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## OPUS HERMETICUM

1.

Will there come Sâr in truth to spell out  
Péladan without a cloak? A card  
hidden up every player's sleeve:  
that is the wind. You are my croupier,  
I am the house. They lose to me  
because their eyes are fixed upon your Form  
while your spirit does its tricks. Anima  
blandula, vagula, but she does come home.  
Every day I come back to life! I hate gambling  
— that's my secret. That, and blue flowers,  
that and the secret sonnets the heart hears  
when other people hear the bus go by  
verbalizing up Crescent St. beneath a peach-pit sun  
far over our heads in a greasy sky, I love it.

2.

Hermetic habits — wearing live fish, birds  
squawk on your epaulettes — reveal the Operator  
at his best: in disguise, *vesti*, all imposture  
and tweed cloaks, silk-lined assistants,  
wings. Some of us have wings. The sonnet  
of course is the ideal hermetic form, twos  
and sevens and eights and sixes, threes,  
a sleekit timorous Babbage's Machine  
to think our way through Feelings to the Will.  
A gizmo to think with! After a lot of heat  
you get an animal that thinks like you,  
that crawls out of the oven exhausted from love  
soon wakes to new life, yours, till you can't  
tell it from a looking-glass, except it smells.

(But by that point you smell too.)

3.

But I couldn't understand it just as it was  
the elm tree still alive and full of mocking birds  
the Buddha statue –touching earth bear witness—  
with little birds dithering around it, sunshine  
everywhere, squirrels bitching, flowers and  
a voice like mine coming out of the sky  
saying stuff I couldn't possibly have known,  
rapture and agency and who loves you in dream—  
then I was saying it too and you were listening  
you looked at me as if I were me but I wasn't  
or not yet, but who is it who keeps this doctrine?  
Where is Wisdom lodged now we have burned  
down Her temple and set up a law book instead?  
Could it be that the sky is really part of our heads?

19 April 2009

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Speak as they come in and out  
smelling of shower and clean clothes  
because sunshine and the grass  
hoists itself out of the soil again  
for the millionth time  
and car doors open and slam  
and the porch light's on all afternoon  
in bright sun and voices,  
and voices.

19 April 2009

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As if they were parts of your hands  
like loose impulsive fingers  
the birds soar suddenly away and write  
their own inscriptions on the permissive sky

that last as long as any message does  
till someone reads it  
and we all do read it, there,  
all day long, and not often does one stop

to reflect on what has just been said up there  
or what one has just read  
or tried to read through all the evening birds  
and maybe that is just as well.

19 April 2009

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When I touch someone else  
I stop being anyone at all.

19.IV.09

= = = = =

Goldfinches. Blackbirds. Faithful  
heraldry of sky. The subtlest alchemy.  
But you will say: I don't care  
about your stupid birds,  
when did they ever do anything for me?  
Can they explain Adorno or raise a rebellion  
in under-funded let's-pretend democracies?  
Can they get government grants for artists?  
Can they make you better in bed or at the bank?

I am abashed, unvoiced. Yet they come quick  
and very gold, and they're the first ones  
I've seen this year, so spring is real,  
late, late though, like the forsythia,  
late flowers, maybe they're trying  
to tell me something too. Like you.

20 April 2009



## FRETWORK OF THE DIVINE

all round. Wooden footbridge  
across the old rail trestle over Rosendale  
leads to the rock face  
they come up this way to stand and read.  
This countenance, less iconic than  
the old man of New Hampshire who  
from his granite face instructed me,  
but this is still a face, stares back at me,  
if you have feet, it implies a journey  
from the heart of the sea  
to the heart of the rock.  
Carpets made of many-colored sands  
woven in Isfahan. Blue faience  
of Shawabti figures, those sky-dwellers  
who came down to help the dead endure the tomb—  
anything that's blue.

Blue or mauve  
or crescent green.  
Hell is doing anything again—  
hence opium, underworld,  
Kierkegaard on repetition, used-up Don Juan  
who is never far away from hell.  
Blue is to be new. Look, fool,  
it is the sky.

2.

But when you say divine  
do you insist or imply  
a personhood beyond the obvious,  
you and me and the sultan, say,  
some *invisible animal that knows,*  
*controls?*

I dunno. I see him everywhere  
in every girl I meet and most trees  
in brickwork of old factories  
and the deep optic weave of twenty-dollar bills,  
he looks a little like Jefferson though,  
Hank Aaron, Wittgenstein,  
a bit autistic maybe like the sun  
well-meaning as an ear of corn.  
I don't know about control – what is there  
to control?

It all keeps happening.  
The divine thing is to pay attention  
and touch the fabric of it as it knows  
itself into tomorrow.

3.

God means never finish one thing before you start another—  
isn't that the story of the Holy Grail  
the Blue Mosque, Chinese pilgrims toiling  
up the foggy slopes of Mount Omei  
and up there He rides a white elephant made of cloud.  
You look at him closely and you see a naked man all blue.

4.

Is that what you mean by weaving,  
architect,

design?

A thing is exactly the right shape  
when you can see only its color—

to which the math teacher countered  
if it were raining the grass would be wet  
every single tender blade of it

so reason too has every now and then  
something interesting to report  
mostly about itself and how it thinks it thinks  
but sometimes knows something about rain.

Which leaves undemonstrated, almost unseen,  
the great mosaic Pantokrator of Palermo  
glowering love down on me from a million chips of glaze,

the one you were asking about,  
the lord of the world we nailed onto the cross

or burned in the lake or poisoned  
or in the porches of his ear did pour  
a hateful word, that's the point,  
when you look at the imbrications of the tile  
rooftops of Lacoste, whereunder pale  
pigeons hoot at dusk and the mistral rattles,  
finds its way always in,

or when you count the glacial striations  
in sunlight on the Mount Rutsen shale  
you know that everyone is everybody else's father,

don't you see it yet,  
and all the rest is mother.

20 April 2009

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The woodpecker keeps telling it

—but what?

I can read his morse code

message he never meant to send.

20.IV.09

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Letting the partner come late—  
after enough time  
the musculature relaxes  
enough for something to come through  
enough for the word to slip out—  
when you're almost finished the dance  
the partner falls into your arms.

20 April 2009

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Parts of a thing but not the thing itself—  
Oh, you're talking about birds again, morning,  
weather, the old reliables. Maybe I am,  
what's it to you, fashionplate? King William  
saw this yellow finch an hour back  
and Caesar still is eating his light lunch,  
don't you feel it yet? The birds,  
the birds are all the evidence we have.  
Evidence of what? That something's happening,  
weather's just the scoreboard, happening  
deep beneath the surface where we meet  
inside the señorita and the garden seat  
the apple and the bathysphere, your hand just now  
brushing hair out of my eyes, tender, confused,  
we cry out in our dream to help each other wake.

21 April 2009

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I got caught in the size of things, a danger.  
The great dome over the Hall of the German Folk  
that holds a quarter-million cheering people  
fits inside a madman's hand. A lawyer  
I thought you called yourself, and I was afraid.  
But then I read the letter closely and you said:  
It was the magnolia, you were right, but here  
people say tulip, so I'm right too. Trees  
have more names than one but just one word.  
I thought it was law but it was flower.  
Words have different names too, can't always  
be Plato in my head, sometimes sit by me  
on a rustic bench, uncomfortable, eating  
prunes right from the box. Or primes. We are fools  
in love with what seems accidental fact.

21 April 2009



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Looking forward to the other side  
the passenger studied the fish  
unusually prolific in the channel  
it must be spring the passenger thought  
and tried to count them  
had reached ninety three then lost count  
as a wake-wave tugged the boat  
and one's eyes rose of themselves  
to the approaching but still distant shore.  
Home soon. The place where numbers  
don't count anymore. One's door,  
one's shadow on one's bedroom wall.  
Still the fish streak under one's affairs.

21 April 2009

## NONAGONS

The order of things is a bird outside  
Mourning dove cooing in some seed  
Crystal sphere hangs in eastern window  
Faceted with intermittent color – a hue  
Like peach varying to that elusive mauve  
Crayon labels used to call flesh—  
Understanding which gives a nameless man  
Certainty he has come to the right place  
To carry out his latest rich man's stunt.

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For we are various in wealth, and riches  
(The crystal light has turned to blue now  
Diamond-deep or sea-foam green) are functions  
Of our sense-impressions, and the man in question  
Is rife with senses if not much else. *Tumult*  
*Of notice* – he lives on that, no time for feeling nothing.  
He thinks perhaps this new place will chasten him  
Ease his money back into the bank, closing time,  
Let the affects sleep the silence be born again.

22 April 2009

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Discourse on the divine: that alone  
is what he needs to summon into language.  
Don't leave God to the believers,  
don't leave Spirit stapled in some billion-copy book.

He is chosen to attend the Birth of God—  
God too is reborn – once upon a time that was  
the single work of poetry to announce,  
god after god, in all our island creoles,

age after age till all language shrilled  
and chattered with adoring, imploring—  
*Description is pure worship*, he writes,  
*There is nothing I can say that is not Thy word.*

22 April 2009

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The urethane deposits on the seventh moon  
once thought inexhaustible are now depleted—  
were they exploited from *below*? Are there  
animals besides us in the world? In church  
they talk about Automatic Grace – the world  
loves us – we are special – but at times  
you’ve got to wonder: where do things go?  
Who is it keeps moving the clouds around  
telling us things we read differently down here  
and we could fight about, defending every dumb  
interpretation? Who took the atmosphere away?

23 April 2009

## TIME TO RENEW

the sources of our inspiration  
what are those?

A man in leather boots  
a woman coming in the door—

nothing more will ever be known.

Or: that's all I know,  
the ground is hard, she goes out and comes back.  
Is that just dream? I heard her scream  
as she was dreaming

or I was, nothing's clear,  
tell me. There was a table too,  
boots and a woman and a table.

I tried to sleep through it but puberty came  
I played chess with Mahler, learned to dream  
in another language, wrote poems in it  
and called myself a speaker.

Lies, all lies,  
my native language is sidewalk and brick wall  
angry uncles and ripped-down ivy, broken doors  
and an old man limping down the street.  
My native language is dog. And I deny.  
It barks and doesn't know what it means by doing so.

23 April 2009