



## From this there is no escape

*Necrophilia Variations* by Supervert

I was strolling along a platform at a major London railway station when a bill poster caught my eye. It was for a new novel, *The Calling*

of *the Grave*. How appropriate: I had just been reading Supervert's *Necrophilia Variations* on the train. And in reading this second book by what I would venture to dub a "contemporary beat" writer – an association I'm sure Supervert would not find unpalatable – "the grave" had been on my mind a lot, of late.

I confess to having had a thorough browse of the other two books in the trio of offerings from Supervert when I met this magazine's editor in London (we had already agreed which one I would take), so my first thoughts involved speculation as to what research Supervert might have undertaken for *this* book...

Some of these very short stories might suggest themselves as scripts for a macabre version of *Sex and the City*; but then again, not quite. Perhaps more like Lou Reed in the early '70s, especially

as a dominatrix appears in "Whoremonger for a dying friend". And I'm sure Carrie Bradshaw wouldn't make an appearance with

a corpse handcuffed to a bed. No, what we have here is a portrait of the cringing man who shrinks from reality and lives in a polite, conservative, cocooned world where the ultimate denial is the denial of death (and sex).

"Meat substitutes" deals with technology and the distance that has opened up between the way we live and our organic existence; it is one of a number of recurring themes. Other stories give the distinct impression of the author having inserted fragments of autobiography; perhaps the one that conveys this most is "Labor Day", although I must emphasise *fragments*.

There are themes of loneliness, isolation and alienation in many of the stories, "A new man", for example, which begins with an interesting question, although one not many of us will have the experience of grappling with on

the morning after... But that is precisely the beginning of this protagonist's alienation from the rest of society. These are themes

that become more prominent in subsequent variations.

"Our wound" possesses a dark beauty, and is wonderfully written – it does not contain the ugliness of the word "stiff" that scars the third paragraph of the following story, "Postmortem", which in other ways is an example of the author's literary and conceptual genius. Indulge me to quote a passage from this latter story, the context being the conceit of a cadaver lying in its grave, the loneliness, isolation and alienation of the living transferred to a cognisance in death; the cadaver, faced with an eternity of solitude, has one "final hope" in the necrophile, who, "[w]ith his erection... achieves the resurrections the Good Book only promises". Dear reader, with these words we can forgive the poetry-demolishing use of "stiff".

And then the author's trademark dark humour turns to dark ☹



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hilarity with “Visions of supernatural depravity” as he reverses the roles and takes us on a light-hearted romp through the nature of sex not with mortal remains, but with fully functioning and animated ethereal bodies. It is this until the last few sentences, when the narration turns to a statement about our mortality; perhaps our final act with the Grim Reaper may not be a sex act, but for all of us it is inevitable. And yes, my friend, this includes *you*. This theme is asserted overtly at the very end of the following story, “Confessions of a skull mask”, as the collection moves away from more playful variations on necrophilia and closes in on the essential point.

In the concluding variation the author addresses his reader directly. I’m not sure it works, or works the way the author may have intended – at least it didn’t with me. Did the *Necrophilia Variations* disgust me? At a very few of the most extreme fantasies I must admit to the occasional twinge; but these are, after all, fantasies, and I found the overall literary quality to be high. So perhaps this last chapter is a genuine self-reflection, one that is also pointed genuinely at the reader, akin to a shaman pointing a bone and cursing his audience.

Do I feel cursed as a result of having read this little black book, as the author implies I should? I do not. And nor do I think the author is cursed, as he also implies. In fact, my own recent thoughts of mortality were strangely confirmed as a result of reading these two hundred pages. As Superververt conveys in his very last line, if we, the living, can fuck the dead, it is Death that ultimately screws *us*. From this there is no escape, and any attempt at denial is starkly, coldly, futile. 

***Necrophilia Variations*** is published by Superververt 32C Inc. (New York, 2005): 200pp.

## Additional Info

Necrophilia Variations

*The author’s trademark dark humour turns to dark hilarity as he reverses the roles and takes us on a light-hearted romp through the nature of sex not with mortal remains, but with fully functioning and animated ethereal bodies.*