



Fungus of the Heart

Jeremy C. Shipp

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Readers of Jeremy C. Shipp's fiction will be familiar with his minimalist, breakneck pacing, his surreal forays into political satire, and his seamless blending of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Now, in his fourth book, the Bram Stoker Award finalist expands on what many critics and fans alike have long considered the most compelling aspect of his work—relationships. This story collection explores how a person's desire can infect their every action and interaction with others. The desire to protect. The desire to hurt. The desire to be desired. *Fungus of the Heart* explores what happens between people when society breaks down and the rules go out the window. Haunting and heartbreaking, pithy and potent, the quirky inhabitants of Shipp's bizarre world will carve an indelible line from your funnybone to your spleen to your emotional core.

Fungus of the Heart Details

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Author : Jeremy C. Shipp

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From Reader Review Fungus of the Heart for online ebook

Debbi Smith says

If you read any book for Halloween, it should be this one. The stories in "Fungus of the Heart" will make you laugh, cry, and scare your pants off. They will stay with you long after you have finished reading them. The story "Ticketyboo" I found really disturbing{I loved it}. Be prepared not to put it down.

Michelle says

I received "Fungus of the Heart" by Jeremy C. Shipp for free through Goodreads First Reads.

"Fungus of the Heart" by Jeremy C. Shipp is a collection of short stories that deal with desire in a very bizarre way. The characters in the stories you could probably find in a circus sideshow or perhaps in your darkest nightmare. Although the subject matter is indeed disturbing it is infused with a hint of humor. As twisted and serious as "The Haunted House" was, it happens to be my favorite story from this collection. This story was like a vivid nightmare. I also enjoyed the very surreal story "Ticketyboo".

This was my first introduction to bizarro fiction. While this is not my favorite genre, I thought that the stories were very well written. The stories definitely held my attention. Jeremy C. Shipp has quite the imagination. How can he sleep at night?

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

Fungus of the Heart is a short story collection that is rather aptly named. The stories do probe into the mysteries of the human heart, although their subjects are not necessarily human. However, they show emotions that humans would be intensely familiar with. The fungus part of the title represents the weird, strange, perhaps even unpalatable edge hinted at in many of these stories. I like that Mr. Shipp was able to capture that dichotomy between being a monster--so alien on close examination--and inside, so identifiable, nearly ubiquitous, like fungus is in our world.

Not exactly stream of consciousness storytelling, but quite free-flowing and non-linear story structure, often leaving me scratching my head mentally, trying to figure out exactly what was going on in the stories. They begin and end at seemingly random moments, but there is a feeling of closure in most, at least for the moment. Not a full resolution, but enough conveyed to give the reader the feeling that whatever Mr. Shipp wanted to tell about that particular story ends up on the written page. Beauty might not be what Mr. Shipp was going for, but I did see beauty in these offerings. The open, honest emotions flowing through them, and the highly visual and sensory imagery appealed to me, although he does go to some dark places here. These offerings ponder the highs and lows of life: love, loss, war, rage, alienation, fear, identity, all those things, and more.

The imagination exhibited here was impressive. I would love to sit down with Jeremy Shipp and ask him what his source of inspiration is. How he is able to fearlessly put down on paper what must wander through his mind, and do it in such a way as to avoid pretentiousness. There was never that sort of feeling as I read. Merely honesty, a sharing of himself with the reader. That's pretty brave and fearless, because people aren't

kind to each other when a person opens himself up to others for examination. I definitely admire him for doing this here.

Although I didn't always 'get' the stories, I got them on an emotional level, and that's what spoke to me as I read *Fungus of the Heart*. Mr. Shipp has a way with short stories that will lead me back to him, probably in the near future. I think fans of Caitlin R. Kiernan would like this collection.

Meredith Holley says

Sometimes, I will wake up from a dream, and it will take a long time to shake off the emotion or realize it wasn't real. The second night I was in Tanzania, I suddenly woke up with a sobbing, shuddering gasp from a dream in which I was mourning the deaths of two of my favorite people. I remember lying in bed thinking that such an evil world, where those people didn't exist, couldn't be real, but I was still so inside of the dream that I couldn't escape it. It took a long time to come back to reality. It strikes me that writing these stories might have had something of that feel for the author. There is a lot of residue of feeling here, filtered through purposeful weirdness. The shadow of evil unreality crossing into something real.

I read this on the planes, and at the gates during layovers. Apparently, according to my notes, I finished it just after I arrived at the Mövenpick Hotel in Dar es Salaam. We had traveled for something like two days. The day before we left, the woman coordinating the winter study abroad program for which I was leaving contacted me saying that, according to the handlers in Tanzania, my flight from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, (weird thing: when you're there, they pronounce it "Addis Abiba." Why is it spelled differently?) didn't exist. Lufthansa, however, assured me that it did, so we continued with plans. Sure enough, when we got to Ethiopia, the flight didn't exist. This didn't seem to bother the Ethiopian Airlines people, though. They just hand-wrote us boarding passes for the next flight to Dar es Salaam. Hakuna matata, I guess. Even though they don't speak Swahili in Ethiopia. Whatever.

Anyway, it was a little surreal. Then, when we got to Dar es Salaam, we were, like, totally set up. Fancy hotel. Crazy good food. We slept for an entire day, which you might say was a waste of time, but I say was very necessary. The only thing we woke up for was breakfast. So, we went downstairs to this fancy breakfast, and we looked outside of the restaurant, and there was this huge bouncy house. It was so incongruous set against the pool and immaculately manicured lawn that you couldn't stop staring at it. The student assistants for the program were sitting at another table, and they were staring at it, too. One of them was this asshole Jersey dude, who I got along with, but who objectively is kind of an asshole. He is a cross-eyed, light-haired, man, and he climbed Kilimanjaro last week. So, this guy stood up, went outside, stood in front of the bouncy house for a minute, and then reached his hand straight out with his fingers flat and extended and poked the bouncy house. He stood there for a minute more and then came back inside. Later, this became more funny when we realized that this guy is a pretty serious, cynical dude.

Coming back yesterday and the day before (fifty hours of travel this time, if you want to know), I met a woman from Tanzania who now lives in Boston. She had gone to Tanzania to search for her father, who got her mom pregnant when she was fifteen and then took off. While searching for her father, this woman stayed at her uncle's palatial villa on the coast of Tanzania (fully furnished with antiques and stuffed animals and elephant tusks), attended two weddings, and had a miscarriage. She had recently broken up with a long-term boyfriend because it turned out he had a wife in Haiti, who he decided to bring to the US. Her new boyfriend is living in DC, but he's from the same village that her father's family comes from, so he helped her coordinate the trip. She has five kids, one of whom is autistic. She didn't find her dad. It was kind of

exhausting to listen to her story.

The way I'm pretending to incorporate these stories into my review of this book, is that these people, these circumstances, are really weird to me. Life is weird; people are weird. I don't understand creating weirdness for the sake of itself, so I have to say that I don't think this here bizarro genre is really for me as a rule. For example, I think most people are weird in one way or another (unless they are extremely normal, which itself is weird), so it kind of bothers me when someone brags about being weird. I think very few people are notably weird or notably normal, and when people try to be one or another, it's awkward. Like middle-school kids going through fashion fads. I mean, usually when we self-evaluate, we just look silly. Maybe it just stands out to me when people self-evaluate as weird because I don't know whether they are intending to compliment or insult themselves. I prefer people to just say what they have to say without a lot of self-consciousness.

Generally, I think Jeremy Shipp walks the line on this. Sometimes, his message is forcefully clear; other times I'm totally lost. Probably, that was intentional within each story, but it created a sort of static feeling to me. With very few exceptions, the relationships in these stories did not develop. The characters, likewise, did not develop with much complexity. Mostly, these stories are a pageant of the carnivalesque with a background of worldbuilding. The weirdness is in the costuming and the set design, and the characters and events are less important. People decide to be evil or not in the stories, but plot and characters are secondary to situational shock. This doesn't really groove with me, but it might with you. Many of the stories are about characters working through some kind of psychological healing, and the weirdness is some kind of corporeal embodiment of their pain. You might like that, but for whatever reason it was a little alienating to me.

Ultimately, I feel indifferent about this collection. There are vivid images here, but even their vividness didn't resonate with me. They were very direct, but still managed to talk past me somehow. I have a feeling that if you care a great deal for the Lord of the Rings, this collection will be more meaningful to you than it was to me. There is something Gollum/Smeagol about many of the characters, and the static atmosphere here reminds me of how I feel about Tolkein. I can't find fault with either collection of stories, but I don't have the gene necessary to appreciate them.

I think usually when you find weirdness in life, there is some kind of functionality to it that informs the person or event that is being weird. Like how the student assistant is someone who mostly bitches about things, but sometimes he pokes a bouncy house. Like how so far my experience with Africa is that it is a place where things won't necessarily happen when you expect them, but where people will get you where you need to go and not be bureaucratic about it. Like how all of our family histories are unique and painful and weird. I don't get how the purposeful weirdness that I think is the bulk of the bizarro genre helps tell stories. There are obviously exceptions to this, but this collection of stories is not one of them. Again, though, I think there is probably a substantial audience for this book. Maybe you are part of it, even though I am not.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

It's no secret that I'm a big fan of alt-horror author Jeremy Shipp (see my past reviews, for example, of his *Vacation*, *Sheep & Wolves* and *Cursed*), who seems every holiday season to deliver yet another new volume of his deeply unsettling tales; and this Christmas brings us a new story collection, *Fungus of the Heart*, which longtime fans can think of basically as "Yet More Sheep and Wolves," a collection of short yet

complexly connected pieces in which Shipp envisions an alternative universe acting as a dark mirror to our own, a world where supernatural creatures actually exist, where a form of hunter/prey relationship now defines how society works, and where a type of profoundly strange mythology of Shipp's invention seems to influence events in a deliberately confusing way that audience members can only guess at. In fact, if anything, this new batch of stories takes on more of a "New Weird" flavor than what's come from Shipp before, with many of these pieces feeling more like convoluted urban fantasy tales than anything approximating traditional horror, a sort of dreamlike alt-reality that at its best resembles the work of Neil Gaiman and the like. I'm constantly impressed with the various turns Shipp is always taking with both his writing and his career, even while tying his entire oeuvre together via common themes and motifs, and this latest slim collection is sure to be a big winner among both his old fans and his new ones.

Out of 10: **8.9**

Anthony says

Shipp's work is hard to define by just one genre. Most of the collection would probably fit the "dark fantasy" description, and almost all of them have some horror component. And at least two have a very "fairy tales but not of the Disney variety" feel to them.

I posted individual story reviews here. Overall, the collection is very strong. A few stories in particular stand out: the noirish "The Sun Never Sets in the Big City," the supernatural detective with a twist story "The Haunted House," the dialogue-driven "Boy in the Cabinet," and the wistful (and anti-war) "Spider House" are perhaps my four favorites of the collection. I can see the characters from "Haunted House" and "Spider House" both inhabiting full-length novels if not outright series. Special mention to "How To Make A Clown," which I think I would nominate for [info]lethepress 's WILDE STORIES anthology if I had a say. The only story in the collection that really didn't work for me at all was "Agape Walrus," but I know people for whom the very out-there nature of the story will be perfect.

Paul Jr. says

Funny, bizarre, darkly creepy at times. A really imaginative collection with something for everyone.

Eric Townsend says

Fungus of the Heart is a collection of wonderful stories by one of my favorite writers, Jeremy C. Shipp. It's got a great mixture of mind-bending horror, humor of all varieties, and all while forcing the reader to stop and think about the people around them and why they do what they do. Perhaps even more importantly, Fungus of the Heart makes the reader examine themselves and think about what is most important to them and what lengths they would go to for those things and/or people.

The first story, The Sun Never Rises in the Big City is one Shipp fans will recognize since it is released by itself, and I read it back in October, 2012. There you get a bit of Noir, and it does stand out from the rest of the stories as a little less dark, and more of a sad story. There is plenty of gore to be had here from The Escapist to Agape Walrus (zombies!), more (dark) philosophical humor in Monkey Boy and the Monsters (what makes a monster?) and Boy in the Cabinet (self imposed prisons), and even just beautifully written

twisted stories like *The Haunted House* and *Fungus of the Heart*.

For anyone who has followed my blog for a while it will come as no surprise that I loved this book. Jeremy C. Shipp is one of the most talented writers I have ever had the pleasure of coming across and I can't recommend him enough. He is THE horror writer for me and his bizarro infusions make his work stand out like no other. Definitely check his work out!

Robert Eccles says

The stories in this collection are both wonderful and wierd, troubling and touching. I would expect nothing less from Jeremy C. Shipp!

Garrett Cook says

I'd like to start by making it clear that my three star rating does not come from any lack of quality in the work. I do not believe there are inferior stories in this book. There were a couple that felt derivative of each other, but none that were outright bad. The three star rating is to me a way of placing this work in the Shipp canon. In spite of some excellent stories here, I feel *Fungus of the Heart* lacks the bite that I expect from Jeremy Shipp. It has the same bold flights of fancy that are found in *Sheep and Wolves* and plenty of good emotional content, but I feel too often ventures into a whimsical Gaimanish realm of Urban Fantasy that would be welcome in a few stories, but in an entire collection is hard to take. Fans of Shipp's other work might want to go elsewhere because *Fungus of the Heart* does not always feel like it is by the Jeremy Shipp you know and love. This is no value judgement, because god knows too many artists lose their talent by stagnating and not allowing themselves to become something else. Good stuff, but I can take or leave Urban Fantasy Shipp. I like Horror and Bizarro Shipp better.

April says

(Originally posted @ CSI:Librarian.)

3.5 Stars - Yet another book that I don't quite have the words to explain. Overall, I greatly enjoyed the themes of love, loss, anger and desire explored throughout this collection as well as the ways in which people become monsters. The gender blurring throughout was really neat too. Shipp created really complex worlds in the span of a few sentences as he related unique and often powerful tales.

That said, *Fungus of the Heart* left with me with a lot of mixed feelings. Slightly over half of the stories - "The Sun Never Rises in the Big City," "The Haunted House," *Fungus of the Heart*, "Boy in the Cabinet," "Just Another Vampire Story," "The Escapist," and "How to Make a Clown" - resonated very strongly with me. I also think that the fact that they didn't always make much logical sense ending up making sense in a completely different yet awesome way. The remaining 6 stories never struck the same sort of chord with me and made sense in a way that felt less organic compared to the other 7.

In conclusion, a mostly fascinating collection that will appeal to fans of Dark Fantasy with a hint of Horror and the occasional Noir vibe.

Dan Schwent says

Once again, I wrestle with the dilemma of trying to review a collection of short stories. Should I talk about *The Sun Never Rises in the Big City*, a bizzaro detective story about a detective and the search for the killer of his rag? Or *The Haunted House*, about a ghost struggling with its identity and trying to help a girl? Or the title story that starts with a man chasing a homicidal jester through a forest for killing his warthog? Or the fairy tale-eque *The Boy in the Cabinet*?

Fungus of the Heart is a collection of bizarre tales by Jeremy C. Shipp. While on the surface the only thing the tales have in common is their strangeness, a deeper look reveals that they're all about relationships. Relationships between a detective and his woman with a detonator inside her, a boy who lives in a cabinet and his cup with a smile drawn on it, or a gnome and her opposition to a war against goblins. The tone of the stories ranges from darkly humorous to creepy as hell. Many of them are so strange they have a dreamlike quality.

If you're in the mood for something different, give *Fungus of the Heart* a try. You won't be disappointed.

Ian says

I love reading anything from Jeremy C. Shipp's imagination. It's quite varied, and different from anything else I've read. I like to read it before falling asleep, hoping it will influence my dreams. If you haven't read anything by Shipp before I'd recommend *Vacation* or *Sheep And Wolves* over this to begin with, but if you like those you will appreciate *Fungus Of The Heart* as well.

Colleen Wanglund says

In this latest short story collection Jeremy Shipp explores what happens to relationships when the rules of society go out the window. In his surreal worlds, he explores the heartbreak, desire, fear, and loss that go into these relationships. Full of quirkiness, horror, humor and the just plain weird, Shipp fans should be pleased with *FUNGUS OF THE HEART*.

My favorite story of the collection *Fungus of the Heart* is an almost medieval yet otherworldly tale about *Nightingale*, a Sentinel seeking the power he needs to save his love *Cailin* who was captured and is being held in the *Fortress*. *Nightingale* will stop at nothing to save her, even if it means turning into a monster to do so. Another favorite of mine is *Tickyboo* about a brother and sister who must live with a guardian until they can learn to deal with the death of their parents. *Monkey Boy and the Monsters* is a funny story about *Monkey Boy* who is hired by various people to fight the monsters of society with his companion *Soapy*, literally a bar of soap.

Other great stories include *The haunted House* about *Ash*, a spiritual being who helps his clients remember and deal with traumatic events in their lives; *Boy in the Cabinet* who is afraid to leave the cabinet he lives in because he is afraid of change; *Just Another Vampire Story* about a man who cheats on his girlfriend and the aftermath of his actions; and *The Escapist* which tells of a war between Gnomes and Goblins and the lengths one individual is willing to go to finally end it.

All of the stories in FUNGUS OF THE HEART are fantastic reads. Some are sweet, others are tragic but all will leave you quite satisfied in the end.

Colleen Wanglund
10/31/2010

karen says

i did it!! i read a whole book on the computer!! welcome me, twenty-first century!!!

i was not made for this modern world. and this book probably suffered for it. but it was totally my own damn fault, the deficiencies are entirely within me: 1) i seldom enjoy short stories, 2) i usually don't like the bizarro stuff, 3) i sure don't like reading on the computer.

i don't know how you people can do it. if i was a character on *heroes*, my ability would not be one of the more dramatic fancy ones (and i would also be unemployed because that shit got canceled) but i am excellent at remembering where on a page certain text has occurred. it is nowhere near as cool as a photographic memory. but it gets me by. i can be like, "that part was halfway down the verso page about a quarter-inch into the book's width" (those of you who know me know that i showed remarkable restraint right there) reading on the computer, i can barely make sense of the words. and i am like this monster scroller, and i will get all jerky and suddenly be like 4 stories ahead. it would be funny if it weren't so sad. i am like a rapping grandma, no one should have to see that.

as for the bizarro stuff, i just frequently feel lost, like several of the stories were deliberately trying to destroy me with confusion. it is not like an acid trip, but like an artist's rendition of an acid trip. my acid trips were never like *fear and loathing*. the closest i ever came to that kind of shit was when i was camping and i wandered off to sit on a sunwarmed rock by a lake and then decided i was a mountain lion, so i climbed a tree and stretched out on a branch and just luxuriated in my long sinewy cat muscles. but i didn't *believe* i was a mountain lion; i didn't hallucinate myself into being a mountain lion. i just thought "were i a mountain lion, this would feel really good." but some of the stories in this book made me feel like the way a dog looks when you pretend to throw the ball you have in your hand and it goes all crazy with frustration and longing. or like the one time i took special k and i felt like someone was using my brain and i couldn't get it back. i did not mean this to turn into a drug-confessional - but i felt so "huh?" so frequently reading this that it is the only reference point i have. but i liked enough of the stories that i absolutely plan on reading them over again when the book comes out in real-form. it will make it easier for me to concentrate, and i one hundred per cent expect to like it more. and i will know where every scene falls on every scrap of that paper.

KIDS, DON'T DO DRUGS!!!!!!
