

BELLADONNA* 14

Reverse Mermaid

by

Lee Ann Brown

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

BELLADONNA BOOKS/BOOG LITERATURE • FALL 2000

“Accidental Necrophilia” is forthcoming in *Fracture*.

Everything Automatic © Laura Wright 2000

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<http://theeastvillageeye.com/belladonna/index.htm>

Some of these song-poems have appeared in The Baffler, Boog Reader,
Oasis Broadside, and How2.

Reverse Mermaid

Rewrit Ballads

The Ballad of Amiri B.

Once was a man
Name of Leroi Jones
To be a culture worker
In his bones

Down into the South
Drove the coastline
Said this country
Ain't no way all mine

Charleston was a sauna
No sign of breeze
Even though he prayed
Couldn't even breathe

Went to Ol' Miss
To look on Faulkner's grave
Said Ash to Ash man
Look who's the slave

Old man he said
Better look see
Your most intimate photo
Is history

Baraka: Blessed Amiri
Only stayed with his,
Signifying strongly
All the unfinished biz

Wouldn't talk to white boys
Larry F. and Allen G.
Even though used to keep
Company

But Larry told the tale
As the subway flashed by
Amiri gave us white boys
A wink of his eye

Ballad of New Orleans

for Robert Hayden

Georgia May Frances
 Egyptian eyes
My momma was french and
 My daddy told lies

Said I was just like her
 Leading mens on
Pulled out a picture
 Of her man done gone

In the poor house with the jaundice
 Died the other week
Still feel his spirit
 Hovering over me

Got too much fluid
 Doctor pump it out
Makes you over-sexed, girls
 Now you watch out!

Young man he walk over
 Bunny painted on his leg
What about it, Georgia May?
 As she pat his head

What should I do girls?
 What should I do?
This young man's got a conjure —
 We're going to the moon!

The Ballad of Phoebe Steele

My husband, Ed was a very fine man —
Went off to school in the East
He did depart for the land in the West
For to turn our famine to feast

He staked a claim upon the land —
Stretched forty by forty wide.
He then returned to fetch me and the Babes —
For to be right by his side.

His arms and heart were as fine as steel —
On him I did rely.
'Til the typhoid came and broke him down
I was far too numb to cry.

Scarce eleven day in our new homeland —
My Babes and I were left alone.
The marriage tree where our door would be—
Stood straight though his soul had flown.

I rolled my sleeves and I went to work —
Plowed the fields all on my own.
Under prairie sky, fiery dawn to dusk
Straight rows I made from stone.

People of the Earth, keep silent watch —
Give me aid when you can
People of the Hills, up above the range —
Throw down much-needed rain

Now I lie still, down in my grave —
In a different spot from my unmarked man.
My children's hold is fast away
They no longer own the land.

Though broken down the land's still there —
Many a year we did our part
She provided us with a meal and a prayer
And a stone shaped like a heart.

Ballad of Susan Smith

A Modern "Cruel Mother Ballad"

I put my car into reverse
On a lee and lonely
This will be my babies' hearse
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

I am a daughter of the Mills
On a lee and lonely
Young I am but doomed to kill
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

I had a love I thought was true
On a lee and lonely
The more he rubbed the redder I grew
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

Left high and dry and all alone
On a lee and lonely
These Babes weigh me down like a stone
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

I see a dark man in my dream
On a lee and lonely
He'll be the one to take the blame
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

O No! O No! What have I done?
On a lee and lonely
To please a man I've killed my sons
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

Naught will cleanse me of this sin
On a lee and lonely
To please myself I'd do it again
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

A Nation's pity for my plight
On a lee and lonely
I look so innocent and white
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

Black Man, Black Man, I accuse you
On a lee and lonely
On Nationwide you'll get your due
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

Why can a woman rout her womb
On a lee and lonely
But not choose her babies tomb?
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

My face it cracks at what I say
On a lee and lonely
I'll spend my life in bitter gray
Far from the green lake side-ee-o

You did as much as dash our brains
On a lee and lonely
Blood on your hands is our refrain
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

My Babes! They speak—The cold black lake
On a lee and lonely
Shoots forth its hand, more souls to take
Down by the green lake side-ee-o

Ballad of Vertical Integration

for Harry Golden

Civil Rights was brewing in a Charlotte coffee shop,
At an orange juice bar called Tanner's down near the main bus stop.
Cross of Trade & Tryon where the Cherokee once hunt,
Harry Golden cast his shining eye on a way to make his point.

In a country of strangers from either side of town,
There were only certain places everybody could sit down.
Here black & white — both alike — stood UP and drank their juice.
“Eureka” Harry Golden cried “That’s the way to call the truce!”

Take out all the CHAIRS from restaurants, cars & schools
Get rid of all the benches — Make way for other rules.
If some folks can't sit down somewhere then everybody STAND
We'll learn & eat VERTICAL — INTEGRATION in this land!

He printed up his paper — “The Carolina Israelite”.
Only in America he then went on to write.
Gold dust shines in red clay — We pass on from the past
Harry, thanks for tickling our funny bones to help the changes last.

Now it's year 2001 — just look around you how
Things aren't quite as far along as they ought to be somehow.
This ballad is a call to arms to open up our eyes:
Each and every one of us, Golden can arise.

For each and every one of us, a rainbow is the prize.

Bitchin' Blues

"She done laid her little body
Beneaf my breast,
And I won't never
Git no rest."

-Sterling A. Browne, "Conjured"

Been this other woman, taken over my rent.
Now there's been this racy woman, taken over my rent.
Thought she was just there for living,
But it's in bed that she's spent.

My baby's going to get it, if I ever see her face.
My baby's gonna catch it, if she ever dare show face.
She's gone and plowed me under
And I can't stand the pace

Her and her music, spiritual and fine . . .
She says she needs her writing, fine fine fine
But the way that she's been acting
Seems she won't find the time.

Jewel, you know I love you, and we have to be apart.
Girl, you said, "I love you, but we're gonna be apart . . ."
But you must know how this just stabs me through the heart.

Red Fox

Red Fox jump into my path
Shining there in the sun
The he gave me a little laugh
Flipped his tail & run

Blackbird drinking in the watergrass
Twinkle in his eye
Feathers shine all purple-green
Then away he fly

Shady Grove, my little love
Shady Grove I'm calling
Shady Grove, my little love
You're the one I'm telling

Chickadee rustling in the grass
Spider on my thumb
Dragonfly is on my knee
I am not alone

Chipmunk hanging from a straw
Baby as he could be
Then he showed me his little eye
And his soft belly

Looking for the One I Love
Could that One be You?
Looking for the One I Love
One who'll Love me True

Shady Grove, my little love
Shady Grove I say
Shady Grove, my little love
I'll be back someday

Do not touch the Columbine
Leave it there in the Sun
It'll fade right in your hand
See what you have done

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*The 13th Sunday in
Ordinary Time*

by

Lee Ann Brown

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**The 13th Sunday
in Ordinary Time**

Rewrit Hymns

The Words of Love

I thank the world it will anoint me
If I show it how I hold it

— Will Oldham

I pledge allegiance to the lamb
And also to the other one
The march is long and now I stand
Again on ground fresh broken

I had small difficulty made
In keeping up with your parade
The underbrush was heavy, dense
With sounds of distant fire

I've been cut & I've been frayed
Then spliced as whole as any maid
Despite this rending I have stayed
In aisles of trees amongst the shades

Our loved ones they have gone
Far from camps of death and harm
We're still in this mortal coil
Words of Love as leaves unfurl

Now you & me we're each alone
Yellow cake & marrow bone
All sense of fear can pass away
I trace a map along the way

I pledge allegiance to the lamb
And also to the other one
The march is long and now I stand
Again on ground fresh broken

Earth nor sea

Instead he gave to me
Three things I cannot see
And they ring inside of me

O my Soul

O my Soul

They Sing inside of me
O my Soul

Vision Crown

for James Yamada & Lisa Smith

I sing this Crown of Hymns
Twined in two leafy wreaths
Come over the sea
Cross boundary
Sung in these blue mountains

Inlaid with rarest gems
This garland now will weave
All manner of inspiring fire
'Tween Heaven and Earthly Love

Crown them with Fiery Crowns
As Double Helix turns
The vortex of
This Wondrous Love
Forever more will burn

Abundance of our Love
We gather here today
The ever-widening fiery Spheres
Together let us say:

Crown them with many Crowns
A Crown is like a Ring
That circles round us all in turn
And sings and sings and sings:

Be Thou My Vision
O Love of my Heart
Naught be all else to me
Save that thou Art

My own true Love
By day or by Night

Waking or Sleeping
Thy Vision my Light

3 Rings
The Words of Love
Vision Crown