.

The plane gleamed reassuringly, like technology always does.  
The power of the lift, the whine of competent engines  
flinging them into the clouds, driving them high beyond the storm  
into the clear, star-filled night. But the flight was rough, and  
nearing their goal, it happened: a jolting shudder,  
surprised looks, and amid the confusion of savage g-forces  
suddenly nothing remained but flames  
and twisted metal  
and silence  
on the charred mountain.

This is when I first became acquainted with death.

These were my friends, my old team-mates;  
two years before we jogged in the hot August sun  
and ranged through snowy October backfields;  
like dangerous tigers we hunted quarterbacks,  
thinking we were forever young and strong  
and invincible.

Jack Rapasy, Bob Harris, and Mark Andrews:

Jack was the joker, but he could catch a bullet  
six feet over his head, and leave two defenders  
to slam into each other as they met, mid-air,  
where he was, while he ambled smiling to the end-zone.

And Bob could throw that bullet, his baby-face

And million dollar smile belying muscle-thick arms,  
rocket launchers, splitting Friday nights with their fire.

But Mark, gentle giant of a linesman, was like my  
big brother; he taught me how to shift and pull and trap,  
and admired my fierce tackle, my willingness  
to sacrifice clarity to stop a power-sweep.

We grew up together, but Mark died far from home.

Their three caskets in our high school gym lay,  
while I, staring at glaring metal,  
stood silent and amazed  
that never would they run,  
or throw, or tackle, or smile, or laugh,  
or again be.

Steven Federle

# Mass

If I trust You, everything else will become, for me, strength, health, and support. Everything will bring me to heaven. If I do not trust You, everything will be my destruction.

Thomas Merton Thoughts in Solitude

When it begins  
music plays and we sing  
songs of gathering, greeting.

This, then, is the family complete,  
assembled around the table  
ready for the thanksgiving feast.

Why can't we just remain  
innocent,  
present?

We tell the stories of our youth,  
laugh at self-folly, glad  
to tell the truth,

but soon we feel the pain  
of separation, of nails  
driven deep  
beneath our tender skin:

his heart breaks; her beloved body  
cancer invades until we can only stare  
at vacant crossings,  
bereft,  
alone,

when you speak  
and, believing beyond reason,  
we feel you, deep down,  
feel the bread subsumed  
in our very guts, spread  
unreasonable warmth  
and comfort

and joy!

We cannot understand such power  
but without it  
our lives  
would cease.

Steven Federle



# Matins

Times of transition  
appeal to my sense of  
transcendence.

In joyful morning  
eastern gold flows  
over our highest leaves.

The blue-jays shriek  
as our cat prowls  
the wet grass.

She does not care  
  
that this is the edge of time.

But I can feel the sun's fire  
as I work in the yard

And hear the mockingbird  
in our highest eaves  
calling to his love  
in the cherry tree.

Soon the wind  
again will rise  
and another summer day  
will coldly decline

As the western fires  
wilt  
to bluest steel, to  
blackest silk.

Steven Federle

# May 1,2011

At nightfall  
we wait for the news  
disasters lurking, terror  
wafting across the land,  
like an acid wind

when we hear  
that he is dead!  
A sudden crowd fills the park  
as though we won the super-bowl!  
World Champions!  
U S A!

I hear their voices  
praising God for the bullets  
that pierced his brow  
and spattered his foul mind  
down to a place  
as dark  
as his murdering  
soul....  
... but his soul!

Now he goes  
to his center,  
to face the One,  
to face his victims,  
to acknowledge the lives he shattered  
and dip his hands into pools of innocent blood.

I feel the glow  
of justice; but what about  
my own soul?  
"Love your enemy"  
"Forgive those who  
trespass against you"

I am not half  
so good as that, but

in my guilty depth  
I know  
I must not revel  
in this evil man's  
death.

Steven Federle

# May Rain

"Let the one who thirsts come forward." Rev,22.

gentle rain  
glistens on gray concrete  
and makes pools  
of shimmering silver,  
clean and new.

the rose reaches  
to the grey sky  
asking only for drops  
of life.

the green earth asks  
and receives.

(7 May 2016)

Steven Federle

# Meditation At San Damiano

dark veins fill my sight  
lying dendrites firing doubt  
through my fragile faith,

complication  
denying all escape

but as these steps rise up the steep hill  
and converge into the unseen sky

I climb  
to my blue redemption,

simple  
and free.

Steven Federle

# Meditation On A Grey Morning

Grey morning  
lights  
the bland sky.

Black birds light  
on bare trees  
thin limbs wavering  
as they flit  
scanning  
the frozen earth.

All the world is waiting,  
to unwind explosive buds  
to shed thin shrouds  
and burst into emerald light  
as joyful black birds rise  
into the endless  
blue sky.

Great is their faith,  
these birds and trees.

They know beyond all reason  
that the sun  
will thaw  
the icy grip  
of violent winter

Steven Federle

# Memorial

## Summer

He worked nights, leaving as we climbed  
the tall narrow staircase to our shared room,  
up into the summer heat, the steel fan  
in the hallway window  
pulling cool, leafy breezes  
from our waving trees.

We heard the kitchen screen-door  
slap shut, the Pontiac roaring to life,  
and watched as slowly he backed down  
the dark driveway, and was gone.

And gladly we glided through our misty dreams,  
flying over tree-tops, baseball games  
and cool swimming pools,

when finally the robin's enthusiasm  
and the fresh morning sun  
flashing through green leaves  
woke us as we heard the car stop  
and Dad call cheerfully, "I'm home! "

The air already scented with bacon and coffee,  
we flew down the groaning stairs,  
two steps at a bound,  
and eagerly started another golden  
summer's day.

## Winter

One winter day I did something wrong, and  
he got angry and drew his worn leather belt  
from the loops of his grey, stained work trousers  
To teach me a lesson.

Terrified, I ran upstairs to the big closet

and trembled behind coats and sweaters,  
as heavily he came up the steps,  
righteous anger ringing in his voice,  
tears flowing down my cheeks;

when my big brother, teenage and strong,  
called defiance to him and drew him down  
into the back yard to fight him  
and save me, angered by his  
memory of so many other beatings,  
determined to stop it now!

But facing his own father  
he could not fight back, and  
weeping, I watched my dad  
pummel my brother's defenseless face,  
far worse than any beating  
I would have gotten.

From kitchen window,  
I screamed to them both  
to stop!

That was when my father saw,  
in the kitchen window's glare  
his own father's angry eyes,  
and felt his father's fists  
landing hard on his own face,  
and he stopped and  
embraced my brother.

Spring

Seven years after my father died  
my first child, my son, was born in spring,  
and in the gleaming, sterile room  
I first held him in my arms  
as, with his impossibly wide, blue eyes  
he calmly gazed right into my raw soul,  
and I felt in a sudden rush of warmth,  
a timeless love



and at last discovered  
the reason for my life.

It was then  
I understood my father.

In my son's face I saw my own  
and felt my father's eyes gazing  
in warm wonder on me  
and I glowed with  
unconditional love for my son.

Steven Federle

# Memory

"Memory"

sometimes in mass  
as sacred songs  
wash over me like rain,

I break free  
and drift  
into memory,

and again you rise,  
your tears flow  
as tears fill my eyes,  
your dying breath  
whispering  
good bye;

after so many years,  
the knife still cuts  
and again, and  
again

I cry.

(20 May 2015)

Steven Federle

# Mercy

Night sways.  
The lilting tree fills  
with mercy.

Raging day,  
blue-jay's anger  
the dolor of  
rose petals  
softly falling  
to tender  
grass  
forgiven

as whispers  
the fading tree,  
"do not  
forget me."

Steven Federle

# Mercy And Love

In order to know and love God as He is, we must have God dwelling in us in a new way, not only in His creative power but in His mercy. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

Nothing I could do  
would ever be enough  
to make the dead-wood  
live. Though the wind  
and rain sever bright leaves,  
tender blossoms from  
the cherry tree, and the  
birds themselves fly  
from my anger,

I know  
I could never  
make it right,

though with tears I flood,  
nourish with a  
broken heart's blood

I am powerless.

Yet still these bruised stems,  
thicken and split  
to bud, spill green life,  
fill the earth  
with mercy  
and love.

Steven Federle

# Mid-Summer's Night

Glowing night,  
clouds excite  
the summer sky -

swaying limbs  
in dusky shade  
sing praise,

for All's afire!

Stars tremble,  
and planets gyre

but this lovers' moon,  
consumes  
the shadowed earth  
with passion's  
pure desire.

Steven Federle

# Miracle

“Come, dervishes: here is the water of life. Dance in it.”  
Thomas Merton

The night looked bad.

Waves towered,  
clouds racing  
across the glaring moon,  
the sea pounding out  
all hope for their little boat,  
when a ghost approached,  
softly glowing,  
impossibly walking across the  
wet way.

Terror gripped them.

They saw grim Satan  
striding across the waves  
to take them down  
to his watery hell,

But Peter,  
truth clearing his fearful eyes,  
saw His face, felt His peace  
and, radiant with surging faith,  
joyfully stepped over the side  
to join his beloved Lord.

His feet touched the soft water.

It was like walking  
through shallow puddles.

Lifting his legs  
he moved slowly forward,

when looking down,  
dark doubt

sucked him under  
legs first,  
then waist deep.

He cried, 'Lord, save me! '

and thrusting his hands  
to heaven,  
he felt the strong grip raising him back  
to life.

Steven Federle

# Miracle Of The Geese

The Catholic school children gathered  
obedient to the bell, silent, waiting  
for morning prayers  
to begin another day,

when geese  
raced suddenly above  
tight formation crossing the  
playground, stroking high air, shattering  
our discipline with lusty  
call, savage  
song!

And the children,  
raising their arms to heaven,  
shouted in praise  
at the wonder and glory,  
the holy presence,  
the miracle of the geese!

Steven Federle



# Mitsuo, What Do You See?

When your spirit goes  
to the glowing  
edge

do you feel terror  
as you hunger for  
air?

What do you see  
in that bright, distant  
light?

Do you gaze through dark pain  
into heaven's living  
flame?

Steven Federle

# Modern Parable

The evil one  
believes that he alone  
lives in paradise.

He sees his gold and marble halls  
fat tables groaning under  
feasts unshared,  
worships the idol  
in the mirror  
and he smiles.

The saint, meanwhile,  
labors in hot vineyards,  
wipes brows burned by  
the risen sun,  
creases the fertile earth  
and with wrinkled hands  
fills the bowls  
of the poor,

and God smiles.

Steven Federle

# Monument Valley

Lifeless distant plains  
Jagged peaks, red sky rising  
God's fire, frozen

Steven Federle

# Moon-Struck

"We must be content to live without watching ourselves live, to work without expecting an immediate reward, to love without an instantaneous satisfaction, and to exist without any special recognition. " - Thomas Merton, from No Man is an Island

high above my sight  
she's shining with borrowed light  
unaware of me,

oblivious of  
the moon-struck sea, she sings her  
song: simple, pure, free.

Steven Federle

# Morning

when the sky is still black  
and stars glitter  
like there's no  
tomorrow,  
the overblown moon  
luxuriant  
above seaborne fog...

this is the time  
for faith  
when birds,  
startled by dawn's  
first spark,  
raise sharp beaks  
and sing  
the first song of

morning.

Steven Federle

## Morning (Haiku)

light, liquid, over-  
flowing bright leaf, washing clean  
night's graven, dull stain.

Steven Federle

# Morning Bright

Morning bright, night chill gone,  
the scented wind stroking  
high, pliant branches,

and I wait for you  
in our summer garden;  
lush in leaf and yellow rose  
and silky grass  
in vernal sunshine,

and it's you I wait for in the ivy shade  
watching our lazy cat  
stretch her dappled fur  
on the bright, sun soaked  
concrete step.

Like the tender vine  
in the warming soil  
I am content  
to wait  
for you.

Steven Federle

# Morning In America

Look down  
and see how the valley wakes.

Beneath these rolling ridges,  
dark houses steam and cluster  
into tight, thin streets,  
the morning mist  
softly washing  
ranks of backyard fences  
into spectral smudges  
between still, red  
autumnal trees.

The city begins again  
after its long, November night;  
cars and trucks flow  
into highways, slowly  
edging east into west,  
and complete at last  
the long, twisted  
continental path,  
from sea  
to trackless  
sea

rolling to the dry limit  
of the broad Pacific  
where no lines restrict and  
no heights give a wider view.

They come at last  
to the concrete terminus  
of America.

Steven Federle



# Morning Prayer

In winter's stark dawning  
in cold fog encased,  
your warmth I'm discerning  
though night will not fade,

for unwilling is morning  
it lurks in sore limbs,  
your song's arising  
and I know that you'll send

to my darkest night-hour  
new light to set me free  
and your song I'll be singing  
in the glow of the east!

\*\*

&#1059; &#1090; &#1088; &#1077; &#1085; &#1085; &#1103; &#1103;  
&#1084; &#1086; &#1083; &#1080; &#1090; &#1074; &#1072;

&#1053; &#1072; &#1072; &#1073; &#1089; &#1086; &#1083; &#1102;  
&#1090; &#1085; &#1086; &#1084; &#1079; &#1080; &#1084; &#1085;  
&#1080; &#1081; &#1088; &#1072; &#1089; &#1089; &#1074; &#1077;  
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&#1074; &#1093; &#1086; &#1083; &#1086; &#1076; &#1085; &#1099;  
&#1081; &#1090; &#1091; &#1084; &#1072; &#1085; &#1079; &#1072;  
&#1082; &#1083; &#1102; &#1095; &#1077; &#1085; &#1085; &#1072;  
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&#1089; &#1074; &#1086; &#1077; &#1090; &#1077; &#1087; &#1083;  
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&#1074; &#1083; &#1091; &#1095; &#1072; &#1093; &#1074; &#1086;  
&#1089; &#1090; &#1086; &#1082; !

Steven Federle

# Morning Storm

Morning storm  
smashing rain  
on our  
highest panes

we watched in wonder

as swaying trunks  
grow drunk  
with heaven's wine

but noonday trees  
stand sober

glittering green  
on absolute blue

the crystal sky  
of spring.

Steven Federle

## Morning, Good Friday

Therefore let me know trust in the feelings of my heart. My hope is in what the hand of man has never touched. Do not let me trust what I can grasp between my fingers.

Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude.

Young grass  
high and thick  
drenched  
filled to brim,  
by morning sun released  
a fury of green, trees  
believing that golden day  
will stay.

Persist, oh life,  
despite the cold of winter,  
and beat, my heart!  
With tender heat  
yet awhile  
I'll breathe!

Steven Federle

# Moss Landing

Framed in darkness  
like birds in deep silence  
the sky and sea breathe  
in steel blue longing  
remembering the dying sun  
and the cries of gulls diving.

On insubstantial sand  
we watch an impossible ship  
moving and not moving  
like a silent cloud at the edge of the world.

I can see no men aboard  
although I know they are there.  
I know they are in steel rooms,  
warmed by twisting turbines,  
softly cursing,  
listening to the night.

The sand moves under us  
as we walk to the sea.  
Our steps change forever the earth.  
The sea changes forever,  
we change the sky with our breath  
and wind-blown sand covers our feet.

Yet we move,  
and for a while we walk  
away from the sea.

The sea will change.  
The sky will change.  
They will wait.  
There's no hurry.

Steven Federle

# Motion

My body's always in motion  
running through unseen routines  
forcing air, chest rising and falling,  
heart-blood coursing  
through a million small chambers  
to glow red again.

Even at rest  
my chest rises to cold air  
and drinks it in, clean and clear,  
and with heady ambition,  
I run,  
my aging legs pounding  
this treadmill  
to nowhere.

But I know this  
is a temporary condition.  
Soon enough  
my blood will congeal and  
pool into still, cool wells.

No more will I wake  
though bright morning itself  
should shake my shoulder  
and with swelling song  
bid me rise,  
for I am not made  
for eternity's day.

Death waits  
and will not  
be turned away.

Steven Federle

# Mozart Smiles

feverish movement  
a circle of light  
in the darkened hall

oboe and flute  
puff and strain  
to maintain with  
swaying violins, violas  
and cellos pounding  
out soul,  
beating heart  
of timpani

while lost in time,  
arms waving  
shoulders hunching,  
flashing  
hands slashing  
the glittering air,

Mozart smiles.

Steven Federle

# My Class

The topic was Greenland,  
sheets of ice  
cascading to the sea,  
plunging in the summer sun  
like kids cannon-balling into the deep end.

global warming  
spawning new islands and bays,  
a lush new age of water,  
green-house gases rising  
in a great belch  
from the man's  
energy binge.

But what is the cause?  
Hydrocarbons burning in roaring cars?

The unseen dead rising  
into the innocent stratosphere?

Jungle trees are burning  
as, wild-eyed, the panther  
prowls the Amazon village  
hungry for her own energy fix.

We could blame it all on Fulton and Watt:  
their steam-punk monsters spitting fire,  
as trudging workers descend  
into the industrial-grade darkness  
and the misery of the money hole.

But one bright student  
suggested a more somber cause  
from which there is no escape  
in cap and trade.

Gaia, walking with large swings,  
slings up  
volcanos and glaciers and men



while, deep in her brooding, iron core,  
she shrugs,  
and, most inconveniently,  
takes her own sweet time  
smiling  
as she contemplates  
her next move.

Steven Federle

# My Mother's Gift

You visited me near dawn -

I saw you  
and felt your joy  
and heard your voice,  
like a memory of waking to bird-song  
on a warm, Ohio summer's morn -

you used to sing 'rise and shine! '  
bringing me bleary-eyed, bounding  
into my childhood's  
glowing day.

And last night  
I saw you again.

I love my dreams about you.  
You sweep away  
all fear  
with your calm voice.

But always after,  
when I wake up,  
you are gone,  
and I face another indifferent day  
in this agnostic world.

But this time was different!  
'You are glowing! ' I said  
from the deep mist of my sleep,  
'Why does your face shine?  
Are you with him, with Dad?  
Is that why you're so happy? '

You smiled (as at a naive child's prodding)  
'Well, yes, of course he's here too...  
but that's not it.

It is because He Is.'

And though I could not see  
what you ceaselessly see,  
I gazed upon the overwhelming,  
reflected light  
enfolding you,  
and I tried,  
oh I tried, to find its source  
but could only feel  
its sudden glory...  
its unremitting,  
warm embrace  
of unconditional  
love.

I did not want to wake...  
I wanted to stay with you,  
to die in the warmth  
of this revelation,

but of course,  
I returned to the morning  
to the pale sun,  
to the granite and steel world,  
to the darkness of the mirror,  
to life,

and yet,  
your loving mother's gift  
still remains  
cadescent  
in my soul's  
deepest core.

Steven Federle

# My Sister's Birthday

We watch as toddlers  
run squealing through the house,  
laughter bounding through bright halls,  
a knee-level storm of pure joy.

They punctuate our grown-up conversation  
as the slide-show begins.

Now you're the bright eyed infant!

Mom was so young and pretty  
Holding you close  
in her strong, gleaming arms,

as the cousins, delighted, cry  
'Look! Grandma's a baby! '

In wonder we watch  
the years of youth and school  
love and weddings  
and bright new babies,

pause on the haunting eyes  
of those gentle people  
whom we've loved  
then lost  
to the good night.

As your party continues,  
I see in the eyes  
of four generations,  
a century's worth  
of smiling for the camera  
a cloud of love  
transcending both years and death.

So don't worry about your age, dear sister.  
clearly  
we never really grow old.

Steven Federle

# Mystic

wind,  
whispering trees

clouds, stars  
radiant,  
unseen

and again, ever-  
moving into darkness  
pale riders on  
night's mystic train

night, to day,  
to winter, to spring  
summer's  
heat arises,  
unforeseen,

as tender leaves breathe  
as taps the rain,

as life remains.

Steven Federle

# Mystical Night

“The mystical night is not mere night, absence of light. It is a night which is sanctified by the presence of an invisible light....” Thomas Merton, *The New Man*

From this holy mountain  
rises good night  
on the gentle wind  
of shadowed bird flight.

How I long for darkness  
to overtake  
day's tired sky,  
my upturned face,

and Thou,  
oh Night  
of Joyful Flame!  
with your dark love  
set my soul ablaze!

Steven Federle

# Natural Force

The earth shrugs  
and beneath the sea  
mountains lift shifting waves  
driving man  
to higher  
planes.

Primal force defines  
the earth  
as we are defined  
by the rise and fall  
of breath.

Yet contented we live  
by the constant sea  
as darker oceans  
roil deep  
beneath our feet,

and transfixed  
we gaze as eternal waves,  
pounding thrusting stones,  
shatter to frothy foam.

No wonder, then,  
when deeper lungs exhale,  
in terror we flee,  
and cry to God  
for mercy.

Steven Federle



## Nearly Ripe

Nearly ripe, these green apples  
hang heavy  
from our bursting tree,  
the warm evening sun  
glinting through swaying branches.

They will be ready  
in about a week.

Then I'll slice them into sweet crescents  
And their taste will dance upon your tongue  
with all the secrets our tree has been keeping,  
its living leaves,  
its smooth, grey bark,  
its very roots  
grasping deep  
into our dark soil,

and these glowing, green apples  
I will make bare and white and moist,  
a love offering like perfect wine for you,  
and your taste will delight  
in the sweet, green love  
of the earth.

Steven Federle

# Neverending

see how night rushes  
down winter streets

how the pall descends  
and suddenly casts  
the bold sun to the sea.

thus it has been  
since colliding  
rocks coalesced

and the diurnal  
dance began;  
and yet, we hope

for sunrise  
for summer  
neverending.

Steven Federle

# New Wine Into Fresh Skins!

Renew me, wash me  
in deeper pools open my  
righteous, narrow mind,

for your wine over-  
whelms, rends ancient seams, blood streams,  
my weakness reveals.

Make me a new man  
and I'll hold your wine within  
my fresh, new-made skin.

Steven Federle

# New Year's Morning 2011

Cold rain falls  
as the earth turns  
for another round.

Last night's cheer  
dives into deeper tears  
as his wan face  
rises in the air.

His gaze is sad;  
your sharp tears wash  
his watching eyes

and hungering arms  
can not bridge  
the thin divide  
that separates was  
from is.

But this morning  
the green, new world waits  
slick and shivering,  
crying for warmth  
and a reason  
to go on.

Let me be your warmth.

Let my arms enfold you  
as I share my little light  
to end your long,  
cold night.

Steven Federle

# Night And Day

Day and night the west  
winds rise to the golden  
edge, the threshold of sight.

I rise and fall and begin again  
'til at last I decline  
into darkness of same.

Hot summer draws out spare  
winter's chill; my days flow  
over, my life over-fills

'til will forsaken, naked and  
chaste, at last I gaze  
on your pure, living face.

Steven Federle

# Night Drops Slowly In Spring

Night drops  
slowly in spring  
through trees flush  
with new leaves

birds rush  
through swaying limbs  
to new nests  
to life yet unlived

as day fades  
to shimmering silk,  
as stars gleam...  
celestial milk.

Steven Federle

# Night Fog

Fog rises  
to black space.

The sea  
overpowers  
the sky.

Vapors swamp  
unsuspecting stars.

Ethereal waves  
wash  
against night's  
mystic shore.

Steven Federle

# Night Plows

lights glare, clouds rise, flare  
in the night, blades split earth, fur-  
rows before the storm.

Steven Federle



# Night Rises

Night rises  
From the still-warm earth

Climbs rough trunks to  
Higher planes

To where leaves still burn  
In golden flames.

Steven Federle

# Night Scene

Black windows frame dark  
folded drapes; indifferent  
stars peer through high arch.

Wine glass gleams. Fragrant  
constellations, red dregs, swill  
over empty stem.

Night trains blare, despairing  
gates clang, steel wheels crease dark rails.  
Night birds stir, dreaming.

Steven Federle

# Night Train

The urgent night train,  
rushing quite near  
calling me, calling me  
come away from there.

Listen! the whispering wheels  
rumble on;  
not a moment to lose,  
but in a moment  
long gone.

Despairing,  
in the dark night I hear  
a distant train calling  
in another man's ear,

and wondering  
how opportunity's lost  
I feel in the wind  
my fear's cold cost.

Steven Federle

# Nightfall

grey limbs twisting  
through emerald shade  
reaching at last,  
clear blue day!

fern overflowing,  
with living lace  
red rose embracing  
impassioned grace.

the sun's final flames  
high leaves emblaze,  
soft night claims  
fading day.

Steven Federle

# Nightfall (The Darkness Rises)

the darkness rises  
over low roofs

past the weak glow  
of my window -

through rough fences  
into trees it drifts

black space filling the holes  
between roses.

(17 March 2015)

Steven Federle

# Nocturne November

breathe deeply  
the darkness,

listen to the rain  
pounding drum-beat drops  
see glass glisten,  
liquid streets stream,

imbibe the stink of mud,  
rot of moldering leaf,

as life  
subsides.

---

atmen Sie tief durch  
die Dunkelheit,

lauschen Sie den regen  
Schlagen Trommelschlag Tropfen  
siehe Glas glitzern,  
Flüssigkeit Straßen-Stream,

trinken den Gestank von Schlamm,  
rot von modernden Blatt,

wie das Leben  
nachlässt.

Steven Federle

# Nocturne: October

Level land

fields  
blown brown  
and hard

fade with day  
to  
hazy  
night.

the wind does not move!

there's  
a smudge  
on the  
moon

and

even  
the geese  
are  
silent.

Steven Federle

# Nothing But Light

"In perfect humility all selfishness disappears and your soul no longer lives for itself.... it is lost and submerged in Him and transformed into Him."  
Thomas Merton

The proud man  
looks into his mirror  
and sees bright shiny lies,  
power, pleasure,  
possession,  
and cries "all mine! "

until, at last,  
in the honest, good night  
sees in his mirror nothing  
but light.

Steven Federle



# November 1978

i.

November lies in wait, violent month  
stripping life from the garden  
wind ripping leaves from living trees.

So much can happen after the harvest,  
life can be broken,  
the grave made rich.

ii

Kennedy rode exposed in the cold Dallas sun  
when a bullet ripped the November air, and  
dark winds ran riot through fields of heaven,

dirty cyclones scattering dust  
into our stinging eyes

and we cried under the black crepe  
draped over blank, empty windows.

iii

November, 1978, loomed large  
in the twilight haze as we waited  
and uneasily watched the news.

In thirsty Jonestown  
the November heat swelled  
the bodies of black children,  
huddled in the arms of still mothers,  
empty paper cups strewn on the ground  
dripping purple Kool-Aid, happy drink for a hot day,  
poisoned with bitter megalomania.

The stench of fear  
permeated Geary Boulevard,  
filling the looming, empty halls  
of the People's Temple.

Protected by the glass wall of my television  
I observed this distant slaughter  
my eyes spared from the sting  
of personal tears.

iv

But November soon became personal,  
and quickly took my father  
and left me stunned,  
empty and cold as frozen Ohio.  
Bad comes in threes,  
and in my rented car,  
on the way home from the cemetery,  
I heard of bloody mayhem in San Francisco,  
madness splattering City Hall,  
in the thick blood of Moscone and Milk,  
struck down on a cloudy  
November day.

Steven Federle

# November Sky

See the perfect sky of November  
cloudless, cool, southern sun,  
garden of blue eternity

vaulting over rioting trees, leaves  
shouting that life is good  
as they fall and cover in red  
the green world

in perfect red  
as in perfect blue  
life turns inward

like the planet  
to pursue

the fleeting sun's  
fading hue.

Steven Federle

# November Sunset

About five o'clock,  
the warm November day  
just stops.

Bright afternoon  
slams into evening  
not even pausing  
for twilight.

Blue sky  
dims quickly  
to violet,

but over ragged black canyons  
the orange sun  
lingers

and suddenly bursts  
into astonishing gold.

Blithely ascending  
the bright crescent  
claims the cool  
velvet night.

Steven Federle

# Now

day begins  
glint of grey,  
gust nudges the curtain  
sun lights my face  
as from unfinished dreams  
I wake,  
eyes,  
wide, dazed  
I rise  
walk  
now  
into morning filled  
with shout of geese,  
trains blaring,  
hurry, can't  
be late,  
now  
into the shower,  
hot shock of water  
wide-eyed  
rush through  
my scheduled day  
eyes always on tonight,  
tomorrow  
later...  
no time for  
now.

Steven Federle

# O Copper Moon

O copper moon in cobalt sky,  
brush back confining trees.

Climb Jacob's silver stairs and rise  
on sparks of angel-fire, free.

Incite in hidden, mystic night  
God's own sacred, fearful delight!

Steven Federle

# O Salutaris

my foe draws near  
challenges my sight

deceives me into hatred,  
and futile fight

cruel darkness descends  
in this cold, foreign place

but with hope I cry to you  
O, open wide the gate

and show me the way  
to my true native shore

and endlessly I will praise you  
for your strong arm restores

my life and my love  
and bright day evermore

Steven Federle

# Oakland

Steel slugs slam  
into black, shattered walls,  
dim cars grinding  
down sanguine streets  
careening  
into the black well  
of night.

The sun,  
dropping into deep,  
inky waters  
shines  
on some other world,

and the pale moon  
pours thick silence  
into the portals of our ears.

We lift our faces  
into black rain,  
to purify sullied eyes  
left bloody and dim  
by the death of children,  
the strangulation of faith.

She watches and weeps  
And waits for words  
she longs to hear,

"Ave Maria...pray for us sinners, "

and at once dropping  
to bended knee  
gazes  
into His human eyes.

"now and at the hour"

The hour of a million sins



The hour of deep silence  
Come home at last,

“of our death”

as bitter wormwood bores deep  
in the bowels of our fear.

Smiling,  
she intones her answer,

“Amen.”

Steven Federle

# Oblation

Bathe me in light, with warm  
water wash, submerge  
my submissive head,  
my face, my hands,  
my wayfaring feet.  
Oh, cleanse me!  
prepare me  
to walk  
into your perfect  
day

Steven Federle

# Occupy Oakland

Shouts in the night, chanting  
streets, red streams, white  
gas seeping through your skin,  
your ears exploding with flash-bang  
shells landing past the trembling camera  
to where he lies, fallen Marine, wide eyed, stunned,  
skull-split victim of this American night.

Just follow their money  
to the headwaters of their greed  
and you will see how they rage  
against your need  
until, at last,  
it's your blood  
they wish  
to drink.

Steven Federle

# October

Bright sun streams  
pure golden breeze.

Green day fades,  
red sun subsides.

Pale moon flies  
into winter's dull light.

Steven Federle

# Old Cat

She lies under my chair  
warmed by the dancing sun  
as singing leaves  
nod the long afternoon  
towards evening.

her fur flows  
in the freshening wind;  
she hears the  
trees whisper  
their secret...

that soon night  
will draw her in,  
cradle her softly,  
and fill her eyes  
with sleep.

Steven Federle

# Omnipresence

In the psalms of night birds  
in the bright morning trees,  
I hear your song echoing,  
overwhelming me.

Always above me,  
around and below,  
inside me your faithful love's  
a constant glow.

In warm summer's ocean,  
in the soft breath of night  
I sway in the rhythm  
of your passionate life.

Steven Federle

# On A Razor's Edge We Live

but gazing into bright desert space  
we see endless highways, distant  
mountains we never reach,  
sharp hills, steep cliffs  
receding  
as we move closer,

closer,  
to the pacing sun  
creasing dark canyons  
casting amber light  
into the gauzy sky,

yet our dark dreams trouble  
faint stars and reeling planets  
throwing wide nets over  
haunted, lost souls

when, morning at last,  
we begin again  
pursuing the tumbling edge  
of this turning globe

and we believe that  
it will never end, will never  
end,  
will never  
end.

Steven Federle

# On The Feast Of Christ The King

The long day ends, at long last, and we assemble in the sky.

I call it 'sky' though, like earth and sea, sky is no more,  
and though I don't know how, I stand nowhere,  
in a great hall of recalled light,  
breathing a memory of oxygen.

I say 'we assemble' though I can  
see no bodies, not even my own,

Yet I hear them breathe, and in their grasping hands,  
feel their nameless fear as His voice fills this place  
and begins the Great Division...  
sheep to the right, goats to the left.

Uncertain of my fate I hear Him say,  
'I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.'

In fear I search for an instance  
when I stopped for the beggar,  
fished for a coin at the traffic light,  
but nearly always, embarrassed, looked away.

'I was a stranger and you made me feel welcome'...

I voted for a candidate who offered electric borders,  
fences to exclude dreamers,  
execute aliens.

Trembling, I turn away  
and for mercy pray  
for just one more day.

Steven Federle



# On The Feast Of St. Catherine

The poet on the radio  
earnestly read her expert lines  
about the sad state  
of the world,  
the failure  
of governments,  
churches,  
parents,  
lovers,  
the certain decline of  
the cosmos,  
the end of the world.

Her lines were exquisitely made,  
and I listened with admiration and envy  
to perfect rhymes, subtle  
metaphor, nuanced images  
until I felt both elation and  
despair.

Then I looked around me,  
to the riot of life in  
my backyard,  
the shrill ecstasy of birds  
the shout of the rose.

My children gathered today  
for a Sunday feast, full of  
laughter and corny jokes.

Maybe the poet didn't have a backyard,  
could gaze only on bleak  
city walls; maybe her lover  
walked out (or should have) or  
her children never call.

I worry about the poor;  
whenever a grimy hand out-  
stretches, I see the pierced hand of Christ,

offering me gift, pearls of great price!

Steven Federle

# On The Feast Of St. Stephen

'The life of the soul is not knowledge, it is love, since love is the act of the supreme faculty, the will, by which man is formally united to the final end of all his striving – by which man becomes one with God.' (The Seven Storey Mountain)

Knowing,  
my eyes can see how wind tears, how  
clouds ravage the sky  
to shreds...

Can you hear the geese fleeing  
shouting dread  
as the savage storm crouches?

Are you afraid?

I know  
how the sea sometimes  
launches boulders;

but the stubborn land  
bows and waits  
and, swollen, forgives

with torrents of life;  
rivers of joy.

Steven Federle

# On Viewing Inferno Of The Innocents

Poised on the edge of the bed  
she sits in sharp light,  
pointed feet barely touching  
the dim floor.

Through fear-filled, furrowed brow  
she stares at the encroaching shadow.

I want to protect her, reach into the canvas  
and take her home,  
adopt her  
make her my grand-daughter  
hold her safe and warm  
make her whole  
watch her dance  
fearless  
in the golden morning.

As I despair  
another little girl approaches the painting,  
and broadly smiles in recognition,  
nodding to this new-found playmate.

She knows how morning light  
always pushes back  
the black night.

author's note:

to see the powerful, heartbreaking works of Gottfried Helnwein, visit his website  
at

Steven Federle

# Once It Begins

once it begins  
i cannot stop  
nor would i wish to  
end the torrent of words  
crush of photons  
bright weight of day  
driving dark worlds  
through eternal space  
trains howling  
poems careening  
through silver morning  
where i sing  
out my  
warning

Steven Federle

# One Simple Motion

The house is dark again.

Music drifts,  
softly settles  
like dust  
on my face.

Now is the time  
when veils decline-

when I can see  
the faint motion  
of breath;

my chest rising and  
falling, life expelled  
and pulled sharply back:

living and dying  
in one, simple  
motion.

Steven Federle

# Ordinary Time

Counting  
numbering days and nights  
calculating the length  
and breadth of  
our allotted  
breaths  
we live  
by the numbers.

It starts in a split second  
of passion  
in the darkness  
plunging headlong  
to a date certain  
when savage lights assault  
our tender eyes  
and we see  
how it will be  
in this clock-  
work world.

Time orders All.

Class bells  
church bells  
the grandfather clock  
in the hallway  
heavily chimes  
as our lives sway  
in the diurnal dance,  
we wake and sleep  
laugh and weep  
and it is all very ordinary  
until it is not;

then the chain breaks  
and heavy weights  
crush our vision's  
persistence

and at last we subside  
into inordinate  
existence.

Steven Federle



# Ordination

"What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy." Thomas Merton

"To love another person is to see the face of God." Victor Hugo

☒

deep in the cathedral  
love resounds

through the bright air  
of paradise  
love rebounds  
playful, full of  
prayer.

Oh, hear the organ's  
profundo ring  
as love pierces  
your living heart

as, prostrate,  
love breaks open  
your breathless soul;

for indeed,

to deeply love  
is to see the face  
of God.

Steven Federle

# Origami Master

My soul's a sheet  
of flat paper,  
unfolded and featureless  
until your hands press  
and pinch, crease  
my stubborn fears  
to your desire.

You know what fills  
my nascent core  
and never give me up  
but with your strength  
to fine edge crease  
and make of me at last  
angel's wings.

Steven Federle

# Our Love

Lightning  
flashing in your eyes,  
wind in your hair, gleaming  
moon streaming  
passion.

It remains  
deep in my heart;  
unquenched desire,  
our love's constant fire.

Steven Federle

# Out Of The Hard Blue

Out of the hard blue it comes  
throbbing, powerful, flinging dust and small stones,  
as it clears the swaying tops of neighboring redwoods,  
and gives the empty, clear, and calm air  
substance, color, and turbulence.  
We shield our eyes and turn away  
from the spinning propellers as the  
helicopter floats slowly down  
closer and closer to the playground:  
ten feet, six, five, one, done;  
and lightly resting on gray pavement,  
on the hopscotch lines and painted stars and planets,  
the roar of its motor drops from banshee scream  
to diminished moan, and finally to whisper  
as blurred blades slow, and the flight finishes,  
and all motion stops.

Then the school children take over, shouting  
as they rush, straining against teachers' restraint,  
to see this amazing machine come to visit.  
They gape at what is usually a speck in the sky,  
but here it is huge and amazing,  
up close, and so real!

After peering in windows, and touching gleaming doors,  
and the short speech by the pilot,  
(so cool in shades and blue flight-suit)  
the scheduled visit ends, and the helicopter  
springs again to life, and leaps  
into brilliant May sunshine, into  
the hard blue sky, and  
quickly disappears.

Steven Federle

# Out Of The Silence

"Out of the silence, Light is spoken." Thomas Merton

I walk  
into the morning.

Birds  
drowse  
in the dark,

an unseen breeze  
strokes my  
arms, my bare neck,

as two cranes  
over the edge  
of the meadow  
rise

as the Holy Spirit  
moans  
in tones  
of morning light.

Steven Federle

# Pagan Moon

Pagan moon,  
solid rock, hanging  
low in the eastern sky,

southern curve  
cleanly slices  
through the  
silk of night.

But north  
of the winking eye  
a bite gone  
from the lunar pie!

Was it blown away  
by some  
stiff  
solar wind?

or just a snack  
eaten by a  
famished,  
smackin'  
dragon?

Steven Federle

# Paradise

Deep inside  
I carry paradise,

a bright flood,  
pours through  
my soul's veins,

but like those blind fish,  
I cannot see  
the holy river  
running through  
my radiant cave.

On a good, clear day, though,  
staring hard beyond me,  
I can almost see  
God's holy fire

glancing off  
my boundless sea

Steven Federle

# Passion

I see your face  
in the gathering storm.

Twisting and bent  
in the rising wind  
my soul groans  
under the weight  
of your holy pain,

for bloody are my hands!

Thorns, like sin, pierce  
my furrowed brow,  
and my tears fill  
the guilty world.

O forgive me!

I did not see you dying  
'til I cried  
scourged with the lash  
of my own stinging lies.

Steven Federle



# Passion In The Garden

In the empty night  
I hear your song.

Longing  
I seek  
but can only see  
my own dying image  
in lying glass  
and glittering steel.

I tremble in fear.  
Where have you gone?

O, sing me your soaring love-song

and show me the way  
for night's a thin wall  
and death, a porous veil.

Steven Federle

# Pax Modern

Away from fading windows  
sealed deep within the efficient building  
empty chairs wait.  
Gleaming floors echo  
friends laughing  
hello and  
goodbye,  
□  
but here I sit  
alone.□

The sun set without me tonight.

Through long corridors I watched  
as slit windows softly glowed  
with withered passion.

But night rises suddenly!

Night is a fast clock,  
firing rounds of morning, tomorrow, next week,  
next year  
into my defenseless heart!

Night is a rude guest,  
an expected surprise.

But where is God?

In this comfortable cave  
bright, sterile altars serve  
quick  
convenient offerings.

No squalor of crucifixion here!  
These are painless rooms,  
climate controlled,  
self-satisfied.

My soul dozes.

From troubling dreams  
of resurrection  
beige walls lull me  
to dubious peace.

Steven Federle

# Penitent

I burnished my heart.

Proudly trusting my love,  
I generously gave it  
to myself.

But still you embraced me  
and beyond all reason  
made of me  
your golden lamp,

to shatter sin's deceiving night  
with your never-ending  
reflected light.

Steven Federle

# Pentecost

When you left us  
I saw how the clouds parted,  
rent curtains,  
as you cleared earth's  
drossy smear,  
and passed into a heaven  
bright beyond  
my wildest imagining.

Bereft, fearful, we  
shut tight the door  
against wolves' howling  
and waited for you  
to keep your promise.

At first it was a whisper,  
the sea-ward wind  
prying loose our  
weak walls,

but soon the song rose, until  
its power overwhelmed us  
with chords of faith,  
and, afire at last,  
we spoke!

Steven Federle

# Peter's Report

Running all the way,  
bent double in breathless pain  
we peer and see  
the gaping grave  
open to the rising sun.

Slowly we enter, our eyes sun-blind,  
when we see the empty bench,  
the bloody cloth cast within.

I try to imagine  
how light must have pierced the cloth,  
the sudden shudder  
of His broken body,  
His sharp breath exploding  
like a swimmer breaking the surface,

and I notice John's eyes  
outshining the sun,  
and my own face  
lighting even death's  
darkest place!

Steven Federle

# Pietà

Into the church  
we few mourners gather  
close to the small table  
filled with a photo  
of a smiling  
young man,  
a single candle,  
and a golden cube.

I did not know him  
whose ashes  
now lay within  
that dark space.

Old friends, his parents,  
and so I came  
to keep them company.

We pray the sacred  
texts, sing holy  
mass to send  
his lingering soul  
sweeping home  
to God,

but his mother weeps  
in the silent repose  
of ancient peace.

Steven Federle

# Poet In The Coffee Shop

new brew  
roasting, flowing  
aroma rolling  
through  
atmosphere,

machines  
grinding, growling  
out fresh  
caffeine

and you,  
awash in lilting  
ballads, consuming  
lovers  
across the room.

Just keep your eyes down  
on your honeyed-  
words,

frenzied bees  
that buzz,

and to song  
burst.

Steven Federle



# Poet To Reader

Deep inside my silence  
words glow like burning stones  
plunging to dark waters.

Share with me my holy fire!  
With joyful shouts,  
we'll flood the hidden rivers.

But if you leave  
I cease.

My words die  
without your eyes,  
molder to  
faded stains.

So come into my heart  
and sing with me  
this mystic chant!

We'll be madmen,  
hunting diamonds in the dark.

Steven Federle

# Political Poem

I don't want to write political poetry,  
but conflict washes over my native land  
like a Katrina surge.

A tempest in a teapot  
doesn't mean much  
compared to the  
relentless fury  
of the tsunami.  
This year's leaves, floating  
gently to my lawn  
glowing orange and gold  
through the afternoon sun,  
signify more than any inept  
congressional  
super-committee;

but when I see a policeman,  
a man I want to call  
protector, hero, friend,  
spray orange pain  
on crouching kids;

when protesters become enemies  
of the state, and plans to smash  
hope are made  
on great, glistening tables  
in bank boardrooms  
gleaming  
with the tears  
of the foreclosed,

then must I write political poetry.  
I'll fire a simile  
into the executive suite,  
I'll make strong the barricades  
with my fierce metaphor.



# Prayer

deep in my center  
lies the  
word.

it resonates  
softly, it  
whispers  
in my ear.

its lover,  
silence,  
embraces  
the word  
like thick mist  
caressing  
golden  
coastal slopes.

but this crude song is  
a metaphor,  
an anxious gong,  
a poor imitation,  
a mockingbird.

patiently,  
the word  
resists  
all explanation

it just simply  
is.

Steven Federle

# Prayer For All Souls

Fill me with your  
sacred fire.

I long to rise from  
this moldering pyre,  
but I'm trapped  
under a dying sun.

Your love  
is just beyond my reach,  
and sight fails

as I falter,  
and back  
to basic earth  
fall.

O, lift me  
with your mighty hand  
and once again  
I'll live.

Steven Federle

# Prayer To St. Francis

'The eyes of the saint make all beauty holy and the hands of the saint consecrate everything they touch.' Thomas Merton

Look at me, O Saint,  
sagging skin,  
thinning hair, face  
lined with roads  
too far traveled.

Can you see  
in me God's  
beauty?

Then touch me!

O take into  
your holy palms  
my living heart.  
Fill me with desire!

Make of me  
a holy psalm,  
consecrated host,  
eternal fire.

Steven Federle

# Preparation Day

The light is fading early today.

Rain turns the whole world to night.

I drive through watery streets,  
headlights  
stretch to bright tapers,  
red lamps  
softly trailing  
blood beneath my wheels.

Death's details  
fill my busy day.

First, the uncut granite,  
sorted and sized,  
words neatly arranged,  
ready to inscribe  
the bare facts of your life,

and then on to the small, white house,  
with its big front window and spring garden  
hidden behind the black iron gate;

this is where your party will be.

Our guests will arrive soon,  
and I must order flowers, great  
purple blooms  
to dim this too bright room.

Now we're nearly finished,

but first I must see  
to your final ground,  
small patch  
of turned earth,

and then tomorrow you can finally rest.

Attend us gently  
as we weep  
and slowly walk away.

Steven Federle



# Prepare The Ground

'When man is grounded in authentic truth and love, the roots of desire themselves wither, brokenness is at an end, and truth is found in the wholeness and simplicity of Nirvana: perfect awareness and perfect compassion.' Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*

Prepare the ground.

Begin with new earth  
and mix my baser soil  
with falling rain.

Find illicit weeds  
and by their roots extract  
vain desire.

Raise higher  
your righteous flame

and make ready the land  
for summer's living  
grain.

Steven Federle

# Prodigal

You warned me  
not to overfill  
my cup.

You told me  
how life can spill  
and drain the cup dry,

yet still I imbibed,  
pouring darkness  
like hundred-proof light.

My feet flashed like lightning  
setting fire  
to the innocent world  
suddenly I stumbled.

Seeing you come  
down the narrow lane  
I crawled in sorrow  
into your open arms  
once again.

Steven Federle

# Proposal

In the glow of the autumn fire  
your eyes warm me.

With bouquet  
of winter rose you sweeten  
our room; your lilting voice lifts  
away night's misty gloom.

So why ever  
should we die?

My heart beats  
in steady time with yours,  
and my mind seeks words  
to shine for you  
like diamonds.

Oh, my love, let's live here  
forever!

Steven Federle

# Psalm

You say  
'be not afraid'  
yet this darkness is  
complete.

A well of silence lies  
beneath my feet  
as I try to feel  
my way back to you.

How can I be brave  
when all around me I hear  
rivers of anguish, tears  
over-flow life's banks?

Terror fills the sky  
in dark flashes  
as my sight declines,  
and endless night  
encroaches on the edge  
of vision.

Will you lift me  
if I stumble  
and fall?

Oh, call softly  
and with seeing  
fingers I'll find  
your healing  
hands again

Steven Federle

## Psalm For 9-11 (Dedicated To Fr. Mychal Judge)

I hear your soft voice  
In the hushed evening breeze  
as gentle wind fills  
these tall, murmuring trees.

For you're never too far;  
your soft breath I can feel.  
My soul stirs with faith  
that no anger can steal.

Through the cold, empty night  
you fill my dark soul.  
Your brilliant light breaks  
death's harsh hold.

In the morning I'll hear  
your clear voice proclaim  
that my life you've restored,  
bitter tears wiped away.

Steven Federle

# Psalm For The 4th Sunday In Advent

In the morning mist  
wait the coastal hills,  
waves fixed, sea frozen  
to solid rock,  
smooth  
as rippled silk.

The mountains wait too,  
but closer to the sun  
they know more,  
and do not despair

for they know that soon  
heaven will call on them  
to proclaim His peace  
and plenty!

Then will the poor  
have their fill  
of justice.

Steven Federle

# Pure Hope

“We are not perfectly free until we live in pure hope. For when our hope is pure, it no longer trusts exclusively in human and visible means, no rests in any visible ends.” Thomas Merton

Close the the gun's edge  
life is sharply  
defined.

Clarity is achieved  
when you have nothing left  
but hope.

That's when you realize  
that your life stands  
without any visible  
means of  
support;

like a high-  
wire walker,  
you are  
pure.

That's why  
you have the freedom  
to stand between  
the red rage  
and the children.

Steven Federle

# Purgatory

As I walk through winter's mist  
I cannot see ahead or even know  
if the jaded sun will break through  
to guide me back home to you.

But I must not wait for certain light;  
I must go on through my dark fears,  
bitter tears, failing sight,

for your gentle, wordless song  
nudges me ever forward, urges me  
always on.

Steven Federle



# Pursuit

The Lord travels in all directions.

The Lord arrives from all directions at once.

Wherever we are, we find that He has just departed.

Wherever we go, we discover that He has just arrived before us.

Thomas Merton, No Man Is An Island

I try to catch you,  
sideglancing  
facing forward to see  
your heels flashing fire  
in the shimmering red sea.

I gaze into night,  
desiring sight  
of your dancing eyes.

I whisper, I sigh,  
but you elude,  
ahead always,  
always behind.

Steven Federle

# Question And Answer

What should I say  
when night ignites  
your question?

You ask me  
again and again  
and patiently wait for my  
answer,

but I don't understand.

How does the faithful moon  
ascend, transcend  
night's fatal space  
with love's perfect,  
forgiving grace?

To your dull-witted child  
oh, give your sweet breath,

and my answer I'll shout,  
my joyful  
'yes! '

Steven Federle

# Radiant Day

radiant day,  
gentle winds  
blow away  
all raw weather  
as skies dive deep  
into blue ponds  
while above in barren trees  
the young sun  
strokes small branches,  
and emergent buds wait  
for the green season.

Steven Federle

# Raking Leaves

Look to the tallest tree  
and see how the noon-day sun  
glints through slender grey limbs  
to where leafless Life contracts  
to its tender core  
(this year's ring  
complete)  
and waits for winter's storms.

Leaves lie,  
golden harvest, luxuriant carpet  
to kick and scatter like  
brittle snow...  
... years ago  
playing through long autumn days,  
we built castles and smashed them,  
diving deep into fragrant mounds  
as the incense of burn piles  
filled the chilled air of November.

Today I just rake,  
scraping turf  
making smaller heaps to haul  
into my big green recycle bin

and see how golden autumn light  
softly glows in gleaming grass,  
free at last  
from the detritus  
of summer.

Steven Federle

# Real

I look out my window  
and see what is real.

Trees, bark encrusted,  
rough my hands; cool  
leaves, cherry blossoms,  
white and vibrant, writhe  
in the bee-blurred light.

Yes, these things  
are real,

and yet,

turning inward,  
to our secret room,

I find you

waiting,  
breathing,

real.

Steven Federle

# Rebuke

As fierce waves crash over my face  
I gulp cold water, I flail  
on rising tide,  
but failing to find air  
I despair and plead,  
"why do you sleep  
while in the storm I die? "

Yawning, sleepy-eyed you awake  
and noticing my terror, wonder  
at my lack of faith.

Frankly annoyed by howling wind  
and complaining shipmate,  
you rebuke both  
to calm.

Steven Federle

# Reconciled

a bird peers down from  
my neighbor's roof, waiting for  
my silence to fall.

where there were five trees  
are now three; survivors morn,  
buzz-saw's anger quenched.

softly clear water  
falls; brown to green rising, coaxed  
into life again.

Steven Federle

# Redemption

'... it is the unaccepted self that stands in my way  
and will continue to do so as long as it is not accepted. '  
Thomas Merton, A Search for Solitude.

Broken-hearted,  
uncertain  
of my sullied worth,  
beaten down, degraded  
to my basic earth,

you gaze on me,  
and I see a new light.  
My face grows brilliant  
in your radiant sight.

You find in me  
what I cannot see,  
and teach me  
to love  
humanity.

Steven Federle



# Redwoods

dark  
shafts  
converging  
to blue space,  
confining, massively  
rising beyond reach, past  
simple comprehension, they  
shelter or imprison, lift me up  
point the way  
to escape, to  
the thin  
edge of  
faith

Steven Federle

# Redwoods At Dawn

Shafts of night rise  
from earth, climb past my front door,  
shade my window, vault

past the high arch, lift  
the sky with narrow rings of  
never-ending green

as golden morning  
crowns with light; excited birds  
sing out graven night.

Steven Federle

# Refuge

Fog hangs in bright tents  
contagion enfolds  
blighted white mist  
like driven, lost souls.

But curtains enclose  
our dim, soft room,  
and lanterns guard  
against fog's ashen gloom.

So build high the fire  
to warm us this night;  
we'll silently wait for  
dawn's thin, brittle light.

Steven Federle

# Requiem

My eyes search the ceiling  
in death's darkness I wait.  
My arms lie unfeeling  
in death's stark embrace.

Paralyzed prisoner,  
helpless I call.  
Oh, bring me sweet freedom  
from this still, lonely cell.

Alone in my darkness  
I hear your clear song.  
Sing gently to me  
and I'll try to sing along.

I'll reach your strong arms.  
I am ready to go  
to my love's sweet heaven.  
Oh, take me back home!

Steven Federle

# Respite

gentle breeze  
windows open  
to tender  
glow

slight  
tree sways  
green buds lace  
dormant  
limbs

and hint  
at summer,

presage  
spring's  
perennial  
leap!

Steven Federle

# Response To Merton: Balandi And Alkaocai

To choose the world is to choose to do the work I am capable of doing, in collaboration with my brother and sister, to make the world better, more free, more just, more livable, more human. And it has now become transparently obvious that mere automatic 'rejection of the world' and 'contempt for the world' is in fact not a choice but an evasion of choice.'

Thomas Merton. Contemplation in A World of Action

Our world is  
bleeding out  
filling the sea  
with stolen  
humanity

Why should I not  
reject this contemptible  
world?

Last night  
in Kahdahar's shadow  
Fear smashed open  
the simple doors  
of Balandi and Alkaozai

as an American soldier  
defiled  
the mothers and children  
of two nations,  
spread thick their blood  
and painted red  
this sinful  
world.

Steven Federle

# Revelation

Inside  
my secret door  
deep in the dark  
I face you.

We are  
alone.

I have no place  
to hide.

I don't want  
shelter  
from your steady  
eyes.

You see right through  
my petty lies-  
into the Truth of  
my shivering  
life.

You know me  
and yet

you love me!

Steven Federle

# Reverie

Your breath

your voice  
summer soft  
lost in sleep

I dream  
your whisper

rushing across  
my bare  
neck

your breath

Steven Federle



# Risk

'Sooner or later... we have to risk everything in order to gain everything. We have to gamble on the invisible and risk all that we can see and taste and feel.'

Thomas Merton

Soft autumn breezes,  
hills: brown, blue, violet - black  
moving to nothing.

risk it all, keep no-  
thing in your hand; grasp thin air  
and take everything.

taste your fears, salt-tears  
sting your eyes; glare like the sun-  
set on the last day.

Steven Federle

# Rockville Cemetery

Among broken stones  
folded over soft grass  
we linger.

See how the fallen pillar  
leans  
on the graven rock?

Someday  
they'll search  
for us, too.

In this garden,  
beyond  
all calamity,

beneath sunny lawns  
in a deeper shade  
we'll fill our own space  
and in peace  
we'll wait.

Steven Federle

# Rockville Road

soft sweep  
of gentle hills  
fallow fields  
famished  
for black seed  
worked earth  
glistening  
in late rain  
listening  
to songs of  
spring  
as every  
narrow  
furrow  
waits

Steven Federle

# Rocky Shore

The new man lives in a world that is always being created and renewed.  
He lives in this realm of renewal and creation. He lives in life.

Thomas Merton

ancient lake  
spirit of  
glacier,  
waves recede  
and the bones of fish  
swim

to summer  
shallows.

day follows day;  
sharp edges  
blunt

to anger,  
to blue  
sky

until arise  
souls, smooth  
and wise.

Steven Federle

# Rose At Nightfall

"God wants to know the divine goodness in us." Thomas Merton

Red rose flames  
in shade of day's end.

night sifts gently  
through dark trees;

but the rose!  
the rose yet blooms;

defies the fall  
of night's certain pall.

Steven Federle

# Rough Sailing

deck rising,  
waves tossing  
taut life-  
lines, cold-  
sailing, salt-  
air, dark water,  
wrenched  
by gale, by moon,  
by jealous  
core  
of earth,

but hold firm  
flex legs to keep  
your balance  
your next  
breath  
exhales life  
like wind  
roaring with  
ex-  
hilara-  
tion.

Steven Federle

# Rough Weather

Cumulonimbus

pressing in from the sea  
squall-line, supercell, windsheer,  
violent, ragged fingers  
reach down, ready to pull  
the trigger  
and end our  
green world.

Steven Federle

# Royal Presidio Chapel, Monterey California

Pelicans fly at dawn,  
Heavy, unsure of the wind,  
Their hungry cries piercing the sky  
Fiercely searching receding waves.

Ancient sorrow lingers here,  
The stunned saints with fading stigmata  
Painted dimly into ever-falling shadow.

Our Lady of Sorrows wears a black mantilla. Her  
cold, glimmering hands clench  
The lace handkerchief Maria Antonia brought.

Our Lady of Solitude pierces my soul,  
Her face shining forth from layers of death,  
Her astounding eyes glittering with living anguish.

(15 March 1979)

Steven Federle



# Ruined

Soft and spoiled  
apples cling to shifting limb,  
foregoing taut skin  
for molten brown,

when night winds  
carry them down  
to invest  
with teardropp seeds  
the unsuspecting  
grassy ground.

Steven Federle

# Rush Of Waves

rush of waves, surging  
of ocean, of atmosphere;  
west wind filling night

with the sound of earth  
careening through canyons of  
empty, endless space!

Steven Federle

# Russian Tanks Gather At The Ukrainian Border

armies in the night, steel  
wheels scrape  
the sacred earth.

Gogol once rode here, troika  
flying over drifts, wind  
blistering his open lips  
as laughing he drew in  
the Russian cold.

So many dead souls,  
to be bought and sold...

fodder  
for Russian tanks

Steven Federle

# Saint

Louis Tiffany and Company, 'Dogwood' Design Window: 1910-1915.

"The pale flowers of the dogwood outside this window are saints. The little yellow flowers that nobody notices on the edge of that road are saints looking up into the face of God." Merton, Thomas, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature*

Her black eyes gaze  
with pleasure.

My hand  
flows slowly over her sinew,  
ears, fur; she purrs in praise

that life is right,  
hunger sated,  
love remains.

Looking into her eyes  
I see a flame  
beyond her understanding  
beyond my understanding:

the spark  
of the being  
freely given,  
freely accepted.

Steven Federle

# Scrubbed Clean

the blue sky  
scrapes  
black space

and wind fills my face,  
raises me to heights  
beyond fear, beyond  
siren-calls

at crossings  
unstoppable  
as ancient trains glide,  
inexorably  
grinding  
fate;

but higher I'll fly,  
beyond the stench of ruin.

foul grief cannot follow  
to where I'll go, lifted  
by the constant,  
immaculate  
wind.

Steven Federle

# Seaward

Seaward waits, poised,  
gently rising and falling,  
by the concrete pier  
ready for our cruise;  
the polished bowsprite,  
jutting in defiance,  
fills my heart  
with an undefined dread.

Underway at last on the calm Sausalito channel  
we strike sail, ropes winching  
the mainsail tight, the foresail stretched  
to catch freshening breezes pushing up  
from the foggy Golden Gate;  
but I see only  
watery desolation:  
no familiar, solid road  
no bright guiding line,  
no golden prize  
as we speed across  
the dark, green desert.

The wind, no longer a breeze,  
becomes a cold gale, flailing our faces,  
making us hurry into windbreakers and hoods,  
and when I turn my tingling cheeks  
towards the shrouded city, suddenly  
out far and in deep, I see

pelicans soaring and plunging to the kill,  
ducks skimming low over the sea like fighter squadrons,  
and sea-lions spying on us at water level,  
their dog-sly eyes following our every move.

Warfare fills this place  
as species battle species, and  
Darwin writes all the rules.

On this voyage of discovery

we are like school-children gaping in wonder  
at colorful plastic buckets of bay water  
revealing sea-worms, and spider-crabs,  
preying on tiny krill delicately inching  
over fronds of firm sea lettuce.

So the bay is not a desert;  
life pours over it,  
on it, and under it,  
claiming at every level  
of this moist, roiling world  
its birthright,

and we are unwitting participants in this struggle  
tossed high and low in our powerful, winged schooner,  
gliding lightly, scooning swiftly on our voyage  
through the turbid, turbulent waters,  
through the violent,  
living bay.

Steven Federle

## Second Death

'All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death,  
From whose embrace no mortal can escape.  
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!  
Happy those she finds doing your will!  
The second death can do them no harm.'  
from *The Canticle of the Creatures*, by St. Francis of Assisi

In the darkness of noon  
proud souls decline  
from glittering heights  
to October's stark truth.

Sacred fire ignites  
their hopeless, sad flight  
into sin and self-  
separation.

Steven Federle



# See What The Rain Has Done

vision scrubbed free; stars  
pierce the silken night. Oh! see  
what the rain has done!

Steven Federle

# Self Examination

my name  
my place in line  
my face  
my fleeting time  
to find what I need.

after  
so much fear  
it's no longer clear  
what is true

for truth is thin  
and empty  
within  
enfolded and  
faded to  
night

Steven Federle

# Sendai

The earth is still today.

Trees rise to the grey sky  
high branches,  
thin stems, etched  
to stasis of  
a photograph.

Be glad,  
for motion can kill  
when deep plates grind  
shocking  
ocean, city, coastal plain  
'til tsunami clears away  
cars and trucks, homes cascading  
like driftwood in swollen springs  
rushing from the heaving sea  
to a more fundamental deep,

where at last silence  
arrests crushed chests,  
and pain ceases  
beneath the liquid earth.

For no cry can pierce  
the stillness  
of a ruptured world.

Steven Federle

# Serenade

"We are always traveling and traveling as if we did not know where we were going. " Thomas Merton

Warm wind stirring my  
tallest trees. Sunset retrieves  
another hot day.

Descends silken sky;  
passion ignites summer's night,  
stars, like wine, delight!

In cool rooms I'll wait  
for you to awake. O come!  
We'll begin again!

Steven Federle

# She Sits In The Old, Red Chair

She sits in the old, red chair  
feet up, the red crush of the ottoman  
giving rest to tired ankles.

At ninety-nine, her face is lined  
and thin, cheekbones jut beneath  
piercing young eyes, as hands,  
thin, pale skin barely concealing  
vein and bone, lie in repose in her lap

as we talk, remembering all the days  
and find her mind a crystal stream  
vibrant, alive with a life of love

filled with places past  
and people gone.

Steven Federle

# Shoemaker

The children watch his hands  
strain against leather, tug  
tough hide, obdurate skin,  
once supple and alive,  
now stiff and dry,

see how his patience,  
like love,  
wears death down  
until new shoes grow  
in his strong hands.

They learn to bend  
life's refuse  
to new use,

how being  
always finds  
purpose.

Thus, in lines of memory  
we measure our days.

The ancestors guide us  
as we build new form  
from old tears,

and our children  
watch  
and learn.

Steven Federle

# Sight Persists

In small cells it grows  
glows in vitreous seas  
like phosphorescent slugs  
by currents released  
holding all the motion, color,  
loveliness  
of the captured world,

until noticing, at last,  
I see.

Steven Federle

# Silent Watcher

Silent watcher,

see how the sun pales,  
as gray clouds enshroud  
jaded day?

Just tell me that you love me,  
and I'll breathe you  
a new world.

The fiery bird  
will rise  
impossibly high  
into the leaden sky.

Watch  
as I fill your eyes  
with desire!

Steven Federle



# Silver Night

wings in flight  
unseen rise past  
death's dim sight  
to the perfect light  
of paradise!

Steven Federle

# Simeon's Blessing

Blessings  
on this radiant child.

I'll smear his head  
with bitter oils, cool  
his brow with the waters  
of paradise,  
and with sweet incense  
raise to heaven  
his soul!

...but I fear for the life  
my failing eyes foresee  
how the rich of this land  
will fear him, strike him down,  
covet even the air  
he breathes,

and you, daughter,  
the soldiers will pierce  
your tender breasts  
with hot swords  
of envy, tear  
an open wound  
deep in your heart,

to be a sanctuary  
for all the mothers  
of all the children  
yet to be slain.

Most blessed  
are you, my child, most holy  
is your name.

Steven Federle

# Simon And Garfunkel, 1969

Their music  
still holds me.

two voices  
swelling in the night  
driving out the silence  
with the sound  
of sweet life.

Horror filled our lives then,  
war was all around  
and the very best among us  
all were  
shot down -

But we never lost hope  
so long as we could hear  
their music ringing clearly  
as the darkness gathered near.

Steven Federle

# Simplicity Of Being

'...it is of the very essence of Christianity to face suffering and death not because they are good, not because they have meaning, but because the resurrection of Jesus has robbed them of their meaning."

Thomas Merton

\*\*\*\*\*

The moon fades,  
clouds enshroud stars  
pale trees glare  
ensnared by winter winds  
blanching at death's edge,

and yet you whisper  
gently in the rain,  
promise me gifts  
of disease and pain  
to strip me clean  
and pure again.

O, make me  
your sacrament!

pure essence,  
of eternal gain.

Steven Federle

# Simplicity/ &#1087; &#1088; &#1086; &#1089; &#1090; &#1086; &#1090; &#1072;

unencumbered  
like water  
flowing through  
pure time, my  
mind climbs to  
perfect sky  
to the silence  
of my heart  
to meet you  
and know  
at last  
your simple  
will.

\*\*\*\*\*

&#1087; &#1088; &#1086; &#1089; &#1090; &#1086; &#1090; &#1072;

&#1085; &#1077; &#1086; &#1073; &#1088; &#1077; &#1084; &#1077;  
&#1085; &#1077; &#1085; &#1085; &#1099; &#1081;  
&#1082; &#1072; &#1082; &#1074; &#1086; &#1076; &#1072;  
&#1087; &#1088; &#1086; &#1090; &#1077; &#1082; &#1072; &#1102;  
&#1097; &#1080; &#1081; &#1095; &#1077; &#1088; &#1077; &#1079;  
&#1095; &#1080; &#1089; &#1090; &#1086; &#1075; &#1086; &#1074;  
&#1088; &#1077; &#1084; &#1077; &#1085; &#1080; , &#1084; &#1086;  
&#1081;  
&#1091; &#1084; &#1087; &#1086; &#1076; &#1085; &#1080; &#1084;  
&#1072; &#1077; &#1090; &#1089; &#1103; &#1085; &#1072;  
&#1080; &#1076; &#1077; &#1072; &#1083; &#1100; &#1085; &#1086;  
&#1077; &#1085; &#1077; &#1073; &#1086;  
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&#1074; &#1084; &#1086; &#1077; &#1084; &#1089; &#1077; &#1088;  
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&#1080; &#1079; &#1085; &#1072; &#1090; &#1100; ,  
&#1085; &#1072; &#1082; &#1086; &#1085; &#1077; &#1094;  
&#1074; &#1072; &#1096; &#1087; &#1088; &#1086; &#1089; &#1090;

&#1086; &#1081;  
&#1073; &#1091; &#1076; &#1077; &#1090; .

Steven Federle

# Slanting Rays

Slanting rays,  
gold and green,  
stream through grass and  
nodding trees,

as high above  
flashing wings  
of amorous doves  
whisper to the wind  
to end  
spring's tender day

Steven Federle

# Soft July

days when you are gone  
are silent

except for the rush of wind  
in our apple tree.

See how the fruit hangs  
heavy, pulling low  
the branches;  
ready.

so I'll wait in the shade  
of soft July  
and think  
of you.

Steven Federle



# Solace

Tears,

dark fears  
like wind-  
lashed leaves,  
like faithful doves  
who softly grieve,

you cry.

Though I don't  
understand  
why life fills you  
with such fright,

please believe  
that I'll always be there  
to help you get  
through your darkest  
night.

Steven Federle

# Solano Sunset

Tangerine sky  
etched edge, black  
cut ridge,

Dusky plain  
broad valley  
waiting

For inky night  
to fill  
the great bowl  
of earth.

Steven Federle

# Sometimes In The Night

sometimes  
in the night  
I fight the  
deepening shadows  
of sleep disturbed  
by fearful stirrings,  
silent watchers  
standing, waiting  
as I fall  
into  
nothing...

but when I awake  
and turn to you  
I feel your breath  
and finding myself anew  
again  
I begin  
to live.

Steven Federle

# Sometimes It Hurts Too Much

Sometimes it hurts too much,

strangling tears,  
struggling breath

slowly steals  
stealthy death.

did the merciful needle hurt you much?

when sleep filled your eyes,  
and your thick blood ceased,  
from the red pain you were  
suddenly released!

but grey dull memory  
remains  
for me.

Steven Federle

# Sonata

The grave is empty.  
Darkness, half lit by the blurred moon,  
Chilled by the sea, the fog waiting,  
The enthralled stars, nearly lost,  
Searching for another earth,  
The dark soil waiting for the seed.

Chaos-night.  
The memory of a fireplace,  
Warmth with music  
Undulating arias  
Like small birds falling into darkness.

Cold rain  
Driving against my window.  
Muffled music and dreams of water,  
And another grave.

Steven Federle

# Song Of Spring

Lusty old bird squats  
on branch, bends backward knees and  
bawls his song of spring.

Steven Federle

# Sonnet For A Grey Morning

Another grey morning, much like the last  
and for tomorrow, more fog's the forecast.  
When days seem the same, life always seems cold.  
Night flows to night, the sad world grows old  
as clouds wrap my soul in still, fatal pall  
but hearts must be silent, though bold blood calls  
for death to cruel winter, and end to dark days,  
fair spring to release enthralled golden rays.

But looking at you, I see in your eyes  
the brilliance lost from blue summer's last sky  
and when you smile, in your warm glow I feel  
your love overwhelm me, new suns revealed.  
Overcast, confined though the earth may be  
with you in my day, spring's born endlessly.

Steven Federle

# Spider Web

The spider web drifts,  
abandoned, useless,  
high in the window  
bright in the setting sun,  
close to a world in motion.

Not immersed in the savage flow,  
it is protected from wild birds  
that caw in the swaying tree  
peering down  
at creatures bound to solid,  
unmoving ground.

Their motion  
is sacred motion,

but the web just aimlessly stirs  
in an inner breeze

always on the edge  
of the living sea

held fast by stasis  
of gravity.

Steven Federle



# Spirit Of Spring

If we trust God to act in us, God will act in us.  
This is how our lives become prophetic.  
Thomas Merton, *The Springs of Contemplation*

Spirit of spring,  
gleaming  
fields, marsh  
weeping.

Oh, trust the rain!

With sacred grief,  
it will lead you  
to prophecy:

bird-song in  
the foothills;  
heavy grapes;  
the tall  
summer  
grain.

Steven Federle

# Spring Plowing

Deeply furrowed,  
the wide field  
lies in muddy chaos.

Smell the sweet clay  
as it fills this cloudy spring day.

Earth's dark womb  
lies bare.  
Gleaming plow,  
efficient engine  
sunder black skin of soil  
to plant the seed  
deep  
beneath the future.

See how it will be.

On a warm, summer's morn  
static breast  
will rise with deeper breath,

and muddy death  
give way  
to ascendant, golden day

Steven Federle

# Spring Storm

night drops suddenly  
birds, nervous, slip into eves,  
silenced; a stone drops.

peace be on this stream.  
slidingsong of rainsoaked creek,  
rising moon, refreshed.

Steven Federle

# St. Peter Addressing The Begger

Look up at me, turn  
your wide eyes,  
expectant, wondering,  
hopeful, and see  
what I can give.

Do you want a coin? Some-  
thing good to eat? Do  
you want a little  
kindness?

I have none of these  
to give you  
but the kindness  
and the secret of  
the seeds of healing  
flowing all around you  
like pollen in the spring breeze,  
swirling like gentle desire,  
blessing your torn lungs, infusing  
your tainted blood, and singing  
sweetly your freedom!

In His name, then, I command you  
to rise and take your place  
beside me, and enter into  
His holy temple!

Steven Federle

# St. Sebastian

Slender arrows,  
pierce me through.

I wanted to forgive,  
but too quickly  
they flew.

My mind fades.  
I rise to you.

\*\*

ref: St. Sebastian, Andrea Mantegna 1456-59, Kunsthistorisches Museum  
(viewed at the De Young Museum, San Francisco)

Steven Federle

# Star Of The Sea

edge of night,

cold consuming  
blackening hills,

clears barely  
the deepening ridge

bright tears -  
star of the sea.

Steven Federle

# Starling Flight

Starlings whorl,  
gyre curls  
rise, turn, drop  
to airy knot  
rippling mist, round  
folds, cloud  
undulant

when, without warning,  
they light and draw a tight  
line of night  
on thin wires.

Steven Federle

# Starlings

Clean and cold, bird-full  
dawn's veils dropp to where starlings  
rear their satin heads,

raise their diamond eyes,  
praise the perfect sky and drink  
clear tears from heaven.

Steven Federle



# Starry Night

Night fills the valley.  
swarming armies rise to crest  
to fiery west.

The battle is done.  
tumbling stars overturning  
pale winter's stark sun.

Steven Federle

## Starry Night (Vacaville)

Night fills the valley.  
swarming armies rise to crest  
to fiery west.

The battle is done.  
tumbling stars overturning  
pale winter's stark sun.

Steven Federle

# Step Of Eternity

But love laughs at the end of the world  
because love is the step of eternity. Thomas Merton

Look into my eyes  
and see me smile,

hear my sighs turn to  
laughter.

Life's a comedy,  
a melo-  
drama  
filled with  
wrong turns,  
missed cues,  
sudden revisions  
and tearful  
reconciliations.

Summer  
seems endless, and  
the heat wilts even  
the sleekest, young runners;

but on paths by cool streams,  
by deeper waters we'll wait

as the sun slides through  
night's ancient gate.

To the cobalt sea  
we'll gaze,  
to the fiery moon;

For night steps gently, and  
sleep will follow soon.

Steven Federle

# Stones In Darkness

stones in the darkness  
cold, unseen, the wind above  
my wooden fence sighs

no sound in the night;  
I hear only my silence,  
feel my waning life.

Steven Federle

# Storm At Sausalito

Sailboats lashed to the pier,  
ebon masts, dark trees bare  
with tightly shrouded canvas sail,  
rigging singing in the gale,  
pier groaning, grey waves grind  
clinging sloops to taut lines,  
steel bulwarks rise and fall  
against gleaming, cool jetty walls.

Steven Federle

# Storm At The Wheelwright Museum

Up the narrow, foothill road  
we hear thunder and see tall clouds  
churning the hot desert sky,  
as lightning in gleaming metal spears  
thrust from slate-grey nimbus  
into the bleeding body of earth.

But our road is still dry,  
the rain falling  
in tall curtains  
between sharp shafts  
of bright sunlight.

So we drive higher  
to the museum at the top,  
to see the soul  
of a murdered nation.

We park on the gravel  
when, at last, the sky breaks,  
and running for the door, laughing  
in the unexpected warmth of pounding rain,  
we fly into the hogan,  
safe from the storm,  
and still breathless,  
we walk through dim galleries,  
gazing at Navajo carpets,  
their patterns whispering tales of  
life and love and loss.

Urgent hale beats the roof,  
drums, like wild hearts, urging war,  
and thunder responds  
with volley of angry cannon,  
when sudden darkness  
swallows us  
power shifting  
to the avenging storm,

and, bat-blind, we drift,  
touching walls  
reaching for any door,  
because all art is utterly useless now,  
all beauty unknowable  
in this uterine cave

where all we can hope  
is to find our way out  
and be born again  
into the sodden world.

(13 May 2011)

Steven Federle

# Storm Clouds In October

Grey,  
torn, and twisted  
they fill the sky  
with the slow motion  
of gods.

Scraping hills  
rising past the dry heights  
they promise rain  
and new life.

(25 Oct.2016)

Steven Federle



# Storm In The Morning

bright smudge in slate clouds  
violence on the mountain  
morning of the storm.

Steven Federle

# Storm Near Travis

Clouds  
glow in  
garish light.

Bombers  
in the mist  
rise  
and fade

as ponderous rain  
falls  
glistening  
to the ground

and leaves  
lunge  
to winter gardens  
flung.

Steven Federle

# Storm On Hunter Hill

Pure line  
slopes skyward

massive, dry,  
creased clusters  
cast-rock,  
hard shale,

till crevasses,  
small streams, fill with rain,  
increase to flash-flood  
greedy hands  
grab pebbles, haul branches,  
crashing to the road  
below.

The rain wants it all down,  
to sink it into the sea,  
level proud mountains,  
make all things  
equal,

but the rising line flows  
to a distant ridge  
where dark oaks  
hold out  
for hard, blue  
day.

Steven Federle

# Storm's Ending

rains cease, clouds closing  
rising to sun, blue by sky  
encased and dismissed.

Steven Federle

# Suisun Creek

Suisun Creek  
flows  
through  
riparian forests.

Hungry trout,  
liquid lightning, flash  
as stonefly nymphs dart past  
brooding periwinkle,  
blackberry groves,

exquisitely  
twisting.

Steven Federle

# Suisun Spring

the green glow  
of our cottonwoods  
newly clothed in the gentle April sun....

our apple tree,  
still skeletal,  
intimating cotton buds  
promising green glory to come,

and the grass!  
all winter-yellow evaporated,  
shouting like a  
third-grade leprechaun  
skipping across the playground  
in the school's St. Patrick's Day Parade.

but most unforeseen,  
along the rough fence  
the vinca  
blazing with royal light  
in the deep, verdant shade  
of our cottonwoods.

Steven Federle

# Suisunes Woman

when waters were clear  
and elk foraged, fearless on  
high bluffs, she waited  
for her husband

flowing swiftly  
with catch of salmon  
he rode the western wind  
as her eyes guided him

while high above  
gathered the feathery  
souls of the old ones,

returned from sea,  
honored guests,  
to the evening feast.

Steven Federle

# Summer River

"It might be good to open our eyes and see." Thomas Merton

summer river  
ore' shading trees,  
hanging leaves casting  
green sheen on waters,  
on the deep  
unbroken mirror

when, rising from night  
it breaks lightning  
and draws first breath  
of thin air.

Discovery made,  
it falls back  
into the cool  
watery shade.

Steven Federle



# Summer's Day

blue sky, golden plain,  
fading hills filled with light -

with summer's living flame.

Steven Federle

# Summons

In the morning  
you sent clouds towering  
and drove fine ice  
into the tender rose,

(its red petals scattered,  
a holocaust  
on pure white ground)

and took my breath away!

Father, I seek you  
like death,  
clean and clear  
in the ringing air.

Green and golden,  
long shadows flow east  
and birdsong fills  
your nodding trees.

In the gentle rhythm  
of the swaying wind  
there I hear  
your song again.

Steven Federle

# Sunday Morning After The Storm

Clear sky, vaulting blue  
drives out the ragged clouds,  
of yesterday's storm.

Yesterday  
the wind raged  
as we huddled close  
behind closed windows.

Lightning  
enthralled the night  
as thunder intoned  
basso profundo,  
felt before heard.

From behind drawn drapes  
we felt trees thrashing  
releasing spent leaves  
until barren and clean,  
fearless at last they faced  
winter's cold scythe.

But now the bright Sabbath  
breaks through,  
and the resurgent sun  
pierces  
spare nature's  
pure architecture.

Steven Federle

# Sunday Morning Storm

High above, shifting in the storm  
all leaves finally dropped and raked,

the tall tree feigns death,  
as emerald grass glows  
in winter's rich rain.

But, late as usual,  
the apple tree, like a queen,  
spreads her royal leaves  
into a golden robe  
below.

Steven Federle

# Sunrise

'Sunrise is an event that calls forth solemn music in the very depths of man's nature, as if one's whole being has to attune itself to the cosmos and praise God for the new day, praise Him in the name of all the creatures that ever were or ever will be.' Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

Oh call me softly  
in the morning!

With winter's sun  
paint golden  
the pale trees.

In deep waters,  
in cool ponds brush my  
legs, caress  
my tender feet.

Your breath flies  
through the green  
canyons.

With tongues  
of flame  
oh, ravish me!

Steven Federle

# Sunset

The evening wind stirs  
our high, green trees,  
whispering down the westering sun,  
as shadows scale our eastern fence.

The sun surrenders its May heat  
to a cooling Suisun breeze,  
while already looming  
on the eastern horizon,  
rising from the gentle green swell  
of low delta hills,  
the copper moon vaults  
into the cobalt,  
its ascendant mastery astonishing  
even the wading, gazing egret,

as on the other side  
of our slowly rolling planet,  
the bleeding sun declines,  
searching the sea for healing.

Thus, from conflict and transition,  
come poise and redemption.

Steven Federle

# Sunset And Fog, Suisun Valley

blue haze  
fast fading day  
cut-paper ridges,  
saw-tooth hills  
scrape raw  
the black maw  
of space,

while pockets of fog  
narrow valleys fill;  
milk  
for giants  
in these sun-  
set hills.

Steven Federle

# Sunset On All Soul's Day

Sunset glows  
over sharp, dark ridges

rich with vermilion  
and ruddy blush

as gathered souls stretch  
incarnadine fingers

in clouds sweeping down  
to bless bleak coastal hills.

For their love arises  
from the raw, bleeding sun,

their golden breaths  
coalesce  
into pure, lucid song.

Steven Federle



# Sunset, Christmas Eve

Light's nearly gone  
bare trees flare gold

sun descends,  
day turns cold.

Old world ends  
in a brilliant flash

but from the east  
hope springs at last

fresh from a child  
drawing first breath,

and the tawdry cycle  
of night and day,

the hopelessness  
of fear and hate

new love overwhelms  
as new day begins

with first holy breath  
of God-infant.

Steven Federle

# Sunset, Rising Moon

Sable hills  
etched flat on fragile panes,  
glowing sky,  
indigo fast fading  
to black,  
while on the edge of fire  
incandescent embers  
(cast from the sun  
gone to create  
new day)  
hurry this wheeling world  
on ancient paths.

But see how,  
newly awakened,  
the cool lady ascends,  
awash in reflected glory,  
full and round,  
and lovely.

Steven Federle

# Surrender

"Real self-conquest is the conquest of ourselves not by ourselves but by the Holy Spirit. Self-conquest is really self-surrender." Thomas Merton.

Look to the west  
and see how your eyes  
must narrow  
or turn inward  
to shut out  
the glare  
that precedes  
darkness.

Hills wrapped in haze  
lose all definition  
become flat, devoid  
of fold or crevasse.

No sudden rise  
blocks your way  
to the edge  
at the top.

Surrender there  
to the light  
before  
night.

Steven Federle

# Survival

Glaring like a field  
covered with new snow,

this incipient page waits  
for my typed letters  
to alight  
like raucous grackles,  
foraging, finding

no tender shoots,  
no easy meal.

These are hard times  
for those who stay close to home  
never winging it  
to southern lands,

these dedicated black birds,  
scratching the page  
for another metaphor.

Survival here is measured  
in image and rhythm,  
in nascent  
white space.

Steven Federle

# Thanksgiving

Full from the feast  
table laded  
with fragrant dressing,  
steam of onion and celery,  
tender turkey and  
five kinds of pies

The family gathered.  
My parents smiled  
at our busy banter  
brothers  
and sisters nudging and  
teasing, beaming  
in the glow  
of that happy day  
so long ago.

Now you and I gather  
our sons around us;  
again we pause, pray  
and eat the bounty  
of this bright Thanksgiving Day.

They say that some things,

kind hearts,  
hearty laughs,  
enduring love

are so good  
they persist long down  
the thankful  
generations.

Steven Federle

# The 1%

blaring train  
declaring right-  
of-way,

elephantine, cyclopean,  
crushing our lives  
with their money,

their bloody truth  
strangling the sighs  
of the repossessed

as wall street swells  
with the cries of  
the dispossessed.

Steven Federle

# The Abyss Of The Soul

When night rushes in  
and tightly presses  
my fading eyes  
and even the faithful wind  
fails,

with breathless prayer  
I will call you.

Your strong hand  
will catch me as I fall  
beyond my failures  
beyond the  
brutality  
of my will,

down to my truest solitude  
to the abyss  
of the soul.

Steven Federle

# The Apple Tree Waits

the apple tree waits.  
its bare, twisted limbs reach up  
to the trusted sun,

thrusting in-  
ward, to  
the core  
of its own  
sweet  
fruit.

Steven Federle



# The Baptism

I walked down from Nazareth with the crowd,  
nudged on by their excited chatter  
and rumors of a crazy man by the river  
shouting God at sinners,  
thrusting them into the Jordan  
like so much dirty laundry  
to be rinsed clean and pure.

These are my people,  
hungry people  
seeking new wine and  
new bread, lepers  
yearning to be cured,

But deep within me  
silence grows,  
and somehow I know  
that I am closer to Home,  
though so far away  
from my father's workshop  
and my mother's kitchen.

When John sees me  
he takes my hands and gently  
pushes my face into the stream  
befouled with the sins  
of the people...

I cannot see.

I struggle  
to rise and breathe,  
from this watery death  
I want to be free,  
and as I break through  
I see His fire, I hear  
His voice like a flash of wings  
falling down on me,  
calling me His Beloved Son,

telling the stunned crowd  
to listen to everything  
I will say,

but frightened,  
I hurry away,  
into the empty desert  
to stray.

Steven Federle

# The Barren Time

The barren time approaches.

Shadows skulk through empty streets  
vacant lines fill with lies.

Fear approaches,  
drains pale the moon.

Only a single bulb  
remains.

Do you see  
them coming?

Are you afraid?

Steven Federle

# The Book Of Life

“Perhaps the book of life, in the end, is the book of what one has lived and if one has lived nothing, he is not in the book of life.” Merton, Thomas, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature*

Turn the pages  
past the flashy cover  
beyond sincere dedications;  
what do you  
read?

Are there tragedies  
lurking in your leafy folds?  
Do you struggle, oh Hero,  
with sirens and one-  
eyed peep-  
ing Toms?

Are you triumphant?

In your brief tale,  
do you satisfy  
harried Plot's demands?

Are you happy  
with your climax, your  
denoue-  
ment?

Or, with eyes moist and red,  
at last do you drop  
your ragged volume  
to the musty cellar floor,  
and wonder,

what happened?

Steven Federle

# The Boy's Gift

I only have  
two little fish and  
the five barley loaves  
my mother packed  
for my father and me  
for our long  
walk home.

I've been hungry before  
and fear losing my little dinner,

but your eyes so fill my heart,  
that, smiling, I give you all I have.

Oh, you must be the One!

for from my meager dole  
you feed five thousand souls.

Never again  
will I be hungry!

Steven Federle

# The Breakthrough

Slate sky,  
the wind has died

calm chill  
flows over  
the sleeping street

when  
bursts a white flame  
feathers rising  
to the heavy sky.

To the impending rain  
ascends the crane

to heaven's  
dark promise.

Steven Federle

# The Bridge At Rio Vista

The bridge stands low  
over the swollen  
Sacramento,

black water,  
rushing to  
darker seas,

hypo-thermal,

sucking breath  
from the fallen,  
the overboard,

the suicide.

Its sturdy stanchions,  
hold fast,

give refuge  
from the maelstrom,

a way across

or a place  
to jump.

Steven Federle

# The Cloud

The cloud surrounds me.

Unseen, It fills my cells.

Through my fears  
it whispers in that deep place  
where only whispers can be heard,  
where darkness  
creases the grey mist  
of consciousness.

It shields me  
from howling despair  
and stays my trembling hand  
from sundering  
bleak soul  
from throbbing heart.

In holy silence  
the cloud envelopes my fear  
and with lustrous grace  
strengthens my will  
to persevere.

Steven Federle



# The Confrontation

The angry sparrow, narrow and light  
fiercely pursued the thieving crow  
slender beak stabbing  
smooth black feathers,  
rising and diving,  
rolling and turning,  
a vicious top-gun  
dog-fight.

Then the crow, tired of torment,  
set heavily down on the high lamp post  
as the small bird circled, crying invective,  
taunting the crow to rise again and fight!

but the old crow, patient and wise  
settled comfortably for this shrill siege  
and calmly waited for the air-show to end.

Finally, exhausted,  
the sparrow gave up,  
but claiming victory,  
like Odysseus  
nearly home  
at last,

became Homer,  
and composed his own  
epic poem  
of the fierce  
midnight raven,  
homewrecker  
wrought low,  
driven down  
into death's  
bitter dust,

which, of course, he sang  
in heroic,  
avian meter

to his faithful,  
Penelope.

Steven Federle

# The Connecticut Effect

devastating velocity,  
blood thirsty, fresh death-  
dealing NRA  
lies fly super-  
sonic flesh thud-  
ing ragged rounds  
slamming into  
stunned souls,  
dreams  
die.

Steven Federle

# The Dance

The gym was dim.

Red and white balloons  
glittered in the dusk  
while flashing lights writhed  
on the dark floor  
like enchanted water-snakes  
gliding through scented fog.

This was a celebration dance!

Eighth grade done at last,  
they stepped, hesitant, into the roiling  
teen-age sea, their synchronous, bobbing heads  
attuned to the be-bop rhythms of the city (not their city) ,  
and the lusty calls of the hood (not their hood) .

Smooth gym walls echoed the dj's mechanical angst  
endless, relentless beats, the racing heart of the machine,  
artificial sighs, nano-seconds long and gigabytes wide.

The boys, spinning on heads and leaping from hands and  
flailing legs, showed an athleticism  
never seen in PE,  
while the girls huddled in their own dark corner  
and planned their move;

their fashion walk,  
legs strutting ahead  
of swaying hips,  
heels clicking the hard, dark floor,  
as they stalked right up to the foul line

where boys were spinning and leaping  
through throbbing lights  
to the tribal, primal beat.

So the girls turned,  
hips flung in defiance,

and sashayed back to the wall,  
staring hard at the gaping boys  
over their swaying shoulders.

Steven Federle

# The Decision

In this emergent tunnel's arch,  
I waver in darkness, I fear  
this pathway of promise, this clear  
light of bright day, this warm, green park,  
as children on swings and slides mark  
if I'll step into the soft breeze  
and dappled light under green trees,  
and leave this cave and freedom take,  
or, entombed, my freedom forsake?  
From my soul's night, I will be free!

Steven Federle

# The Denial Of St. Peter

(after Caravaggio's, The Denial of St. Peter)

On the edge  
hands clenched,  
sad eyes downcast  
bitter fear forcing tight his lips  
he holds his breath

he pauses  
as the angry finger  
of the state  
points at his throat,  
hard eyes searching Peter's  
indecision  
for rash conviction;

but she, she knows  
has seen before  
his adoring eyes, heard his  
boastful voice  
by the campfire  
of the condemned.

Slowly he moves  
toward the inevitable lie  
as the bloody sun  
stirs to song  
the drowsy cock.

Steven Federle

# The Doctor Said

The stroke was bad, and arriving at the hospital  
we expected hushed, grim words  
from the preoccupied doctor.

The doctor said it was brain-stem, hopeless;  
the coma was total; his mind, the doctor said,  
was at the bottom of a deep well.

So we entered his room and  
saw the machinery of life-support,  
reassuring noises, glowing red displays,  
tubes and wires tethering his shattered mind to the bed.

The doctor said that Ed would not come back,  
and we should cut off the milky food  
flowing down a clear tube to his still living gut,  
and give him a gentle death by starvation;  
it would not be painful, the doctor knowingly said.

But his coma was so restless and active,  
his eyes were wide and darting,  
his mouth opened, as though to speak,  
and his legs rose and fell,  
like he was walking to Sunday Mass.

He looked alive, so we refused  
and directed the nurses  
to keep hope flowing,  
at least for now.

When it was my turn to sit with him,  
I said, "Hey Ed! You know,  
I've been drinking all your beer at home, " and he smiled  
and looked at me with humor and said, "ohhh? "

But the doctor said it was automatic reflex,  
and smiled indulgently at me.

The next morning the doctor,  
(expecting no response) said,



“Hello Ed. How are we feeling today? ”  
but stopped, nothing to say at last,  
when Ed replied, “Lousy! ”

Ed lived for the next three years  
as grandchildren were born,  
baptisms were witnessed,  
and first communions were celebrated,

and ready at last, he died  
one bright, peaceful  
April morning,  
with nothing more  
to be said.

Steven Federle

# The Elders Are Confused

You call us unruly children,  
but you confuse us!

First, your cousin came,  
eating insects, drinking honey,  
preaching re-thinking,  
shoving stubborn heads  
under cold Jordan's  
waves.

Clearly possessed!

Then along you come  
laughing, eating, drinking,

with sinners consorting,  
singing songs of paradise  
to prostitutes.

So what's it to be?

Mourning  
to John's dirge?  
or dancing  
to God's piper?

Steven Federle

# The Encounter

Stretched  
on sun-warm carpet,  
gazing out on fenced wilderness, she draws furred legs  
to furthest extremity; claws extend and retract  
as she clenches her  
padded fist.

Then  
in an instant she's on all fours,  
back arched, whiskered mouth grimaced to  
horrible grin as she growls and spits  
into the gleaming window.

Looking back,  
assured by double-pane,  
the bird, all feather and fearless eye,  
wonders at this new, strange  
creature glaring inside.

Steven Federle

# The English Teacher

When I told them how Jim Crow  
made prisons of  
bathrooms, restaurants,  
candy stores, schools

and how the school bus forced  
colored kids into a ditch,  
(too black to ride)  
and justice finally failed  
even Sunday school girls,

they looked askance,  
narrowing their eyes  
and asked how people  
could be so unfair,

so I showed them.

Six million gone  
with the careless wave  
of the Kommandant's baton,  
and Anne, discovered and reduced  
to words on a page.

Their eyes grew suddenly old and grave.

Now  
asking them to write April poems,  
I say,  
look at the cold winter day...  
wind blowing  
through restless trees,  
rain filling the land to  
make it green,

but instead they sing dirges,  
of children who murder,  
and children who die.

So why should I be surprised?  
They did not make this world  
and I cannot lie.

Author notes

(after reading "The History Teacher" by Billy Collins)

Steven Federle

# The Eye Exam

I Struggle.

The white dropper  
looms like a bird's beak  
a little too close  
to my tender eyes,

but finally the drops splash  
over my eyelashes  
my nose and cheeks.

First a sting  
and then I feel  
nothing.

Soon the quiet room  
becomes immense and bright.

I gaze in wonder  
as my hands grow  
transparent,  
throbbing veins turn to  
blue rivers  
coursing through pale ravines  
of webbed bone.

Vision grows deep  
with dilation.

The doctor peers  
through my eyes,  
looking past  
murky vitreous,  
right down to  
my optic nerve,

and I wonder what she sees.

A small hole torn into the retina,  
just to the left

yes! that's where  
lightning flashed before,  
where  
now lies blindness...  
my own circle of night,  
foreshadowing  
Nothing.

Steven Federle

# The Feast Of St. Francis

from 'Canticle of the Sun, ' by St. Francis of Assisi: 'Be praised, my Lord, through  
Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through  
which you give your creatures sustenance.'

Bird-song rises  
in clear, liquid waves

as golden leaves arc  
twisting  
to the ground.

Heavy gold  
must fall.

October heat  
gives way  
to winter rain

yet inevitably life flows  
like the breeze  
rising from the broad sea  
to the high Sierra;

grey clouds rise  
and heavy snow falls.

All the living waters  
give praise.

Steven Federle



# The First Day

'The new man lives in a world that is always being created and renewed.' Thomas Merton,

rows of vines  
tangled, waking, alive  
converge to the point  
of vanishing, to the blue haze  
where this lush mountain,  
rain blessed, gracefully lifts  
the deepening dawn  
to where you wait  
in the thin veils  
of day.

Steven Federle

# The First Day Of Summer

Blue-jay crouches on the fence,  
shredding a web,  
looking for an easy snack.

She hops down lightly and looks at me  
wondering what I am,  
so silent, still,

cannot see my fingers darting,  
my restless eyes  
fill with her innocence,  
curiosity  
life,

but finding in me  
no threat, no meal,  
she bends backward  
bony knees and leaps  
again to summer's sky.

Steven Federle

# The First Moment

A door opens in the center of our being and we seem to fall through it into immense depths which, although they are infinite, are all accessible to us; all eternity seems to have become ours in this one placid and breathless contact.

Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*

The approach is clear;  
light of day,  
bright sky  
beyond my  
silken shroud,

the door is open,  
but I am afraid.

Should I pass through,  
perhaps descend to  
endless depths?

I listen,  
I hear you calling me  
calling me;

come home.

so, breathless,  
trembling with life,  
I begin.

Steven Federle

# The Fog Lifted Yesterday

we grew used  
to the low sky,  
bland light  
grey blight  
over our dim  
winter lives,

when suddenly the sky soared  
the sun streamed gold and red  
crossing the broad blue spread  
of pure, clear  
atmosphere.

Steven Federle

# The Gap

Distracted, ears filled  
with gossip, with chattering  
laughter, hissing pots,  
baroque music.

This chair's too hard.

My small table's streaked  
and sticky,  
twisting veins  
of old, spilled  
coffee.

I seek silence.

Where else to find it  
but here,  
under this too-  
bright spot-  
light?

Steven Federle

# The Ground Of Life

I am alone  
in my high-back chair, listening,  
attending to every sound, the breeze  
through fluid curtains  
strokes my thinning hair,  
whispers poems  
into eager ears  
of the soft moaning of the dove  
who warms her thin eggs  
alone in that small place  
above our front-porch,  
telling me that love  
is certain.

Steven Federle

# The Heist

Two grey-blue mockingbirds  
alight on my cherry tree,  
and set up their look-out;  
the squatting male belches  
shrill, harsh warnings, his  
screeching song feigning pain  
to make the gold-finch  
and robin flee in alarm,  
while Bonnie to his Clyde  
picks at my ripe cherries and  
knocks one to the ground;  
flitting lightly down, she arises,  
all Betty Boop  
red lips pouting  
between pointed beak,  
as together they make their get-away,  
high into the cottonwood,  
beyond the reach of my constable cat,  
to divide the fruit of their crime.

Steven Federle

# The Homecoming

When you were in Vietnam  
we got your letters, two or three at once  
and then the whole house buzzed like a nest  
of honey drunk bees as we poured over  
your every word.

We kids imagined you, strong, tough,  
blazing with righteous American fury  
cutting down those dirty commies,

but Mom and Dad  
read each letter more slowly  
glancing at each other  
with darker looks.

Then one day we got the recording you made,  
tiny plastic reels, shiny brown tape wound  
in fragile loops; your voice!  
just like you were in the room, speaking  
re-assuring, everyday chat about R&R  
and shopping in Bangkok. Finally,  
the tape nearly spent, you said that  
you were coming home soon.

And one bright July morning  
you came home! Your hat was rakishly tilted,  
a Lucky Strike cigarette carelessly drooping  
from the corner of your grinning mouth,  
all paratrooper swagger, gold braid running  
through your buttoned shoulder loops,  
colored ribbons and medals all over your chest.

As you walked through the door  
I stood aside, awestruck, shy.  
You sat like a visitor in your own home  
and we opened the packages you brought for us,  
Christmas in July, as one by one we held  
our Asian wonders, and watched  
as Mom held your hand and



Dad searched your eyes.

But you were tired, so upstairs in my room  
you took a midday nap, and when Mom told me  
to wake you for supper, I nudged your shoulder  
and you bolted,  
breathless,  
down the steps,  
into the quiet street  
and stood at tense attention,  
(the neighbors all gawking) ,  
as you waved your M-16  
made of air  
and memory,

and waited  
for the mortars  
to fall  
and kill us all.

Then the light returned to your eyes.  
Slowly you walked back to the house  
and gently took me by my shoulders  
and told me to never,  
never  
touch you when you were asleep,

and I never asked you why.

Steven Federle

# The Humble Man Prays

“A man who is truly humble cannot despair, because in the humble man there is no longer any such thing as self-pity.” Thomas Merton

I am like this window  
streaked with rain,  
obscured by  
blowing dust,  
neglected  
yet holding firm  
against the wind.

I know  
that some fine, clear day  
you'll open  
the door,  
wipe my sins away  
and clean at last  
I'll dissolve  
into your light.

Steven Federle

# The Inward Man

Day after day the outward man crumbles and breaks down, and the inward man is born and grows in wisdom and knowledge. Thomas Merton

Leaf-bare,  
swaying, slave  
to the storm, I wait  
for the gale  
to drive me down,  
dismember me  
scatter my shattered limbs  
across winter's ground,

while deep inside  
my cambrian core  
life persists!

I'll survive.

Beyond my limit  
I will arise!

Steven Federle

# The Joy Of My Youth

The morning is cold,  
the moon slung low  
lighting the snow  
iridescently blue

In the dark, glowing church  
red votives flame  
throwing bright prayers  
to the ceiling

Introibo ad altare Dei,  
The old priest intones  
"I will go  
to the alter of God"

and I quickly recite  
Ad Deum qui laetificat  
juventutem meam

"To God,  
the joy of my youth."

The church is empty,  
but still we go on,  
chanting the ancient love-songs

to the One who lives  
in the flickering flame

to the One who rises  
in ascending incense

and hears our words  
and becomes them.

Steven Federle

# The Kingdom Of Heaven

Cast your seed  
upon my barren soil.  
In winter's dark night  
I yearn for new light.

Rain falls;  
fleeting life fails  
as fearfully I pray:

O fill my fertile soul  
and show me your sun-filled face!  
Warm me with your  
radiant grace

Steven Federle

# The Light In November

The light in November slants low.  
It fills my eyes as I glance  
askance through amber trees  
and see the leaves descend in  
gold flashes  
past my open window.

The autumn sun skirts  
my low Suisun hills  
casting deep shadows  
along the ebbing marsh

where wading egrets probe  
still, black waters

and finding their prize  
rise to blue heaven,  
white, slender wings  
elegantly beating  
the softly falling sun.

Steven Federle

# The Modesto Swat Team Waits In Violent Weather

Violence is essentially wordless, and it can begin only where thought and rational communication have broken down. Thomas Merton

unquiet night  
sky rushing  
past peace  
past even  
the thrill  
of anger

howling clouds  
slowly twist  
to darker thoughts  
and drop  
mute ice  
on lavender fields  
on lilies, white and life-  
less.

In Whispering Woods  
his mind snaps.  
He fires off rounds  
of death,  
and, wordless, waits  
for the ice.

Steven Federle

# The Movement Of The Soul

'All the passions can be reduced to four: joy, hope, fear, and grief. These four are so closely connected that, when one is controlled, the others all obey. Consequently they can be reduced to one: joy. And desire is the movement of the soul seeking joy.'

Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*

Fear  
is knowing  
that the dark cloud  
bearing down  
on thrashing trees,  
sending calling birds  
to awkwardly flee,  
holds both  
life  
and death,  
but not knowing  
which it will be.

Fear  
can lead to grief  
when tumors increase.  
Blood grows  
thick  
until, together  
at last, we stand  
coffin-side  
and wonder  
why.

This is the line that splits heaven from hell.

We comb his hair  
and shave his face,  
carefully fold a rosary  
into his cold hands,  
and wonder that  
his chest is



so still.

But his eyes are safely  
sealed against the  
terror of the grave,  
so we lay him to rest  
and slowly go  
our separate ways

Remember  
those cold March days  
when we stood, our  
backs to the rising sun?

Too bright  
to see, the sun  
strokes us  
with a lover's warmth,  
and rekindles in us  
life's desire.

Thus will it always be.

Death can never win  
though his illusion is strong.  
The mortal body succumbs  
but the soul ascends,  
like birds, joyfully rising  
to the morning sun.

Steven Federle

# The Mute Pain Of Trees

Cezanne's rough, jutting trees  
slashing the blotted sky,  
at the dark bridge at Mainte,  
stone arches stoically standing  
as scarred trees hang low,  
over the still, black Seine;

while in the Grove of Heroes  
an ancient redwood

twisted trunk,  
tense muscles,  
aching, rising,  
spiraling past scars,  
past clean cuts of  
amputated branches,  
beyond the tops  
of lesser trees,  
all pain forgotten,

spreads its green crown  
and shoves the blue July sky  
a little higher.

Steven Federle

# The Next American Idol

Is it true that all my motives have meant nothing?  
Is it true that all my desires were an illusion? Thomas Merton

I wanted to ride the wind,  
feel the rush of pride  
as I strode front and center,  
to become the next  
American Idol!

My flame rose high into  
the summer night sky.  
Garish and bright  
My eager stars spread  
the heat of grandeur  
the light of illusion.

But in the soft dawn,  
in the morning rain  
only my smoldering  
lie remains.

Steven Federle

# The Obscure Sense Of The Presence Of God

I see how the evening sun lights  
the high grass, trees shift in the gentle wind  
and small brown birds flit between  
outdoor tables as young women  
reach for coffee cups  
dropp sweet crumbs to the rough sidewalk,  
to the birds. Intent on home-work,  
office-work, they never look up  
to see how the sky  
deepens to darker hue;  
how day will fade soon  
and vermillion night set fire  
to the seaward hills.

The west wind will finally drive them in,  
and the grateful birds will all fly away.

I see it all.

My old eyes know how this old world works,  
how Your love lurks even in the weeds  
that grow on the edge of the most  
tended garden; hides in the cries of  
the grieving mourning dove;  
falls like rain in the tender,  
moonless night.

Steven Federle

# The Old Man's Lament

The child-sun blazes  
through grey morning fog  
his passion overpowers  
night's sluggish slog  
'till bright noon's on fire  
with his effervescent love,

but it's all the same, it's  
all the same.  
Morning, noon, and night  
may embrace our little lives,  
but it's all the same.

The ancient moon rises  
in the fast-fading east.  
Bloody sun dies, failed day retreats,

but it's all the same, it's all  
the same.  
Morning, noon, and night  
may consume our little lives  
but it's all the same, all  
the same.

Steven Federle

# The One Thing

rain  
falling  
tenderly  
on spring grass, on leaves  
bending as two mourning doves moan,  
beat wide their wings and brush back the sky, falling low to  
dark earth. Gladly would I give it  
all for a moment  
in the glow  
of your  
eyes!

Steven Federle

# The Only One

'The only One Who can teach me to find God is God, Himself, Alone.'  
Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation.

The only one  
who can fill black night  
with interior light,

who can lead me  
past the gun-shots,  
thump and thud,  
hate filled percussion,  
of hidden mines,

the death of  
children

is God,  
Himself,  
Alone.

Steven Federle

# The Other Brother

It was a hot day in the field  
when, returning at last  
bone-tired, sore from  
tending your stiff-necked flock,  
I saw bonfires,  
extravagant blazes lighting  
the way to our house,

but not for me  
home late from  
work,

so I asked your servant  
"why such celebration? "

That's when my anger exploded;  
...poor fellow, he bore my rage  
and yelping away  
cried it wasn't his fault!

No, it wasn't.  
It isn't.

It's You.

You ask me to obey  
and obediently I honor you every day.  
With sweat and callused hands,  
I cajole this stingy land  
to give up a little wheat.  
With my blood  
I water these fields;

but when I wanted to show  
my friends a little generosity,  
I asked you for a stingy goat,  
a meager feast, and  
you said "no."



So here he is, come home at last,  
profligate brother...prodigal,  
wastrel, drunkard,  
sinner!

He's back  
and suddenly the prize calf  
I worked so hard to make so fat is slain,  
a royal feast for your favorite son  
(though somewhat late) come home again!

But,

as always  
my anger fades  
in the glow of your summer love.

I don't like this!

but you tell me  
that your love does not diminish  
but increases with the giving...

and, after all,  
it is not every day that one's brother  
is to life recalled.

So for you, Father,  
I'll look him in the eye  
and let him back  
into my life.

Steven Federle

# The Palace Of The Goveners, Santa Fe

Along the wall,  
deep in the shade  
of the Palace of the Governors  
Indians recline,  
casting invisible lines  
with slender wooden rods,  
nudging their rings of soft green  
and glittering silver, hoping  
to catch the eye of  
a lingering tourist  
fishing  
for a spark of interest.

But every angler knows  
that if you show  
your desire,  
the fish  
will pass you by.

And so they idly glance  
into the bright, busy  
city square beyond  
as we slowly walk by,  
nodding politely,  
inspecting their rings  
gleaming like lures,

when at last we come  
to the smiling potter.  
Gently he pulls us into,  
the curving, perfect void  
to touch this black-ware,  
to feel what it holds:  
the smooth darkness of  
everything.

Steven Federle

# The Palace Of The Governors

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the smooth darkness of

everything.

(11 July 2011)

Steven Federle

# The People Of The West Wind

Suisunes once lived  
beneath the Twin Sisters.

Ascending beyond the vineyards and twisted oaks,  
they still drift through morning mist,  
and walk the sacred paths  
of their fathers.

Guardian oaks still embrace the People.  
Meandering branches lean low,  
give their clambering children  
an easy climb  
up high to where acorns  
fall in the western wind  
to feed  
their hungry  
souls.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The Suisunes people, called The People of the West Wind, lived for over 10,000 years in the area where I now live... but they nearly died out within a generation of exposure to European missionaries seeking to save their souls. They would have eluded the attention of the Spanish longer had they not given refuge to escaped mission Indians. In 1810 several dozen of these gentle people committed suicide rather than submit to the Spanish.

If you listen carefully in the morning breeze you can still hear their laughter.

Steven Federle

# The Poetry Lesson

I'll turn off the classroom lights  
and open the windows wide  
so you can see.

Look deeply

as the sun shatters  
our rainy world  
into rainbows.

Feel how cold wind,  
flooding through open doors,  
flings to the darkened floor  
new poems,

like raindrops  
piercing fertile soil -

can you hear it?  
the steady whisper  
of God?

Steven Federle

# The Proud Man

The humble man receives praise the way a clean window takes  
the light of the sun.' Thomas Merton

-

The proud man  
is like a dirty window.

He cannot permit to pass  
the morning's glory;

whereas the humble man  
dissolves in the light  
of the rising sun

like a freshly scrubbed window.

Steven Federle

# The Quarrel

'Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt.' Thomas Merton

\*

Words spoken drift like  
mustard gas, doubt burning like  
webs, unexpected

spiders brush my ears,  
slip into my eyes as blind-  
ly I run away.

Steven Federle



# The Real Hope

Spring proceeds,  
despite the cold  
Pacific winds.

Storms that should have  
blown through months ago,  
now come lately,  
blustering that late is better  
than not at all,  
and gather clouds, complaining of the hour;  
they huddle and decide to get it over with  
all in a day, and squeeze  
fountains out of the  
heavy April air.

This is the moment!

At last the iris arises,  
sleek, and slender, and plain  
curvaceous head,  
concealing glory

'til rain all finished,  
the sun having drenched  
time and emerald space  
with his golden flame,

the flower unfurls,  
and stirs to nectarine passion  
courteous bees, and  
lingering birds.

Steven Federle

# The Rejection Of Jesus

"I hear the whisperings of many: "Terror on every side! Denounce! let us denounce him! "

Jeremiah 20: 10

Why do you not believe me?

Have I not wept  
as, lost and empty  
you cried out in the night?

I shed bitter tears  
when at last you fell  
and did not arise.

I'll breath my anguish  
and fire your still heart  
with my passion.

What more can I do for you  
than die?

(image: Jesus the Homeless, bronze sculpture by Timothy Schmalz  
Regis College, the University of Toronto.)

Steven Federle

# The Road Waits

The road waits,  
but I'm not ready.

I pause, cradled by soft leather  
In this silent room,  
listening to morning's  
soft breath stirring  
the glimmering summer leaves,

as the perched bird  
gazes through my open window  
into my wondering eyes  
and waits.

But this is a good morning to wait.

Look how the extravagant grass waves,  
and truant weeds luxuriate along the fence,  
while in the small central garden  
red flowers gather like  
warm, slumbering children  
under the wide,  
spreading vine!

But still the road waits.

I've seen  
the glistening pavements  
slide under my rolling wheels,  
the river to my right,  
green Ohio rising  
into northern forests,  
and misty Kentucky  
calling to me  
across the wide,  
glittering waters.

The road goes on,  
and I cannot

wait.

(16 March 2011)

Steven Federle

# The Sadness Of Holy Saturday

Through the moonless night  
clouds choke receding light

and the world descends  
into darkness.

Where are you  
as winter's chill pierces my hands?

Oh, where have you gone?

Do you not care that I decay  
without your gentle breath,  
that without your light  
I wane like the failing sun?

Why have you abandoned me?

Through my tears I see  
two millenia of agony,  
the six million slain,  
all the fallen generations  
newly free, heavy nails  
at last released.

Steven Federle

# The Sea Of Love

'...it is a sea of Love which flows through the One Body....'  
Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

The sea of Love  
fills my lungs  
courses through  
open fingers  
warms glowing  
heart, pulses  
blood-lines  
through diaphanous  
skin.

In in the surge  
of mother-sea  
I wait  
and grow  
and emerge  
into who  
will be.

Steven Federle

# The Serene Happiness Of Silent Acceptance

For all God's gifts there must be in us a response of thanksgiving and happiness and joy: but here we thank Him less by words than by the serene happiness of silent acceptance.

Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*

With gift of thunder and pain  
prepare the soil  
for living rain.

With gift of streaming grace  
fill my soul  
with unspeakable faith!

Steven Federle

# The Song Of New Leaves

In the broad afternoon  
high in the tree, they come  
they come by the dozens  
and sing, all to  
sing the song of  
new leaves,  
they come, the blackbirds  
with red wings, brown  
birds with striped wings  
they sing, their orange  
breasts bursting,  
blue wings spreading  
wide, enfolding  
they sing  
while high in the tree  
the white dove moans,  
swaying in the breeze,  
high  
oh! high  
in that moon-struck tree  
she moans  
to the moon  
nearly consumed  
by the sky!  
the sky  
of perfect blue!

Steven Federle



# The Summons

In morning  
you sent  
towering clouds  
and fine ice driven  
into spring roses,

red petals scattered  
on pure white ground

and took my breath away,

so now I seek you  
like death  
clear and clean  
in lingering day

as green and golden,  
long shadows flow east  
and birdsong fills  
nodding trees.

Breathless  
I hear you

in gentle rhythm  
of swaying wind  
I hear my father's  
song again

empty at last  
fulfilled.

Steven Federle

# The Terrorist

Carry your anger  
in a heavy bag  
filled with nails  
and sharp shards  
of hate, honed to  
a hard edge of  
murder.

When you see  
their bright smiles  
you will know  
it is time  
to ignite  
your Inspired  
device.

Steven Federle

# The Third Of July

Pursuing happiness  
I move to the back yard  
and in the shade of my umbrella  
in the soft, warm breeze,  
I sit very still  
and hear  
the mockingbird call.

I see his tail-feathers  
thrust skyward,  
waving in avian semaphore,  
enticing his mate  
to love in the swaying tree,

while stretched on the fragrant grass,  
alert ears pointed skyward,  
my cat hears everything  
and, finding happiness,  
closes her eyes.

Steven Federle

# The Vine

The ugly stump, desolate, dead  
and too deep to pull, waited for my saw,  
but I, lazy and pre-occupied, lingered  
as winter inundated  
the mud and rock desert  
outside our kitchen window.

Then spring came, and all excuses spent,  
I slogged out, grim executioner,  
ready to cut and pull,  
when I beheld green, craggy fingers praying  
for just one more chance;  
so putting the saw back into our messy garage,  
we began the project,

raking, hoeing, cutting, digging  
(hard work for a lazy man)  
and soon sod to lay  
and bricks to haul for the patio,

when, bushwhacked, we spied  
the truant stump  
proclaiming itself a grape vine,  
stringy runners running rampant  
through the little garden we built around it,  
hooked fingers grabbing for anything  
to pull nascent leaves up,

up to the warming April sun,

out of the dark winter earth,

and alarmed we cut it back, fearful vintners,  
afraid for threatened geraniums  
and knock-out roses,

but a treaty agreed upon, the vine settled

for one corner and left the rest  
to more delicate flora.

Life will not be denied  
in our backyard.

Steven Federle

# The Waiting

The fields are ready,  
furrows made deep  
for farmers' prize seed.

Vineyards recede  
into straight narrow lanes.  
and twisted vines  
in cruciform lines  
conceal summer's new wine.

They wait, well quenched  
by winter's rain.  
Sweet tears  
drench the ground with  
baptismal springs,  
and leafy green shade  
will soon to spread  
over orchard lanes.

We wait  
as the moon, crescent mother  
cradles her star-swollen belly,  
and amorous crickets leap into the night  
to sing her a waiting lullaby.

Steven Federle

# The Window Of Being

'Actions are the doors and windows of being. Unless we act we have no way of knowing what we are. ' Thomas Merton

walk  
through the door  
and do

not stray  
in this dark room

silent,  
inactive  
thin soul of  
yesterday's  
rain.

no.

break open the window,  
and breathe deeply  
the light  
of being.

Steven Federle

# The World Is A Sacred Vessel

'The world is a sacred vessel...' Thomas Merton

blue vessel  
in black vacuum

miracle world  
encircling  
thrall of this perfect star

sacred vessel,  
His living cup  
to beloved proffered,

wedding gift  
beyond measure.

Steven Federle



# They Are Strangers Here

Seagulls circle high,  
In the heavy October sky  
wide, white wings  
nudging the dull air  
riding gyres  
past the waving crest  
of our highest redwood.

They are strangers here.

They'll find no shallows to fish  
no mussels to lift  
above the concrete wharf,  
drop and crush  
and delicately dissect  
still living white flesh.

They must be lost.

Here they'll find no flying sail  
no schooner driving into  
wintery winds. They'll have  
no rising bow here  
to amend their errant way.

And yet, for now, they'll stay,

Graces of light  
In the gray gloom  
of this cold autumn  
afternoon.

(27 Oct.2010)

Steven Federle

# They Seek You In The Storm

They seek you in the storm  
riding high above the lightning, striking  
the yielding earth with your fire.

In fields of the dead; in  
seeds flung deep -  
generations  
unknown  
they seek you,

in the stars,  
coldly staring,  
your imagined face  
the emptiness of  
interstellar  
space.

But I know you lurk  
in my lonely night;  
alone, I seek  
your eternal light.

Steven Federle

# This Christmas Moon

This Christmas moon  
breaks shining through  
my empty, dark night.

Its aching light,  
in waves of delight  
bathes  
stark winter's shore  
in the glittering sea  
of Nativity!

Steven Federle

# This Day Will Not Come Again

'A sweet summer afternoon. Cool breezes and a clear sky. This day will not come again.

The young bulls lie under a tree in the corner of their field. Quiet afternoon. Blue hills.

Day lilies nod in the wind. This day will not come again. '

Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

I expected the slight rise  
in the east, the sky  
growing slate, then  
blushing pink and  
suddenly blue.

The winter tree  
is often  
bathed in gold,

and the familiar song  
of thrush and jay,  
woodpecker's rapid tapping  
brash geese  
shouting,

are often the same  
from one to another day.

But this sudden breeze,  
freshening breath  
of the butterfly,  
the warmth  
the joyful cry!

My God is here!

I breathe,  
I sigh.

Steven Federle

# This House

In this house

walls vault  
rise to high windows,  
arch to sky and tree.

See the bright table,  
gleaming plates!

Onions are steaming  
in the fragrant air; Oh, hear  
the happy clatter  
of dinner

in this house.

Steven Federle

# This Rising

I wanted to be the thundercloud  
pounding fury in electric flashes,  
but impatiently the earth pulled me down,  
and trapped me, like silent, winter tule fog,  
pausing over dark, delta waters

until I rose over the darkening valley  
and observed the crescent moon  
ascending over seaward hills,  
effervescent disc  
dissolving into death,  
while radiant, scimitar edge,  
rent the black night.

In the pure air at last,  
just beneath the black vacuum of my limit,  
I discern the elevated host,  
this consecrated, bloody body,  
in the agony of redemption,  
in the glory of this perfect moment,  
this nexus of heaven and earth,  
this rising.

Steven Federle

# Three Intimations

My tree is still bare  
though tender  
buds flare.

The mockingbirds know.  
They fall on robins,  
fiercely cawing.

White cranes rise,  
face the sun,  
and flash fire.

Steven Federle

# Three Poems For My Father

i

When I last saw you  
Your hands were clenched  
With a rage foreign to your voice  
And you were rushing inward  
Away from the moon, beyond the glowing  
night  
Of my grief.

Yet on my way home  
I saw the moon rise.

Where have you gone, then, If not  
to that land behind the moon?

ii

In the emptiness above the earth  
In the terrific clashing of jet with atmosphere

I heard your new voice  
I saw your new hands

Tearing at the cold, hurtling steel,  
Casting off silk shroud

For dark soil  
And even darker rivers.

iii

If stars loom too large  
Is not my window too small?

(11/24/1980)

Steven Federle



# Three Vespers

In the day's final glow  
all colors flow  
to the whispering breeze,  
dark, rustling  
leaves.

Through the hot afternoon  
with purpose I moved  
and never did think  
bright day would sink  
to gloom.

In the gentle west wind,  
in the soft starry glow,  
I hear you sing  
and then I know  
never will you  
leave me  
alone.

Steven Federle

# Through Bright Morning I Run

Through bright morning I run,  
eyes brimful with green love  
as the silver world sings songs  
of golden spring,

and through azure noon I love  
how joyful psalms, bird-throated, rise  
from verdant hills.

But when the long day ends,  
in bright window framed  
I see  
your dark door.

I will not fear the velvet night.  
for in the burning stars,  
I see your eyes; in hushed  
delta breeze,  
I hear your voice  
calling me.

Steven Federle

# Through These Front Windows

See how our neighbor's trees  
fill with dusky breeze  
as bright sky fades to bluest steel.

Light laces through the blackening limbs;  
swaying crowns arch  
while just above  
climbs the golden star.

Oh! See how the planet, worlds apart  
from our own treading voyager,  
glides through God's black, velvet heart,

and darkness fill the tender earth  
as sudden night joyfully buoys  
our slowly turning, blue-green world  
with His sacred void.

Steven Federle

# Through Thin Slats

Through thin slats  
I see how flat blue hills  
wash out to whiter dusk,  
rise to garish sky,  
where tenuous day presses  
even the setting sun  
down to shallow grave.

But here, deep within this room;  
I am safe, surrounded  
by circle of empty chairs....  
peaceful meeting,  
vacant stares....

where I wait for night  
to unfold this paper land.

Then, with bated breath  
will I hear the fated cry  
of coyote, the riot of  
lusty toad.

Steven Federle

# Through Thin Windows

Through thin windows I see  
young leaves rising to twilight storm,  
blue mist shimmering  
on quick-silver street,  
as glowing grass drops  
into blackening copse.

With Stygian hand  
has night claimed  
declining day.

Steven Federle

# Thunderstorm

Cobalt fingers probe  
naked ground  
when explodes  
the darkest cloud.

Edge of lightning  
searing air  
with raucous roil of  
heaven's laughter.

We watch in fear  
'til setting sun  
sheds royal tears  
of golden love.

Steven Federle

# Thunderstorm On Easter Morning

Easter morning  
sings green  
allelujah.

while rising storm  
stacks up night

and bright as glory  
lightning strikes

and thunder  
rumbles

and rain  
delights.

Steven Federle

# To An Unknown Land

To an unknown land  
o're the distant sea  
crowding me in, it  
carries me.

Through night and day  
I'm rushed along  
and though I want to stay  
I can't stay long.

Compelled to go,  
yet I linger with you;  
Though I want to remain,  
harsh time whispers, 'no.'

Steven Federle



# To Live For Oneself Alone

'To live for oneself alone is to die.'

Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

Stars line up  
and testify  
against me;

a raspy chorus of  
marsh-voices  
rises to decry my  
bitter tears as  
human lies.

I despair  
in the empty  
wind, as trees  
whisper rumors  
of my lonely end.

Steven Federle

# To My Wife In Mourning

bright day, still birds, black  
spots on the blue sky, slightly  
sway in trees, and wait

for winter to stay  
or summer at last to come  
like you're waiting for

the pain to stop, death  
to give way to the winter  
sun's soft, warm embrace.

Steven Federle

# Too Soon

rises the sky  
to blue perfection.

New grass waves,  
uneven rows  
unwary of  
the leveling blade.

Delicate flowers  
unfold  
too soon,

and naive birds  
in winter-spare trees  
sing  
like it's June.

Steven Federle

# Tornado

In the clash of day with night  
rising heat, swirling vapors, vortex  
of hail and nascent funnels  
stoke Jehovah's fire  
in the Southern sky

until flashing night slays dark day  
like judgment come round at last,  
and heavy clouds reach down  
to wipe clean  
the sacred slate.

Steven Federle

## Towards 280 (After Wayne Thiebaud)

Vibrant canvas, undulant colors  
thin lines of thick paint  
streaking white fields,  
of bright California light.

The blue road plummets  
into wider boulevards.  
Down steep freeways  
over shadowed s-curves  
the black cars streak.

Past the pink condo  
rising high along the blacktop,  
its thrusting blue shadow slicing  
the indurate road,

they drive down bright 280  
past creamy waves of warehouse  
through fields of pale gold,

where at last they converge  
on the incipient, blue  
bay.

Steven Federle

# Transcendent Thunder

Deep thunder shakes this warm July evening  
and lightning flashes over the waterfront  
filling the clear, starry sky with acrid clouds and glimmering rain  
falling to the water as children gaze  
in shock and awe,  
waiting for the next big one to explode.

False bombardment as celebration:

such fits my nation, founded in genocide and slavery,  
this nation baptized in the blood and tears  
of Navaho and Cherokee and all the tribes of the American holocaust  
a nation that devoured one quarter of its sons  
in four short, blood-soaked years; my nation,  
a nation of efficient bigots and hungry hypocrites,  
giving the world Gettysburg and the Trail of Tears  
as models for problem-solving;  
a nation unlike any other, not able to live up to its promises  
because no other nation dares make such promises.

The bright violence of rockets' red glare lights our sky  
like the bold Declaration ignited the world, and thunder  
rocked mighty kings from complacent belief in their divine rights,  
rocked the people of Europe, thirsting for their own rights  
and land and a chance to pursue a little happiness;  
yes, rocked even distant Asia, deep in its ancient dream  
foolish men joyfully following the distant thunder  
to seek the fabled Golden Mountain.

The promise was made and broken and made yet again,  
and the anger of betrayal torched the cities of the sixties,  
and singed our hearts  
and in the redeeming pain of change  
made them a little less impure.

Yes, we are imperfect,  
but we know our sins  
and pay for them over and over again,

and to remind ourselves of the debt yet unsatisfied,  
every summer we celebrate in the only way fitting for such a nation;  
In the starry sky fiercely glowing with liberty  
and in the transcendent thunder  
of the Promise.

Steven Federle

# Transfiguration

From this holy height, □  
I gaze into my Father's eyes.  
His fire scorches,  
my pulsing flesh,  
and casts my sinful soul  
to the sacred pyre  
as joy of rapture  
captures my life.

Filled with God's fire  
I finally see  
I never was  
what I appeared to be.

Steven Federle



# Transition

The generals line-up, war-plans  
in withered hands, ready to strike  
the children.

But do not fear this transition!  
For above the black clouds, know that He lingers,  
Ready to strike!

Then will the blind see and the deaf hear.  
Then will we leap for joy  
As the mute break forth  
In song!

Isaiah 35: 1-6A - 10.

(10 Dec 2016)

Steven Federle

# Transubstantiation

Golden eyed, blazing  
through summer trees  
gently swaying  
you blind me,  
bind your warm hands  
to my sluggish brow  
and ignite me with your holy flame.

My heart, fiery and free  
soars high, with you  
always beside me

Leading me  
through dissolving mists  
'til pure at last,  
at last I see

You're filling me  
with your eternal mind,

making of me your sacred bread,  
your free-flowing  
wine.

Steven Federle

# Travis Moonrise

Over barren trees  
the tattered moon  
ascends, barely clearing  
dark hills  
pausing, unwilling  
to fall back  
into cold, delta fog,

like the lumbering C-5  
rising through the gloom  
on bright thunderbolts  
to December's  
bleeding moon.

Steven Federle

# Tree And Cloud

Upward strains brittle  
limbs, arid tree lifts grey age  
drifts down love's pure grace.

Steven Federle

# Tree And Sunset

Oh, learn from the trees,  
that through cold days' rush  
endure, from hope to hope,  
and embrace  
evening's blush.

See how the faithful jay  
flits from branch to  
barren branch,  
and sings of  
summer's lost day.

For all trees believe  
in summer's heat,  
though icy winds may strip  
their tender leaves.

They know that change  
is always the same,  
until  
some long winter hence  
they'll fall, by vicious storm slain,  
and grateful life will  
quietly end.

Steven Federle

# Tree At Dawn

tree at dawn, bursting  
seed, rising sun, emerging  
summer's golden day.

Steven Federle

# Tree By The Road

A naked tree  
stands apart.

Cars pass  
with freeway speed  
bending thin branches  
in their own furious wind.

Slowing  
I see black leaves  
on nearly empty limbs...

No, not leaves,  
but dark pears,

or glass balls left to fall  
from a forgotten Christmas tree

abandoned, alone, without cheer,

when, roaring, an eighteen wheeler  
spews misty twisters.

Then leaves, ornaments, and pears  
all rise in a singular mass  
of flashing black wings  
cawing into the  
grey winter  
air.

Steven Federle

# Trust

Let my trust be in Your mercy, not in myself. Let my hope be in Your love, not in health, or strength, or ability or human resources. If I trust You, everything else will become, for me, strength, health, and support. Everything will bring me to heaven. If I do not trust You, everything will be my destruction. Thomas Merton  
Thoughts in Solitude

I trusted my strength,  
lifted weights, made  
muscled arms strain  
overpowered everything.

Young fool!  
thinking blood  
can forever freely rush  
from throbbing heart  
to grasping hands.

One day  
into a morning mirror  
I looked

and saw my father  
gray and failing.

Steven Federle



# Turbulence

layer upon layer  
pounding out  
justification,

charged and ready to strike,

cold winds blow,  
bright rains ache  
ready to flow.

Steven Federle

# Twilight, Mercy, Love

Twilight, mercy,  
love to share  
soft breezes,  
gentle air.

Trees are swaying  
birds give flight,  
sing to sunset  
lullaby night.

Steven Federle

# Uncertain Night

In uncertain night,  
cold lamp-light  
pitches misty tents,  
meager respite  
from December's blight.

Winter fog softens  
both pain and joy,  
consigns hot youth  
to sterile void.

Steven Federle

# Unknowing

Dry October hills -  
life fulfilled.  
and dying.

See how the ridge  
cuts the sunset,  
draws a thin edge  
of blood.

In the valley of man  
red lights throb.  
Leaves fall,  
unknowing.

Steven Federle

# Unripe Apples Fall

Unripe apples fall  
and lie wasting on the ground,  
spots spreading into brown,  
circles, decaying, waiting  
for sun and time to gently take  
seminal seeds into the warm earth.

Small birds fall  
down low  
from their high, swaying tree,  
to where patient  
fallen apples  
melt and glow.

Two looming hawks rise  
waiting for the time to be right,  
to turn their dark wings  
and with swift silent stroke  
give feathered death  
to these surprised souls,  
casting them like seeds  
into the dark soil.

Steven Federle

# Unsent

In the distance  
across the dark continent,  
we've drifted  
into silence,  
our years shrouded  
in a mist of  
unknowing.

Oh, once we were brothers  
roaming the hills of green summer!

Remember that long bike ride?  
We pedaled all the way  
to Link Road, to the  
Little Miami River  
to see Mark.

I could not imagine  
that we could go so far,  
but we did.

And at school we always moved  
in a dance of competition  
and sibling pride,

but now, living so long beyond sight,  
we've lost our bond.  
We are strangers.

I hear you're doing quite well.

I hope in the quiet  
of long winter's night,  
you think of me  
occasionally.

Steven Federle

# Vanitas Folia

Leaves quickly fall  
now that November  
is nearly done.

From behind a glass door  
I watch the dry storm,  
blanket the ground  
with dappled  
death.

Useless appendages  
liabilities in the wind,  
cast-aways wait  
for the hollow scraping  
of my wide rake.

Yet in the tree  
holdouts  
hope for reprieve,  
wave and rush  
confidently  
sure that bright color  
can distract, delay death  
with brilliant  
blush.

Steven Federle

# Venus Rising

Evening star rising  
into day's fading sky,  
alone, serene,  
and wondrous bright,  
surpassing dark hills  
into cerulean night.

Steven Federle



# Vesper

The western sun glows tangerine;  
noon's blue edge  
not wanting to leave  
vaults high over the bright valley sky.

With wide sweep of level cloud,  
bands of passion, blushing impasto  
strokes of burning orange  
contend with fading light  
to send spent day down  
into indigo night.

Steven Federle

# Vespers (You Are Near)

You are near  
though I cannot see  
your face.

Your voice I hear.

Your gentle breath  
moves to quiet passion  
the bare limbs  
of your beloved trees.

I hear you say  
that you love me.

Your darkness  
I embrace;

for me you wait  
in the rising night  
with endless gift  
of eternal life.

Steven Federle

# Vestige

"This is the reality I need, the vestige of God in His creatures."  
Thomas Merton, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature*

Bright day,  
seaward breezes  
clearing the sky,

Can you feel the chill?

Can you hear sounds of  
rushing trees,  
of mockingbirds  
calling  
cawing crows?

Behind life's song  
can you hear the beat,  
the steady  
basso continuo?

Oh, just gaze  
hard enough  
into the  
living blue,  
and be it!

You'll climb the  
bright back of night  
and enter into  
the song -

the song  
in the mind  
of God.

Steven Federle

# Vicksburg

The river glints  
in the morning light  
as we slowly drive  
past the guard-gate  
and into the rolling hills  
of the Vicksburg Battleground.

But there are no battles here today  
in this ringing forest,  
on these wrinkled meadows;

These cannons spit no fire  
into this soft Mississippi morning,  
and no soldier falls, sighing  
into these cool, dark earthworks.

Slowly we drive the winding road  
past a bronze soldier  
grasping his bronze rifle,  
tensely gazing  
into the empty distance, waiting  
for the screaming charge,  
of his deadly brothers.

But all anger spent,  
they sleep now  
under smart ranks  
of gleaming stone;

Now they lie,  
unknown soldiers,  
lulled by whispering  
Southern magnolias  
far from forgotten  
Northern homes.

(5 August 2010)



# View From Sutro

Seen from golden heights  
the tangled city  
squares up.

Straight streets,  
rigid veins  
spurt quicksilver  
past towers  
of fog.

It throbs.

Hearts, minds,  
sing passion  
joy, lust,  
boredom.

A dying man  
clings to desperate sheets,  
passing;

An infant cries  
drawing raw air,  
beginning.

It's alive,  
greater  
than its sum.

See how it beats  
in the cool Pacific sun?

Steven Federle

# Vigil

Deep in the twilight grey  
I wait  
for black night to drop  
suddenly  
and completely.

At the end of the day,  
hope is measured  
one careful procedure  
at a time.

Night  
is not kind in winter.

Too early It comes,  
and stays much too long.

It brings fear,  
red eyes  
and stinging tears.

Lit by throbbing numbers  
night probes your veins  
one pulse at a time,

as your shivering soul watches  
from cool blue bars  
gleaming in the distant ceiling.

Stroking your hands  
In the fading day's light  
I pray  
for one more  
morning.

Steven Federle

# Vision

In the raw air of crystal dawn  
the sun devours waning night  
with dragon-song,

and rises to cerulean heights  
to the vaulting domes  
of eternal sight.

Steven Federle



# Visitation

Through hospital corridors  
past darkly soiled sheets

through bloody, cold doors  
where the comatose sleep

to your death-bed, afraid,  
where you're waiting for me...

...but this time's different;  
your eyes understood,

you said slowly, gently  
"God is so good! "

Steven Federle

# Vital

close to my heart  
lungs contract  
chest falls

fighting  
to maintain my  
windy passion

chest rises  
blood requires  
oxygen's fire

still alive

Steven Federle

# Voice Of The Stranger

God speaks, and God is to be heard, not only on Sinai, not only in my own heart, but in the voice of the stranger. Thomas Merton

Holy night,  
human speech ceasing,  
leaves whispering, praising  
marsh-reeds swaying  
in the gusty breath of God.

Throughout the hot day, lusting  
tongues lashed; verbs clashed  
through the busy lanes. Fear filled us  
as we sought the hidden path.

Just listen  
to the night-  
song of dark meadows;  
spring-swollen showers,  
tears of passion,  
engorge the sterile land.

Oh, hear the stranger sing  
through these dry, city streets,  
tell tales of strange  
and ponderous deeds,

songs of frogs  
who, once loved,  
become kings!

Steven Federle

# Wait

Cold winds lash  
spring branches;  
new leaves  
lust  
for heat;  
torn stems  
litter  
tender new grasses

and wait  
for discordant chimes  
to rend the sky,  
release bright spirits,  
charm the shy sun,  
and cast to waiting earth  
Summer.

Steven Federle

# Waiting

Waiting  
sitting in silence  
finding things to do  
on this normal, quiet evening.

rustling papers  
and tapping keyboard,  
with one eye on the phone  
waiting for disaster  
to ring through my complacency.

I can almost see  
the sterile walls, the contained chaos  
as hurried doctors and nurses  
bring relief to the battle-weary  
binding the hundred wounds  
of collision and anger,  
cancer and a failing heart.

I can almost, but not quite, hear  
The IV pumps, heart monitors,  
crash-carts clattering down  
shining halls, carrying the artillery  
we aim at the enemy.

But right now,  
right here  
all is quiet;

the cat mews patiently  
for her evening meal  
as I watch for the phone  
to light up  
and give me the news  
that will shatter  
this quiet evening.

Steven Federle

# Wakeful Hills

"We have become more humble than the rocks,  
More wakeful than the patient hills." Thomas Merton A Book of Hours

The morning fog flows like milk  
Through folded dry hills,  
Like cream spilled on brown grass;

Then rises the sun, rolling fog  
Into shimmering waves,  
Before the hard hand of  
Simmering noon-day.

But you permit no illusion.

I see what is hidden  
Beneath the dark oak tree;  
Under these dry rocks  
What is given to me:

For down shimmering highways  
Past white valleys of bone  
I'll glide till I become  
The humble stone.

Steven Federle

# Waking To Darkness

Reaching to turn off the alarm,  
I look out dark windows  
and see the dreaming moon,  
high in the tree,  
filling the sky with  
unfinished sleep.

Better to wake  
to the morning's light,  
to roll to my side, glance  
out the highest pane  
and see the sun  
fill the world again.

Steven Federle

# Walls Of Sleep

"There is no where in you a paradise that is no place and there you do not enter except without a story. To enter there is to become unnameable."  
Thomas Merton, A Book of Hours

I  
am  
here in  
this room, this  
house, light of candle,  
see only as far as the door  
of darkness, the narrow yard, black trees, night without breeze,  
confining me in walls of sleep.

Steven Federle



# War Rages

War rages  
in secret places,

cold war,  
shivering bones  
firing stones into  
the hidden nests  
of the  
enemy

until war ends  
in collapse  
or  
annihilation;

but simply speak  
and soon words  
like sweet rain  
will ease your  
desert pain;

reach out,  
hand to trembling  
hand  
and find  
new strength:

friendship  
and sacred  
peace.

Steven Federle

# We Must Be Grateful

'For all God's gifts there must be in us a response of thanksgiving and happiness and joy.'

Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*.

\*\*\*

We must be grateful  
when the old ones leave.

Forsaking the March sun,  
they brush off tender, white blossoms.

Past the fleeing migrations,  
they exhale their final, tainted breath.

Rising from earthen bones  
in deep silence, new hymns intone

of thanksgiving and joy  
and home.

Steven Federle

# We Must Believe

We must all believe in love and in peace.  
We must believe in the power of love. Thomas Merton

Peace fills this house  
as I alone awake and hear  
the sounds of easy breathing,  
the morning birds, striving  
with rising dawn, singing  
in the sun with piercing song,

while in the great distance  
beyond the gentle flame of sunrise  
anger rages.

The birds of Homs are silent.

Waning day swells  
with the wails of  
mothers.

They cradle the innocents,  
caught in the cross-fire  
of a Assad's evil greed.

Thy will be done.

Though I cannot understand  
I must believe  
in your powerful love,  
your infinite  
Peace!

Steven Federle

# We Sing

Over bright fields  
we fly.

Thin slips  
of consciousness,  
bounded by darkness,

we rise  
on our song's  
golden glow

not knowing  
how descends  
the growing edge  
of nothing.

Steven Federle

# When It Happens

when it happens,  
will I feel the dark waters  
seep into my lungs, hear the silence  
pour thickly through my ears,  
taste the bitterness  
of uncried  
tears?

I've heard how it rattles  
as it jimmys locked doors  
searching for any opening  
to surprise sleeping cells,  
strangle  
the innocent  
heart.

As the wave washes through my mind  
Will I feel terror  
as I flee  
to higher  
ground?

Or will I quit  
this tragic trip just  
seconds ahead of death's cold grip,  
and ascend to you,  
slender and  
shining  
and new?

Steven Federle

## When It Happens...

when it happens,  
will I feel the dark waters  
seep into my lungs, hear the silence  
pour thickly through my ears,  
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seconds ahead of death's cold grip,  
and ascend to you,  
slender and  
shining  
and new?

Steven Federle

# While You Were Sleeping

The sun has not cleared  
my neighbor's house yet.

His high trees glow  
golden-green, nodding slightly  
in the morning breeze,

but he is not about,  
probably sleeps  
deep in still rooms  
curtained and shuttered,  
easily breaths  
unaware

of the deep chorus  
swelling in the brightening sky,  
mourning dove and  
mocking-bird, jay and sparrow  
and clicking hummingbird  
singing into being  
the new day;

but I see  
and I hear.

I'll tell him  
what he missed.

Steven Federle

# Who I Am

“To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name.” Thomas Merton. *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Through bone-wrapped eyes, through murky vitreous,  
through matter grey, lightning emotions flying  
at the speed of light through my  
tunnel vision, I focused on what was  
just beyond the  
end of my  
nose.

I did not create that small voice  
singing sweetly in  
my ringing  
ears;

but just before dawn, fingers numb,  
hair disordered by the  
western breeze  
blinding  
me  
to Your love,

I heard Your voice!

Now the warmth of morning  
cradles me  
like  
open hands.

Now I know  
who I am.

Steven Federle



# Wide Iris

Sun glares,  
summer simmers, flares  
sears the savage sky.

I scowl  
contort my taut brow  
to block the cutting light  
from my too-open sight.

Steven Federle

# Wild Mustard

spring hills, green peaks laced  
with stroke of gold - waving flame;  
the wild mustard flows

Steven Federle

# Wildfire Close To Home

'The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another. ' Thomas Merton

Night streaks the afternoon sky.

Smoke pours through trees  
riots through suburban streets,  
flames snarl, snap in the meadow,  
the red beast  
just beyond the fence.

I feel its glare  
as wild heat brushes my brow.

Crossing arms, I walk  
quickly, first to the corner,  
then to the threatened house,  
where my young neighbor  
clutches her baby  
and wonders  
when will it be time to flee,  
leave home,  
abandon furniture, new carpets, tv  
dreams of  
safety.

We watch and wait  
for the calm firemen  
to arrest this marauder  
cool its rage  
restore to ordered life  
this blue July day.

Steven Federle

# Wilma's Welcome

He sat the table, fresh kid,  
waiting for his dinner,  
pushing back the war  
now so far away.

His big brother smiled  
glad to see him safe,  
when she walked in,  
carrying a steaming plate  
of the best fried chicken  
either had ever seen.

The aroma awoke in his memory  
soft Ohio nights,  
God's righteous thunder rumbling  
gentle rains cooling the hot August sky,

when Mom carried in our dinner,  
fried chicken and mashed potatoes,  
safety and love.

And looking at his brother's new wife,  
he smiled and at last said,  
'welcome to the family! '

Steven Federle

# Wind - Chimes

Wind-chimes  
clamor in the night.  
Breezes rush  
through unseen leaves.  
Darkness revels in deeper sight.

Call me from  
this empty room  
and give the wind  
my breath of  
desire.  
Set my sluggish soul aflame.  
I'll rise like sparks  
and fill the night  
with your  
consuming  
fire.

Steven Federle

# Winter Garden

Winter gardens, rows  
leaning low to mud, coldly  
promising nothing.

The pale sun, lingers...  
Are you still here? I saw you  
in spring, green breezes

singing in the trees,  
lusty crickets shouting grace!  
Why did you leave me,

in this place defiled?  
Will you turn your holy face  
from your unholy child?

Steven Federle

# Winter Morning

You rage all night,  
urging black clouds  
to mutinous thunder.

What wind blows from  
such mighty lungs  
that heaven itself  
bends to the blast?

In sleep's confusion  
I hear you  
calling me  
out of the dark,  
into winter's  
dim light

where trees rise  
still and bare  
into the sepia air

and small birds  
search  
the desolate earth.

Steven Federle

# Winter Night

Sliver of moon,  
thin crescent hovers  
over  
breathless hills.

From night's broad loom,  
empty skies fill  
dark rooms  
with blackest silk.

O guardian  
stars, dropp on my face  
your amazing  
lace!

Steven Federle



# Winter Solstice

Drive the narrow road  
past cold  
misty vineyards;

peer carefully  
through pulsing wipers,  
past jeweled beads  
smeared to curving trails.

Look  
into the glaring eye  
of traffic.

Swinging around  
tight bends  
cars pass you,  
throwing  
sheets  
of driving  
rain.

Hold tightly to your wheel!  
Keep your lane.  
Do not descend  
into the flooded gutter;

for on the western edge  
in darkly glowing cobalt  
the declining sun,  
leans towards longer southern days.

Night  
has begun,

the longest night  
of the year.

Steven Federle

# Winter Tree

The winter tree  
does not move.

Its wide trunk  
plunges into graven earth,  
unseen roots, grasping hands  
feel deeply the living soil,  
hold firm anchorage  
against the coming storm,

but rising wood, thin  
though strong enough  
to paint slender lines,  
trails into purer air,  
gives shelter  
to Christmas birds.

They hunch on stems, quietly  
waiting to sing open  
the dawn.

Steven Federle

# Winter's Tree Of Leaf And Bird

Winter's tree, of leaf and bird,  
of mystery stripped  
silent and spare

where living glade  
with leafy trunk and fragrant limb  
once hid mockingbirds  
as they played  
through drowsy summer's  
longest day.

But now in winter's brittle chill  
all is silent, all is still  
as death works out  
his hollow will.

Steven Federle

# Wisdom

She (Wisdom) is in all things like the air receiving the sunlight. In her they prosper. In her they glorify God. In her they rejoice to reflect Him. In her they are united with him. Thomas Merton

\*\*\*

striated layers of time  
rise sharply to the sky,  
and flatten out  
against aching blue  
ages of rain and wind  
and pain descending  
on us.

we are  
the air receiving sunlight,  
shattering the long night  
on smooth, warm rocks

we are  
the morning joy  
of earth, wisdom  
of eternal  
birth.

Steven Federle

# Wolf Moon

the wolf moon rising  
hard, red, sure  
black night's  
bloody core.

Steven Federle

# Wooden Valley Vintage

swollen grapes  
extracted flame

fresh blood shed  
sweet fruit entombed

stacked casks  
fragrant gloom.

Steven Federle

# Words

Words fill my pages  
as the world rages, darkness pervades  
yet I pray for new days,  
worlds without end  
endless words

(flashy magic, shaman tricks  
conjuring spirits  
from spell-bound minds)  
you cannot find  
your answer in  
words.

Steven Federle

# Wrapped In Trembling Skin

Wrapped in trembling skin,  
my throbbing nerves  
synapse  
to chaos, pain, and pleasure  
to permeation of  
sensation.

Fear or joy  
compounds  
the fall of day.  
Night  
fills my eyes

light fails  
in the lowering sky.  
Clouds  
pile high, tear  
to tatters, shred  
vapors scudding over  
grey hills.

There  
I see my self-  
made  
hell.

Steven Federle



# Wunder Der Gänse!

Die katholische Schule Kinder versammelten sich  
Gehorsam gegenüber der Glocke, schwieg und wartete  
für Morgengebet  
beginnen an einem anderen Tag,

wenn Gänse  
raste plötzlich oben  
enger Formation über den  
Spielplatz, streicheln hohe Luft-und zerschmetterte  
unsere Disziplin mit kräftigen  
rufen, wilde  
Song!

Und die Kinder,  
mit erhobenen Armen in den Himmel,  
rief in Lob  
an das Wunder und die Herrlichkeit,  
der heiligen Gegenwart,  
das Wunder der Gänse!

Steven Federle

# Yahweh's Voice (Psalm 29)

Yahweh's voice through endless seas  
convulses terebinth, trembles trees,  
primeval forests compels to bend  
to majesty proclaimed  
from His highest seat  
on the rising wind.

Steven Federle

# Your Sacrifice

'He does not need our sacrifices,  
He asks for our selves.'  
Thomas Merton, No Man is an Island

Your sacrifice is like  
the breath  
of the sparrow  
in the roiling storm.

It is not needed  
but pleasing in its  
simplicity.

When you peel away  
your small, feathered  
soul, when  
you stretch your thin  
lungs to sing  
your song of self-  
immolation,

remember that  
it is not necessary,  
no, not at all,

but still pleasing in  
your purity of  
tone.

Steven Federle

# Your Sadness

Your sadness  
fills me with  
longing.

Of failing bodies  
we talk of  
treacherous blood, aching sinew,  
swelling hearts, fiery love's  
dream, passion's youth  
fading to dull pain.

I want to pass the night  
locked in your fresh embrace  
but time  
darkly intervenes,  
shadows impenetrably  
lie between.

Steven Federle

# Your Silence Sings

"Silence can carry many different messages; it can be a powerful form of communication." Thomas Merton

Your silence sings in  
emerald leaves glistening  
through arching blue skies.

Apple trees groaning  
anointing the sacred ground  
with seeds of silence.

Close by rushes a  
train; howling wind brushes my  
face with your silence.

Steven Federle