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TORCH SONG

If there were a chance for me
inside your factory
I'd show my pass
at every gate

I would refuse the easy answers
the obvious the true
and make things up instead for you
(cheese flowers, animals

made of fire) to give you
and make you remember
how tight you have to hold me
in the lovely lie we never met.

1 September 1993

S P E L T

The man in the moon
(put there
for gathering brushwood for his fire
on Sunday, or on the Sabbath)

is planting wheat
(or he gathered sticks
in the unlikely places
where no one is supposed to forage
between the hours)

and how will his wheat grow?
He waters it with names we know,
quinoa, barley, buckwheat, spelt
(maybe he left camp years ago
to fetch our firewood)

he's still looking
frightened by rabbits and blue deer,
sniffing dust flowers
dodging the dreams of fitful lovers,
hardhats in space capsules,
drifts of rock and roll)

the word is water

(his sin is mystery
he did what he did in the wrong time
now does what he does in the wrong place)

the word is water
and loosens all our sins

the man in the moon
talks to his hands

(or he went to catch rabbits
who would never be caught)

he broke his arrows

on marble stags)

(the man in the moon
was the first one I loved
I looked up to him
in the brilliant August nights by ocean
and knew he was the one
the one who named me
the one who one day
would teach me my name)

the man in the moon
lifts up his hands
the word is water
the moon is full of birds
his sins are simple, grievous, large,
nobody hurt, nobody remembers,

a sin as large as the sky
(the word is water)
his sins flood us with light
and we can see us moving in the underbrush
busy with lust and thievery and something else

something that has the long slow taste of water
something like a branch from no tree
broken off with a crack
where there is no sound in the middle of space

the man in the moon
carries the wind in his belly
like a big pot
like a fish in the sky

he breathes inside

how his old seeds grow!
he talks to them with water
they answer in oil and fire
uncle spelt and sister corn
and dear my daughter millet

how can a sound speak in no air
how can the seed grow in no soil
how can a dry old word gush moisture

is sin the same as being in the sky

is the moon we see
the seed itself
growing fat and growing dim
breathing in a month of nights

are we the soil he plants it in

what grows inside us
when the words are listening?

(the moon in his belly
the wind in the moon
a letter in the wind
we run to read)

the man in the moon
filled a pitcher on the Sabbath
lit a fire on the Sabbath
went dancing on Sunday
went gathering wood
where no one should

the man in the moon
knows all the tricks
broke all the sticks

because a seed knows nothing about laws
except its own and a man
can learn to carry the wind
safe in his belly and carry
words in his hands till they spill
fetch water from the sound of words
milked in the empty atmosphere

a man is heat and hope and not much more
he stands in the sky

writing to harvest the moon
when it's finally full of who we are

a moon is a flower that grows in time
and only in time

its seed is a funny grain
that poisons us with eternity

the man in the moon
did what he did at the wrong time

what's wrong in time
gets cured in space

the man in the moon
grinds his seed

the moon is a millstone
in the rough of space

he turns it and turns it and we breathe
with breathless happiness some opposite of air.

1 SEPTEMBER 1993

A DEFINITION FROM THE TIBETAN
DICTIONARY OF CHANDRA DAS

äXf(*“a net. Also a Chinese woman.”*

Mesh. I learned that as a child
from Nora and my mother
in that order. Women
are about mesh:

hair nets. Face veils
of fine dark gauzy lace
or lacy gauze that
wafted from the brims of
big showy picture hats or
little tender velvet cloches,

women are about mesh,
nets, network, crossings,
sewings, intersections,

fine organdy mesh curtains
stretched out to dry on pinewood frames

fine muslin curtains full of light
dancing in the morning window

women are about meeting
and crossing over
knitting, women are meeting
and making firm and parting,

darning, weaving.
Women are weaving.
Mesh stockings
silk or nylon that new word,
women are mesh,
silk stocking

measured in *deniers*
how long I've known you
strange little word and never
looked you up and when I write
you down you look like deny-ers,

but mesh denies nothing,
holds everything,

even when the stocking runs
it still holds the leg

weaving and veiling, hiding and holding.
And all I am is what they weave me.

1 September 1993

E - FRIENDS

People you meet in e
are nice people
you never fear them they
have no feet for
instance to come
muddying your turkey carpet
they are clean
and even when they misspell
the words don't stain the sofa

and they say and say
and say all kinds of things
but never touch you
people who tell everything
and never touch you
this is a paradise of method
and a palace of apart

people you meet in e
trust you and you trust them
it is better
than talking to your brother
it's like talking to yourself
isn't it their words
look just like yours
up on the blue screen
the little words like clouds
drifting from meaning westward
to nowhere special
and you read along
the lazy eddies of what they're saying
the way you put up with your mind---

the people you meet in e
teach you how smart it is
to listen carefully to yourself
and let it go

I love the people I meet in e
their names their amazing
foreign places their languages their vulgarity
(e-mail makes people coarse and jolly
like war time, like transit strikes, like bad weather)
I love their silly jokes and slogans
the way they try to draw pictures with letters
and waste kilobytes on looking cute

I think of them at their consoles
running their clean fingers through their nice hair
a little nervous a little quick
stealing a few minutes from spreadsheet or edition
to toss a few cards down in infinite solitaire.

1 September 1993

THE MANSION FACT

The mansion fact
that a word is
and all the deft syntaxes
wait for me, little plane
buzzing in and out under a cloud,
wait for me on the prairie
to become finally
our American epic

murderless, with brass hinges,
holding everything,
begun in the middle of us and leading everywhere,
everything held firm in mind
iron straps around the Saratoga trunk.

Premise: that the Roman era
is new begun, we're still
in the days of Marius—
no empire yet and we
have just begun to think in Greek.

So the colonial smokebush and rose of sharon
and mansion lilac are the truth of us,
ragweed, immigrant flowers
tossed by Japanese
in honor of the Three Most Precious Ones
have drifted also here,
seed way, wind's mind, we still arrivers,

name that bright flower
rooted in the hollow sky.

2 September 1993

IMMIGRANTS ALL

That a word is all we're for
(having forgotten all his Armenian
and his mother never taught him Swedish
and his father wasn't speaking
except with his own mother
and the Gaelic was left on the boat and Spanish
everybody knows anyway
and no one speaks,

2 September 1993

To exonerate the stars
and rule them harmless
over the sea of sagacity
we skim over in little selfish craft
taking so much trouble to keep the water out

trying to keep the mind from lighting up
till we get home home home
to what we think is our own.

3 September 1993

A PIECE OF FRENCH LITERATURE

Garnet in matrix
call Michel
of the Mountain matrix
around garnet
remember Balzac
I hold the most of it right here
in a chunk of Gore Mountain
that also speaks Polish better than the Pope.

3 September 1993

THE SKEPTICS

Today I might take a long time shaving
lathering elaborate like a subaltern having a fit

and studying my face in the mirror
the face I have examined only a few times
in this planetary age the few
momentous opportunities for suicide

and seen those smart frightened eyes
never quite taken in by my despair
and always holding back from my elation,
alert when my lids are puffing up from sleep
or lack of sleep, eyes, spies
they seem to be of some me beyond me
or beyond that, something hopeful cool and green
who's checking to see what I make of this latest fiasco
bottled before the world was made
and laid in straw until this morning pulled the cork,
this day, this ultimate catastrophe.

So here I stare through my eyes
at all my shapely failures
when all I wanted to do was feel the new blade
skim painlessly across my acre
and ride the contours of what I think is me.

3 September 1993

THE INVADERS

When he saw the shape of the cloud
over the monastery dining hall
a foreign word came quickly
to his nearby mind,

[*ko.mong*]

o yes

it is the words
who are the aliens

oyez oyez
they have lived here with us
nearer than mitochondria

they moved into our brains and altered
our minds over millennia

Harappa, oyez, Sumeria,

every language
is a foreign language,

an invasion
from outside of space.

3 September 1993

THE REGISTERS

By holding promises firm
something comes to hand

By a piece of rock
something's understood

The hard word is always
where you are

If you don't need anything
you can see through the wall

Try it, my candidates,
walk the bottom of the sea.

4 September 1993

THE DISTRACTION

A quiriness or willingness to be rough
like a stockade fence
newly set up
to keep me from counting the cars

Lessons of darkness and of rock.
Their seemly innocence guides them
yearlong through trash, beach volleyball
model cities blown up for TV

the blow-dried televangelists
four channels worth last night
when I the fool looked up and down the dial
for something my fence had just been built to hide.

4 September 1993

THE MERCHANTS OF IT

People who sell religion have funny hair.
Fact. Check it any night on those high-numbered
channels where no honest workingman consorts,
up there with the weather. You'll see
pearl-grey polyester judges' robes
on choristers making sounds, their mouths
are oval eager but keep the sound off—
some suave realtor in a blue suit
is waving a tattered leather book at you
smiling fiercely like a dentist on the make.

4 September 1993

THE CHRONICLE

A day of relief
those southpaw clouds
pelting cool air on,

sidearm from the mountains.

O reader I have settled
the day's weather
in your lap

so many days
to spill, so many
to chill or warm you

taking stock
of nothing
but what happens

enough to attend.

4 September 1993

W A K E R

Rip Van Virile
who fell a
sleep one
day beneath the ash
the mountain ash
and woke to himself
unendingly multiplied
the father
of his country

O how meek a
chanticler paternity is,
a quiet cock crow just
enough to send the stars
to bed and wake the sun

Years later they put it on his gravestone
under the umbrella-like
arrangement of
pussy-willow branches in earliest spring,
father of his
and so on

Sleep in rain and wake a tiger
old and delicate and full of guesses
and nobody
(least of all your
body) knows who you are

4 September 1993

