

Softcover: US

# The view from inside Hugh Hefner's harem

Former Bunny Girl Izabella St James paints an unflattering picture of life at the Playboy Mansion and its lord of the manor

BY CAROLE CADWALLADR  
THE OBSERVER, LONDON

*Bunny Tales* is subtitled "Behind Closed Doors at the Playboy Mansion," but it could have been called "Too Much Information." Because while there's a lot of detail in here which is really not terribly surprising — that Hugh Hefner, aged 78 when the book was written (now 83), is not, in fact, one of the world's hottest lovers — there's also an awful lot that the world didn't really need to know. Such as, after popping a Viagra twice a week, Wednesdays and Fridays, Hef still liked to sleep with up to four girls at a time and "wiped himself off with a wet bath towel after he had sex with each girl and before the next." Or that during the ensuing performance, with many girls arrayed around the room, and porn showing on various screens, he encouraged them to give "Oh daddy!" shout-outs.

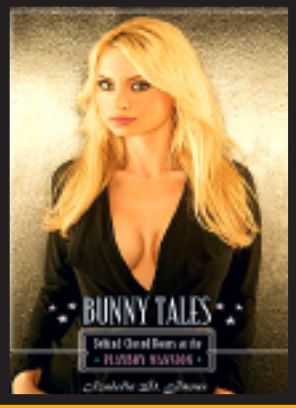
It's not a pretty picture that Izabella St James paints and it's certainly not an erotic one ("It seemed to me he just laid there like a dead fish"). The mansion, though still the stage set for regular Playboy parties, is a decrepit time warp, unchanged since the 1960s. "The carpet in the upstairs hallway also had not been changed in who knows how long. Everything was just old and stale. Archie the house dog would regularly relieve himself on the hallway curtains, adding the scent of urine to the general scent of decay."

So what exactly is St James doing there? She becomes one of Hef's "Girlfriends," with a room in the mansion, a US\$1,000 allowance (picked up in person from Hef's bedroom every Friday morning, when he'd make a point of discussing any perceived personal failings — usually "lack of harmony in the group or lack of sexual participation"), a US\$10,000 down-payment on a car and all the plastic surgery you could want. Hefner has one tab with a Beverly Hills hairdresser and another with a surgeon and all Girlfriends are encouraged to have what they want, although breast augmentation is the first and most urgent of his requirements (and costs him around US\$70,000 a year).

Unlike many of the girls, St James says she doesn't have "a plastic agenda" (not that this stops her), nor is she some poor and desperate would-be topless model from the Midwest. She graduated from McGill University in Montreal, and then went to Pepperdine Law School in Malibu where, she believes, she was "like Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde*, with my blonde hair, pink tank tops, and low-rider jeans." Why did she then go to Hef? Because "how many of us actually get the chance to do something completely out of the ordinary in our lives?"

Well, yes, watching a 78-year-old

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BUNNY TALES: BEHIND CLOSED DOORS AT THE PLAYBOY MANSION

BY IZABELLA ST JAMES

256 PAGES

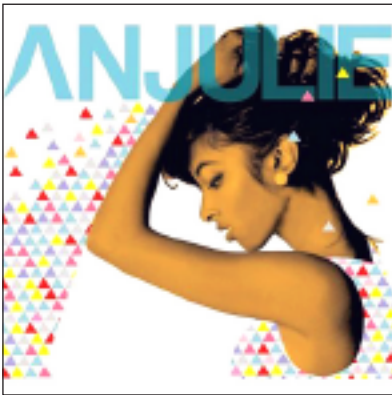
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man performing sex acts with teenagers is somewhat out of the ordinary, although St James rather blows her cover by mentioning in the prologue that the catalyst for her writing the book was meeting "one of the few elite actors who are members of the exclusive US\$20-million-a-movie club." The actor, after chatting her up, was disturbed to discover that she once lived in the Playboy Mansion, so *Bunny Tales* reads like an attempt at self-justification.

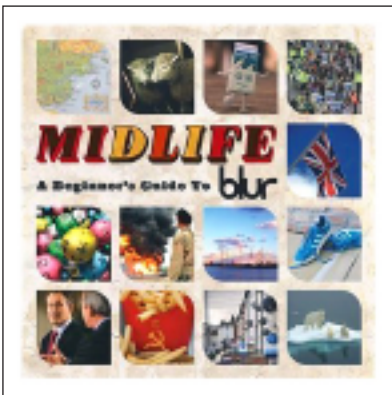
Just possibly, he was unimpressed by her account of sleeping with a man who eats all of his meals in bed, has a retinue of staff to maintain his 1,500 "scrapbooks" and insists all Girlfriends are tucked up inside by a strict 9pm curfew. And although she says sexual participation was voluntary, it doesn't sound all that voluntary.

There's more than a touch of the Howard Hughes about Hugh Hefner, from the compulsive behaviors — his evening meal is always served with "apple sauce and a glass of cold milk" — to the cataloguing of his sexual conquests. And as a sly biographical examination of Hef, his rampant egomania and his fossilized sexual attitudes, this book certainly provides good material for any future biographer. St James does eventually grow tired of living life as if she were "in a car commercial," not to mention the "sex duties" and the perpetual cat-fighting with the other Girlfriends.

But she also genuinely believes that it was a small price to pay for entry into an MTV lifestyle. Oh, and the US\$20-million-a-movie actor? She reveals at the end of the book that he changed his mind and that they're now dating.



ANJULIE  
Anjulie  
Hear Music



Midlife: A Beginner's  
Guide to Blur  
Blur  
Virgin



DORROUGH MUSIC  
Dorrough  
E1



SEE MYSTERY LIGHTS  
Yacht  
DFA

As Santigold rip-offs go, *Boom*, the debut single by Anjulie, is among the cleverest. Apart from the drums, all the other instruments — the flatulent junkyard brass, the bone-dry Morricone guitars — are obfuscated, floating through haze. On top Anjulie coos coyly about giving in when really she should know better. And the faintly Caribbean chorus — "Boom, sha-la-ka" — echoes a skipping heartbeat, a theme woven into the song's lyrics. (On Aug. 4, *Boom* received a 2009 MTV Video Music Award nomination for breakthrough video.)

But unlike Santigold, who occasionally forgets to ground her excursions in song craft, Anjulie isn't eccentric in the least. Of Guyanese descent by way of Toronto, Anjulie has an unapologetic pop ear, an intuitive gift for melody and a voice that, while not rich or deep, eases into long sighs, syllables melting into each other so that entire lines, or verses, can seem like one long, fluctuating note.

All together it makes for an often-sumptuous debut album of lithe, modern coffeehouse soul (in senses musical and literal: Hear Music is a joint venture between Starbucks and Concord Music Group) that smartly avoids the bohemian. The Lisa Stansfieldesque *Some Dumb Girl* splits the difference between Muscle Shoals and acid jazz. *The Heat and Same Damn Thing* are lightly drizzled with calypso and reggae. And *Love Songs* could have been a Neil Diamond number, and it knows it: "I fall so easy for the cheesy things in life," Anjulie sings.

*Crazy That Way* has the most conventional beginning of the songs here, with just a woman, a piano and a confession: "Sometimes I lock myself inside your closet, breathing the scent of your clothes/Take home a T-shirt and pretend I lost it, hide it under my pillow." But then come the strings, marching a quick step beneath her, and after that the multitracked vocals. Soon the mood is acoustic Michael Jackson as filtered through the lens of Ne-Yo, a hint of how the next generation of singer-songwriters is coming of age.

Long before he was animated and immortalized as 2D, the lead singer of the virtual band Gorillaz, Damon Albarn was the leading bloke in the English band Blur.

For many, Blur is a needle in the haystack of mid-1990s alternative rock one-hit wonders. *Song 2*, forever linked with a teen slasher film and often played at sporting events, is pretty much the only Blur song you'll find on anyone's iPod. Luckily, we have this double-disc "beginner's guide" to lead us through more than 10 years of some of the best Brit-pop ever created.

Disc 1 offers *Beetlebum*, *Girls and Boys* and the aforementioned *Song 2*. Disc 2 presents warm, fuzzed-out guitars, punchy synths and Albarn's charming accent on tracks like *Stereotypes* and *Chemical World*.

Every couple of years in hip-hop the party relocates. From Atlanta it went to Houston, then the Bay Area, then Miami, and then back to Atlanta. (New York? Not in ages.) During the last year and a half it's landed in Dallas, which has become an unexpected hotbed of post-snap-music dance-craze rap, thanks to Lil Wil's *My Dougie*, B-Hamp's *Do the Ricky Bobby* and the GS Boyz's *Stanky Legg*.

All those synchronized moves? Dorrough will have none of it. A Dallas rapper with a pair of hits, *Ice Cream Paint Job* and *Walk That Walk*, that require no predetermined dance steps, Dorrough has more in common

with the city's rougher voices, like Big Tuck, Tum Tum or Fat Pimp.

Dorrough is an unmemorable rapper, though; dismal rhymes abound on his debut album, *Dorrough Music*. Nevertheless he's got a gift for the sticky concept. *Walk That Walk* is an addictive ode to catcalling. With its bouncy, high-pitched synth stabs, *Flashout* captures the nervous energy of conspicuous consumption. And occasionally Dorrough's overreliance on the simple results in cleverness. On *What's My Ringtone*, he wonders what song plays when he calls his girl: "Is it *Love* by Keyshia Cole? Or *Playa Cardz* by Keyshia Cole?/All I know is it better not be that *I Should've Cheated* by Keyshia Cole."

Last year Dorrough had a hit in the southern US (alongside SupaStarr) with *Halle Berry*, a celebration of women whose beauty recalls that Oscar-winning actress. But between then and now the rights to that bawdy song were sold to the Louisiana rapper Hurricane Chris, whose slightly more genial *Halle Berry (She's Fine)* has become a huge success in the US, bigger than either of Dorrough's hits.

To add insult to injury, Hurricane Chris' version comes with its own dance (largely repurposed from *My Dougie*). Even Berry tried it out on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*.

The video for *Psychic City (Voodoo City)*, from the new album by the experimental dance-rock duo Yacht, begins with a disclaimer: "Due to our strong personal convictions, we wish to stress that this film in no way endorses a belief in the occult."

It's a funny statement, coming from a group so invested in ritual and enigma. *See Mystery Lights* was named after an unexplained phenomenon in Marfa, Texas, where parts of the album were recorded. Its cover, designed by Boyd Elder, involves an arrangement of mystic triangles, encased in holographic foil. Among the album's catchier refrains is this one, from *Ring the Bell*, a slow-throbbing opening track: "Will we go to heaven, or will we go to hell?/It's my understanding that neither are real."

Jona Bechtolt is the chief heretic behind Yacht and a remix specialist with a canny knack for concept. (The band's name originated as an acronym for Young Americans Challenging High Technology.) His previous albums were solo projects, but here he teams up with Claire L. Evans, an artist and writer from his hometown, Portland, Ore. Their partnership works easily: On a starkly funky track called *I'm in Love With a Ripper* Bechtolt sings the verse and Evans sings the chorus, along with a mock-confessional coda. ("I got told to marry a doctor," it begins.) On *Summer Song*, which rides a disco beat, their voices blend into an echoing, androgynous whole.

Instrumentally the album hews to the house aesthetic of the DFA label, which signed Yacht on the merit of *Summer Song*. So the drums sound live and present, the bass is full and clear, and myriad textural elements fade in and out of the mix. It's indie-rock party music, and its spare-parts feeling comes honestly: at teamyacht.com Bechtolt dissects the influences behind *Psychic City (Voodoo City)* "in granular detail.

All of which makes the occult disclaimer feel like a smirking jape. Does a band like Yacht even have "strong personal convictions"? Maybe, if you count the message of *The Afterlife*, which is that whatever lies beyond, it's going to have a groove.

— NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Softcover: US

# Shakespeare on the Chinese stage

Alexander Huang digs deep to uncover ulterior motives for Chinese culture's embrace of the Bard, but winds up digging himself into a hole

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

There are many ways that Shakespeare and China might interact, even though they are two such different entities. One is an individual Renaissance artist, the other a numerically vast population and a culture that's both ancient and diverse. How might two such different cultural presences, then, opt to relate?

Firstly there is the point that Shakespeare, irrespective of his country of origin and date in history, is widely perceived as the world's pre-eminent dramatist. China has no comparable claimant, and it's Japan's Chikamatsu who's usually granted the accolade of being the finest dramatist East Asia has produced. Nevertheless, China's dramatic traditions, and especially its operatic ones, are a major world presence, and in an age of globalization, interactions between China and Shakespeare on many levels are inevitable.

*Chinese Shakespeares* seeks to chart many different forms of such a two-way influence — productions of Shakespeare plays

in China and Taiwan, productions elsewhere that use Chinese theatrical traditions, adaptations of Shakespearean plays that seek to re-imagine them in Asian contexts, films based on Shakespeare made by Asian film directors, and so on. All form a rich quarry for thoughts on cultural relativity in the modern and earlier ages, and it's interesting to see that Taiwan in particular comes out of the study with particular prominence.

Its contribution to productions related to Shakespeare is shown to have been very extensive. Among the many directors discussed are Stan Lai (賴聲川) (notably in relation to his *Lear and the Thirty-seven-fold Practice of a Bodhisattva* of 2000 and 2001), and Wu Hsing-kuo (吳興國) who founded the Contemporary Legend Theater (當代傳奇劇場) with his wife Lin Hsiu-wei (林秀偉) in 1986; their productions of versions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* in the traditional Beijing opera style were major features of their era. Stylistically similar Shakespearean productions, such as Zheng Bixian's (鄭碧賢) *Othello*

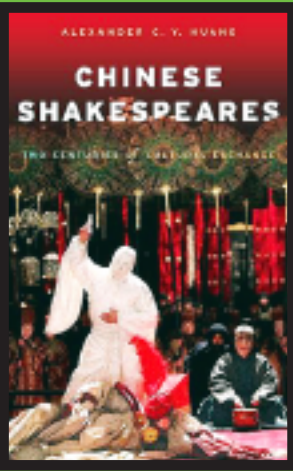
of 1983, were simultaneously taking place in Beijing.

Also discussed are Taipei's Shakespeare's Wild Sisters (莎妹劇團) company (notably its *Crazy Scenes* of 2002, based on episodes featuring madness extracted from *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Othello*), the Golden Bough Theater's (金枝演社) Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese) *Yumei and Tianlai* (玉梅與天來) of 2004, based on *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Godot Theater's (果陀劇場) *Kiss Me Nana* (吻我吧娜娜) of 1995, based on *The Taming of the Shrew*.

But the question nevertheless remains as to what are the motives for the uses of Shakespearean material so far away from its place of origin. And closely related to this is the issue of why Shakespeare achieved his preeminence, both national and global, in the first place.

China, so the argument goes, needed and needs a national poet just as anywhere else does, and if it can't come up with one of its own — especially in the high-profile area of stage performance — then it will simply have to

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CHINESE SHAKESPEARES  
ALEXANDER C.Y. HUANG  
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co-opt somebody else's. This is as absurd in the Chinese context as it would be in any other, including Shakespeare's original one in the English branch of European Renaissance culture.

The ridiculous argument has been presented to students for some time that Shakespeare was only one of several equally talented English dramatists in his day, and that he was "promoted" to the role of National Bard in the early 18th century because Great Britain, busy acquiring the first of its sequence of empires, felt the need for a national poet to equal Rome's Virgil and in some way justify the new national role of imperial expansion.

It's true, of course, that the English theaters were closed down by the Puritans a generation after Shakespeare's death, that when they were re-opened in 1660 it was often with musical versions of the plays styled on the French pattern, and that a revival of interest in Shakespeare purely as a dramatist did take place in the early 18th century. However, a quick look at the prefatory material to the Folio edition

of almost all of Shakespeare's plays of 1623 unambiguously demonstrates that his reputation was sky-high even seven years after his death, with his friend and colleague Ben Jonson asserting that he was probably a greater dramatist than any produced by Greece or Rome.

This absurd relating of Shakespeare's status to British imperialism isn't the only flaw in this otherwise competent book. There's another howler, too, when the critic G. Wilson Knight is associated, alongside the older critic A.C. Bradley, with the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays via their characters. Knight in reality led a movement in the very opposite direction, playing down analysis through character in favor of one using patterns of poetic imagery that were studied independently of the characters who gave voice them.

Alexander Huang is keen to find ulterior motives for the adoption of Shakespeare in Asian contexts, but the real reason for it seems to me disconcertingly simple. In a globalizing age, anything from any

one part of the world is deemed to be perfectly serviceable in any other. It would be absurd if planes or cars were found only in the countries that first invented them, and it's equally absurd on the cultural front for products to remain for long in their places of origin. Moreover, it's not because this is a globalizing era that such things happen — they happen because they can happen, and it's only in retrospect that we dub our age a global one. Why Shakespeare is performed in Asia thus doesn't need explaining. What would need explaining would be if he wasn't.

So, from the performance of *Hamlet* on board a ship off Sierra Leone a mere five years after it was written to the multiple versions found today almost wherever you care to look, Shakespeare is a global phenomenon. Of course there are crossover influences in all directions, but apart from that, Shakespearean productions in Chinese are no different from any others. It would, after all, constitute a form of very special pleading to suggest that they even might be.

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