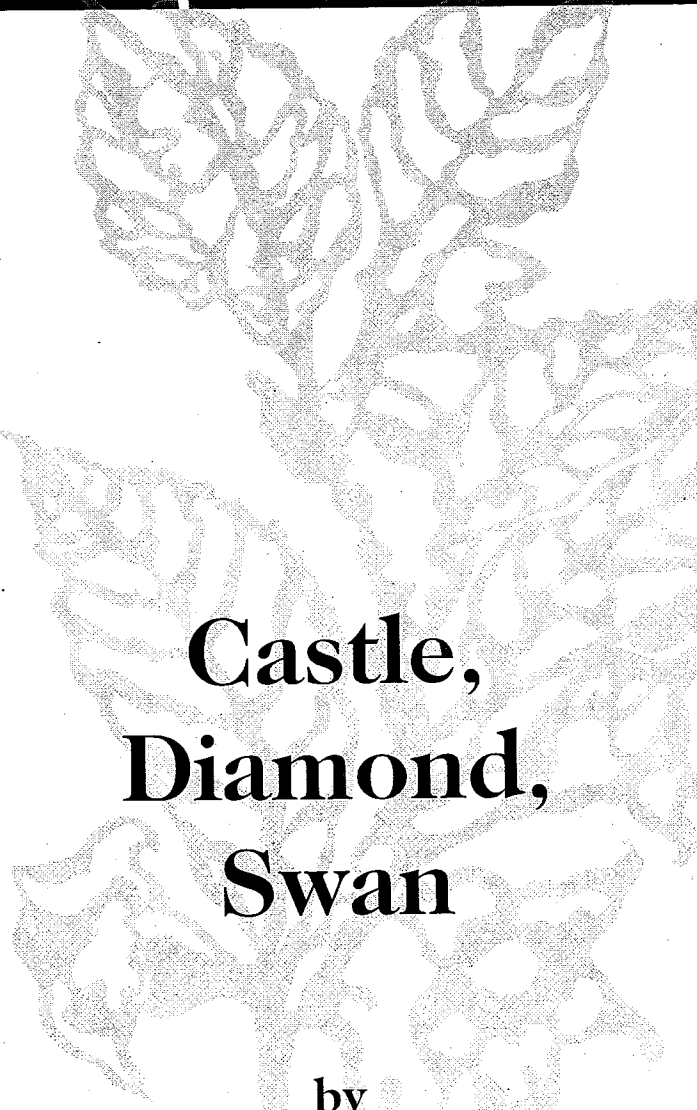


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#41

Spring 2003



Castle,
Diamond,
Swan

by
Elaine Equi



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

Castle, Diamond, Swan © Elaine Equi 2003

Belladonna* pamphlet production and design, Bill Mazza:

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Belladonna* is a reading series that promotes the work of women writers who are adventurous, experimental, politically involved, multi-form, multi-cultural, multi-gendered, impossible to define, delicious to talk about, unpredictable, dangerous with language.

Rachel Levitsky, editor belladonna* Books.

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Castle, Diamond, Swan

**by
Elaine Equi**

Epic Mountain Hoax

Always a question of scale
fanning the flames of music.

Temple of crumbs.
Stalwart microcosms.

Swerps of brazen heroes
coup de grease.

Singularly panoptic delirium.

Tales of the mogul
lost in space.

What are you not doing down there—
the sky seems to say.

I am climbing
a flat surface (hence the difficulty)

with a sack of juicy fears—
I mean pears!

Whatever I told you yesterday wasn't me.
I was mixed up.

Today I can separate,
subtract myself better from the landscape.

Almonds

Almonds make me feel like autumn all year long. They're like a carrying case for tears that have dried but are still salty. When I'm gone, shed no almonds for me. The coffin-maker's daughter was an unusually happy child. She wanted only a pair of almond slippers to go clogging in—and a marzipan forest full of hand-painted leaves. Lorca was said to be able to play the almond and coax from it music to soothe melancholy moods. Instead of rice, Italians throw almonds at a bride and groom, perhaps because they think no pleasure complete without a bit of pain. In the palm of the hand, almonds nestle like pills said to transform phlegm, alleviate coughs, and soothe the intestines. Some worship the smooth lingam, but other secret societies extol the almond. Pray daily an edible rosary which they crunch between their teeth.

Swallowed

Famished and Full are sisters. They come together for brief periods known as meals. Famished is always rather irritable. Some say food eaten quickly is hardly tasted, but Famished wouldn't agree. She finds most things delicious, if hard to distinguish in the rush to consume them. It's Full who finally couldn't even say if she's eating or not. Still, she feels food in a way that Famished can't—as a starchy afterglow or wavelength. At first, these two seem like opposites. Famished likes to gobble everything standing up. Full is happiest lying down. Famished can appear saucer-eyed and greedy, a ravenous scavenger. Full can seem full of shit or sometimes contempt. For most of the day, each goes her own way and imagines herself an only child. However, when they are together, that is while eating, there is a moment when even they can't tell or tear themselves apart.

Castle, Diamond, Swan

I began life as a straight man,
using only straight lines

to connect things.
The ruler ruled.

One tower towered over
its two brothers or sisters,

dividing itself evenly between.
All things being equally said and done,

I liked the gap-toothed rook best—
its horizontal stairway leading nowhere

but across to the castle next door.
The diamonds followed.

A triangle phase that could only be resolved
by adding more triangles to make

a whole heap of crescendoing pointed things:
witches' hats, kites, knives. Perhaps a diamond

was just an icy cube stood on its side.
A rock one could see through—

the facile facade of its glittering
pool or skyscraper.

I drew enormous diamonds
perched on fragile smoke rings.

If you looked at one long enough
it turned into a tent set up by glossy nomads.

I didn't care much for jewelry
but took care to make mine big and showy.

As far as I could see, the best thing about being
a diamond was that you got to live in a box,

velvet-lined and eerie with music and mirrors
which a diamond would never look twice at.

But a swan was a much more complicated thing.
First, there was its dark eye locked in

the tight parenthesis of its head.
Next came the long rays of its neck's

diagonal strokes – their fall cushioned
by a pillowy body. To draw a swan

required a certain amount of allowing
its glide to guide you. I'd had a few

parakeets for pets until I met you.
Then a swan would come to greet me,

suddenly appear in the lagoon at the end
of the narrow street we lived on.

Once I gave it half my ham sandwich –
after that it seemed to know my step.

Would look directly into my eyes
as if to say: "Don't romanticize these things.

I'm not an enchanted being."
"Okay," I'd think. "Whatever you say."

I wore a lot of black eyeliner back then myself,
and you and I were always drinking vodka,

and in spring the swan was like a clump of snow that never
melted, and in winter the cold didn't bother us at all.

“Incognito As Summer”

Hidden in heat’s

edgeless brim:

was that fountain always there

or did it just spurt up?

Forged in forgetfulness—

an unending green

signature.

Your name has been chosen.

Your presence is requested.

Safari Queen

It's like being at the theater.

Every night,

I'm literally in heaven.

Climb the stairs,

slip into my private box
and watch the sunset's lap-dance,

its coy, over-the-shoulder wink.

I can imagine decorating

a place like a movie theater—
red velvet and popcorn strewn

across the floor. Right now,
my place is more like a therapist's office

but I feel the need for something
visually sumptuous about to emerge.

First, the cars move. Then the people.

The dialogue is simple

and kept to a minimum. And the title,
I know, is "Safari Queen".

At least that's what it says on the label
still attached to the marigold

planted next to me. Caught up, no doubt,
in it's own plot, but still a queen.

Not So Grand Narrative

1.

To be honest, I was never interested
in the story—except as a way out.

Something had to happen
that much I knew, though it doesn't
much matter what.

The past belongs to a character
who shares my name and not much else.

An eccentric neighbor usually seen
looking over her mail.

Sometimes, I wish she'd leave—
just move to another city.

If she won't, perhaps I will.

2.

“You're either biography or you're not.”
Now, what does that mean?

Do only certain lives have the necessary
coherence to make the grade?

I don't believe that.

Well, maybe I do. It's possible.

But as I've said, I have no desire
to live in a biography.

What story does my life tell?
Whatever one you want to hear.

3.

Be careful of what you get,
you just might end up asking for it.

A kind of constant going forward
to work back—which reminds me,

where is my Scherazade?
Tell her to fix me a drink

and make herself comfy.
It's going to be a long, dull night.

Nodding Statues

You understand weight, mass—
the body fallen into its habitual stance:
posture is destiny.

You acknowledge slowness,
the durability of fears
carving themselves again and again
from the raw materials of any given circumstances.

And yet there is lightness too,
an implied wink to your stately decorum
(civil or religious garb, ostentatious nudity)
as if to say: all a put on—
for display purposes only—
revealing instead telepathic emptiness
where an inner life should grow.
In you is stored strategy
saved up for the next move.

Do I look like a statue to *you*?
Do you keep your memories on a pedestal?

Can we meet here again?
Can we not talk some time?

Some of these poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Accurate Key*, *Conjunctions*, *The Mississippi Review*, and *Vanitas*.



belladonna* Catalog

Pamphlets are published in conjunction with the belladonna* reading series
and are between 6 and 20 pages in length.

Books are \$3 each; \$5 signed editions; add 50¢ postage per item. Checks payable to Rachel Levitsky.

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