

# BELLADONNA\* 5

---

*Excerpts from*

*The Book of Jon*

*by*

*Eleni Sikelianos*

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

BELLADONNA BOOKS/BOOG LITERATURE • FALL 2000

*The Book of Jon* is a work in progress.

Excerpts from *The Book of Jon* © Eleni Sikelianos

Belladonna\* pamphlets design, David A. Kirschenbaum.

It is set in FuturTLig 12 pt, FuturTMed 10 and 33 pt, Minion BoldCondensed 14 and 60 pt, Minion Condensed 10 and 12 pt, and Minion CondensedItalic 10, 12, 16, and 24 pt.

Price is \$3 in stores or at events, \$4 mail order.

Belladonna\* pamphlets are published periodically by Belladonna Books/Boog Literature.

Belladonna\* 5 is published in an edition of 100—26 of which are lettered and signed by the poet—for her Belladonna reading at Bluestockings Women's Bookstore, October 6, 2000, with Fanny Howe.

Belladonna is a reading series at Bluestockings Women's Bookstore 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.

Bluestockings Women's Bookstore is at 172 Allen St., New York, NY 10002.

For further information: 212 777 6028 • [info@bluestockings.com](mailto:info@bluestockings.com) • [www.bluestockings.com](http://www.bluestockings.com)

Rachel Levitsky, editor Belladonna Books

David A. Kirschenbaum, editor and publisher, Boog Literature

351 W.24th St., Suite 19E

New York, NY 10011-1510

[levitsk@attglobal.net](mailto:levitsk@attglobal.net)

*for Pat*

I woke up with a liquid, luminous picture: Albuquerque's grid-like streets under a big blue autumn sky, cedar smoke climbing and filling the neighborhood, the smell of highland resin mixing with the whiter clouds, the Sandias laid out and also rising in that watermelon-and-gold light. Here in New York, it is a quiet Sunday; the cats (you have never met them) are lying around or scrabbling in the suitcases in the closet, Laird is in the other room working on his novel, the small voices of children escape from windows across the courtyard and then they rise.

When did I see you last? In March, I think there was snow, and you were not well. The first day, we hung around Pat's backyard, you crouching, me sitting in the hard-crusting dirt, the sun warming our shoulders. I can hardly remember what we talked about—books, maybe. And then the talk turned to guns—the variety and nature of each you had investigated and examined or had pointed at you recently. You had a job to do and we walked through the quiet streets of the neighborhood—you'd wrecked your truck a month earlier and were wheeling a bicycle along on your left—and on through other neighborhoods, past little plots and meridians, barking dogs and all manner of crocuses poking up from the dirt, 'til we reached the site. The owners of the house invited us in for tea and toast, they had just moved from Chicago, their son lived in Baltimore. The woman was painting burgundy- and cream- colored squares onto the kitchen floor, houses were much cheaper here, she said. They had a tree down, but you didn't work that day.

Then you were excited about the prospect of seeing me read, because you thought maybe I would stop in the middle and say to the audience, And there is my father, pointing, and all the good-looking women in the room would turn to you like luscious, trembling flowers to a dark, underwater sun, and smile. But you did not make the fifty miles to Santa Fe.

I have never thought of you as a part of any trend—just as a human out there, sometimes gone missing in the desert, sometimes out of his cracked mind, a person whose spinning thoughts could never be predicted or duplicated—but here you are, and have been, part of a long, boring trend of absent fathers and junk-high assholes.

You were the story about pulling a piece of paint off Rousseau's animals in the Louvre at 16 and fingering that morsel in your pocket all summer, till there was nothing left but powder. I saw you falling asleep under that fixed blue sky, with those black lions. I have never, I suppose it is peculiar to sons or daughters, really thought you were going to die. That your blood might freeze into icy clots one of these winters nights, you won't get your methadone, the final pneumonia sneaking over you come dawn. In the white snowy towns of your youth, in the brutality of American families and landscapes, with the blue winter light opening over you—how will you survive?

I am sending this letter on to Pat, in hopes that she will find you.

#### NOTES TOWARDS A FILM ABOUT MY FATHER (JON)

Words (white) are flashed quickly on a black screen in rhythmic segments:

This is a film about my father / with no pictures.

Why should I make a movie / of him?

It's true/ I probably love him / more than you do, / and it's funny / that this is based simply on the fact / that he's my dad. / It's possible / it's been known to happen / that this could have made me love him / less. / I repeat: / Why should I make a film / about my father, / and one without / depictions? / Because a movie would not be able to show / all the likenesses / of why I love him. /

Because he looks like me? / (I mean / I / look like him. /

Because some humans / will go / and what will be / left of them? / (pause.) / No. /

To repeat / an unrepeated answer / trying to respond / to the question: / Why should I make a movie about / Jon? /

My father taught me / how to drive / but I slammed on the brakes / too hard  
/ and almost broke / my brother's nose./ I saw my father / approximately /  
once a year / after that. / Maybe you know this / story?/

[Now there is the real movie, with real pictures. These happen in intervals.  
Some minutes (unspecified) of footage of my father, then no picture (but  
words) again. It might take me until his death to finish this project.]

Some shots I would like to show:

Jon playing the piano.

Jon lighting a cigarette (that's easy).

Although my father / was / ... we probably won't / show / this / picture./

Jon/ is shy / about a camera / and that's / like a chapter / in this / story./

Fields of light, Everglades, ruins of light, like asters, mountains explosions  
of highways of lights like a floral antechamber arrangement, lights infor-  
mally or formally seeded across a valley, a glade of some dusty green, dusty  
blue, amber, some red, some white. And when a lake, no lights; just dark-  
ness, and silence. And then lights again, amber and white. Each light is a  
thought, a thought goes out. Each light a string, a web of thoughts;  
persons/people thinking in the dark making thoughts shine and knit and  
spin under a bulb of light; or the dark-thoughted feet shuffling from room  
to room, over rough wooden floors, a hand moving across plaster and dry  
wall, shooting around molding, door jamb, to unhinge a door, to break the  
light bulb, plunged in my father's dark world; Albuquerque.

A knot of thought at the forehead. It's me trying to remember not the events but the scenery and sounds that unfold to make up the last visit with my father. And the lights laid out like, as one descends upon the scene.

## THE DUKE OF ALBUQUERQUE

There is my father  
in the doorway. What is he

doing there?  
He stands. He happens

again and again. I happen  
to be here, where my father is

tonight, standing in the door-  
way. I happen to be trying to fit him in

to the size of this room.  
There are his shoes.  
What are they doing?

There are his hands, little  
scabs. There is his

nose, but  
disappearing. My father  
disappears in the frame of  
the door

like a black

pinhole that starts here & then grows  
to his specifications (skeletal).

There is a thick  
black heavy black

space made in his shoulders'  
frame & then he is

here he is again, trying

to fit into the room with  
clothespins, the table, hills, colored  
pencils, dust  
clumps, & pillows. He puts his

head down on pillows. His thinking  
is clouding, like the clouded

leopard paces curved  
lines around the edges of caves & is  
restless in short stubby

legs & beautiful  
tail in the terrible

zoo, Albuquerque. His spots  
are nebulous, floating through  
and over his soft gray

& cloudy silk made for animals, not  
hats. He is alone tonight but from this  
cage he can hear the lion (*Panthera*  
*leo*) roar in the stucco  
boat cave. My father from his house  
on Lead heard it when he lived there, he has the same blood



disease as King George, it's making him  
mad & gives you scabs

on your hands. He is moving his  
hands back through the black

frame, night erasing the downy black  
doorway, hands

disappearing, appearing  
& gin, whiskey, anything his liquid  
pocket is all liquid his hands

liquefying in all  
liquidness, the night  
my father  
stood framed in the door of excess, like  
40 milligrams & cigarettes  
impressed with the fast  
liquefaction of his dress.

Father, my hand versus  
this mouth, my fist, wrist,  
his cigarette, which has more

to say, a bird of my tongue

is better, and a beast  
of yours, the body

of your discourse is deposed to small doses  
and glued  
together but the guards are basted on neither  
your tongue nor your word

sun nor your sun  
light. Sometimes lemonade is square and a square can prick  
a tongue, but yours is more  
more. A plaid

shirt versus evening, you took my brother  
too far down the detergent aisle at

Landmark. This is where we  
talk & walk, in the frozen foods  
section with our furs on. We're getting everything  
straightened

out. Potatoes, peas, your liver is  
getting all fixed up, carrots.

The dark marks  
on this scene

are shadows; shadows are a way  
the eye has for knowing things  
took shape.

When the cataracts were removed, I learned  
to see. We moved between  
colors. From seeing, I learned theft &

fraud, blue can  
fake a blue.

So thanks for the blueberry pie, Pops,  
but you took half of it home with you!  
You cheated at tres quatro cinco ses!  
Your teeth which are henceforth  
reduced to small stubs in the gum &  
forests, forests, now

shush. Please exit  
the frame using the leg body leg  
method and keep the oxygen  
levels steady.

When the light printed on my silver  
gut, & what  
it did: it  
spelled (this doorframe) back  
wards.

If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I  
had my liberty I would go walking  
with a good leg, and a good foot  
and enough money in my purse

Here, wait, we'll dance out the answer

When he lived there it was a house in perpetual motion. Jon walking out the backdoor slamming the screen. Jon angling through the kitchen, knees bent, arms turned slightly outward, hands large and making more motion than is necessary for simple walking, the whole torso torqued to the side. His body is a study in corkscrewed angles. Or not his body, but how he has trained the muscles to move and handle it, bone and shoulder and tooth. The full wrapper askew, the contents maybe (maybe not) fixable. Jon, leaving a bowl of oatmeal to make a phone call but instead banging out the front door or the back and will he come home in one hour, in twelve, in three? He has forgotten. Forgotten what he was doing and puts on the glasses with one black arm missing, mutters over the encyclopedia reading the entries for hours. Or the History Channel. Then he is still. The oatmeal rallying into a cold, goeey lump in the green plastic bowl by the telephone book.

Some of the guns he knows about: sawed-off shotgun with a pistol trigger; crowd-pleaser; eight-rounder; .357 with expanding bullets, buckshot for the first two rounds so that if your hands are shaking side to side—or up and down or however, but shaking bad—you can still hit if not kill your target. Simon came in high and waving it around, angry, Jon in the bedroom with Simon's girlfriend, although nothing was going on. Hey, nothing's going on, man. I swear to god, no-thing.

Jon knows a man who once drove him up over the mountains past Madrid, who killed at least seven people: one woman, a girl with a grenade strapped to her abdomen, an old man ploughing a field with a water buffalo. I bet you don't have the guts to kill that guy, I bet you can't hit him from here, someone said, so Vince used his head for target practice.

The dark story has come to an end and will resurface from its pool only briefly this evening, in the kitchen.

—Is Jessica here, I want to show her my gun.

The snow is piling up. It's flying little white blind spots across the air and landing in soft, silky layers. It is pillowing the earth, a featherbed to end all rust and dirt. Trees hope to shake free of the white glove, but won't. A man walks through the window, walking through snow. He is wearing moccasins, or he is barefoot. He walks all day and he walks all night over the small foothills through the scrub brush and through the snow and sometimes he runs. He runs or he walks, just for the fuck of it. The dark night up around him howling, or the day laid out brightly over the sky.

[Picture here of me & Jon, wild hair]

He thinks he will walk all the way to Santa Fe but does not because this is several years later—many years later, to be accurate. And he is tired now of walking all night, all day, he doesn't do that anymore but he will speak of it as if he will—"I will go out and walk all night in the goddamned moonlight, I'll walk all the way to Santa Fe in the snow just for the fuck of it."

Houses and houses and houses and houses. Houses and houses and houses and a pool. Then the bigger buildings rise up out of the Earth's surface at the radiating axis of the city. Cars move around, people inside them. (Watch) from the window as the city changes from a sea of houses laid out in sloppy grids, splattered across the valley, creeping into the mountains, falling off right into the sea. (But there is no sea here.)

Is this your inch? Whose inch is this? I'll build a house on it.

Watch as the city shrinks from the window, into this specific patch of grass, that roof, those antennae, that language, that garage, a driveway, a child on a bigwheel. The child has shiny hair. It's not a bigwheel, it's a hippity-hop; she bounces down the driveway and into Carpenteria, 1972.

There are hobos out by the traintracks they wear bandannas over their chins and noses, when the train stops they jump off chickencoop roofs and trains, the children playing in the sand pit by the line of eucalyptus trees scream; men in dark stubble jump off the train to scare them, children of shiny hair, that is their job, to scare them, although they never jump off, the children never see them, the children jump up from the sandpit screaming and run when the hoboless train stops. This is at dusk, and the night towering lemon is high.

Belladonna Books/Boog Literature  
351 W.24th St., Suite 19E  
New York, NY 10011-1510

**\$3**