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## **BIRDS OF A FEATHER**

A man in a coat  
sinks the boat

\*

Well said  
soonest dead

\*

Bare skin  
must win

\*

Luff means flap in the breeze  
Tough means back to the trees

\*

Star bright  
spoils night

\*

Everything done  
leaves none

9 April 2004

*[Prolegomena to the Bergen Street Magic Spells]*

## BERGEN STREET ZAUBERSPRÜCHE

familiar house fronts  
unchanged in all my life  
conceal strange arts

the way who knows  
what could happen with a pen

whose hand holds?  
we keep walking up the sidewalk  
to the very large plane tree

there is discussion: is it  
elephantine or Herculean?  
Elephanta or Herculaneum?  
Ruins, India or Italy?

why is the tree  
looking at me?

and then the *seiðr* starts,  
witch work,

north of magic  
a road spills  
white sand

under spruce trees

sand in snow

you write with a fingertip

the one you want

when wind blows

the name away

the one you want

comes to your house

if you don't have a house

use a bird

if you don't want anyone

proceed to the end of the night

where someone is waiting

no road can resist

a tower hurries towards you

always blame it on the wind

2.

iron gate

keeps the street straight

then drink the contents of the cup  
in one draught  
keeping your eyes open  
and focused on what's in the cup  
until the last drop  
is in your mouth  
then close your eyes  
and toss the cup as far as you can  
without letting your arm come  
north of your shoulder

when you wake up  
your clothes will seem to be on fire  
but it is only a shadow  
of someone very rich  
who's thinking of you at this moment,  
mouth begins to water

get up quickly and paint out the sun.

There. Moonman is on the stairs  
with his big white leper face,

now rub him out with spit,  
now paint a star instead  
where the sun and moonman's shadow cross  
and stargirl whistles in the street

how come so few people whistle any more  
the subways and the sidewalks  
were full of people whistling

not just men of a certain age with red faces  
but they did whistle best

some girls whistle  
this one does

a star is a whistle in the sky.

3.

It isn't a matter of remembering  
it is a matter of holding it on your lap  
squirming like a flower  
you want to call tuberculosis  
but is really only one more rose.

4.

The furnace is running in the cellar  
because the lawn is cold  
a bird bounces off the window

I find him later  
under the bush, cock bluejay  
with a broken neck  
the intelligent gravitas of his eyes  
hardly dimmed by dying

the connection is everywhere  
time is a clumsy pet

a business card on my table  
the perennial mystery of anybody else

5.  
how a bruise  
finds the skin—  
that's the way  
to begin

talk to your mother  
the way ice melts

talk to your father  
the way trees walk

Everything is something else.



Everything is something else also.

Why does that mean so much less.

O word

you golden bird

at the feeder

of my heart

listen to my chest, love,

these are finches

zooming around in there

squalling and tweetering

a gold bird variation

take you out for finch

not today and not to borrow

always elver and never eel

the world was meant to feel

cold coffee

cold coffee

for Dizzie Gillespie

my heart in my hands

I approach my hour

still growing up

I am the garden where I began

all concrete over now

a limestone lawn

a man with an animal head

a bridegroom with no door

a bridge without a waltz

a floorboard without a mask

a stone without a cathedral

chalk all over our hands

now swallow what you've drunk.

Good Friday  
9 April 2004

**At the intersection of the mouth and the street**

a word falls out of the sky  
but sprouts wings before it strikes the pavement  
and flutters around us ordinary people  
saying stuff, things interesting as money,

things you think you remember your father  
telling you years ago when you were both alive,  
a word like the English ivy on your red brick house,  
little pig, like everything before it became everything else

and you call this music? I tell you not even  
showgirls in Las Vegas in all their glory  
heard chromatic intervals like these

they keep me panting, keep me on your trail,  
think of all the things you find in the river,  
so many people telling you what to do  
and very blue the dome we live inside,  
rain forms on the curve of the roof and falls

and so it all comes together like a train crash  
and every word wants to remember when you first spoke it  
or else be silence and forgive your mother.  
I think I am a telephone.

9 April 2004 <late>

## ANUBIS

stand still and howl  
at the interface  
of man and street  
a thing like a dog

he waves his hands  
before his eyes  
as if to see them  
or as if to brush away  
some to us unseen  
obstacles that hide  
his seeing from itself

truly the moon  
rolls along the ground  
towards him  
cars come and go around it  
headlights taillights  
mist in the trees  
but no one is looking at the trees.

9 April 2004 <late>

## ADAM WOKE ME

Adam

Seth

Melchizedek

all have something to say.

The Jews before the Jews.

The other priest.

\*

On this day

while Christ lay in death's hands

his spirit body walked among the dead

telling the secret that wakes them up,

a secret I can share with you:

Wake up, come back, we need you.

And *Adam* woke.

Who are you

who breathe like me?

*Jesus* answered:

Everyone who wakes

breathes the same breath.

You were a shape of clay  
who learned to breathe  
learned to count your breaths  
and little by little came to know  
the mind that made you.

Then *Seth* woke and rubbed his eyes and asked  
Then who made me,  
shall a man of blood  
be born from pure breathing?

Sure, said *Jesus*,  
after the rigidity that was Cain  
and the looseness that was Abel  
(Cain means stiff, Abel means empty)  
worked each other out  
(the loose fixed,  
the fixed flown)  
(dead, fled)

you were what is left.  
From Adam's meditation you were born.

But what about my mother, *Seth* was asking,  
didn't I crawl out of her living body?  
How does she figure in this story?

I am a man and do not know so clearly  
but I think she knows  
how to breathe  
from the beginning,  
what Adam needed to learn  
to take inside his ribs  
she knew already,

Adam studied her while she was sleeping  
and watched her rib cage soft expanding  
as she breathed, studied her breath  
and learned to breathe,  
counting the measure of her breathing,

ah, strange is the sleep of women,

through them everything can be known  
but they claim to know nothing  
but they smile when they say so,  
they claim to be sleeping.

In a corner of the room  
strangely pale  
compared to the dark parlor of the rest  
a quiet man said Welcome,  
I am *Melchizedek*, I have been lonely

in this charnel paradise  
all built of after,  
they never manage to get to sleep  
enough to wake from it,  
some drowsy centuries they have waited  
and I have watched over them  
pondering the breath they can't quite draw in,  
  
for the dead, Sir, are those who do not breathe.

Who are you? *Jesus* asked.

We are the Jews before the Jews  
from whom you come,

a lineage  
that came before the Covenant was made  
and runs beside it, and deep inside it,  
always there, always pure,  
a clinamen in the disaster.

This lineage is what you call the Breath of God  
and is the breath of the beginning,  
Noah's breath in Moses' lungs—  
for I was *Shem*, your second father.

Each person has to find



the religion that came before his own  
and still runs through it,  
the lineage of which his lineage  
is a shadow or a dream  
or priestly artifice or monk confection,

and when it is said  
Find your face before you were born  
what is meant is  
Find your breath before you breathed

it runs outside you, beside you,  
inside you, the first current,  
all girl and olive tree and goat and hill

we are where the breath comes from  
that woke you  
over Jordan

and now you bring it back to us  
alive,  
and wake us

because sleep too is a mother  
one more mother you don't understand  
Eva, Maria, who are these women  
who gave birth to you and still endure you,

endure your teaching and your ideas,  
endure your death and resurrection,  
all the Miriams,

why don't they wake now,  
where are they sleeping?

There's always something someone doesn't know –  
*Adam* spoke so slowly,  
painful, old,  
but he knew something the rest forgot:

what Eve told him when it all began,  
the thing she whispered in his ears:

Take in  
this forbidden breath  
and set it free  
inside you

for when you breathe  
you will be like the gods  
and when some day  
you come to die,  
breathe not all of it out,

a little of it keep  
and call it me

and I will sleep inside you  
until the whole forest wakes  
and we stop hurting.

Then the light came on strong  
and I could see that Adam was my father,  
his tongue was wounded, a silver  
stud ill-fitting  
stabbed through it  
just like a young rebel with his piercing,  
the pain he bore  
a pain we did not understand,  
it darkened his speaking

where did that come from,  
who did it, why did he endure,  
could nothing be done,  
did he want it so?

Speak for me, *Adam* said,  
it is the morning when the holy dead  
whisper through the veils of sleep  
and tell you Speak,  
speak for me, tell them of me, Adam,

you knew me as your own father  
as you see me now, always old, always before you,  
tell them of the ones before the Jews  
who are the Jews,  
tell them how I found the breath  
your mother gave me

and how I kept track of it  
and knew the mind who made me.

*Adam* stood up  
capable again  
to do breath's business  
in such a silent world

Die in your religion  
and wake in mine,  
he said,

and I could not tell  
which one was speaking,

my father's tongue pierced.

And when I woke from this Book of Adam  
my *wife* told me: so Adam was himself the serpent,

the forked tongue one, who tricked his wife  
into that act of mutual breath, the inspiration,  
the sacred transgression,

yes, said *Adam*,

she is right, that is the secret no one ever told,  
I was the Serpent and to her I came  
in that alternate guise so she would not know me  
and would listen to me the way  
women always listen to the stranger,  
I put her up to what she did to me,

breathless, I taught her breathing,  
and with her kiss she breathed life into me

and when we both were breathing  
we had to leave that dreamy garden  
of chalk and leaves and chemistry

and so fell into living  
and this living pierced me ever after.

10 April 2004

Holy Saturday