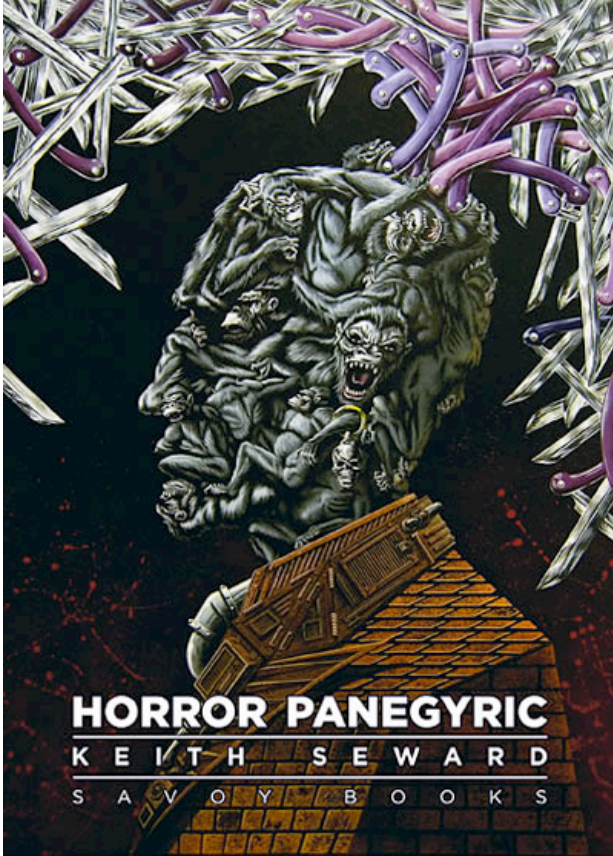


Horror Panegyric

Author: [Simon Sellars](#) • May 21st, 2008 •

Category: [Ballardosphere](#), [William Burroughs](#), [alternate worlds](#), [body horror](#), [surrealism](#)



Keith Seward, aka [Supervert](#), is a writer based in New York. He also runs [Reality Studio](#), a website and forum devoted to Burroughs. Reality Studio has had a big impact on ballardian.com in that it's a template for how to present an intelligent and provocative site about a major cultural figure without descending into the worst excesses of fandom. There is much discussion of Ballard over at Reality Studio's [forum](#), and some crossover the other way: Supervert submitted an entry to our Ballardian Home Movies competition and occasionally pops up in this site's comments box, as do other RS regulars. At some stage I hope to conduct an interview with Seward, in which the Ballard/Burroughs nexus will be analysed along with Keith's various writing projects (but as always with this site finding the time is the factor, although I hope the interview will not be too far away).

I have Supervert's two books, [Necrophiliac Variations](#) and [Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish](#), and I find them to be hilariously challenging examinations of the nature of sexuality. Careening through outright farce to science fiction and beyond, these self-published, thoroughly subversive gems have been around for a few years, appreciated by the likes of Mark Dery and i09's [Annalee Newitz](#).

Dery even [managed to draw Ballard](#) into the frame:

Things are getting weird out there, so much so that imaginary obsessions such as exophilia, the "abnormal attraction [to] beings from worlds beyond earth" that is the subject of the underground novel Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish, are starting to sound downright plausible. Can we be far from the future foretold by J.G. Ballard, where car-crash enthusiasts get off on vehicular manslaughter and fans of Space Age snuff thrill to footage of astronauts being roasted alive during re-entry? In the introduction to his 1974 novel Crash, Ballard wondered if the android numbness induced by media bombardment—the "demise of feeling"—would open the door to "all our most real and tender pleasures—in the excitements of pain and mutilation; in sex as the perfect arena...for...our...perversions; in our moral freedom to pursue our own psychopathology as a game."

Now Keith has a new book out, a limited-edition hardcover called *Horror Panegyric*. Published by **Savoy Books**, this is Seward's appraisal of Savoy's notorious *Lord Horror* novels by **David Britton** and **Michael Butterworth**. The novels tell the story of Lord Horror, who, Seward writes, "is based on a historical personage: Lord Haw-Haw, aka William Joyce, British fascist and radio announcer". The books are alternative histories of a fascist England, brutal, bloody, highly confrontational and shot through with a violent Surrealism.

According to Seward:

Lord Horror takes the repository of symbols bequeathed by World War II and pours it into a cauldron boiling over with pop culture. Bigots and death camps get cooked up with rock and roll, comic strips, esoterica. It's a "what if the other side had won the war" trip like you've never seen before.

...

*Constant harassment — which continued into the late 1990s — from an obsessed constabulary would have quashed most publishers, but Britton and Butterworth operated under a maxim more along the Nietzschean lines of "what doesn't kill us makes us stronger." Far from folding up shop or retreating into less controversial publications, the two launched an all-out assault. Though the novel *Lord Horror* was effectively suppressed and remains difficult to find even today, the character Lord Horror multiplied, made appearances in different media, spawned other characters who in turn featured in their own books, comics, music. In short, the death of the book was the birth of a twisted empire, a reich of deviant imagination that neither Allied nor Axis powers would ever have recognized.*

...

*Their franchise of Lord Horror productions is provocative, original, visionary, and contains at least one outright masterpiece (Motherfuckers). Young writers should be looking at it the same as they do *Naked Lunch*, i.e. as a work that shows them what the possibilities are in the hands of a master. Academics should be crawling all over it with their magnifying glasses trying to figure out what it means and what it says about society. Anyone interested in literature should be reading and experiencing the damn thing. A few cognoscenti are there already, snapping up the first editions of *Lord Horror* before everybody else catches on and prices them out of the market. But the victory celebration hasn't happened yet, and it is hard to understand why.*

The *Lord Horror* books are now difficult to find, but following Seward's essay in *Horror Panegyric* are excerpts from the works that are guaranteed to stoke the fire. Perhaps you might even find yourself sharing **Colin Wilson's reaction**:

*I think that, as an exercise in Surrealism, *Lord Horror* compares with some of the best work that came out of France and Germany between the wars, for example Georges Bataille... Britton is undoubtedly brilliant, but when I came to the bit about Horror hollering out a Jewess's foot and putting it over his penis, I started skipping. With the best will in the world, I couldn't give his brilliant passages the attention they deserve because I kept being put off by this note of violence and sadism. No doubt it is because I belong to an older generation that is still basically a bit Victorian.*

Horror Panegyric is **available online** at supervert.com or can be **purchased in hardcover**. The latter is worth it for the great cover art and design by **John Coulthart**.

....: **Previously on Ballardian**:

- + **J.G. Ballard: the Visual Tribute** (including work from John Coulthart)
- + **The 1st Annual Ballardian Home Movies Competition** (featuring Supervert)
- + **A Home and a Grave** (Mike Holliday's essay on Ballard's *Unlimited Dream Company*, analysing it as a "fascist novel" with similarities to *Lord Horror*)
- + **J.G. Ballard: The Corridor Interview** (a republishing of a 1974 Ballard interview from *Corridor*, Michael Butterworth's early fanzine)

Author: **Simon Sellars**
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Newer: **Bunker Tales** »

9 Responses »

1. **Tim** on **May 21st, 2008 at 10:59 am:**

I'm impatiently waiting for my copy of Horror Panegyric to arrive. I know I could read it online, but as a Savoyophile I want the hard copy.

It's interesting that the original Lord Horror novel has never been republished. Savoy says: "In answer to frequent queries, Savoy currently has no plans to reprint the book." Yet it's available in a Czech translation and as a talking book.

2. **Supervert** on **May 21st, 2008 at 1:38 pm:**

Many thanks for the write-up, Simon. It's especially meaningful because I feel that Savoy's books aren't as well known as they should be, especially outside England, and thus every bit of exposure helps to extend the message of Horror Panegyric — and really it's a simple message: read the Lord Horror novels!

3. **Simon Sellars** on **May 21st, 2008 at 2:15 pm:**

My pleasure. By the way, can you shed any light on Tim's comment, ie, why has Lord Horror been republished in Czech but not in English?

4. **MaaqF** on **May 22nd, 2008 at 12:13 am:**

A useful history/introduction to Lord Horror and some of the related materials can be found in Brian Stableford's essay 'The Adventures of Lord Horror Across the Media Landscape'. This essay was published in Other Dimensions Number Two (Fall, 1994), published by Necronomicon Press. A year or so ago I was offered a copy of Lord Horror, but the price was well out of my reach. A pity, as I was researching the history of British literary obscenity prosecutions at the time.

5. **Supervert** on **May 22nd, 2008 at 3:24 am:**

About the republication of Lord Horror — Savoy is a small, independent firm. I think that they believe it's better to invest their energy, passion, and limited means in the production of new books. There will be a new novel in the Lord Horror series, and they have a number of other projects in the works as well.

It's also worth bearing in mind that Lord Horror has caused Savoy no end of legal troubles. Probably it would be safe for them to reprint it. But if you, like David Britton, had served two terms in jail for charges of obscenity, how anxious would you be to reprint the book? It's to his enormous credit that he keeps working at all, let alone keeps writing such outré books as he does.

Meanwhile if an entrepreneurial publisher outside England wanted to reprint Lord Horror, Savoy would probably listen to offers. Horror Panegyric makes the case that the books are ripe for picking by an American publisher in particular. Graphic books are all the rage here. Somebody should swoop in and offer Savoy a deal for the novels plus all the comics they've put out.

6. **Simon Sellars** on **May 22nd, 2008 at 12:28 pm:**

I understand that David would be anxious, but as you suggest in the essay the climate is quite different now. Still, two prison terms would definitely put me off.

For Tim's benefit, I hope you don't mind me posting the following passage from your essay, which helps shed some light on all this:

"Aesthetic advantages are balanced by disadvantages of a mostly practical nature. It's very expensive to print a book. A romance publisher can run off half a million paperbacks, but an individual is going to be strapped to pay for a thousand. And once you've printed it, you have to store it, market it, sell it, fulfill orders, shlep to the post office, keep records, fill out tax forms — all when you really should be doing what a writer is supposed to do: write. And when you add to the disadvantages the sort of legal harassment that Savoy has suffered, it's amazing that Britton and Butterworth have persevered at all.

As a result of these practical difficulties, Lord Horror is not as well known as he should be. Savoy has done relatively small print runs of the books. No publisher has had the vision or, more likely, the courage to purchase the rights to publish them in America. You can buy Motherfuckers at Amazon, but the two other novels are rare and expensive. The comics have also become collectibles. The smart young people who would most enjoy the works probably can't afford them, or don't know enough about them to sell an old iPod and turn the funds into a copy of the Reverbstorm comic.

It is time for that to change. This is a call for action. If you're interested in transgressive literature, buy a copy of Motherfuckers before Amazon sells out. Watch eBay for Lord Horror — a copy recently sold for about \$150 — and Baptised in the Blood of Millions. If your interests extend to comics and graphic novels, buy the various Lord Horror comics. If you're into music, try the Savoy Wars CD. Better yet, if you're a publisher or if you want to be the next Barney Rossett (the legendary founder of Grove Press, publisher of Henry Miller, Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, et al), contact Savoy to inquire about American rights to the books. Publish them all in a nicely designed line of paperbacks, so that they look as well as they deserve but aren't too expensive for the college set."

Keith Seward, *Horror Panegyric*.

7. **Tim** on **May 22nd, 2008 at 10:54 pm**:

Thanks Simon and Keith. Very interesting. I guess it's time to learn Czech...

8. **Simon Sellars** on **May 22nd, 2008 at 11:03 pm**:

I like this comment from Robert Chalmers in The Independent (http://www.savoy.abel.co.uk/HTML/fenella_independent.html):

"The overall tone of some passages of Lord Horror is such that reproducing quotations in a family newspaper is simply not an option. As I recently explained to Britton, my own preference, if I ever find the copy that is festering somewhere on my shelves, would be to incinerate it rather than sell it for the £300 that the edition now fetches."

9. **Nick Garrard** on **May 23rd, 2008 at 5:10 am**:

I wrote an article on the Savoy team back in December and they were absolute gents to work with - furnishing me equally with their time and plentiful copies of their books and comics. As a result, I've had a copy of "Horror Panegyric" for some time. It offers a wonderfully balanced, learned and mature argument for a greater common appreciation of the Savoy canon.

Thanks for bringing this to attention, Simon.

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