

**BELLADONNA\*29**

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*TRACE HISTORIES*

*by*

*Rosmarie Waldrop*

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

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Some of these poems have appeared in *Grand Street* and *SFSU Review*.

For Marjorie Perloff.

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# 1: LINGUISTIC ARCHEOLOGY

a man named Freud  
is learning Chinese

a woman moves  
through his genital zone

from this alarm  
grammatical organization

\*

take another man  
(young)  
whose language has broken down

he has gonorrhoea

\*

we take Chinese  
for a description of the facts  
the world is hidden by a veil

we know that metaphor  
is beautiful  
and, like philosophy, leaves  
everything as it is

we must fall very deep  
into our memory

\*

a chessboard in a painting  
a feeling of  
sexual immobility

the world is hidden by significance

\*

take a nearsighted father

you cannot tell him  
Look at that tower ten miles away and  
go in that direction  
out of the world

\*

a woman's mouth  
is a woman's mouth  
a woman's voice is hidden in hair

\*

he's not so  
inarticulate and gurgling

the woman must be on her knees

\*

a man learns Chinese  
Mandarin  
is not the only fruit

\*

a window  
may open of its own accord  
an eye  
high in a tree

a woman's body parsed

\*

the young man shows his tongue  
the clothes lie in heaps  
on the floor

he climbs  
out of a cramped position  
into a  
cramped position

the body is hidden

## 2: INFANTILE HEX

stages of youngness

about the middle of the story  
identity replaced  
by expression

and singing with it

\*

He shouted her name as if he knew her

\*

Viennese  
explodes in his  
mouth a bite  
of an expected apple

\*

but sleep shall come in many kinds  
of language

sleep shell  
put on the caul

as water withdraws into  
libidinal positions

\*

but you exaggerate  
a couch  
can't lay a ghost

### 3: *OBSESSIONAL ROSES*

no sublimations after the fall  
uncanny the metaphysics  
of mathematics

\*

stones right in front  
of your eyes

makes them hard to throw

\*

how improbable

a woman on her back  
in a garden touching

her hair  
or an apple

\*

or snakes  
and ladders  
when the place we must get to  
is the place we are

\*

can you read she asked  
can you undress

\*

the apple falls in a straight line

\*

the unconscious never sleeps

#### 4: EXCITING CAUSES

calendars  
clocks  
no distance ungathered

\*

*foutoir*  
*Rumpelkammer*

\*

time can be felt like this  
not quite a possession  
though the eye moves with great speed

\*

and the way sun reflects in a window  
makes space continue into pain

\*

our language  
seduces us

then goes to sleep with a dry mouth



## 5: *ATTEMPTS AT INTERPRETATION*

The problem now before us  
is approaching  
the body of a woman

\*

rain so slow against the pane  
each drop  
a pebble slipping down a slope

\*

we shall consider ourselves justified  
his wife took a short holiday

\*

ordinary common sense  
unequal to  
the strange demands of life

\*

nocturnal emissions  
souls armed with consciousness of sin

\*

it is important  
not to stand too long on one leg

\*

translating the paranoiac mode  
requires  
no small amount of air and  
a delirious optimism

\*

a woman is a woman  
but a pebble is a stone

## 6: REVERSE ARCHEOLOGY

he had forgotten  
that he had a mother

to penetrate  
in case of paranoia

\*

a stiff chair  
beside the bed

\*

he himself pressed the mirror  
into our hand  
and silvered it

hence we must strip his sentence

\*

there's more than one sun  
in the month of May

\*

an unripe idea dropped from the tree  
every muscle in his body rigid

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