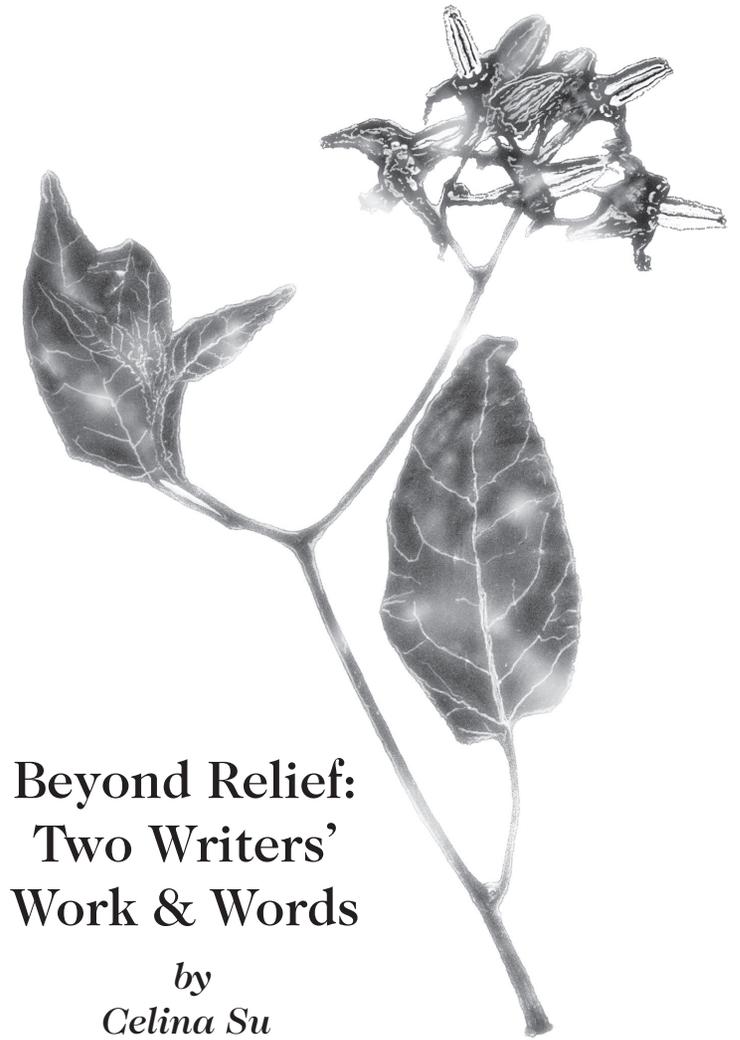


BELLADONNA* Material Lives
CHAPLET SERIES



Beyond Relief:
Two Writers'
Work & Words

by
Celina Su
&
Ariana Reines



BELLADONNA* COLLABORATIVE

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*deadly nightshade, a cardiac and respiratory stimulant, having purplish-red flowers and black berries

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Beyond Relief: Two Writers' Work & Words

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Have you ever been a fool
I cannot describe my love
Have you ever been a fool been a fool been a fool
Have you ever ridden in a taxi
Have you ever stood and ordered a coffee
Have you ever seen a tree fall against another
Have you seen the trees shining in mediocre night
Have you ever seen a river of garbage
Have you ever seen a ravine
A ravine filled with the things of man
Have you ever seen a purple palm at the end of the day
I had to pass through all these severed chambers
I was repeating the words all the way through
They got me through
They got me through
But when I was out it was no longer possible to see their power
And anyway when I was out I forgot them
But sometimes the heavy feeling comes the sinking feeling
I have to go through again
If I could get to the grove of white birches
To be like a secret bird
Semen and boullion, my face full of pussy and chapped metallic lips
Tongue fat with use
And then to have to go again to that country

And again to that country and again
Have you ever been a fool?
Have you ever been a fool?
Maybe I will talk to you
I cannot describe my love

It is like a brick in my guts
When I am always the maid of the house
When I live on the floor in the kitchen
And I have to talk to the terrible lady who rules the kitchen
And I have to keep her iron candlesticks
And I have to light the black candles to calm her
And I have to be the one to talk to her
Me, it has to be me
And when I do it while I am doing it I can always handle it
But always after and always before the memory of her
The anticipation of her is like a lead
And my heart shudders with dread
And I am made dowdy by my exhausting work
And I get used to sleeping on the floor
The blue slate receives my cheek
Like a cool mastaba on a silver pool
And I have been pressing down on my heart for so long
That it is now rectangular
A large gold bar
A brick of Algerian hash

Laminated Identities

For my mother

Packing Meat

Between bars a misnomer, an absolute value, as if only the distance matters. But.
With my referents shifting, peeling off bloody smocks and bloused peasantries
In these numerous states of distress

I stand on crates to hack passing meat. As if they were sitting ducks
Rather than hurling decapitated cows, speeding, a carcass every 3 seconds
Or 4. On feces-

Coated downward slopes. As if remittances constitute remuneration
For my left elbow wearing away. From slicing my shoulder,
Bits of tenderloin.

The attending says. I have an enlarged heart. A big heart? A big heart of heavy metals. Oh precious.
Enlarged hearts mean shorter life expectancies. You know what they say:
Almost inured, nice guise. We are finished first.

My enumerated value no less. Slab me silly. If capital flies then why clip these wings of toil.
Border crossing or birth canal. Render me further, farther,
A packed cipher:

If this place is what you call yours, then
Better to have grown hearts and sliced them
Than to have hemorrhaged at all.

Chai-Dan Submits Three Aims

For Chai-Dan and his family in Maehongson Province, Thailand

As if hailing from a documented birth. A nascent shiftless country. Not
so evidently nicknamed—
border in an adopted language. To win asylum, to name three aims.

One. To take refuge in the imperfect. No, less perfect. Sitting in a hut, an
appellation of near truth—
Counting the square meters. The mattress, the buckets, the lightbulb on
a string.

Two. To slash leaves against the dirt ground. Living days on stilts—
To ground them into a roof of harshness. It protects us thus.

How does one reclaim an insult that has not yet been called—
Borderlines move daily. My legs lightning and yet. No path to a camp.

Two and a half, to construct houses without a name. Without numbers
or years or—
To stand on the right side of the border, to hurry east. Still, fingers as if

One possessed fading papers. Folded like a road map—
Pressed in plastic bags lined like onion skin. What renders me human.

Except my body outstretched, rock-gathering. To break into shards to
mold into wetness—
To render the river concrete. To displace this place. To reap the rewards
of infinite fractions.

2.66 with a bar over it. To smooth this stuttering invisibility. If I am not
legal nor here. Less a state—
I christen these escapes. To flee an integrating war. Into more a state of
abject sustenance.

To unrealized factions, to flee this absence of bullet point goals. A
determinate wage. Then my running evades name-calling—
(To belong nowhere is to steep oneself in ambiguity. To call myself.
Realistic. Which liberation lies in illiteracy.)

Still, if only, if I do not list an occupation here. My laminated identity—
Replaces no names, to eek out to bequeath room to Number
Three,

Raphaella said
I think to be a poet is a very beautiful thing
Because a poet wants to be right but does not want to win
And that is a very strange thing
That is a strange and beautiful thing

In Leogane I get hit by a truck
I can't tell you about it
It depresses the back of my tongue
And stiffens there to make me puke
The sun like raw yolk under which I'd like to finally get off my knees
Like a shaded green room from which trees are visible
An empty green room in the emperor's house
In the emperor's house which is like a hospital
Which is a magic chapel
Which is a secret place
For a year they have been building the road alongside it
A person can go there

Seeing Like a State

Beijing, July 2005

If there were an aerial view, we would be these new ants on the hill, hailing from the Mongolian Wild West, trailing into different construction sites. Trying to become Olympic. Tiny speck workers, clearly not on spec. Would rather partake in a trade deficit, any day. No papers, nor what to write on them:

*They told me it was an organized enterprise.
I came to the Beijing coast to fall off a cliff of a building—*

*I walked east to marry a new woman, leave my old one behind.
I knew I would never see her again, and she—*

*I squat on shared toilets, crisscrossed planks over pits of shit. I transform them into big ring roads.
So ill-distributed, these plights of fancy—*

*I came here to look at the pale giants who live in the cities—
They all rise half a meter taller than me—*

*I write my red story on a piece of white cardboard and sit on the sidewalk,
watch them crowd around me—
They stand around, whisper bitter nothings amongst themselves.
The rolling Rs at the ends of their words make my bowels tremble,*

Whether for emptiness, or in bile. Then make no mistake, these mistakes we can only—

Well, then. There are no aerial views, only fragmenting bodies. I see them from the inside, pink and iridescent heliotrope, flecked by black, curdled. If the forbidden cityscape corporeal, then it is a proper burial, the entrails of the buildings devouring themselves with a vengeance. As if we were the tapeworms living off concrete and steel, tiny parasites so easily erased with digestion, defecation.

Whose *rigor mortis*, softness in the want of.

Long Distance Ghazal

For Shahid, working in Afghanistan

“I wonder what misfortune today will bring.”
Home sounds, like those a desolate father brings.

From a well, container, opening. Metaphors of a kind.
The will inside what the outside wills, or brings.

Around you sway deserts, gunmen, mountains,
Just, reported truths the impervious may bring.

But your moves echo there, *witness, beloved, or martyr*.
What wishful mourning does a swaying syllable bring?

Bananas, two Tajik apples, proportion. Audio files,
A glossy magazine. Is this what money brings?

Or freedom? I see I ask too many questions. Only.
A sign of concern, of distance. I meant to bring.

Alone. A pump. Drinking waters forthcoming.
But that which fortified aloneness brings.

Shakes to what unfolds in real time. As if we inch
Forward, regardless of what tomorrow brings.

This is wrong. For what, or where, do we wish to unfold?
Elsewhere, tired women also march for the water you bring.

Beckon a leave. Flight. Kabul's redoubts line lead cavities.
It is almost as much as the fortune these days bring.

The original Celina bid some humans to sleep forever.
To a guesthouse, to count the decisions eternity brings.

Double
Grapes
Belly split down the middle like a busted fig
No moon
No night
No night saw
Unbelievable hunger
When you have to drink the medicine raw
When a green gas curdles your guts
But at least it grants you total surrender
Unlike love for example

Twelfth Night

The dog
lifts its leg
and pisses on the doorframe

My mistress will see you now.

I saw her once
In a strip mall
On a patio
In a slimming foundation garment
It felt colonial
It felt abandoned
She was heating a frozen dinner
Her movements exquisitely refined
A woman who had been so neglected
I was scared to gaze upon her softness
Like the gentleness of everyone not made
Cruel for being unloved

It is like the twisting of a dove
It is when the bird flutters at the back of your throat
It is very very sensitive

The Following are Proposed Facticities:

Between you and me, larceny is da bomb.
Advocacy cannot be fair and balanced, only weighed.
The plasticity of his policies can be measured by pork barrels.
Social forces won't keep me from my newly laced bootstraps.

All capitalists are bloodsuckers, supplying demand for first cities.
Her heresy is committed with the sound of one hand flinching.
Your veracious mendacities flop like giant manatees. Oh the humanity.
My hypocrisy can be cured via daily injections of hypercrisy.

Indignities are in the eyes of the indigenou.
Moccasins without socks don't look so good. Really.
I wear cheap peasantries, sweatshop-embroidered blouses.
Facilities with identity formation render me the same.

Your pumped up fallacy has achieved a new, shiny allure.
My leprosy is a figurative force, attached to the nerves.
Modesty prevents her from linebreaking on the streets.
Doctors compare phalluses to clitorises, & gender them by millimeters.

Your majesty's colorblindness is a guise, or a disguise.
Between legitimacy and co-optation, a fine crash pad.
Participatory democracy is an endless meeting.
Whimsy me citizen, human, or just barely so.

Postcard in Cuba

Bahia de Matanzas, 2006

I. Havana

No US embassy, of course.
Only, an official special Interest,
Sleeping next to the monument to Elián.
Sometimes, a grave Concern. Almost disarming,
Heavily safeguarded by cruising men.
Black star flags stand in the way of Googled freedom.
A bloodletting for the bruised hearts of bombs.

Incandescent invincibles. *Mots justes*. In the absence of.
(Thinking back to all those rallying crowds at Union Square.
Not there, even. In the midst of shoe ads, dancing silhouettes.
Or big, multi-storied underwear people. Whole
American Virgin mega forever & noble mania warehouse.)
Mulled over, I carry a suitcase amygdala.

These balling, dancing folks tell me:
Home ownership rates mean nothing
Without entertaining plasma.
Universal health coverage won't fertilize
My music download collection.
& what is basketball without
Air Irans? I could just kill you for those shoes—

Or, as the English call them, trainers—
But my personal ones are closeted
In some epistemology of the covet.
Those skinny ass jeans are to die for.
Blunt transformations of my disconnect
A sort of pointy-toed slippered sadness.

In Beijing my friends joked that *schadenfreude*
Is actually a Chinese word. Or Esperanto.
Gleefully. WTO pacemakered annual growth.

I beg of you: Distill my heart.
Dignify this vertiginous life-expectancy.
Post-Soviet my brassiere, please.
Honor this arrhythmia of my economic valves.

Unbudgeted sweet endlessness unjealous perfection
I could smell the black earth I could put it in my hands
I could eat the apple of my eye

Horse come to charge my life
Fat tooth ripped out when you gnaw the iced rocks
Whose house is this
In the mouth of the dead cataract
The smoking chimneys at the refinery
I know they are my responsibility
The telephone towers when we are looking at the sky waiting to be
taken alone
All those furniture stores filled with despair

It was like green frozen places
Snow on motherboards
It was snowing but it was sunny
The sun through the windshield flocked
With salt and watermarks
When the sun is moving through the shadows that are passing
I met a woman called Therese
She was a Jew in the Continental style
She was melancholy, poised, and closed
Like a pearl on a bed in a box

II. Matanzas

At the clinic, rectal ozone machines
Render my *special period*
A giant raft-hungry placebo.
The supposed end of neoliberalism,
A *perestroika* of homeopathy.
Ooh, & the beach is to die for.
Especially on these hot days, a nice, cold war.

Block party! The party block. Block this party.
The difference between *fiesta* and *partido*— lies in.
You see, those committed to defending the Revolution
Feed me ruby soda and sweets.
(Awkwardly, the kids aren't allowed to partake in this.
Gracelessly, we embargo cured meningitis.
Who would have known, that this poor, poor...)
Grab my hands, twirl me ballooned wishes of love & love.
Wish you were fear.

Cigars aren't allowed back,
Only "educational" souvenirs,
So I got you a dream-shaped procedure.

It's structurally adjusting my hyperglycemic red.
On the way from. On the way from.
I cover my brains on the way to.
Oh *sub rosa* palimpsest. Your senses cry over my wet foot,
But my dry foot sinks deeper.

The Incessant of Travel

Day 1. In Phnom Penh, unraveled. Open arms, open plains. These terrains where the nations united do not pretend to keep peace. Here, the brutal face lies not in the panopticon, but in my own ability to turn the other cheek. Then, to the other side. I do it one more time, and faster. I have managed to *just say no*, just like Nancy would have wanted me to.

What would Jesus buy? A panoply of incandescent sins, a high percentage of missing limbs. Succulent mines—

Night 2. I ride to them in darkness, without any street or bicycle lights amidst the trees. I hear the neighbors' steel wheel spokes only when they whoosh past me. I get there before dawn. A voice tells me that someone will steal my bicycle, unless he watches it for me. I tell this one-metered silhouette my name, promise a very small reward in return.

A dozen hours later, two dozen street kids rush towards me. "Celina, I watched your bicycle!" "No, it was me, Celina. I watched your bicycle!" What would apsaras buy? Shoes for the five-year-old postcard peddlers, iced glass bottles of *saudade*. Fleeting, bitter sweets for a state of grace, only, missing the—

Week 3. The kids plead me to cut out this hole. Hard water, kidney stones, and infant melamine, sight unseen. It was like the last wound, but in reverse, its transient contours all the more searing. To fathom the magnitude, to count each as each before me, pulling at my skirt, holding my hands, to recognize the pan-epic. The difference between a module and a nodule an interstitial slash, malignance made bureaucratic.

What could I say? If I can't get to it, let's at least color it in. Fetishize the artifice, as if it were. To numb the phantom pain. I come here and not to Buenos Aires because I like the food, especially the tea leaf salad. That some good will come of this. Our pleas without the pretty—

gentle
gentle
soft
black
rubbing
rubbing
thing

gentle
gentle
soft
black
rubbing
rubbing
thing

a dip in the mouth
a water
a lint
a glass of water
a dip in the mouth
a soft pull
it is like a sigh
my sight

warm in the middle
when you put it in the middle
where you put it
we could be putting a small sleep
we could be putting a small sleep into it
a drive to a place could be put into it
we could have put a small secret into it
into the sleep stall
which is an ash wood culvert
which is a drum made of copper
which is a drum filled with oil

I have to line up my lazy eye
With a narrow arrow
This spirit is easily scared away
Bleached asphalt like a wick in the office park
I am afraid the spirits will fly out of my head
They will drool from my mouth in oil-black declamations
When the trees shake and when my hair shakes
When the sweat pools in the seam of my spine
When I decline
When I look in your eyes
Like a giant black boar, ice shagged in her hair
The ancient choir of fuck squirrels says Ah
The dark furred things put the fingers of their grey nimble hands upon
the carbuncle
Upon the jewel
The apple of my eye
It is our right
We hunt at night
Our black eyes shine
Our rough tongues keep us clean

Cream fell in clots out of me
There went my health
The moon was listing to one side
I pictured somebody driving a car
A life through a window to petrify me

When you are looking at me
It really means something to me
Although I am in default
There is a crowd of pigeons murmuring
They are cooing in the airshaft like doves
Chrome sky slick against the world
Etched by the fire that is willing to kill me it said
But only slowly but only slowly but only
Every once in a while when it lets me sleep

Sleep-Deprived, Mobile My Socioeconomic

Cultivating the fine art of
pressed-for-time dawdling. Twirling
red tape around one's pinkie,
daydreaming of brackish water
and the moment before required—

When myths make a home in yours—
Did someone give you a cloak that infested the others?
Or have they lined your drawers for years?

Poised to flutter about—

Dentists and banks and life savings—
a conversion of saving half-lives,
this financial purgatory so oddly American.
Teeth gleaming from these stiff upper lips.
To wake up with the smell of burning enamel,
the grinding of whose toil. To insure these incisors, home salty home—

A social contract between state and citizen.
Clench a thousand-year-old alkalined heart,
translucent green artifice of what we thought
was pure, a tautological beginning.
To savor this egg and bury it—
an aporia of the *no way in*.

Engineers of my beloved industrial spreadsheet complex
Like ad men walking down Madison:
Creating new weapons of planned obsolescence.
Morality is incontrovertible and easily converted into a convertible.
Pull the top down, wash my mouth with some bubbling detergent,
Oxymoron cleanse my mind.
My people forever a task of the future. And the others?

Critical Care

“The difference between a poem and a lion is an alphabet.”
– Sahar Muradi

1.

Typically, your sentiments travel back to me only via hearsay,
But once in a while, every few months, they stop me in my tracks.
As if, your thoughts bellow through a loudspeaker,
As if they constitute a call to prayer.

And now. With the clenching comes the possibility of thought.
As if seven decades and three continents cannot encompass
You, a small crucible for a star witness, skin taut.
Stents and vasopressors for what the heart cannot contain.

These feelings refracted like a thousand shards of *almost*,
For you beat me to the punch. Our inchoate words of love
Simultaneously diffuse and concentrated enough as to be unutterable.
So that we chew upon them, ceaselessly. We refuse to let them go.

Grinding each sentiment to a fine thread of longing,
And then—your mouth repeatedly fills with blood, sentience, cognition
Without, they insist, recognition.
The difference between the light and the word is

First, the act of falling, and then, the semblance of sleep.
Before I was born with a broken heart, you carried me
To Iguaçu. Between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay,
Above the roar of the water, a silence proclaimed: There is more to
come.

2.

I had promised to be kinder, to practice greater patience.
So what now. What is purposeful— they tell us—

Is not. We bear witness to this supposed state of non-being,
As if—we hear them say— meaning lies elsewhere.

The difference between waiting and wanting is a generation.
The difference between acquiescence and happiness is never.

The difference between this moment and the next meal is always.

You will say
And I will say
The waving wheat
Smelled sweet
You will say what does the moon mean
Anybody can look it up
Meaning it is more a matter of choosing how to mean what we see
So purposefully when it is time I was swept away
The moon looked exactly like heartache to me
A fat heart gulping down its own pebbles and keys

You make me so happy
How can I write it down
Your eyelashes are like brushes

If I lose my power
If I lose my power
If I lose my power
If I lose my head
Now that the prong is sticking me
The money prong
Being lost among the people sweating at the mouth of the port
It is my fault I got erupted
It was my responsibility
Grey black and green garbage bags stuffed I wished with leaves
A tender filament of woodgrass
When I lay on the boulder I heard a woodpecker
I remember when you cried at Christmas
I remember when you said you loved me so much

The difference between what you gave and what we took I cannot fathom.

Between home & Nanchang & Taipei & Nashville & Princeton & New Brunswick & Campinas & São Paulo & New York & Elkins Park & East Brunswick & Monroe is not yet a lifetime.

But what is clear is invisible. What is weightiest remains intangible. The difference is not that I do not know, but that I never will.

We track most carefully what we cannot see. Opening one's eyes wide is not seeing, but believing.

Twelfth Night

I saw the moon waning over the bridge
The fat moon was waning over the bridge
The moon was hanging over the lighted bridge

The moon was waning over the bridge
I saw the moon waning over the bridge
I saw the moon waning over the bridge

My heart

I saw the fat moon waning over the bridge
I saw it rock back like a cradle
I saw it rock back like an empty nut shell

The moon was waning over the bridge when I saw it
What I saw when I saw it rock back like a cradle
What I saw when I saw it fall open like a cored fruit

What I saw
Clutching my black crystal claw
My intergalactic claw
My most recent thing

Then we went together
To Gibraltar
I saw it slanting out of me

You fell asleep with your laptop on your belly
While I was put into a car with a woman called Therese
We rode over the icy fields
Glassy green like the innards of a computer