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## decH2010

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## ELEMENTAL THINGS

A year is when all the certain people are alive

the last such year was 1969

things forget themselves

away

Flushing 1939 the French pavilion lights  
never knew anything could be so bright

I saw then that was *language*

my nova

the things of mortal childhood

elemental things

1.

Stand by the wall and write them down  
big or small as they seem to rate  
until the wall is counseled with your elements

this is your Mendeleev Table, you seek  
for the order in it, there is order, orders,  
there must be, the periods  
of linked attention, the augmenting light.  
the weights of what you know

the halogens of your desire

Oxidize me, you cry, Great Time,  
Great Wheel of Time,  
spin me till I come talk-side up  
and have something to tell  
even You.

“Eternity is in love with the productions of time”

then seek out your proper Azimuth aloft,  
the lost element,  
the secret name, my home.

See, I believe my lies.  
Boys from Brooklyn  
usually do.

The wooden bridge to Manhattan Beach,  
the teal-blue iron bridge to Rockaway

and in the evening

by Broad Channel

taste of raw clams, littlenecks, cherrystones,  
didn't know anything could have so much taste

the hour of the hedges

west of Nostrand

where America began

a land of protestants and numbers

numbered streets

though of concrete on some steps there sat

a lion

I fed when I was taken walking

but what do such beasts eat?

the succulents, the lobed leaves of memory,

here, take my hand, put it where it longs.

Belongs.

Longs to be.

2.

There is nowhere on the other side

all these things I never said

the elements of ordinary

I say all the time

they are wrapped snug  
in silken pronouns  
stored in unspoken sentences  
stacked beneath the spoken words

the universal rain.

It matters because it touches everyone.

So I wanted to be born  
I guess, I wanted to be rain  
or dry enough to get indoors  
be wind enough to go all the way  
across the little inlet  
where the flounder boats sneak out  
before the sun has risen—  
they don't go far  
and some of them are back in time for Mass

whatever that really is.

Memory can't bear churches,  
memory is a cathedral of its own  
(Saint-Sulpice is what I see when I say it  
sunset on a grey day, not a cathedral, just big,

the vast space inside a stone)

(or the Lady

Chapel in Saint Patrick's

hot afternoon alive in blue)

memory gives no choices

keeps its prisoners forever

they can all walk into my dining room right now

no one of them is ever far

*when you come into my mind you come forever*

I see my mother standing by the deacon's bench

haloed with new snow outside

time is a criminal

but on our side

3.

As you go deeper into genealogy

I see that as exterior memory

what you're looking for out there

might be in here,

here being the place in which you think and speak.

This word

is your ancestor,

the sound of words

in your own mouth  
the surf that crashes  
on the Western Isles.

Use archive to find inner.

It will tell me  
but will I believe it  
when the church burned down

what year my oldest memory as me.

(You and me get intermingled here,  
agents both, endurers of the obvious  
us, both and any, many and none,  
none but me and none but you)

Where does the child live before memory  
why doesn't remembering begin when perceiving begins  
is there consciousness at all before memory

memory not the trace of event but the trace of awareness

then why do we have to learn to remember  
and what if we didn't?

Memory is a glove  
protects the hand

from experience,  
too big for young hand,  
slips off the aged

memory survival function  
high wind = fear  
Æolian music of the dense-set bare branches

god Theremin.

4.  
Everything scares me—  
that is my secret power, cowardice.

A glove. Leaves  
in the stone lion's mouth.

Where shall we go  
to learn how not to,  
not to believe the words  
heard in whose head?  
The battle I must do  
is listening,  
I am the hero—a hero *hears*.  
That is the meter of the epic,  
swirl-curve inward of the hero's ears.  
And where does he hear?



A hero always hears *here*.  
Here is the locus of the epic,  
its action is in hearing  
on the shores of the river of silence  
under the walls of the city  
  
much-talking city.

The first sin.

What a word is *peccatum*!  
What is it from?  
It means a little stumble when we're walking,  
  
not the lion, not the street,  
not the yellow elmtree leaves

a stumble  
on our way somewhere

where is it from  
or is it always here,  
when was my first sin?

I thought my penis was the Holy Ghost  
who always (they told me) warned me  
if I did wrong. Could this be wrong then

the exciting thoughts in mind  
that made the penis rise  
like a nun's finger shaken in blame

the penis was the sign  
the sign was the sin

five years old  
a word on the wall

flowers and lions  
I liked the pansies best  
three-colored, soft to the touch  
cool by the shadowy garage.

28 December 2010

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I have said all this somehow before  
that's not the same as saying it now

thinking makes things happen, thinking is now

now has blood and semen of its own

now is newborn

now is milkweed sap

now is dandelion fluff

now is snow

and out doesn't seem so far away

but out is very hard.

28 December 2010

*Oratio Recta*

The thrill of purport  
the schooner nosing out of the bay north  
to be west of you  
and you can see it from the house  
assigned to you in the magic of the stars

the street address counting down from heaven  
so many houses  
and each of them with people  
and each people stinks with star sulfur

each slips by the other  
terrified as mercury

to touch the other is to become her

32 million people in Chungking the newspaper says  
it withdrew from its province to be its own  
as a house withdraws from its street  
to collect itself

when I was a child men collected stamps  
or said they did alone in their studies at midnight  
I sat in the kitchen reading

everything I know is from that hour

now without looking down at the page

I can see the schooner sliding west through the straits  
taking aim on the whole sunset

it is motoring

the sails loose reefed, ready for the ocean out

I can see you seeing it from your front yard

but you have to look

up from your book to do it

you have to look up from your book

Say what do you know about horses

did you ever get there on horseback

the way the knights had to, had to come

to the broken chapel. hear mass

said by the crazy old priest

who turns out to be your uncle

god, do you have enough uncles

and he has to hear mass without leaving the saddle

the priest hobbles over and lifts the Host to him  
he has to bend to  
Domine non sum dignus  
has to bend to take  
on the tip of his tongue  
a red lance to pierce again  
the Savior's side

the actual messiah came and went  
while you were reading  
while I would not look up from my book

her shadow healed us

so the knight kept going on his long persuasion  
and the priest made crosses in the air behind him

we feel the breath of the cross still  
it is the last whisper of the Empire

the one that reigned from me to you  
all the way

the knight had to cross the whole world  
to be sure he hadn't missed an acre

we follow clues too

we watch the sloop until it hurts our  
eyes I watch you watching  
we fade in sunset

what are we even doing here  
why haven't we done it all already  
done everything and left nothing  
and why aren't we at it even now

the this of it, the thing that leaves the shadow

just put it in your mouth  
no taste just heat  
no spill just tell

so it was coming through the dark  
the way a story comes back through the mind  
the whole shape of it intact  
a broken jug glued back together  
some pieces missing  
some out of place  
but the shape shows

forget the livid dragon the green lion the red maiden  
who poured silver in your skirt

how many horses  
the ones with names  
how many names  
the ones you forget

how can you tell the Grail Legend all over again  
with no horse and no maiden

but she is a maiden and you are a maiden  
and the horse with horns  
carries us all, Duncan said so  
and he was born in a myth and died in a number  
proper romance of the modern age

the strange language

we traveled side by side in a tunnel  
we clattered through the ivory reeking walls  
carbon monoxide and water vapor drifted  
against the dingy light  
we were inside the hollow thighbone of a giant of old  
buried underneath the Vosges  
seven kilometers we drove  
gasping for breath in that foul air  
it came on daylight in St-Die



where the Grail also had been sought,  
and since sought there, found there

that is Its station,  
to be there  
wherever it is to be found  
and to be found  
wherever it is sought

seeking

glance, eyebeams gently  
firmly held, touch,  
caress— these  
are all the instruments of knowing,  
all the probes of love  
and no further need be gone

and all that anxious going further,  
your suckings and your fuckings,  
do nothing but violate the astral sheath  
of that beloved other whose sacred otherwise you spill  
by the act of trying to go in

we have no in

we live at the surface of ourselves

and that is where we are

that is where the you of you is stationed  
the station of the Grail

to force your way inside  
or swallow one another in  
just breaks the very identity  
in which love consists  
insists

reduces  
otherness to surgery and meat  
the cannibal manners of the middle class

that is not the way of Albí  
that is not the way of Tamalpais

this a glance and a then  
a gaze sustained and answered  
so long it can be held  
and then a touch  
and then caress that lasts  
even to the rising of the dawn  
when the man you tussled with

*ha-ish*

blesses you and he is gone  
leaving you lame with fulfillment

and full of your own self  
his love conferred  
as you to him  
in that weird reciprocation  
the winter knows  
the sun comes close but gives less heat

you rise strong from each other's  
knowledge of the particular difference

where else can you be found  
but where you are sought?

inside there is nothing  
a beautiful woven fence  
and inside it nothing but the prance  
of the silver unicorn

a creature best known for its absence  
it flees when the fence is broken

*rompe la tela deste dulce encuentro*

John said

let my unicorn run free  
in the imaginary pastures of the lord

he meant  
but that is not our meaning  
not on Tamalpais  
or among the quiet eagles  
nesting on Whaleback  
or where the cougar slipped down last winter  
along the Sawkill past our summerhouse

where we are  
is where the gaze rests  
and the light  
touches us  
with its radiant enough

no selves and no circles

are you still watching the boat  
Charles was one hundred years old yesterday  
and he was one for whom a boat  
meant what it brought or bartered

for our commerce is not with waves and latitudes  
but flesh and blood, the gorgeous annals of exchange,  
the money of our minds poured out to know the business of the world

what there is and where it is

the mushroom—name it—under that boulder on your lawn  
and there is no such thing as a tree

and what that schooner's doing  
is pleasuring some rich folk out to sea  
where they have no more business than here on shore

but I'll grant them liberty to go and come and sell and buy  
as long as they keep looking

and for god's sake be good to look at  
that's the least you can ask money.

28 December 2010

