

in which chromosomes have not yet been sorted out. The nameless She, the “Sakra Wound,” holds in her nothingness a plurality of names, an aural splendor that multiplies rather than recedes:

Because you hold the Name of many
And the beauty of all
The solitude of boats at night
The strength of nacre upon swallowing its pearl
At the bottom of that funnel it rolls unto its origin
Searching for the Conca
Vity of its childhood

The split of concavity into “Conca” (evoking, in Spanish, *concha*) and “Vity” (in Spanish, “Vidad,” which suggests *vida*, or life) repeats the dyadic split, only this time in terms of sameness rather than difference; the *conch* is already *life*, the spectral womb of the goddess. If there is a goddess invoked by *Sakra Boccata*, She is Killa, the Quechua word for “moon,” which Mazzotti alchemizes into *LoKilla*, the Spanish diminutive of *loca*, and which Eshleman in turn translates as “LittleKrazyOne” (“Oh LittleKrazyOne Queen my Queen”). In cultivating a rich aural fabric that incorporates Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Quechua (and, via Eshleman, English, too), Mazzotti constructs a poetry of the moon, for the moon, and by the moon, an authentically *lunatic* lyric that swarms language and explodes its categorical binaries into androgynous depths.

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Harold Jaffe, *Induced Coma: 50 and 100 Word Stories*. Fort Wayne, IN: Anti-Oedipus Press, 2014. 170pp. \$13.95

While Harold Jaffe’s writing has been dubbed “literary terrorism” by numerous critics (and even his own publishers), one would find it difficult to categorize *Induced Coma: 50 and 100 Word Stories*, his most recent volume of docufiction, as terroristic. Rather, Jaffe’s meticulous deconstructions of mainstream “news” articles and various other online and print sources demonstrate the consciousness of an artist who is struggling with, as he calls it, “writing in a dying world.” The terror is therefore not of Jaffe’s conscious doing, but the result of his ability to remove the blinders set forth by a rapidly deteriorating culture, one that does not want to acknowledge the extent to which it has succumbed to various millennial diseases: virtual solipsism, televised suicide, crimes against the environment, repressed sexuality, and an increasing disconnect between cultures, within families, and ultimately, from oneself.

In the prose style and formal structure of *Induced Coma*, Jaffe extends his characteristic use of economy and constraint as an immanent critique of what he considers the dangerous brevity now endemic to today's vehicles of vernacular communication. Much like its critically acclaimed predecessor *Anti-Twitter: 50 150-Word Stories*, *Induced Coma* comprises 50- and 100-word dispatches that entertain the reader with their stripped-down satire, all the while revealing the violence belying humanity—a violence so endemic to the human condition that the hope for remission and recovery seems futile. The reader faces an internal conflict, unsure whether engaging in or enjoying the texts entails complicity in that violence. However, it becomes clear by the end of the collection that Jaffe is not so much trying to foment despair in his readers as he is trying to encourage collective awareness and alternative perspectives. Take, for example, the opening text, "Induced Coma," where the medical practice intended to help patients cope during recovery from trauma is instead portrayed as a "sweet space" separate from the violence and technology of the modern world. In other words, a state to be desired, not feared. To understand the alternative perspective, no explication is needed beyond Jaffe's description of the scenario. The spareness of his prose is that straightforward, that unadorned. Trusting that his readers are intelligent enough to construct their own meanings, Jaffe allows the constraint to do the work for him. His technique demonstrates the extent to which the ironic understatements, tacit analogies, and subtle implications of blank parody can produce social satire.

The brand of irony in "Induced Coma" is a signature of Jaffe's docufictions, where existing texts are appropriated, reframed, and "treated" to generate a defamiliarizing effect for readers. Jaffe's signature irony is meant to do nothing less than expose the oxymoronic creeds of Western culture, a culture that Jaffe claims is "devolving." But readers of *Induced Coma* and Jaffe's other treated texts can see that little fabrication is required on his part to achieve that end. For instance, in "A Bangladeshi," Jaffe simply juxtaposes stories of the American "ice-bucket challenge" fad and the reality of water scarcity in South Asia to mount an exposé of overconsumption and waste in Western culture: "An estimated 25 million Bangladeshis have been exposed to arsenic through water making it the worst mass poisoning in history...Bangladeshis knowingly poison themselves because there are no alternative water sources." Jaffe does not need to drive the point home any further, for a self-incriminating culture requires no overt opprobrium or condemnation. And this is the true mastery behind *Induced Coma*. Each "treated" text—the result of carefully paring down the original prose and defamiliarizing it via name, place, and date changes (among other things)—is painfully (or humorously) self-aware and overt. Readers cannot mistake the cultural and political implications of Jaffe's treatments, as there are no idioms or symbols to obscure the artifacts'

identities. The original texts Jaffe treats retain a vague presence in his writings, but they reveal themselves through layers of palimpsest, out of which urgent warnings emerge about the need for compassion, the future of humanity, and (to borrow from Vonnegut) the prospect of “a planet which [is] dying fast.”

Even though the texts are treated in such a way that they embody formidable power individually, the overall organization of the prose helps give depth and multidimensionality to the book’s overarching lines of critique. Most of the pieces in *Induced Coma* are organized thematically, which helps carry one impression over into another, all the while inverting, reverting, and disorienting the reader’s expectations about the given topic. For instance, “Niquab” begins a thematic series on women and describes the challenges of Egyptian female students who wish to attend exams despite a ban on the veil. When juxtaposed with the next text, “Millions of Women,” an overview of how American divorcees are at risk of becoming “bag ladies” because of financial instability, “Niquab” becomes more than a snapshot of female repression abroad. It becomes a paragon of true subjugation against which the succeeding texts are measured. While neither “Niquab” nor “Millions of Women” overtly denounces Western culture, the series proceeds in that direction. Jaffe follows up with a text that details the “thigh gap mania spreading across social media” (“Thigh Gap”), and then gives readers a farcical European study entitled “Housework,” which posits that “housework alone significantly reduces the risk of both pre- and post-menopausal women getting [breast cancer].” Together these texts provide an ample counterpoint to the struggles of the Egyptian student, revealing through contrast the extent to which hegemonic culture has become enslaved to its superficiality. Hegemony as farce may be the key theme of *Induced Coma*, but Jaffe’s skillful treatment of his source texts ensures that the political overtones of this theme emerge gradually, obliquely, and with great subtlety over the course of the book.

Induced Coma does not exclusively critique sociopolitical themes. Jaffe also operates in metafictional, fabulist, and allegorical modes. Making a reappearance from *Anti-Twitter*, several pieces entitled “Things to Do” give the reader access to the various personas of the “writer” behind the writing. “Rockstar ’69,” “Stella,” “Mephisto,” “The Almost-Planet Pluto,” and “Dialogues with Death,” meanwhile, are fine formal and thematic departures that transport the reader towards an otherworldly, Borgesian-inhabited space. In fact, because of his ability to be simultaneously transparent and dreamlike or mystifying, one cannot escape the inclination to place Jaffe alongside Borges—or, in his more “terroristic” criticisms, Foucault. Ultimately, Jaffe’s newest collection upholds his reputation as a master of literary activism, not terrorism: he does not disappoint readers seeking the ideological truths belying a diseased surface culture.

Tara Stillions Whitehead

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