

Jonathan Shaw is an icon in the tattoo community. Getting him to admit it is another story. A pirate currently biding his time south of the border, Shaw's work has spread into the back alley nooks and crannies all over the world. Artist, entrepreneur, and editor—the man has his share of hats to wear. So it shouldn't be surprising to learn that he is currently donning the title of writer with the release of his first novel, "Narcisa: Our Lady of Ashes," out this month on Heartworm Press.

Shaw earned his place among the tattoo elite by navigating the world of underground tattooing; he was known for breaking rules and just generally raising hell. He started one of the most well known shops in New York City, Fun City Tattoo, he founded International Tattoo Art Magazine, and he was often found with A-List, celebrity clientele (think Depp, Ramone, and Moss).

That was all in day's work in the '90s. These days, if he lets you find him, Shaw is somewhere like on a Brazilian beach, living and writing about the life so many people could never imagine having lead. Enter "Narsica: Our Lady of Ashes," the tale of a man's love and hate for a teenaged prostitute and drug addict who blows into his world like an unexpected ocean storm on an otherwise calm day of sailing. With his lust for the open road, robust adventures, and thrill for the untamed life, Shaw is the closest thing we have to Kerouac in this modern day and age.



**You've said that this book is semi-autobiographical. What has inspired you to write?**

Like most writers, I'd have to say that all writing has an autobiographical quality to it, since writing is a form that, by its very nature, draws so deeply from the mental landscape and personal experience of the author. That having been said, I must qualify my statement by emphasizing that my book, "Narcisa" is purely a work of fiction that is, obviously, largely inspired by real people, places, and events. Everything about my life inspires me to write. Without my pen and notebook I'd be, well...fucked!

**How do your blog entries over at Scabvendor.com relate to the story in "Narcisa: Our Lady of Ashes?"**

They relate deeply in that they spring from the same sources of inspiration as the book and deal with similar subject matter and philosophical and ideological issues. My blogs are something like out-takes of the book, like you see sometimes at the end of a DVD. They may very well end up evolving into another book someday. Or maybe not. Who knows?

Meanwhile, I'm having as much fun writing them as I did with the book, and people seem to be interacting with these blogs in a way that's super gratifying to me as an artist. It's a great format, and I'm really happy to have an opportunity to keep the ball rolling, as it were, even now after the book is done. I think that's always been a bit of a dilemma for writers, the inevitable come down after a book is finished. You go through a period of mourning that comes after you write the end. With these blogs, I kinda get to sidestep that final feeling and just get to keep going. It's a lot of fun.



Art by Jonathan Shaw



Tattoos by Jonathan Shaw



**What do you consider yourself to be most? A tattoo artist, a writer, a father, a rebel?**

Not to get all crazy about it, but, first, I consider myself an eternal spirit trapped in a temporal, human form. In this human form, I am, like most people, a work in progress. For twenty-five years of my life I worked as a well known tattoo artist. I was in the public eye a lot. So for many people who never met me or knew anything about me, aside from my public image, that is what defined who I was.

Today I am known as a writer, a novelist, an outlaw poet, a pirate, an artist, an adventurer, whatever. Those are just words, labels that pertain to certain things I do. They're not what defines who I am.

Like most people, I'm a multifaceted being in constant evolution. To some extent, my creative expression will always reflect that diversity of experience, just so long as I do my job well, as an artist. As far as me being a rebel, I'm not. To be a rebel, one must belong to something against which to rebel. I've never really belonged to anything.



Jonathan Shaw, Johnny Depp, and Jim Jarmusch



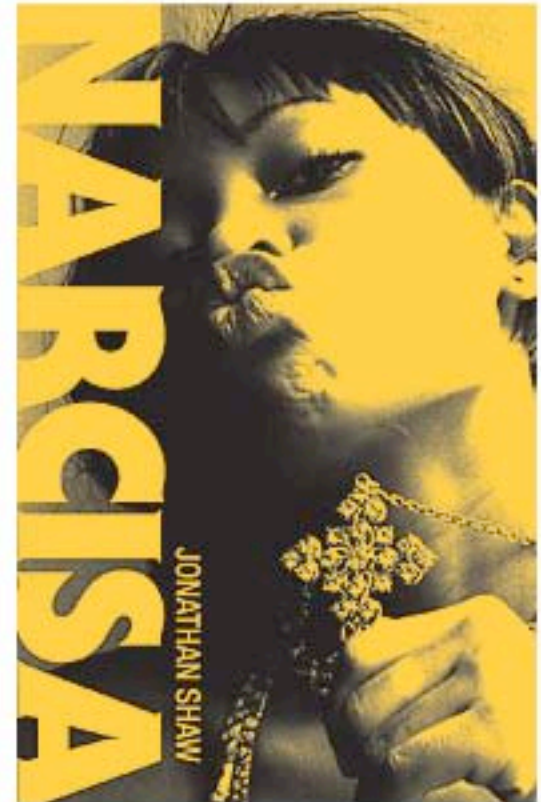
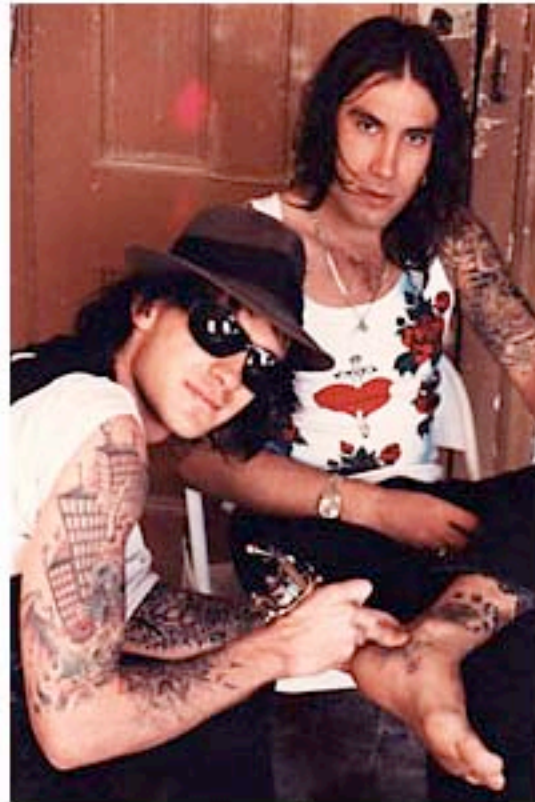
Johnny Depp's tattoo by Jonathan Shaw

**Do you have plans to write or publish any more material?**

Of course. It's all I do all day long. When I first started writing "Narcisa," I was already well underway with several other books in progress. Those projects got temporarily sidelined when the person who inspired the book's protagonist, Narcisa, came storming into my life one day like an angry child, demanding to be written. But those projects are still very much alive and well. One of them is an epic memoir called "Scabvender—Confessions of a Tattoo Artist." I think the title is self-explanatory, it's essentially my life story.

**You've lived, really lived, more than most people ever do. So, how is life treating you down in Rio de Janeiro?**

Like you said, I've been fortunate to have lived an interesting life so far, having had the opportunity to be reincarnated repeatedly, without having died, at least not physically yet. There have been many deaths and rebirths for me mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I grew up in Rio de Janeiro, in another one of those same-life incarnations. I moved on, traveled the world, settled down, and did many things in many different places before moving back to Rio seven years ago to begin still another incarnation. It's been real cool. I spend a lot of time on the beach reading, writing, bodysurfing, just chilling. I live near the ocean and I ride a motorcycle. Got a few close friends, and the rest is girls, girls, and girls. You know, the good life. It's a pirate's life for me!



**Any additional thoughts about your book that you'd like to leave us pining over?**

Right now I'm doing this big rewrite of the original first edition with a seasoned, professional book editor for a major literary agency. My agent thinks that with this editorial work, he can turn this thing into some kind of major bestseller. I'm just putting in the work for now. It's a full time job, almost like writing a whole new book from scratch. As far as the present edition of "Narcisa," I just hope that the work will speak for itself. That way I won't really have to. Cheers!