

Is There Life After Sadomasochism?

by Terence Sellers

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The late afternoon sunlight cast its frail rays over the dusty furniture. Two aging jades stirred vaguely amidst the velvet - Ballantine, the brilliant author whose infamous subject matter had rendered him both notorious and adored; and Amanda, Bernini's St. Theresa come back as sculptress. Both were Hyperaesthetics - of the Ecstatic School of Thought - that fin-de-siecle movement that seeks the extreme in all things - and most particularly, Extremes of Beauty, which are often quite atrocious.

Refugees they were, from the darkly glittering byways of lower Manhattan. Their seclusion now in the deep Styx of New Mexico had enraged some, and relieved many . . . but no matter what the herd lowed, the desert was there to console them.

If John Ruskin's gentle analysis, that the desert lands are most conducive to the production of a religious art could be true, it might be said that these two were in serious difficulty. What art of religious power could come from two hearts darkened by satiety? From two minds still crawling through dry streambeds of despair? We shall see...

Desert and labyrinth - labyrinth and desert. And the labyrinth was Manhattan.

Their plunder of the demi-monde New-yorkais Sadomasochiste, circa 1970-1988, had left them both prostrate romantically. Romantically prostrate? No this is NOT mere affectation. For to have seen so much, to have known to ground zero how much pain and cruelty might exist amongst us, beneath the whitened veneer of normality - who could look at that, and remain in any way innocent?

Once you have seen inside the body like that... seen the poor frail bravery of the living animal, naked, helpless and exposed... once you have been inside the body like that, seen the flesh melting, and felt your own violatory strength ebbing... once you have known your own violence, and stopped yourself just inches from crushing, seen the writhing pleasure of the thing self-destructing, and realized how easy it is to kill... you know there is no safe place inside the body, cozy and well packed in the happy flesh as you may feel. Those who have chosen to look at this hell do not return unscathed.

Cocktails came early in the afternoon, and the birds all twittered on cue.

There was something of the great Apatheia, those ultimate Philosophers, about Ballantine in particular. Was that the tearful glaze of nostalgia - or was he only drunk?

“What next?” he sighed.

“Why don’t we drive the car off Devil’s Throne?” she suggested again.

“I’ve told you - Stan won’t let us die yet.”

“But there can’t be a life - after Sadomasochism,” Amanda insisted.

“No, of course not - “ he affirmed, refilling his glass.

“How then are we to nourish our bright lives?” she quoted.

“No longer with the ‘baser prey’... but how can I sublimate another day?”

There in their private Waiting Room to Hell, they watched the clock go around again. These once proud encyclopaedists of desire now listened as the instruments of pleasure ran down, coughed and shuffled off in old carpet slippers... their pulses faintly beat against a burgeoning void...

Ballantine again counted over his dead lovers, as Amanda muttered, “Nostalgie de la Boue-

Boue". Perhaps a new sensibility would emerge; perhaps not. Sex was still the only thing that concerned them, and as artists they were bound to keep their powers free from bondage. Libido as life, the lotus of creation, must flow, and no matter where, must break through all restraints of deadly convention.

But exhaustion was upon them... as now there was a severe physical horror, a fatality, attached to the act of sex. The blood was toxic - the semen was toxic - the body of the beloved was toxic. Behind all desire lurked disfigurement. Behind wretched flesh stood the doctors. Sex was coming again into the hands of the authorities, who had, perhaps, in their own laboratories, by design or accident, spawned the parasite growth - the Virus of AIDS.

Sex might now be more of a crime than ever; sex was now an act of murder. Were there to be no more lovely panoply of choices, but only dignified abstinence? Crabbily thus these two had assumed celibacy...and, as in Victoria's time, it had to be that to tremble on the edge of consummation must become more thrilling than consummation itself.

Exhaling a thin stream of blue, she mused "I have often wondered why, in the city, there is such a strength to all our so-called 'illicit' sexualities. Out here in the deep Styx, folks are never quite so 'out'."

"It's because the rest of the country is a seething nightmare of breeders! And if you won't participate in that, you must come to the City, where you can be 'filthy and anonymous'. There you can experiment, experience all... Nobody's anonymous out here. You can't be. Everyone's a fucking solid citizen!"

Still he could rhapsodize, "That anonymity is necessary for hot sex. With total strangers, you can be the hungry body, raw and unashamed. Oh the Baths! And all the bars... I will never, never deny that our Dionysian Experiment was not extremely beautiful!

"You could do anything, you could be anyone, with everybody. My poor imagination cannot bring to me the wonder, the strange miracle, nor the pleasure I could gather from one handsome and improper stranger." A tear seemed to glimmer in the white of his eye - or was he only drunk...

He went on, coaxing himself to the vision, "It was fantastic. No one knew you - all the gorgeous bodies, offered in the darkness... and pleasure a swift-flowing, nourishing stream - that no coming generation will again be able to conceive! At least not until there's a Cure."

"There'll just be something else to torment their sex!" Amanda reasoned. "It's the curse of Venus!"

“Oh FUCK Venus!” he gave a shriek, “Can I STAND it that the Dionysian Experiment is really OVER?!”

“Venus against Dionysis - Love must win over Desire!”

“It’s over - those days will never come again!”

“ ‘The Art of our Necessities is strange, and can make vile things precious.’ All our precious instruments...our bodies...the Mysterious...the Cruel and the Holy...all required for our Vision! So that pleasure is over now. There must be other excitements and incitements!”

“Such as?”

“The exaltations of deprivation.”

“Spare me!”

“So here we are, exiled to the provinces, by some Higher Power I feel - where we can’t do any more damage to ourselves or others.”

“It was either that, or being put in a jail-cell.”

“Strapped to a hospital bed, subject to surgical probes.”

“I’ll see you in the future - still trying to rave under the morphine drip.”

Amanda was always more hopeful, “Perhaps we shall evolve, after all, darling! If we stay away from Manhattan. Perhaps we can become...less decadent?”

Ballantine could only laugh, “As though it’s only a STYLE? Haven’t you been wearing black since you were twelve? And your four adolescent suicide attempts, demonstrating an early belief in the uselessness of life? And what about your polymorphous perversity, which renders you incapable of marriage, stability, or perhaps even Love? Not to mention your extensive research into every aspect of psychopathy and perversity. All your morbid predilections. . . no, darling, you are MARKED. You ARE Decadence!”

He went on, “But still you’re only a product of these times. In your forties in the year 2000, I see you as a blossoming black flower of the Christian millennium, horribly conscious of every sin that has ever been committed, yet somehow above it all, somehow unscathed. You’re healthy,

you see,” he ended flatly, and not without a certain contempt, “YOU will survive. And I promise you I will NOT.”

She did not protest. For only a few days had they understood that he was infected.

Cigarette smoke drifted through the dense air of the room, caught aslant the rays of the setting sun that brought all the dust to glittering life. At the window he gazed out at the barren landscape, then turned to see her staring into the litter of cocktail glasses. “Let us be a little happy then, while we are alive. Even if I must only exist as a talisman of death.”

“We should quit drinking,” said the one, so that the other might reply, “What for? Whatever do YOU want to live forever for?”

A bit further down the Royal Road to Nothingness, Ballantine demanded of his friend, “How do you live, without sex?”

“I don’t.... I mean, I do have sex.”

“You do not. Admit it, you hate sex.”

“No, I hate only those who have to have it..”

“You are too fixated upon your Ideal. Your desire for perfection now approaches a kind of Anaesthetic Perfection. Just learn to use their bodies!”

“Oh, I have.” She covered her eyes.

“Crying again?” He looked at her closely, “Really but don’t the old fantasies die hard.”

“Perhaps it’s the Christian sickness, still craving a sublime sacrifice... of the self to something greater than itself.”

“That in time proves itself to be a snorting hog,” he concluded her rapture.

The thought came to him then - “You wouldn’t be thinking of...falling in love again, would you?” He shuddered delicately. She said nothing. “If you ever fall in love again, I’ll have to kill you.”

She vainly dissembled, “Do you think I could survive another one of those submissions?”

“You’re lying. You’re still planning to find True Love.”

“No, no dearest... you’re right, I couldn’t take it. I would come out more dead than alive. To kill me would be redundant.”

“Enter the Paradox: ‘All men kill the things they love’. Themselves first, then the things they love, and finally even the things they hate. And then they expire from Boredom.”

“I wish . . . I could just go. Tomorrow.”

“Not yet. You can’t go before me. I haven’t got everything down yet.”

“You must let me see your diaries, my darling - one of these days.”

“Never. It’s too dangerous. You know what they say happens . . . when you meet your Double.”

“You die. So show them to me.”

“No. I haven’t got it all down yet.”

The dark paralysis of melancholy clenched at their prone and semi-conscious forms. Amanda had once again to concede to his perversity... as she watched him stretch himself along the dusty sofa and sink into reverie. Unbeknownst to her, he was focussing intently upon her. Whenever he began to record her, in his fashion, by that conscious design to later remember everything, she on her part became, through a telepathic faculty, the living actress of his imagination.

And as she improvised, she waxed brilliant, perfectly original, involuntarily giving him more text - yet these erratic and exquisite creations of converse were not always the easiest things to recall.

He initiated the topic, “Sex and the worship of god must once again become one and the same thing.”

“Meanwhile, you live in a culture where Tantra is porno.”

“You can’t imagine the herd might be capable of any such refinement?”

“I agree that that worship developed in a time more innocent, before we had so many variations, so many insane permutations of sex imbedded in our minds. Just consider how many murderers there are in this country. And WHY are there so many? Because the urge to kill has merged

with the sex-drive... murder has become a form of sex. More than ninety percent of these insane murderers have had someone twist, or even kill their sexuality at an early age - and usually through some form of Christian hygienic training.”

“Don’t you know that sex is dirty? Wait until you’re married... be a heterosexual... spawn...what’s wrong with you, anyway?”

“They try to murder our sex, but Sex cannot die.It merely becomes the same thing as murder”

“So tell me if it’s true - that they will actually orgasm into the pools of blood?”

“You see, you’re fascinated! How can we ever Return to a more innocent time, with the weight of this nightmare and guilt in our collective consciousness? ‘A purer, more innocent time’? Perhaps it never existed...except in the minds of the exhausted High Decadence as a pastoral Ideal, a literary product of the last frenzied days of Manhattan.”

“When you think now about the 1960s - how pathetically naive - to have believed that such a thing as Man might evolve!”

“Guess who else died yesterday?”

“Barry?”

“No. Not yet. Carol.”

“Oh well - she’d been sick a long time.”

“Her parents don’t want to bury her in the family plot. And the parish priest backed them up.”

“Hypocrite dirt! They LOVE the disease! They have just been waiting to destroy our Experiment. With their bigotry they have killed our new Science. They will do everything they can to blot out the Knowledge that we unearthed in Our Pure Indulgence!”

“So we ate the whole Apple, worm and all! And thus we can’t be allowed to go on living.What pleasure they must get in watching us die off!”

“Sex will harden again into conventional forms. Sex may at last achieve the Christian ideal, and be permitted only in laboratories, at specified times, under direct supervision, for the purposes of procreation only. Good luck with your cult of ecstasy . . . you’ll be branded Satanist and hounded to the latest in gallows.”

“As the last germ of Intellect is stamped out.”

“Probably not. It’s never been easy. There’s always too much persecution.”

“Live doomed, die hoping.”

“Doomed and doomy. Our lives are over.”

She agreed, yawned, and partook of an esoteric herbal medicine. **“Higher mind?”** she inquired.

“Yes, please.”

Half an hour later, Amanda broke the trance, **“But you are ridiculous! Our lives are over? I don’t THINK so! What about your imagination? Your huge, ungainly brain that takes you traveling into whatever realm you desire?”**

“I’m tired of it. I’m tired of trying. I’m bored! All I want to do now is get married to the perfect young boy, settle down in front of the TV set, and drift off downstream in some backwater town.”

“Be careful, dear, you’re waving a loaded gun around. I will have to report you to the Aesthetic Police on charges of Entropy.”

Ballantine began to whine, a thing he did most sumptuously, **“I WANT to be a Philistine! They have it so easy! I’m TIRED of the Hyperaesthetics! I’m too ANCIENT to Idealize!”** But Amanda continued to glare at him.

He insisted, **“To be visionary now is TOO PAINFUL!”**

To this she had to capitulate, **“Corrupt. I didn’t think it was possible that YOU could become MORE corrupt!”**

“Corrupt, yes. But not hungry.”

“Not hungry?”

“Not hungry,” he repeated, with a strain to his voice. Then, in response to his own self-torture, he had to torture her, and so asked - **“What if I never wrote anything again? I mean - Now That I Know.”**

She gazed very seriously at him, “Darling, you must have sex immediately. It’s been too long.”

“I KNOW the only way out is through sex. I have to start looking again. I can still have Safe Sex!” She looked at him askance. “I never HAVE appreciated sublimation. And this could be The Last Boy..”

“I wish you luck. Out here in the deep Styx they hear ‘Manhattan’ and flee before the Mutant. What viruses might you harbor, in your aura, man - not to mention what’s a-lurkin’ in your blue and degenerate blood?”

“I confess, I am one of the black fiends, from one of the most pungent cesspools of modern Syphilization. I’m a homosexual from Manhattan!”

“Evil, dark, diseased and so punished by God.”

“And finally ruined. RUNED! So I should never fuck again. Thank you, God, I’ve learned my lesson.”

“Between the two Hells: New York City, and this radioactive desert - what’s an out-of-work libertine got to look forward to?”

He took a slow turn around the attic room, not lighting the lamps as the sun set. “It was the Comte Saint-Germain, in 1787, who revived an oracle of Nostradamus, that was meant to be read every hundred years.” He rustled through the books piled high on the low table, withdrew the small green volume of Nostradamus, and read:

Whilst princes and kings are captive in prison
Songs, chants and refrains of the slavish mob
Shall in the future be received as divine oracle
By headless idiots deprived of judgment

“Saint-Germain warned the royal family to flee from the mad greed of the rising herd. But the royals were themselves too piglike to budge from their gilded pigsties.”

“Louis Seize was an intolerable slug.”

“Glutted. Thus ended one of the most advanced civilizations we have yet evolved.”

Ballantine and Amanda saw again the white outstretched necks of their ancestors, upon the dirty chopping block on the Place de Greve. Felt that swift cut of the blade, severing head from body - but never the Spirit from the Mind. For at least five minutes their sarcasm failed them.

“You see, we have no choice. We cannot die. We must live, as there are fewer and fewer of us left. I’ve got to get healthy!”

Ballantine laughed at her, “If I was younger, I would encourage you. I used to imagine there was some intrinsic Good in continuing to live. Now I doubt it. Do I care, at all, if the human race is saved from destruction? All our puny Arts: all Vision, Magick, every Science and system Ñ has any of it really been able to stop the general stupor that is even now coming over the eyes of the huge, ever huger and homogenous masses? And Marie Antoinette thought she had it bad.”

“ ‘The man of genius may be insane, but all the sane are idiots.’ “

“All right,” she sighed, “though I’m feeling a bit too frail to pursue my insanity at this very moment.”

“What about the acid? Could it be still fresh?”

“Only one way to find out.”

Forty minutes later, it was indeed evident that it had been very fresh... though it had been in the refrigerator for three years. “Eewhoosh!” sang Amanda, as Ballantine’s eye was caught by the figure of a young man, passing along the lane up the hill behind the house. Twilight lent a melancholy glory to this passage... Ballantine felt suddenly he could not bear to lose sight of him...

As if reading his mind, Amanda was musing, “Passing strange — curiouser and curiouser — I do feel a need to explore the Unknown.”

She didn’t notice her friend was already gone, in pursuit again of the Golden Ideal. This time it manifested as virile and nineteen - and who, when he realized he was caught in the sights of the most notorious of the local derelict aristocracy, began to stroll a little faster.

Thus he returned empty-handed, to announce, “Forget Art as our Religion. We shall worship Boys. These Nature religions, your goddesses and what-not - never mind that junk - even you girls will have to worship The Boys.”

“Please, dear, don’t tell me what to do. You know I will worship nothing human. I wish I could live for pleasure, as you try to... But for me the point of pleasure is no longer the climax, specifically sexual... but to expand the awareness of the senses outside the body. I aspire to treat the

awareness as nerves, capable of arraying itself throughout the entire universe ... so that I will be capable of experiencing exquisite pleasure in anything! From every sound, color, scent, tone of the voice... and so becoming once again conscious of Beauty in ecstatic fashion.”

Ballantine was recording, and shuddered, “But really - who could bear so much ...feeling?”

Now they emerged from their attic and went out walking into the night. A green half-moon flickered through a thick cloud cover. A few stray, articulate snowflakes fell. They walked up the road to the old country church, whose stained-glass windows had long ago been sold. Plywood boards were nailed in their place, painted over squarely NO TRESPASSING. But the graffiti had flowered: with giant cocks, the peace sign, FUCK BUSH, and the inevitable 666 done up in gold and silver. PAGAN ANGELS . . . METAL NYMPH . . . DEATH 101 ... VALMONT 1990, WAY BEYOND MY CONTROL... Hippie scavengers had moved in on the place, completing the desecration with joy.

And from the interior of the church came the sound of the speed freaks drumming...drumming on the garbage cans, drumming with old thighbones, beating out a freaky tattoo for the Millennium’s crazy tailspin.

“Apocalyptic, man...”

“You know they’ll keep that up for hours.”

“Most likely. Religiously practicing their Satanism... having sex all day, and saying their prayers.”

“Kali, Kali, Dance to Death!”

“They’ll Go as they Come . . . and Come as they Go.”

The snow flew thicker and began to cover the two entranced figures, gazing on the renegade church. Suddenly past them flashed the figure of the blonde boy, dressed in a sort of silver bunting. Ballantine gasped, “Look, it’s him again, look. he’s going in!” And the boy disappeared through a broken pane in the church’s basement window.

“The basement!” she wondered, as her friend followed the boy, “Future generations shall weep, to hear how he had to have sex in basements.”

“It’s actually alot more fun in a basement...the catacombs?” he reminded her. “But now it’s Us Pagans, hiding from the Christians.”

“If only they would just throw us to the lions. Instead they bleed us slowly with fear, with their inhumane morality.”

Strangely cheerful, he reassured her, “We can reverse it. Construction begins tomorrow on the new Coliseum. We should have finished that job 2,000 years ago. We’ll stock it with Beasts, and laughing Scarlet Women in red velvet-lined gallery-seats.”

“The Apocalypse is LONG overdue.”

“I insist on the pagan rites! I insist on every one of my Perversions!”

Ballantine crept up to the broken window, and peered into blackness. The sound of someone’s excited breathing caught his ear, and he swung his legs over the ledge and let himself fall. But there was no basement so dark he couldn’t find his way around in it.

“. . . The Last Boy.”

Midnight sounded in the old bell tower; shadows again spread their dark array. It was the end of the century. Our jades’ rather typical ennui de fin-de-siecle is but one aspect of the grimmer unease we all shall face in the year 2000. C’est la fin du Millenium! And worse: as Hell will spring to life on earth, inextricable from a new Paradise ... and with little in between...and certainly nothing beyond.

No afterlife! Only Afterhell - as hell follows hell after hell...and into the fiery arms of a billion hungry ids shall we watch the old moralities stumble, skid and fall. But so shall the Ecstatic Ones yet remain to sing...to sing, and sing on, of the perishing.