

*a net of seven graces*

*poems by steven schroeder*





**a net of seven graces**  
*poems by steven schroeder*

©2019 by Steven Schroeder

originally issued as a digitally printed handbound book in 2007



**i**

**psalm**

Spirit-filled, rain  
speaks in tongues  
til morning.

Congregation  
gets happy, shouts heat down  
with hallelujahs,

laps up words beyond  
language it cannot contain.

ii

**bu dao zhi dao**

*To leave off making footprints is easy,  
never to walk on the ground is hard.*

*Zhuangzi*

Zhuangzi, I can't tell you how many times I  
have seen wingless creatures fly,  
almost always when they leave off thinking  
how to make wings.

Never

putting feet on the ground, they leave  
footprints no one else can miss. No,  
never touching the ground is easy. Not  
leaving footprints is another matter.

Even dull wanderers who stumble  
upon them devote whole lives to divining  
what wondrous creatures must have passed this way  
before, never move again, transfixed by the site of them.



Stevan Silroć

**iii**

## **Bodhisattva**

When Guanyin, enlightened, chose to remain  
in the world of becoming and passing  
away until every being is  
enlightened, he crossed the border  
into China and became a woman.

**iv**

**meditations on Kohelet**

1

*Logos is common, but the many live as though  
understanding were private...*

*Heraclitus*

Rivers flow to ocean, ocean  
takes the rivers in. Rivers flow  
and flow again.

Still,  
nothing is

thirsty as the ocean.

Sun is new day in  
day out. But nothing  
but nothing is still.

2

*True, the living know that they will die; but  
the dead know nothing.*

*Ecclesiastes 9:5*

Nothing to count on but what is not  
here. Nothing is certain  
for creatures

desperate as we are to know  
ends better than beginnings.

Time and chance have it all under control, more than we will ever know. Nothing desired can be known.

Desire nothing.

### **The missing Gospel**

The Gnostic one. The one in which is hidden knowledge of an hermaphroditic God. The one

in which two become one and Thomas is the hero because he does not



hesitate to put his hand in  
the wound and later  
travels East where

common gods are wise  
enough to change  
their minds, to change  
their sex, to change

what is  
unchanging where

the world has been older  
than we can imagine  
for a long time

and every day there are more

deaths and more  
resurrections than

we can know.

## **two beginnings that might be good news**

1

First, the word and the word was  
in the presence of god and god was  
the word in the presence of god. This  
very thing was first in the presence  
of god. All things came to be  
through this first thing and  
nothing that came to be

came to be without this  
first thing.

Life was in this first thing,  
and the life was the light of human  
kind, light that shone in darkness.

And darkness did not overcome it.  
Darkness has not overcome it.

2

speech spoken  
is strange  
names named  
nameless  
unknown world  
mothers all

things known  
for no reason  
random desire  
makes ordinary  
extraordinary  
desire desired  
silence spoken  
enters through  
a thousand doors

v

**four healing recipes from Hildegard, *Physica***

1

a cold rose  
for the eye  
at daybreak

every healing goes  
better with the good  
strength of a little rose

better still,  
bouquets

of them. And hot  
masala, licorice  
to calm the furor

insanity is stirring  
in our heads

2

*Wheat is warm and full of kernels  
so that there is nothing lacking in it.*

Every kernel conspires  
to make wheat warm as  
sun it's harvested  
since Spring.

Harvest  
the whole when Summer's  
turned, and there will be  
flour to warm another  
body of Winter.

Real flesh, real  
blood, it is  
ground for patience.

Bake without the whole  
ground on a millstone  
and it is another  
matter, the body  
of an empty mind.

There is nothing to be done

for it but to tie it to the whole grain  
until the last drop of poison drains.

3

*...it does not drive away any illness*

Lungwort, cold and dry, is not  
much use; but it makes sheep fat  
and happy. When what we have  
expelled into the world makes  
lungs swell, take it.

A lung has almost the same  
nature as a sheep. Our sheep  
nature has led us to this. We think



we would breathe easier  
if we swallowed something  
cold, hard, able to shatter  
whatever is where it is.

4

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

Take time. It will  
turn your head.

## **political science: a short course**

*If the person does this often, he or she  
will be cured without a doubt, unless  
the person dies, or unless God  
does not want the person cured.*

*Hildegard, Physica*

For an empty mind worn down  
into madness, cook whole grains  
of wheat in water. Strain.

Tie them, warm, in a cloth around  
the head. The juice will renew  
the mind. Do this until  
the mind is right

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

For insanity, licorice. Hildegard  
says it extinguishes *führers*  
in the head, where

Fascists are most dangerous.  
Grind nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves  
to powder. Add whole wheat flour  
and water to make a paste.

Eat it often, all of you.

It will calm bitterness  
of heart and mind, open  
hearts and clouded senses,  
make minds joyful. Add java  
pepper to elevate thinking.

### **Scivias**

*a note to St. Hildegard*

There was no iron mountain, no  
great glory to blind my sight. But for  
an instant something did. The shadow  
was not soft; and when it rose, it left  
a pattern on my vision, like coffee

swirling around a drop of cream.

You might say half my vision was veiled. But vision is whole in every eye. So I was left with one vision exposed, one vision veiled. I had been warned that the way I was made inclined me to this, so I was looking for stars, but there were none.

Only a veil and the swirl of cream in coffee frozen floating on the surface of my vision. We joked about calling the chaplain, and I knew you would have found the nearest church. But, being good modernists in a demystified age, we made our way to a hospital to wait

with a crowd of suffering folk whose affliction

was so much talk there was no time to listen.

Remystified, I left without seeing  
a doctor. The next day, a temple  
entered by initiates with a key,  
a coterie of priests to name the demon.  
The exorcism, a ritual of pure light, is  
Friday when every mosque on earth is filled

with prayer. I can see it with my eyes  
closed. Meditating to the sound  
of a Russian liturgy, it becomes  
a dark branch heavy with cherry blossoms.

A bright sun devours it, collapses to green  
light while I wait for the voice of some god,  
expecting silence, knowing no god has nothing to say.

But if you have ears to hear, you can hear  
nothing on edges where chatter breaks.

### **green worlds rising**

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

They see that it is good and name it.  
Everyone knows Adam is a woman who  
turns when emerald lovers whisper her name

to see that it is good. She takes in light,  
and it becomes her body, broken. Stones  
are the bones of the earth, marrow where

rain has fallen. Warm soul breathes life in  
cold flesh. She writes every name in a book.  
Demons have no taste for it, but the devil loves

the ones that take in fortune seekers blind  
to green worlds rising hot from cold time.



## **A Net of Seven Graces**

*four poems on some words of Meister Eckhart*

1

### **like a word**

unspoken, I slept  
in what god knew  
before  
the first beginning,  
for the last end.

2

**nothing in common**

In the soul, there is  
a blood relative of god

that has nothing  
in common with nothing.

It is not, like nothingness, nothing.

The I with which I see god  
is the I with which god sees me.

3

**if I did not know**

Every creature possesses  
an infinite capacity  
to take god in, god

an uncontrollable desire to be

taken. God  
falls, every time.

4

**a net of seven graces**

Drawn by a trinity with cords  
of power, wisdom, love, it is  
emptiness that takes us in.

Sin makes a satan  
of the soul. It makes an  
entrepreneur of intersections.

Every act of will contains eternity.

## **four things Julian saw**

1

The first of three nothings  
is all that is, small in  
the palm of your hand.

And you wonder  
at the birth of god in it,  
at desire that makes you  
want to die of it

the way god always dies,  
makes you envy a woman  
murdered, a beaten man  
abandoned, a

demonstration  
of power in  
a public place.

2

When I saw all things at once, I saw god  
does all that is done. And I wondered  
what sin could be. The devil works

like the devil every day; but every  
thing done is a piece of a whole  
done well. So sin must be

nothing. When I laughed at this,  
the world laughed. And I believe  
even god had to smile.

3

The third heaven is  
the boundless delight  
of a spirit that rises

wholly from compassion.  
The soul of a soulless  
world, the heart

of a heartless  
condition, the sigh  
of oppressed creatures  
who know what must be

done for pain. We're tempted  
to cling to any reason  
for pity. But

we turn.  
And when  
we turn,

all will be well, all  
will be well, all  
will be well,

all manner of things  
will be well. You will see  
with your own eyes

that all things will be well. On earth



as in heaven, sudden fear, fear  
of pain, a species of despair,  
reverence

that softens and strengthens  
and pleases until we rest.

The false fear, sudden  
fear, fear of pain, doubtful  
fear that is despair assails us,

and there is no peace.

But a spirit rises wholly, a sigh  
from pain, boundless.

4

Blood. The mother of god  
that was and is and will be  
love. All that is, small  
as god makes it. That all  
that is is made for love,  
that love is all that makes it.

That every good  
in every thing is  
all the god there is,  
all the god there was,  
all the god there will be.

**vi**

**credo**

in real bodies  
of metaphor any  
fish could swallow

whole

in prophets  
consumed  
fleeing

in bloody cities  
shriveled gourds  
counting cattle

in nothing  
three times under

in silence

**You Are What You Eat**

Over lunch, conversation turns to a study of the life expectancy of monks in one of the oldest temples in China. It seems they die ten years younger than their lay counterparts, a fact the author attributes to the absence of meat from their diets. But I am surprised monks in such a place would linger so long. They tarry, I suppose,

long after enlightenment, after the manner of a Bodhisattva taking on the world's desire to release it. Relieved of the weight of desire, it is small wonder the world lives longer,

unmindful of life sacrificed  
to satisfy its appetite.



**Kun Iam**

Someone seems to have forgotten  
the guard dog when they  
abandoned this place. All skin  
and bones, she circles and circles in  
intense heat, trying to find a dog-shaped  
place to rest. But there is so little  
dog shape left that there is no place  
for her in all this emptiness. Purple  
bindweed struggles to cover the garbage  
that washes up on the waterfront from  
casinos and other places forgotten humans  
have made out of our lonely circling  
here. But they cannot keep pace

with the acceleration of our  
effluent. I pause at Kun Iam temple  
at the bottom of the cliff, ask for  
a bodhisattva of compassion  
to make a place for all the beings  
circling in loneliness, put my hands  
together and say thank you when  
he pauses in his cleaning, climbs  
the steps behind me to open  
the gate so I will not have to  
circle back and climb up another way.



**ix**

**xizi hui**

Every letter must burn before a god  
can take it in. Nothing binds  
words in books. Libraries  
blaze. Breathe. Conspire.



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

