

and familiar voices," and this description suggests that reading the book out loud might be the best way to consume the text.

While humans die and monsters triumph in both *Horrors of the Holy* and *The Tales of Horror*, neither volume produces fear or loathing. There's too much posturing and self-reflexiveness for the reader to be concerned for any of the characters. Also, since in both books, the outcome is all too predictable, the collections lack suspense. Yet suspense and fear are not the only reasons for reading horror fiction. If you are well enough versed in horror to enjoy the spoofing of conventions, and if your sense of humor tends toward the macabre, you may well find these two books worth reading. Neither collection of tales is entertaining in its own right, but when read as wry commentaries on horror literature, both satisfy.

Necropsy: The Review of Horror Fiction, Volume III (Fall 2001)

Short and Horrible Fiction by Women: A Review of Staci Layne Wilson's *Horrors of the Holy* and Laura Mullen's *The Tales of Horror*

by Robin Roberts

Wilson, Staci Layne. *Horrors of the Holy: 13 Sinful, Sacrilegious, Supernatural Stories*. Ranchos Palos Verdes, CA: Running Free Press, 2000. 106 p.

Mullen, Laura. *The Tales of Horror*. Berkeley, CA: Kelesy St. Press, 1999. 107 p.

Although they represent very different approaches to short horror fiction, *Horrors of The Holy* and *The Tales of Horror* have in common a wry self-awareness of the horror tradition. Sly, self-conscious references to conventional creatures such as vampires and conventional characters such as the endangered heroine define these slim volumes' attitudes toward horror.

Horrors of the Holy has a promisingly alliterative title, and most of the stories do indeed involve ministers, priests, and graveyards. But the subtitle is perhaps misleading, if taken literally. There's little shocking or disturbing in these stories. After Jimmy Jones and Heaven's Gate (the latter referred to in the book), who can be surprised by a demonic minister, determined to kill? What is novel is the mechanism, the boob tube, serving as the instrument of death. Wilson depicts ministers and priests taken over by malign forces, perverted to corrupt and kill their flocks. She shows more sympathy for vampires and vampiristic creatures. Through a number of first-hand accounts, she lets the undead explain their plight. None are as engaging as Anne Rice's vampires, but then these are all very short stories—one is only a page and a half. There's simply not much space for character development. Wilson opts instead for the bizarre set-up, as in "Cutting Room Floor," in which a character called "Fiend" lies in wait in the women's bathroom at a movie house, or "Always Amber," in which an evil amber ring forces its owner to murder. These clever scenarios are the strength of this collection. Its weakness is its somewhat pedestrian prose style.

The Tales of Horror, by contrast, has an innovative (not to say irritating) format. Its being a flipbook, lines are set up sequentially, so that the reader creates her own plot by turning the pages and reading in sequence. To say the least this is an acquired taste. The pace of this collection is deliberate and slow, the opposite end of the narrative scale from *Horrors of the Holy*. Not surprisingly, the author of *The Tales of Horror*, Laura Mullen, is a poet, and she comes with poet's trappings, such as high art pretensions—indicated by the untranslated epigraph from the French poet Baudelaire. Yet Mullen's grasp of horror conventions is solid. The gothic plot of a haunted house is hackneyed enough, but in this new format, its familiarity allows the reader to see the stock figures anew. The book's back cover describes it as "a text scored for old