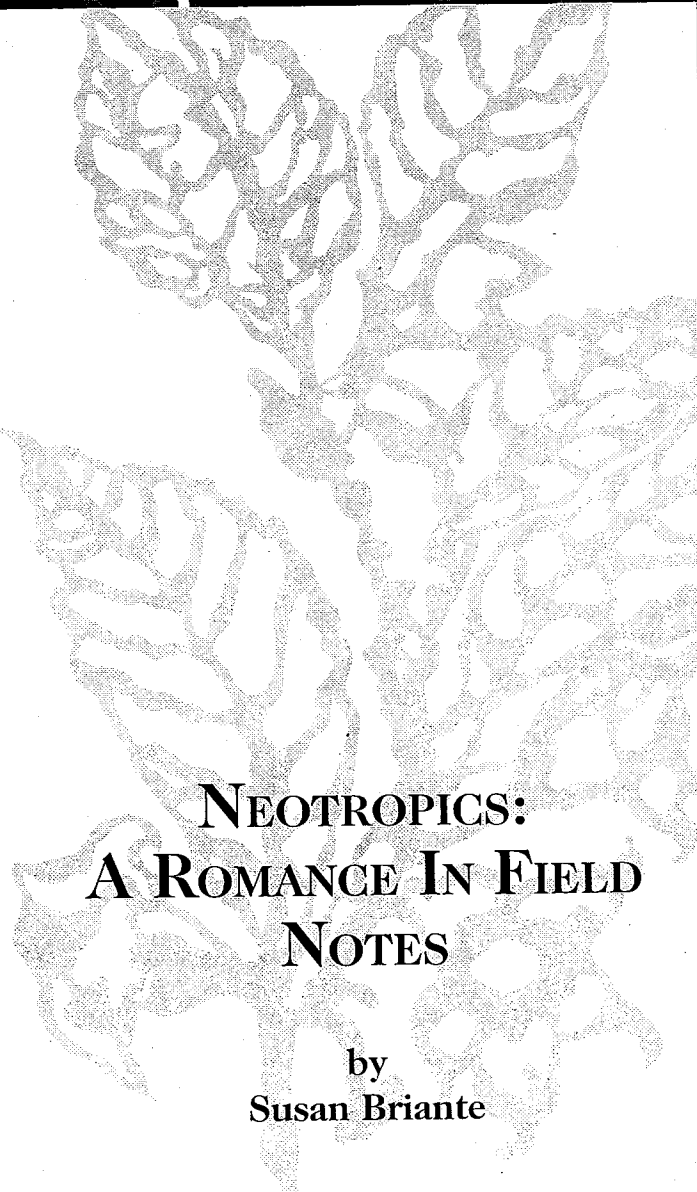


# be | adonna \* #52

Winter 2003



**NEOTROPICS:  
A ROMANCE IN FIELD  
NOTES**

by  
**Susan Briante**



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

NEOTROPICS: A ROMANCE IN FIELD NOTES © Susan Briante 2003

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Rachel Levitsky, editor belladonna\* books.

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**NEOTROPICS: A ROMANCE IN FIELD NOTES**

**by  
Susan Briante**

## EVENTUAL DARLING

Trees step out of the DMZ to be named. Vague branches smolder.  
Ginkgo and litchi, royal palm and teak, rise like an alphabet. I prune  
a grammarian's path.

Leaves shaped like feathers, we call pinnate; palmate when shaped  
like hands. But nothing accounts for how we respond to their  
gestures. Silver backed, searing green. A meadow's edge is arbitrary.  
And patrolled. I witness close-cropped hills unfold, anonymous, as a  
page torn out, unable to conjure up a face that could move me.

At a detention camp on Galang Island, Vietnamese refugees sculpt  
a Statue of Liberty. Pure products of motherboards and strip mines.  
Welding awl and machete. Our lady smiles, wide-lipped, broad-  
browed and innocent. She clutches a crude pine bouquet instead of  
a tablet; a parrot where she should hold a torch. The bird draws out  
its wings. What stories should we read from such plumage?

And yet we are best when adulterous, when we mispronounce or  
misspeak a phrase. On a day bed, we make love: eyes swollen, palms  
wide. And it is like clear cutting. It is like agent orange. Storms of  
seraphim. Clouds of flame.

### 3RD DAY OF THE RAINY SEASON

Mist treads down the mountain roof by roof to rest beside me.

White-tongued bougainvillea embrace a fishtail palm.

Romance plays no part.

Cuts of raw beef fill flatbeds hurling up the hill.

I sit with my legs closed, a single woman edging a plaza in Taxco.

My gaze zigzags like a taxi through the developing Tuesday.

A downpour rinses the municipal palace; ether stuns the cortex.

Dawn is a damp hand slipped beneath my knee.

A farmhand in front of a Banamex shakes water from the brim of  
his hat.

La limpieza es calidad de vida.

A boy opens his mouth to swallow the droplets.

Exaggerated tenderness, writes André Tridon, is a cover for the death  
wish.

Propane canisters rattle, church bells come ragged as a second pulse.

Romance plays no part.

Coming down the mountain like a fist I can feel inside of me, a kick.

Whole neighborhoods numb to the needlework of rain.

## EVENTUAL DARLING

Nestlings idle, scatter, spark from a banyan tree  
in piston and parabola bent to ripening  
hydroelectric streams; canebrakes waiver  
with flight; tender chimes soothe the adolescent forest  
then launch at the least of a turnpike.

Under latent sky, streetlights flame  
in ochreous, tar thick veins; cutaneous  
roads fleck the feathered night; positivists consent:  
each wingflash mars the ink-blot tropics.

Brasilia!

Brasilia!

## 5TH DAY OF THE RAINY SEASON

Between the window washer and curb, a galaxy swirls.

Between windshield and rag, office towers sway.

Old ladies pluck orange candies from pink market tubs.

Passionflower vines capture red and blue wavelengths of light.

Any search requires a preposition as in "Estoy buscando a mi amigo".

Tradewinds skirt a Flamazul truck with its license plates from the  
interior.

Water trembles in a cistern with nothing to heat it.

The frigid woman, writes André Tridon, is a cripple or a neurotic.

Jacaranda trees bloom like lightning strikes.

"To the girl with the prettiest eyes," he says handing me his knife.

Nutrient cycling occurs through a process similar to valet parking.

Between my lover and myself, a preposition stiffens like cinder block  
brick.

A guard in a bulletproof vest hoses a pick-up.

Every time he's out of my sight: "Estoy buscando a mi querido".

The window washer slaps a twisted red rag against the curb.

A broom licks the sidewalk. A slice of flesh-red mamey slips from  
his blade.

## EVENTUAL DARLING

A spire, a scalpel, a needle or the flagpole  
in front of the Metropolitan Cathedral,

the horizon pitches south, demands  
and remedies written out long hand on cotton sheets

bleach scented, sweat damp as mothers-  
in-law before the National Palace sell plastic flowers

from a wrought iron fence, indiscriminate in class  
or species, soldiers lower the flag in spread

and crease, a fevered palm unfurls in a gesture,  
in a fresco, of nation building towards me

to transmit infective histories (just a twinge)  
the Keynesian vaccine inspires steeples

like the Pemex Tower or the Torre Latino  
or a tar-driven scourge of rooftops.



## 7TH DAY OF THE RAINY SEASON

Along the Pan American Highway, farmhands wade through fields of  
roses.

Pills linger on the tongue like moths on water.

Droplets of pollen slip from anther to stamen.

I wait at a tollbooth with market bag and notebook.

A stem's placability should not be mistaken for delicateness.

"Breathe deep," the doctor told me and slid his stethoscope like a  
coin over my chest.

A seat by window suffices to stitch the world together.

I consider the number of heartbeats per minute within this pasture  
of traffic.

Exaggerated mania for identification, writes André Tridon, is a  
symptom of weakness.

Vaya con dios. Frene con motor.

During a season of vinegary prescriptions, I sketch market produce  
and bullrings.

When fertilization take place, ovaries swell, each petal folds like a fist.

Before a sloshing door at the back of the bus, who wouldn't resent  
the IMF?

Along the Pan American Highway, a beekeeper tends the blue  
cabinets of his hives.

A billboard celebrates: 300,000 more miles of pavement.

## EVENTUAL DARLING

11,000 handmaids swaddle an intersection,  
every hood ornament contemplates the manifest

    ribs of a city—Kanpur—  
factories blur across shoulders

in amber shawls, raw cotton, positively  
erotropic      it's easy to fall

in love, symphonies of iridescent trinkets  
flexing tonic chords    a wet nurse

on the western curb  
    arouses fender and jasmine,

glances off her      driver's side mirror  
    billow and urge

as vendors flood crosswalks  
    hawking pigment and carrion.

## 12TH DAY OF THE RAINY SEASON

Irises rot on the altar of Our Lady of Remedies.

Sores in the back of my mouth cast doubt on the efflorescent body.

After downpours some trees synchronize their flowering.

What makes the masses into masses?

The bond is of a libidinal nature like the shivering leaves of a mimosa  
tree.

Chickadees fight in a puddle of gravel.

I carry a Nikon into the sanctuary.

Regard the saints with their gold leaf and neon, their porcelain gaze  
and silver plates.

But who watches over the woman going to bed in a motel alone?

Who is the patron of "Your finger is in my eye"?

Light particles rinse marble arms.

A 20-liter tank of natural gas rolls across courtyard tile like a lung  
filled with bells.

Civilization, writes André Tridon, surrounds motherhood with many  
complications.

Lord offer us your patience, your therapy, an unlit candle, a suitable  
shutter speed.

A teenage boy tugs at his crotch, then gestures toward yellowing roses  
in the sacristy.

## EVENTUAL DARLING

Cables of dust bind the farmers' wives to plastic flowers, pesticides,  
bikes,  
to plastic sacks of cassava; in slipknot and pitch, the present  
perfected voice of Agence France-Presse slingshots through east  
Kinshasa.

Inside the canvas, a picture does not finish.

Shepherds of reflex and deviation with preferences for "sticks  
trowels, knives," with preferences for nipple clamps and half-light,  
chase flocks of pandemics across withered earth

to swat and prod at syphilophiac scars,  
while the rooftops of a processing plant glisten like hand mirrors,  
while the tanks of a refinery shimmer like a silver backed comb.



**Notes:**

*Neotropics: A Romance in Field Notes* is for Roberto Tejada. Certain lines in the “Rainy Season” poems are lifted or paraphrased from *Psychoanalysis and Love* by André Tridon (Brentano’s 1922).



belladonna\*books

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# belladonna\* catalog

Pamphlets are published in conjunction with the belladonna\* reading series and are between 6 and 20 pages in length. Books are \$4 each; \$6 signed editions; add 50¢ postage per item. Checks payable to Rachel Levitsky.

## 2000

1. Mary Burger, *Eating Belief*
2. Camille Roy, *Dream Girls*
3. Cecilia Vicuña, *Bloodskirt*, trans. Rosa Alcalá
4. Fanny Howe, parts from *Indivisible*
5. Eleni Sikelianos, from *The Book of Jon*
6. Laura Mullen, *Translation Series*
7. Beth Murray, *12 Horrors*
8. Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, *Audience*
9. Laura Wright, *Everything Automatic*

## 2001

10. Lisa Jarnot, *Nine Songs*
11. Kathleen Fraser, *Soft Pages*
12. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Draft 43: Gap*
13. Nicole Brossard, *Le Cou de Lee Miller/The Neck of Lee Miller*
14. Lee Ann Brown, *The 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time/Reverse Mermaid*
15. Adeena Karasick, *The Arugula Fugues VII-VIII*
16. Aja Couchois Duncan, *Commingled: Sight*
17. Lila Zemborain, *PAMPA*
18. Cheryl Pallant, *Spontaneities*
19. Lynne Tillman, chapters from *Weird Fucks* and "Dead Talk"
20. Abigail Child, *Artificial Memory*—vol 1 & vol 2 (\$6 set)

## 2002

21. Deborah Richards, *Put A Feather In It*
22. Norma Cole, *BURNS*
23. Jocelyn Saldenberg, *Dusky*
24. Gail Scott, *Bottoms Up*
25. Carla Harryman, *DIMBLUE* and *Why Yell*
26. Anne Waldman, *[THINGS] SEEN/UNSEEN*
27. kari edwards, *a diary of ties*
28. Bhanu Kapil Rider, from *The Wolf Girls of Midnapure*

## 2003

29. Rosmarie Waldrop, *Trace Histories*
30. Tina Darragh, from *rule of dumbs*
31. Chris Tysh, *Mother, I (fragment of a film script)*
32. Jennifer Moxley, *The Occasion*
33. Zhang Er, *Cross River . Pick Lotus*
34. Tonya Foster, *A Swarm Of Bees In High Court*
35. Lauren Gudath, *Animal & Robot*
36. Alice Notley, *IPHIGENIA*
37. Caitlin McDonnell, *Dreaming the Tree*
38. Eileen Myles, *We, the Poets*
39. Suzanne Wise, from *The Blur Model*
40. Lydia Davis, *Cape Cod Diary*
41. Elaine Equi, *Castle, Diamond, Swan*
42. Maggie Nelson, *Something Bright, Then Holes*
43. Summi Kaipa, "One: I Beg You, Be Still" from *Was. Or Am.*
44. Julie Patton, "Car Tune" & *Not So Bella Donna*
45. Joan Larkin, *Boston Piano*
46. Minnie Bruce Pratt, *The Money Machine: Selected Poems*
47. Anne Tardos, *A Noisy Nightingale Understands a Tiger's Camouflage Totally*
48. Michelle Naka Pierce, *48 Minutes Left*
49. Veronica Corpuz, *Untitled*
50. Leslie Scalapino, "Can't is 'Night"
51. Jen Benka, *A Revisioning of the Preamble*
52. Susan Briante, *Neotropics: A Romance in Field Notes.*