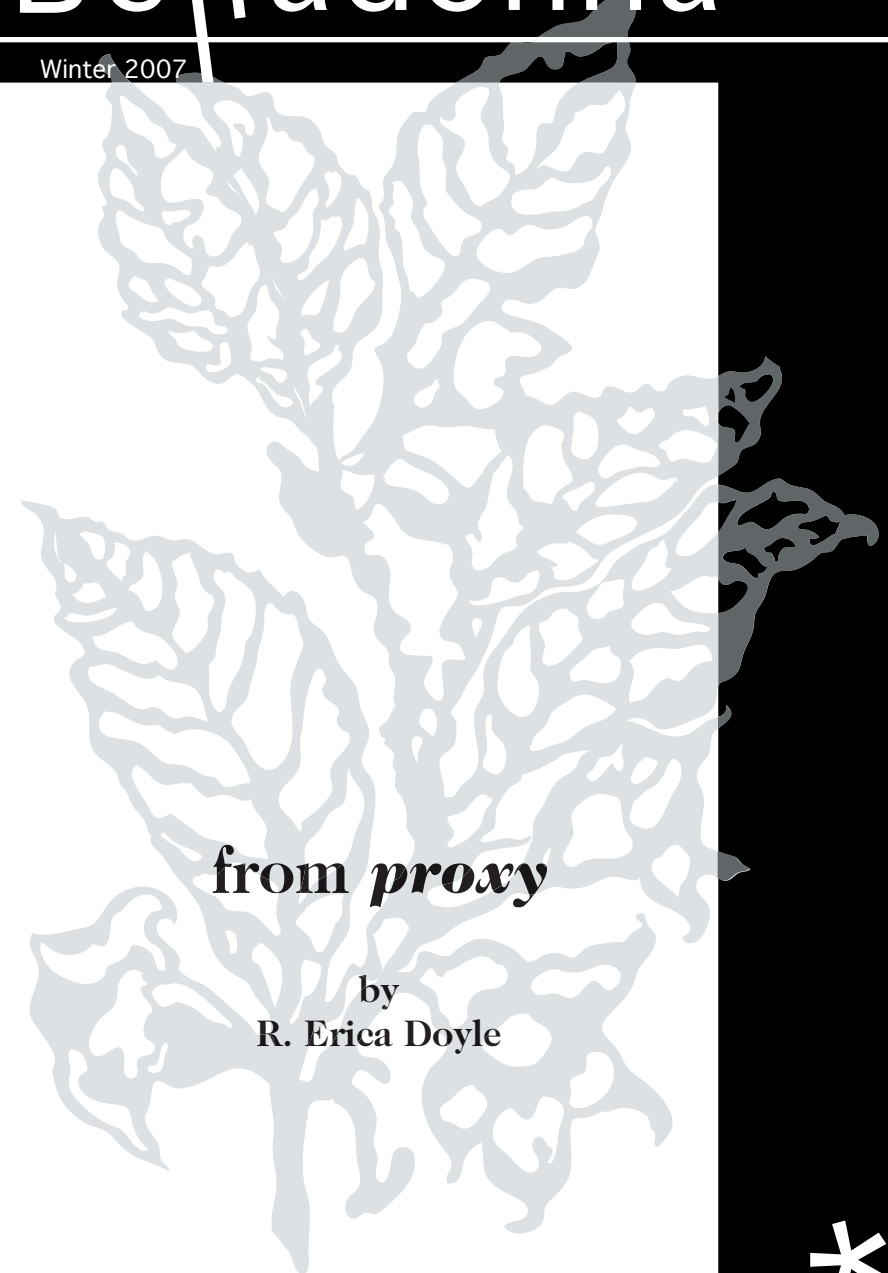


Belladonna* #110

Winter 2007



from *proxy*

by
R. Erica Doyle



Belladonna Books

925 Bergen Street, Suite 405, Brooklyn, NY 11238

www.belladonnaseries.blogspot.com



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

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Belladonna* production and design, Bill Mazza.

It is set in Geneva, ITC Calson Medium and Bold, and ITC Officina Sans.

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Belladonna* is a reading and publication series that promotes the work of
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form, multi-cultural, multi-gendered, impossible to define, delicious to talk
about, unpredictable, dangerous with language.

Rachel Levitsky and Erica Kaufman, editors, Belladonna Books.

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- 2001
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 19. Lynne Tillman, chapters from *Weird Fucks and "Dead Talk"* OOP
 20. Abigail Child, *Artificial Memory*-vols. 1 & 2 (\$6 set)
 21. Deborah Richards, *Put A Feather In It*
 22. Norma Cole, *BURNS*
 23. Jocelyn Saidenberg, *Dusky*
 24. Gail Scott, *Bottoms Up* OOP
 25. Carla Harryman, *DIMBLUE* and *Why Yell*
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 30. Tina Darragh, from *rule of dumbs* OOP
 31. Chris Tysh, *Mother, I* OOP
 32. Jennifer Moxley, *The Occasion* OOP
 33. Zhang Er, *Cross River . Pick Lotus* OOP
 34. Tonya Foster, *A Swarm Of Bees In High Court*
 35. Lauren Gudath, *Animal & Robot*
 36. Alice Notley, *IPHIGENIA* OOP
 37. Caitlin McDonnell, *Dreaming the Tree* OOP
 38. Eileen Myles, *We, the Poets* OOP
 39. Suzanne Wise, from *The Blur Model*
 40. Lydia Davis, *Cape Cod Diary* OOP
 41. Elaine Equi, *Castle, Diamond, Swan* OOP
 42. Maggie Nelson, *Something Bright, Then Holes* OOP
 43. Summi Kaipa, *"One: I Beg You, Be Still"*
 44. Julie Patton, *"Car Tune" & Not So Bella Donna*
 45. Joan Larkin, *Boston Piano* OOP
 46. Minnie Bruce Pratt, *The Money Machine: Selected Poems* OOP
 47. Anne Tardos, *A Noisy Nightingale Understands a Tiger's Camouflage Totally*
 48. Michelle Naka Pierce, *48 Minutes Left*
 49. Veronica Corpuz, *Untitled*
 50. Leslie Scalapino, *"Can't" is 'Night'*
 51. Jen Benka, *A Revisoning of the Preamble*
 52. Susan Briante, *Neotropics: A Romance in Field Notes.*
 53. Joanna Fuhrman, *Belladonna* Moraine*
 54. Nada Gordon, *SONg of My OWnself*
 55. Catherine Daly, *Surplice*
 56. Caroline Bergvall, *GONG*
 57. Maria Negroni, *Art and Fugue*
 58. Lourdes Vázquez, *May the transvestites of my island who tap their heels*
- 2002
- 2003

- 2004
- 2005
- 2006
- 2007
59. *Belladonna* Bilingue: Womens Work In Translation* (vol. 1)
 60. *Belladonna* Bilingue: Womens Work In Translation* (vol. 2)
 61. Jaimy Gordon, *A Month of Love*
 62. Rachel Daley, *You and Me Story*
 63. Latasha N. Nevada Diggs, *Manuel is destroying my bathroom...*
 64. Joan Retallack, *THE REINVENTION OF TRUTH*
 65. Renee Gladman, *Untitled, Woman on Ground*
 66. Nicole Brossard, *Matter Harmonious Still Maneuvering*
 67. Eileen Tabios, *THE ESTRUS GAZE(S)*
 68. Susan Howe, *118 Westerly Terrace*
 69. Corina Copp, *Play Air*
 70. Lyn Hejinian, *Lola*
 71. Mercedes Roffé, *Theory of Colors*
 72. hassen, *Salem*
 73. Mónica De la Torre, *Doubles: An Excerpt*
 74. Erin Moure, *Befallen I*
 75. Lisa Robertson, *First Spontaneous* OOP
 76. Martine Bellen, *NYC Stories / Lessons of the Microscopist*
 77. Karen Weiser, *Heads Up Fever Pile*
 78. Fernanda Laguna, Gabriela Bejerman, Cecilia Pavón, *Belleza y Felicidad*
 79. Mairéad Byrne, *Kalends*
 80. Stacy Szymaszek, *hyper glossia* OOP
 81. Nathalie Stephens, *You But For The Body Fell Against*
 82. Rachel Zolf, from *Human Resources*
 83. Kathe Izzo, *Public & Private Love*
 84. Kim Rosenfield, *10 Perfumes*
 85. Ann Lauterbach, from *Nothing To Say*
 86. Myung Mi Kim, *From Penury*
 87. Laura Elrick, *Permeable Structures: A Performance Essay in Stereo (excerpts)*
 88. Melissa Buzzeo, *Near: a luminescence*
 89. Dawn Lundy Martin, *The Undress*
 90. Sharon Mesmer, *Vertigo Seeks Affinities*
 91. Marjorie Welish, *Art and Language Writes an Epitaph*
 92. Rae Armantrout, *Fetch*
 93. Laynie Browne, *Desires of Letters*
 94. Elizabeth Willis, *All the Paintings of Giorgione*
 95. Kate Colby, from *A Banner Year*
 96. Margaret Christakos, *My Girlish Feast*
 97. a.rawlings, *Wider*
 98. Deborah Meadows, *The Draped Universe*
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 100. Maureen Owen, *From Working Papers*
 101. Patricia Spears Jones, *repuestas!*
 102. Anna Moschovakis, *The Tragedy of Waste*
 103. Rebecca Brown, *Always & Like This*
 104. Evie Shockley, *31 words * prose poems*
 105. Jocelyn Saidenberg, *Dispossessed*
 106. Jen Benka and Carol Mirakove, *1, 138*
 107. Harriet Zinnes, *IT IS AS IF*
 108. Maggie O'Sullivan, *Windows Opening*
 109. Stacey Levine, *Susan Moneymaker, Large and Small*
 110. R. Erica Doyle, from *prox*

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phasedown

Everything the same terrible color.

Gather in her breasts like sails. Like nets and draw deep. The hand pumps between. A link to turning inside out.

All the displaced lust in the world would not pacify this quest. The fist in the center of your chest is turning. Everything behind it is wet and begging. Your ears pop in the tunnel. Fragrances of sound emerge dully. Postulate, postulate, gratiating consciousness. Around the first the scar tissue thickens. You were born with that wound. It's getting deeper.

They make all the usual gestures but you can't reciprocate. Your gills flap feebly in the eaves. This mouth, that mouth humming a stillborn melody. Bees fall from your lips.



After you, your ex-lovers seem to fall into more promising arrangements. Ba-dum, they find the perfect one they thought you were, with your salmon twisting. Each time, you smile on the phone, murmur, *Of course*, or *Guaranteed*. Sometimes you meet them for coffee uptown, receive cooing emails of their children. You run into your friends on the street. Your ex begs goodbye, her husband is waiting. Your friends appreciate her ass, ask, *Were you two ever together?* You say, *No, not really*.

In the white house there is a terrace on top of the garage. The shutters are red, baleful eyes. You tell time by the muezzin. At the end of the journey there's some kind of danger. You cover your hair and walk to the beach. Old women grip the ends of their safsaris in their teeth. After two greasy pastries, you watch the boys tear their shirts off and race into the Mediterranean. As if in a thousand broken thermometers. Pretty brown boys and mercury. They will not die from it. *The same reassurances. This may just pinch a little bit. You going to feel some stinging. Now this might burn for a second. This might hurt but it won't kill you.* Dogs and pine trees. Pebble after pebble.

A leatherback confused by streetlights, you hover in the shadows.
The golden thread that pulled from your diaphragm ends in frayed
tangles. Blue devils swirl in a dream. In your chest the burning
begins. The compass points west. The sun sets in the north.

If only your hands did not tremble so, here, if only you could
keep the skin from sloughing off your chest in sheets, release the
blade that cuts your palm, and walk into the day.

You are a sense of humor. You are a complete delusion. *Oh yes,
I taught before*, you tell the eighth graders. *I used to teach in
college before I taught you*. They laugh. They always knew you
were a fool and here's the proof. *Miss that's crazy, we're bad*,
they say, frowning. *No, you insist, this is more fun, more energy,
more life. I like teaching you*.

You don't say, *This is more like dying when you know it, this is
more like fighting as you die, die, die*.

You graph the words only after she has spoken. Open the door and they come tumbling out. Voice, voice, you are calling, without realizing with it is. Are you her puppet, or a channel? When she is silent, a dead volcano, you too, sleep. Numb up. The anesthesia of her absence. Just a call – *I'm prattling* – rattles your bones awake.

You're crying on the phone to anyone who will listen. My heart is a blister, you croak. They all hang up. Dial tones greet your frozen ears. Wandering the elevated platforms of the outer boroughs, old women clutching Christmas packages watch you with remorse. Or so you perceive. The sky has the same deep blank as the dial tone.

You heard some news and knelt. You heard some news and laughed. You heard some news and your skin cracked. You heard some news and your chest crashed. You heard some news and bit blood. She says, *No, no, no* and *no*. Says, *Yet, yet, yet* and *yet*. In another frequency, opposite notes demand a scale.

Could the Jerome Street reservoir hold the slate sky any closer than desire? A pigeon the color of dried blood struts and dips. Black squirrels with ochre bellies inquire about nothing. She builds with someone else in a home between here and there. Your belly churns with chocolate flavored nicotine. A girl shouts at the steam covered glass in a deli, The food is breathing! I'm getting outta here. What has gnawed at bones flagellates, whisps.

A fine quill. A computer screen. A blinking cursor winks its eye. The beckoning is pink between your teeth. The moan of a street sweeper. Pigeons growl atop dead air conditioner. Sound permutates. The same sigh of your mouth on flesh.

You toss your words again and again into the fountain, where they glimmer like coins. The year bears the stretch marks of how you woke from arms that held you safe and sleeping. Your eyes no longer close. The stars have claimed you. In the room, love sleeps where you've left it to follow crumbs that vultures covet. You wander the mangrove spinning, alone amongst the roots where cutlasses left red gashes. Tree crabs scuttle beneath your groping fingers. Boas curl bones in the forks of branches.