

Nine-Inch Heels in Real Reel Time

Lance Olsen

*SEX FOR THE MILLENNIUM: EXTREME
TALES*

Harold Jaffe

FC2/Black Ice Books

Illinois State University, Campus Box 4241

Normal, IL 61790-4241

174 pages; paper, \$9.00

If you like your narrative or your sex vanilla, you should probably go somewhere else right now. Shoo. Scat. Scram. Because this new collection from one of our country's virtuoso transgressive fictioneers is pure terminal atrocity-exhibition rainbow ice. I give you, by way of example and introduction, the following emblematic passage from the title story, which involves a woman sodomizing her grown brother with a pretty gnarly strap-on while said grown brother remains unhappily chained to a tree:

Withdraws the bloody shitty 10-incher (Taco Bell), shoves it in his bloody mouth, gagging him.

Tough love.

Produces an official eight-inch USMC Nightstalker Bowie and stabs his eye while fucking his mouth.

Stabs his other eye, throat, still humping. Gropes between his legs, severs his gens, then pulls her bloody dick out of his mouth and fucks his front where the gens used to be....

With the prey's left dead fist in her ass, she severs the left arm above the wrist, gets up, cleans and packs her instruments, saunters away.

More like a waddle than a saunter, probably because of the dead fist in her ass.

Oh, man. Take a look at what's going on here. I don't mean (or just mean) the obvious aesthetics of the ugly, distant echo of the

Jaffe's...slim collection possesses all the apocalyptic energy, absurd humor, self-reflexiveness, and disruptive formal play of Barthelme doing Burroughs.

Marquis de Sade and Baudelaire, via perhaps Michael Hemmingson via Doug Rice via Kathy Acker, which might make even Bret Easton Ellis's American psycho blush, but rather the almost complete lack of sentence subject, which implies a larger loss of selfhood and whose absence focuses our attention, syntactically as well as existentially, on the object-position of peopleless people (the only names here, it almost goes without saying, refer not to individuals but to corporate brands unusually juxtaposed with the creepy situation). Look as well at the precise, spare, almost spiky prose obsessed nearly as much with exploring itself among the open spaces on the page as with exploring its ostensible topic of severe trespass.

And, most important, listen to the tone: maliciously deadpan, shot through with a wickedly detached irony, and, all said and done, given that mention of "tough love," given that final saunter-corrected-to-waddle, surprisingly... *funny*. Appearances to the contrary, then, we don't enter the gruesome precinct of self-indulgent, cynically chic splatterpunk here, but of appropriated and modified Swiftean satire—hyperbolic as some Crumb comic, topically drastic as any mind allows (I hope), and, perhaps more than anything else, morally outraged by the world it discovers around itself.

This is sex for the millennium and Sex for the Millennium: a text in two interlaced parts, each holding half a dozen guerrilla fictions, neoclassically symmetrical yet cleft, most in the form of monologic rants by the affectless and the disconnected, or of Jaffe's

signature unsit-uated perfect-pitch dialogues between a misshapen constellation of teratoids at the centurial edge: a vampire trying to kick the habit, a porn star trying to break her own record of guys boffing her in a single day, a dominatrix and a shockjock, pedophiles and supermodels, freemen and orgiasts, Dennis Rodman and a televangelist and a transsexual cowboy venture capitalist, and more web surfers than you can fit into the expanse of your hard drive.

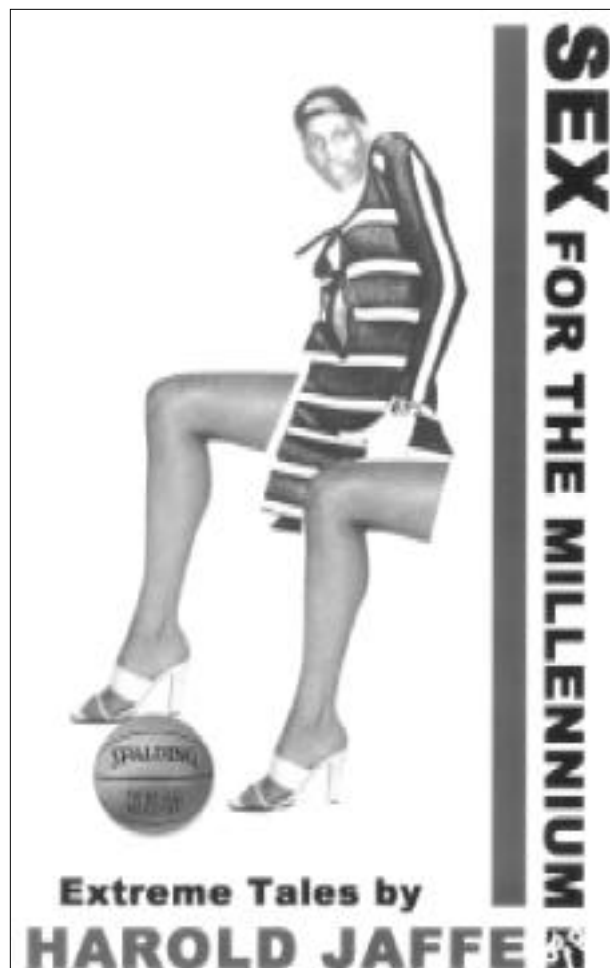
Those speaking and those spoken of here are, of course, as psychically and socially divided as that dismembered brother above, not to mention the text they inhabit. They are little more than disembodied talking heads whose voices, genders, and selves elide into one another, sometimes transposing in the course of a few lines. They are at essence, registers of a moribund culture of electronic, sexual, and violent excess, always in search of a new way to up the experiential ante for the vestige of a vestige of an emotional buzz as they scud through a surreally depraved multiverse jammed with full-face snout helmets and organic oat milk, Disney videos and snuff flicks, carcinomas and cellular phones, anal plugs and health clubs, serotonin re-uptake inhibitors and massive caffeine ingestion. Given their single-minded fixation on the flesh, their talking head status is acutely ironic. They

privilege discourse of action over action itself, watching over touching, recounting over doing, and each voice is continually and irreparably out of sync with those surrounding it.

In his recent manifesto in *Paradoxa* (4.11, 1998), “Slash and Burn: A Narrative Model for the Millennium,” Jaffe calls for a kind of aesthetically “beneficent terrorism.” Since “morality” is currently defined and controlled by the dominant culture, or cultures, he argues, artists need to embrace something closer to Bataille’s appeal for an “immoral subversion of the existing order.” Hence Jaffe’s axiom:

If the dissenting American artist wants something of her work to be felt, she must educate herself about contemporary culture, technology, ideology and media (all of which are largely synonymous). Then, in the spirit of a guerrilla, find a seam, plant a mine, slip away. These seams are the rents, or fault lines, in the web of interlocking ideology which prevents us from being ourselves.

Such an (admittedly essentialist) axiom proposing simultaneous cultural appropriation and cultural resistance obviously rhymes well with the Avant-Pop’s attempt to consciously absorb and commandeer pop-cultural artifacts from cartoons to on-line chat groups, sitcoms to cyberpunk, B-films to rock ‘n’ roll—all those loci, that is, which supply us with the deep-structure narratives we use to make sense of our postindustrial irrealities—in order to turn the



Cover used with permission

self-perpetuating mechanisms of these hyperconsumer capitalist products in upon themselves, dismantle them, demythologize them, reveal their inner workings, and, perhaps, even make them ours while probing tentative means to transcend them—however briefly, however utopianly, however incompletely.

The enactment of Jaffe's axiom in *Sex for the Millennium* thus results in a brutal political critique of a culture in which sexual outrageousness has become commodified and technology has turned us all into staticky para-beings robbed even of our own dreamtime, which now exists as little more than one site among myriad others of media-tion, commerce, and ideological police action. This, I imagine, sounds like somber business in spades, but in Jaffe's case it really isn't. His impressive slim collection possesses all the apocalyptic energy, absurd humor, self-reflexiveness, and disruptive formal play of Barthelme doing Burroughs. Like Swift, their iconoclastic progenitor, these voices are concurrently socially incensed and bleakly-yet-innovatively comic. Jaffe's trickster shock fictions (most just five or eight pages long) perpetually shapeshift, quote each other, contradict themselves, halt, and begin again while constituting, reconstituting, and deconstructing the reality studio called the Society of the Spectacle with all the televisual zeal, angry affirmation, and Ovidian fluidity of a splendid MTV rotation schedule.

Lance Olsen (www.uidaho.edu/~lolsen) teaches at the University of Idaho and is the author, most recently, of Rebel Yell: A Short Guide to Fiction Writing.