

be | adonna



#42

Spring 2003



Something
Bright, Then
Holes

by
Maggie Nelson



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

Something Bright, Then Holes © Maggie Nelson 2003

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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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Something Bright, Then Holes

by
Maggie Nelson

Something bright, then holes

I used to do this, the self I was
used to do this

the selves I no longer am
nor understand.

Something bright, then holes
is how a newly-sighted girl

once described a hand. The continuum
cracks, and now I am

half. A whole
half. I see that now, though

I still struggle to see
the beauty in front of me

O the blindness of having been born
able to see. Before

the planes flew
into buildings, before

people and paper came down
like heavy confetti

I used to do this, used to go
for broke. I re-read

your letters, and remember
correctly: you wanted to eat

through me. Then fall asleep
with your tongue against

an organ, quiet enough
to hear it kick. Learn

everything there is to know
about loving someone

then walk away, coolly
I'm not ashamed

Love is large and monstrous
Never again will I be so blind, so ungenerous

O bright snatches of flesh, blue
and pink, blinding in the light

then four dark furrows, four
funnels, leading into an infinite ditch

The heart, too, is porous;
I lost the water you poured into it

20 Minutes

in-progress, & after Gillian Welch

days spent here, renting

time, days barely folding over
into night

you don't come home
you don't call home

heart lets loose one kernel, expels it
like a seed, a cluster
of debris

one kernel, one small injury

not the whoosh of death
not its blue comet
devastating the chest

just a kernel, cracked to show
its mealy center

I wander around, do things
that seem "good for me"
Later, at night, unravel

my dream-self, smothered
the room lit up by bugs

and you don't even remember your dreams

who cares what you'll say when you call and why
am I constantly seeing this red light
behind my eyes, why am I

leaving notes on strangers' cars

the public molests me
no primitive bones in my body
man and *woman* are not primitive forms

curl into a fetus-shape and howl

they found the ice maiden
lying on her side, wearing a necklace
of wooden camels

elaborate blue tattoos encircling
her blades, the ink injected
with a needle of bone

her skin soggy and blue but still
(miraculously!) hugging its form

her eyeballs gouged out, the sockets stuffed with fur
brain siphoned out of a 2-inch wide hole
at the base of her skull

burnt coriander nearby, to cover her smell

they know she was young because of
the squiggly line down her skull, a sign
the skull is still knitting itself together

before 30, the skull is still knitting itself together
the seam moving toward seamlessness

my skull, almost seamless

red light behind my eyes, getting redder

*no marriage no marriage
friend*

I walk around the block enraged
the moon full, the brownstones
crippled by cuteness

I know you don't want my words, words
aren't "it," won't pull the cargo out of the station

what if where you are is what you need
sucking the dregs from the bottom of a basin

I boiled three pots of water to sit in the tub
watch the blood leave my body

felt a ribbon descend then exit
orange smoke billowing out
into water scented with oils

and if there is no kernel
and if there is no ritual
no 3-foot headress for the corpse, no six stallions slaughtered
and thrown in the grave

how shall I say it—we no longer
prize our decay

pure self has nothing to do with happiness
or does it
I don't care about self I want out
of my story

the story of a girl looking for quiet
as she charts noises
a girl just strange and quick enough
to be useless, to be hopeless

to see hope as a fetish

and if the purpose of language
is to generate more language
I am not sure I want it

there are people below
drinking amber liquids
look at that couple, I don't like the way
he holds her waist protectively
as they walk to the subway

I rent this view, this song lasts 20 minutes
all that happens in it
is one chord change, earned
by the plodding

of a girl singing with a voice like chalk smeared on metal
word-crumbs, dreams let go by
dreams with messages that flap out the window

The helicopter can't break down now, she'll start to melt

Was it a sign that the ice maiden didn't want to be taken
from her grave?

or is it simply the sound
of my impatience, the stupid echo
of my demands

the blood exits without ceremony
exhales softly into the oily water
grows lukewarm as the afternoon soils itself

grey day now an orange night

solid static orange from the streetlights
so it's never really night, I stay awake
watch the night vibrate
with its supernatural glow

These are the nights to come
These are the nights alone

Outside the search is on, for the druglords
in the projects
The search is on
for bodies in the pit, for clues the sniper left

On TV the men in FBI raincoats
walk together in a row
with a strange methodical closeness

their eyes riveted upon the nothingness

asphalt, grass

you could make a demand on me
you could ask me to lose my boundaries

When I was young I dreamt regularly
of purity
but I am no longer
that puritan

you, you stand pure as a tree
the question the ground asks of the sky

who cares now why
there is something
instead of nothing

the question now
is how did we become
earth's affliction

The Oracle

from Jane

Go down to the dumb
oracle. Bring an offering

of sorts—a pear, a cuticle, a block
of quartz. Kneel down

on the cold slab of marble
wedged in the dirt.

Concentrate. Let the sun vault
over its dial.

After a while a question
will come. But as

I already mentioned, the oracle
is dumb. So trudge home

to your room where
candles make shadows

of fruit. Ask the shapes
Ask the dark city

*Am I to live this life
with a blameless ferocity?*

Then wait
for morning to bring

the bright sediment of things
into focus. It

comes clear.

Koan

from Jane

*Not yet, says
a scrap of garbage
floated by*

*the wind.
Not yet, says
a limb of*

*lightning,
shrouded by
clouds.*

*A girl in a boat,
the boat full of holes.
Closer.*

*A slit sky.
A slit sky and a bowl.
Almost.*

winter poem, 2003

it's another morning
of snow and blood
and deep green tea
its powder

before I awoke I took
a vow of silence, it was
the only way to heal
my jaw

at dawn the snow came
to make its frosting
today's blood comes
quiet and painless

whereas yesterday
it made a great circus
what's new is that
I'm an animal

with another animal
keeping company & time
it's the coldest spate of days
we can remember

my rings slip spontaneously
off my fingers
they say we make no defense
no 'meaningful opposition'

in my dream we escape captivity
by pretending to be mummies
when that doesn't work
we take heavy drugs

by day the radiator continues
to clank, a black flock of birds
scissors past the flag
and I speak

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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 6. Laura Mullen, *Translation Series*
 7. Beth Murray, *12 Horrors*
 8. Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, *Audience*
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 20. Abigail Child, *Artificial Memory*—vol 1 & vol 2 (\$6 set)
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21. Deborah Richards, *Put A Feather In It*
 22. Norma Cole, *BURNS*
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 38. Eileen Myles, *We, the Poets*
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 41. Elaine Equi, *Castle, Diamond, Swan*
 42. Maggie Nelson, *Something Bright, Then Holes*



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