

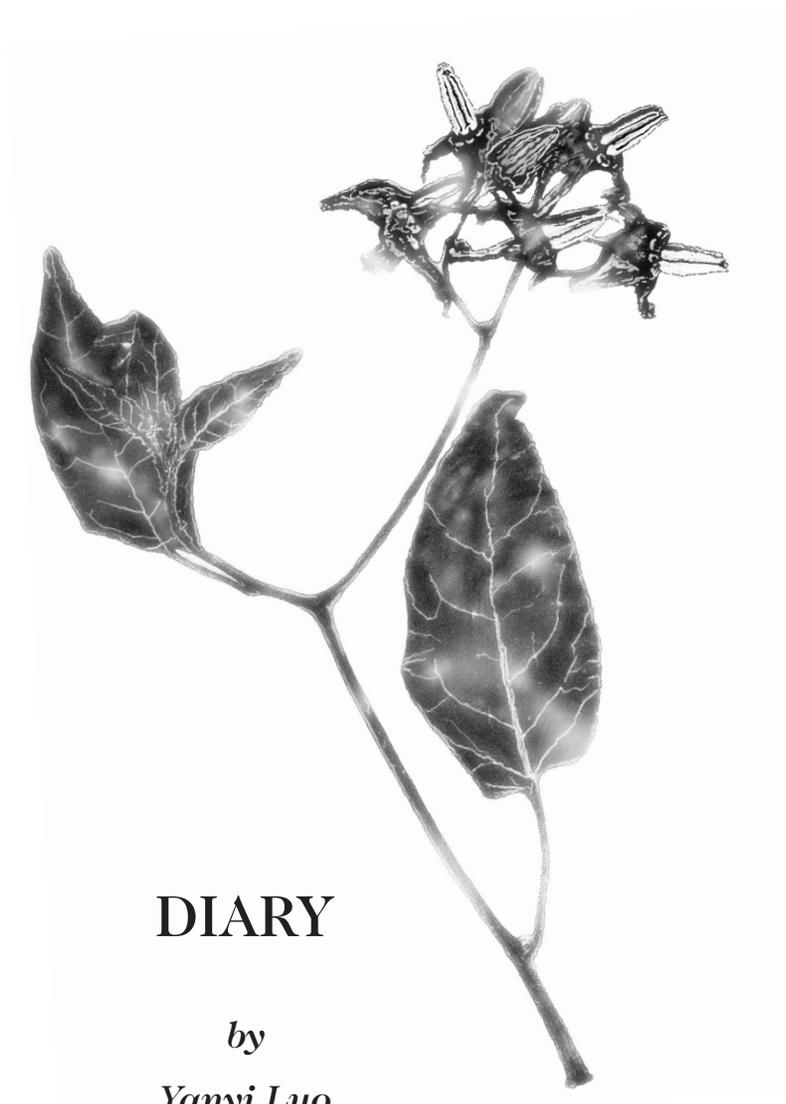
BELLADONNA\* CHAPLET SERIES



BELLADONNA\* COLLABORATIVE

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DIARY

by

*Yanyi Luo*

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



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Belladonna\* is an event and publication 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.

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62.

Last night, I had a dream about giving a speech on art. I had no notes and felt awash with calm. *Why is art necessary?*, the first line ran, and nothing was easier to answer because it was so unanswerable. It occurs to me that an answer would have ended my speech, and what I wanted was to ask something repeatedly, to spend my life on continuing the question. It is a certain life and not its answer that is worthy of being repeated. Invitation, invocation, request.

42.

What is it about listening that leaves me so close to the surface?

**DIARY**

**Yanyi Luo**

## On Vanderbilt and St Marks

On days that are nights  
and no one wants me  
I go to the bookstore green-backed  
leather wood hard floors stacked  
on top of each other

Along the rows the books  
are whisper thieves and not all  
without a home though  
they are roaming and with the dust  
and dressed in heat and gold

Stutters looseleaf from the radiators  
while the bell tolls (It's open It's closed)  
I move but barely ruby

Is it Mozart or the snow accumulating  
over the days I fail to be myself

When we can't be one  
it's fine to only find each other  
Tonight I listen to the radio

49.

Kate calls it a camaraderie; a kinship with the other Kates. Specifically, no derivatives, but the same moment when you poke up your head at the same sound, the knowledge that a name is what you're given and completely outside of what you have. Kate wants to discover the other Kates. She wants to discover what they each have.

59.

“The other kids made fun of our house,” Doreen says of her American friends. I screw my face with incredulity, but really I completely understand.

8.

Michelle says I have three I's: a diary I, a lyric I, and an I masquerading as a you. Michelle says the diary I is not the strongest I, the politics of which distract me for weeks until I come to realize that I want to know who I am talking to. In all instances, I was talking to myself. At least, I meant to.

## 9.

Laura texts, without attribution,

*Most likely we travel to exist in an analogue to our life's dilemmas. The work for the traveler is making the effort to understand that the place you are moving through is real and the solution to your increasingly absent problems is forgetting. To see them in a burst as you are vanishing into the world. Travel is not transcendence. It's immanence. It's trying to be here.*

[1:27:47]

Eileen Myles in her essay on Iceland

[1:29:12]

you know I don't love her but occasionally she gets to the point and it's a lovely little burst

## 58.

We go through my baby photos. In this photo, I am eating, and Doreen says that my house looks like her house, that she too took many photos like this, small hands each holding a chopstick and the rice bowl in between.

## 56.

What I also mean to say is that I recognize the focus. The impulse to know someone else before you reveal yourself. The impulse to know someone else because you have never been asked to reveal yourself. The impulse to know someone else because otherwise, you do not know yourself. The impulse to know someone else because you are self-conscious of your whole self, the one that fills up too many rooms, so much space. The impulse to hide how much space you need. The impulse to hide what you need.

## Aubade

Sitting with Laura in the loving  
light laughing about the love  
we should have had

It's not hard  
The coffee stays strong  
as having all of it, the new  
ink staining across the page  
just printed

I was dreaming wrong  
When I think of you I see  
bluebells    you against light eyes  
and Laura talking about  
how shallow hers are

and how blue    Color strung  
as meditation    yellows  
whites and grey cloud hums

Awake with fondness  
not caring for meaning  
but this morning in  
the sound of *dilapidating*

(Forgive this message  
and how it takes so long)  
Doubt is the distance  
I will travel to be with you

37.

Definitions are not static. They are where we begin. For what? For whom? Beginning is not an origin. It is the arbitrary place from which we start our lives.

55.

Doreen and Jane are generous, they want to know about me. We spend most of the afternoon talking about the things I've been thinking and the life that I live. In fact, I like it. It seems so selfish to want to be known!

61.

We didn't have cable. We had a satellite that absorbed wavelengths. Despite being labeled aliens, this is the closest we would get to extraterrestrial. The planes count too, thirteen hours at a time, which is also the time difference to China. All we did as aliens, we did because at some point, it is easier to be lonely than to continue working. Opportunity did not do work for us. You want to read about jade dragons and incense, but no one writes about the work. Work that is so close that you forget your face. To be a foreigner was to be a guest in all houses, to never have manners, to not have a past. Every day was a day where we started over. Every day we were so rootless, we had to make the same friends over and over again.

14.

Another Kate who I am closer to has an idea to start a podcast series where she interviews other Kates. In high school, a girl who sent me a heart-shaped necklace also sent me a typewritten note in a copy of *An Abundance of Katherines*. I try not to count the number of Kates, Katherines, Caitlins in my life for reasons that overlap with why Kate is starting her podcast. This is a note to ask Kate why she is starting her podcast, in case there is no overlap. I actively accept and refuse what the Kates share. No one has my name or knows how to pronounce it. I believed this until the first week of college, when I was telling someone exactly this on Low steps and a man started calling for me because I had won a raffle. Another Yanyi appeared several feet above and I now I tell this story but I never explain how I had to change how I saw myself distinctly. I was never unique, I was just made to feel that way.

## 2.

Frank O'Hara's "Morning" is the first poem I consciously memorized. I am mailing it in Caitlin's letter and I am rereading it this morning very slowly. Seeing the text, I realize that I have memorized some parts incorrectly. At first, I was not reading it; I was reciting it from that place where rhythms and bodies begin to stay with each other. Reciting so quickly because I needed to catch them as they happened to me, so that I would not lose the music of the poem and therefore the poem. Right now, losing the poem as it exists may not be the worst thing. If I really knew it, I could do it at any speed.

## 53.

I asked for Cheerios after my fifth birthday which was also my last birthday party. I don't remember what we usually had for breakfast, but it was not that. My parents spoiled me, but only I knew the other ways. I wanted the Cheerios because they were the most delicious snacks I had ever had and I didn't know I could ask for things from the store. They were expensive, they weren't off-brands.

We didn't have bags so I used cellophane and tape to meticulously wrap a handful of Cheerios into a bag-like structure. Then I walked across the hall to Jane's apartment. Jane was one of my first best friends, or at least that was what I told myself. I'm not sure if she remembers who I am but I remember being embarrassed more than once at her house.

I knocked on Jane's door and held the bag of Cheerios in front of my face and said thank you for coming to my party. I don't remember what she said. When I went home, my face was hot with embarrassment. Had she been confused? Did it dawn on me as I saw her face, whatever it had been, that it was just weird to give people cereal as party favors? Cereal that I only knew about because once, I had it at Jane's house.

Ah, so that's what had happened. I didn't know how to have a party. I didn't know what I could have as party favors, and that it was not okay to lick the sugar off the plate when I was finished with my donut. Thinking back, perhaps I don't have birthday parties because of the way I was made to feel poor, that I had nothing to give.

24.

Lyric is the other logic of language.

33.

When I'm potting the plants, I think about this little life in my apartment. I have not been home to help it grow. When the sun is treading lightly still over the (ending) winter months, it was so nice to talk to Robin over the phone. It was so nice to nail my poster back up, to put up new lights along the wall. There are more ways that I can be here. There are things that I have not done.

## 12.

The diary I is confessional but extremely extravagant. Lauren says that I am most me in these poems and she is the only one who says this. I am rejected from most poetry magazines but they are not who I was writing to.

## Shipping Labels

Every time something breaks  
I go home with the intention  
of two love poems. They bang  
like bongos in my skull for  
the sake of my happiness.  
The fridge is open when I  
crash in and is wrecking everything  
because it is full, because the couch  
is occupied with artichoke hearts.  
They watch TV. They spend New Year's  
with only boxes of themselves for company  
(present company excluded).  
Upside down is the cardinal direction  
of fragility and the cause of effect  
which is red. It is rather exceptional  
the ways I have given up myself.