



Porcelain Utopia

Jonathan Harnisch

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This work is articulate, coherent, and insightful in its portrayal of the shifting world of the schizophrenic.

Prolific author Jonathan Harnisch gives an intimate look at the inner world of a young man tormented by a range of psychiatric and physical disorders in *Porcelain Utopia*, the third book in his An Alibiography series.

Harnisch's protagonist, Ben Schreiber, has been hospitalized after his arrest for a drug-fueled attempt at bank robbery. Diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, narcissism, borderline personality, PTSD, and schizoaffective disorder, Ben—thirty years of age, affluent, and highly intelligent—suffers from troubling delusions and hallucinations.

Ben begins treatment with a psychiatrist, Dr. C, to whom he must reveal the various personalities who share his mind and body, and their sexual fantasies and fetishes. But he does not believe psychiatry can help him and fears that becoming “normal” will destroy his creativity.

As an author with schizophrenia, Harnisch uses his intimate knowledge of life in a double reality to create a vivid, intense portrayal of a character who experiences his inner life as a full-time, kaleidoscopic, exhausting fantasy in which illusion is more interesting, and more real, than daily life.

The book's strong, to-the-point prose keeps the pace of the story moving evenly through the character changes, psychological ruminations, and sexual activities, both real and imagined, that characterize Ben's high-strung personality. Cycling between suicidal despair, cynicism, humor, and hope, the book explores the labyrinthine manner in which the mind attempts to keep past trauma hidden and skillfully brings to light how a patient's creative gifts can serve as an adjunct to therapy.

The text is articulate, coherent, and insightful in its portrayal of the shifting world of the schizophrenic, and it presents only occasional errors in grammar, syntax, and word usage. The dialogue, which includes conversations between both hallucinatory and real-life characters, is convincing and poignant.

Diary entries, philosophical musings, multifaceted inner reflections of various real and imagined persons, and records of therapy sessions reveal the struggles of the divided mind and highlight the profound loneliness, self-hatred, and desperate search for relief through drugs and sex that can characterize the lives of those who suffer from severe mental illness.

The book's swirling cover art sets the stage for the mental and emotional turmoil of its protagonist. An outline helps guide readers through the ever-changing world of the schizoaffective mind by presenting brief summaries of the events in each chapter.

Raw and disturbing due to the explicit and often pornographic sexual acts and fantasies described in the story, including childhood emotional and sexual abuse, *Porcelain Utopia* is for adult readers who are interested in exploring the healing potential of creative expression and the workings of a tormented, yet fascinating and resilient, mind.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March 14, 2016)

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