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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 nutured 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

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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

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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

## IMMODESTLY

Like Henry James without a brother  
Thomas Wolfe without a mother  
we do the best we can.

We isolatoes!

How rich the textures blent by sharing  
heartful voices all life long!  
How tense the arid ceremonies of beauty  
we monogenes call forth,  
Shakespeare and Melville and 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 quirkiness 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

## WAKER

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

