



Bruce, Cara (editor). *Viscera: An Anthology of Bizarre Erotica*. San Francisco: Venus or Vixen Press, 2000. 194 p.

Cara Bruce notes in her introduction to *Viscera* that many of the stories therein "focus on taboo, erotica and death, of blasphemous religious symbols and murder, all presented with their polar opposite--the lifegiving force of sex." From the tales in this collection that is appropriately subtitled "An Anthology of Bizarre Erotica," it seems that virtually *every* single story individually manages to fulfill Bruce's description.

This is in no way a good thing.

To put it bluntly, the twenty-five tales anthologized here by Bruce simply push the envelope too far. It is as if none of the contributors are familiar with the concept of gratuitousness, nor with the fact that in *Zombie*, *Hannibal*, and *Exquisite Corpse*, Joyce Carol Oates, Thomas Harris, and Poppy Z. Brite have already examined the poetic possibilities of necrophilia and cannibalism. What we get in *Viscera* is decadent sexual escapade after decadent sexual escapade, starring serious necrophiliacs, heinously cruel serial killers, and a few average people who have just gone way over the edge. With almost no break for the reader, Bruce heaps one extremely graphic and usually gratuitously pornographic tale on top of another, apparently aiming for shock value. However, in our opinion, she achieves little else. Perhaps it is because the writers of these tales are attempting--and failing--to produce tales informed with dark humor, or so it seems in such fare as "The Decapitation Party" and "I Am Joe's Penis."

This is not to say that shock value horror, what is often called Splatterpunk, is an inherently weak subgenre. Writers like Brite, one of the first Splatterpunk novelists, and short story master John Shirley, prove time and again that decadent and shocking sexuality can be used as a backdrop for horror. These writers also understand that the shock of necrophilia in and of itself does not a story make. Bruce's contributors, on the other hand, most of whom have published little, and usually in erotica zines and collections when they have published, seem to think that cunnilingus with a severed head (Simon Shepherd's "Pure Love"), or worse yet with various severed heads (Paul Bradshaw's "The Decapitation Party") is enough to merit a publication. Or they assume that a Mafioso lesbian gang rape (M. Christian's "The Bang Gang") somehow makes a meaningful statement about the human condition, one that is worth the price of the paper it is written on.

Well, in a sense, they are right. Obviously, these lazy attempts at producing a story can get published. Writers have been finding this for quite some time in fact. The only thing is they usually publish under the pseudonym Anonymous, and their books are usually placed on the higher shelves in most used bookstores.