



# Mr. Splitfoot

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## Mr. Splitfoot Samantha Hunt

A contemporary gothic from an author in the company of Kelly Link and Aimee Bender, *Mr. Splitfoot* tracks two women in two times as they march toward a mysterious reckoning.

Ruth and Nat are orphans, packed into a house full of abandoned children run by a religious fanatic. To entertain their siblings, they channel the dead. Decades later, Ruth's niece, Cora, finds herself accidentally pregnant. After years of absence, Aunt Ruth appears, mute and full of intention. She is on a mysterious mission, leading Cora on an odyssey across the entire state of New York on foot. Where is Ruth taking them? Where has she been? And who — or what — has she hidden in the woods at the end of the road?

In an ingeniously structured dual narrative, two separate timelines move toward the same point of crisis. Their merging will upend and reinvent the whole. A subversive ghost story that is carefully plotted and elegantly constructed, *Mr. Splitfoot* will set your heart racing and your brain churning. Mysteries abound, criminals roam free, utopian communities show their age, the mundane world intrudes on the supernatural and vice versa.

## Mr. Splitfoot Details

Date : Published January 5th 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

ISBN : 9780544526709

Author : Samantha Hunt

Format : Hardcover 322 pages

Genre : Fiction, Horror, Fantasy, Gothic, Mystery, Magical Realism

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## From Reader Review Mr. Splitfoot for online ebook

### Amy says

Wow. I just don't think I can capture, in words, just how much I loved this novel. I have never read anything quite like it. I never completely knew what was happening but I could NOT put it down. It's weird and strange and nutty in all the best ways!

The structure of the book - alternating chapters with two different narratives - make the book feel unsettling in some ways. You know they will come together but you have no idea how or when. The world that Hunt creates is mesmerizing and odd and wonderful. I don't typically like not knowing where I'm going when reading but if the writing is good enough, I can go along with the ride. And boy, did I go along with the ride on this one. SO. DAMN. GOOD. Someone described this as a 'fever dream of a book' and I think that is such a great description of this one.

There are some startling and poetic moments in this novel. I think it's probably not for everyone but I highly recommend it. Especially if you enjoy great literary fiction ... this is literary fiction that knocks it out of the park!

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### Ace says

A complex and layered 'ghost' story, Ruth and Nat live in an orphanage (run by a complete religious nutter and alcoholic) called The Love of Christ. A cruel and hunger ridden childhood brings these 2 kids eventually into the hands of a conman who uses Nat's 'channeling' skills to make some quick cash from unsuspecting and quite gullible customers who believe Nat can talk to their dead relatives. As the kids travel along the country channeling the dead, another storyline is developing with Ruth's niece Cora. In some parts quite spellbinding, they trek across America to find something that Ruth wants Cora to see. Fantastic read, a bit gruesome and I didn't see the end coming at all!

Thanks to Little, Brown and Netgalley.

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### Sandra says

A weird and very odd story, dealing with two narratives in the past and present day.

In the first, we learn of Ruth as an orphaned child, situated in the home of the overzealous and religious Father, where she grows up together with Nat. To entertain themselves they 'speak to the death', bringing horror to some of their fellow orphans. After meeting the mysterious Mr. Bell, they find a wider audience, making some money in the hope of escaping their Love of Christ! home. Years later, Cora is living a life in this digital age where everything needs to be shared online, *"if we don't post it, it never happened"*.

Then one day Ruth turns up and whisks her niece on an adventurous walk to an unknown destination.

Cora barely knows her aunt, having met her only once at the age of 11, and being infatuated with her ever

since. "I liked my mother fine, but Ruth was like being close to thunder. And then Nat. Lightning." Since Cora is in need of change in her life, she goes along without protest.

A ghostly and supernatural undertone can be felt throughout the story. With a religious fanatic and an apocalyptic cult and its leader thrown in, it all felt a bit too unreal. As the reader, you are not sure what exactly is going on, and where and how it all fits together. Characters felt unattached and thus the reader too. It is an interesting story though, and readers who like their thrills to be a little bit unearthly, will definitely enjoy this.

*Review copy supplied by publisher through NetGalley in exchange for a rating and/or review.*

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### **Sarah says**

I loved *The Seas*. I very much liked *The Invention of Everything Else*. This one, in my opinion, was just alright.

It certainly has its moments: striking, poetic, revelatory *moments*...I'm just not sure they're worth all the pubic hair, dirty pickup trucks, and gratuitous inventory of every last item in every last room in staccato, present tense prose. And, yes, we're all *very* aware of backward hicks and religious zealots. No need to keep informing us of them. I found the mystery engaging but a bit too contrived: Mystery for its own sake.

I feel like every other book that comes out, lately, is some variation of *this* book. Yet *someone* must want to read it, since writers keep writing it, publishers keep publishing it, and buyers keep buying it.

Kids today and their literature. \*shakes cane\*

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### **Julianne (Outlandish Lit) says**

4.5

Mr. Splitfoot was an incredible read that kept delivering beautifully thought out strangeness. This is a perfect book for #weirdathon in March, if you're looking for potential reads. If you dig cults or Carl Sagan at all, read this. I continue to think about this wildly original story, and I'm now kind of obsessed with Samantha Hunt.

#### **Some highlights from my video chat/review with Shaina Reads:**

**Shaina:** There's a cult. There's some weird magical realism. And it's a love story.

**Julianne:** Sort of.

**Shaina:** Sort of. And there's like weird sci-fi elements.

**Julianne:** I don't even know how to begin explaining why this book is good. Like it seems impossible to put into words.

**Shaina:** I mean it's impossible to put into words partially I think because a lot of the words we use would be

very big spoilers.

**Julianne:** Yeah.

**Shaina:** But it just draws you in and you're really - I mean you don't know what's going on but you're kind of happy to not know what's going on. You're happy to like go along for the ride.

**Julianne:** You know that it will be revealed. You know you're not going to be let down, because there's too much random weird shit going on. You're like ok this is going to connect in some way and I really want to see what she's going to do with it. Ya gotta have faith.

**Full review with video:** Outlandish Lit

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## **Ron Charles says**

The historical and the fantastical entwine like snakes in Samantha Hunt's fiction. Her first novel, "The Seas" (2004), caught the tale of a mermaid who loved an Iraq War vet. "The Invention of Everything Else" (2008) screwed time-traveling gizmos onto a story of the inventor Nikola Tesla. And now, her new gothic novel, "Mr. Splitfoot," germinates in the loamy soil of religious fanaticism.

From her home in the Hudson Valley, Hunt must have soaked up the spirit of New York's dark woods, which have long been fertile ground for revelations. Remember, it was here, in the Empire State, that. . . .

*To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entert...>

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## **Jenna says**

This fever dream of a book took me on a heck of a vivid road trip, which is pretty impressive considering I read it during a blizzard and my most significant actual journeying consisted of short trips to the kitchen to procure drinks and blizzard snacks like Valentine's Day peanut M&M's.

I love a good communes-and-cults book, am fascinated by members/characters' quests for belonging, meaning, explanations, family, origin stories, and stories of where and how we'll all end up in the end. This book has all of this, in spades; there are cults within cults and virtually every character is questing for all of the above. This tangled web of questing characters, as intricate as a map of meteorite crash sites scarring the earth (something that's in the book), creates a kind of crazy, frozen lakey, Upstate New York Gothic Vortex into which the reader is sucked like a vulnerable, emancipated, aged- out orphan seeking refuge (also a book reference).

Of course, where you have questing vulnerable humans, and cults and communes, you also have con men and women, traveling snake oil seance-holding salesfolk whose livelihood involves controlling others and keeping them in thrall. So again, given that cults and communes are abounding here, never outside a collection of Flannery O'Connor stories have you ever seen such a collection of various and sundry fictional con artists of various stripes, some nobly antiheroic, some deserving of at least some antipathy, and some seemingly downright cloven-footed.

Samantha Hunt herself is a crafty con artist of an author who maintains a very delicate balance of keeping things juuuuust mysterious and intangible enough so that you really do feel lost in space for much of the time you're reading the book, but also grounds and specifies and humanizes everything juuuuust enough so that you are invested in the outcome and keep forging through, in the grip of suspense to discover whatever may be there whenever you may be fortunate enough to emerge through the shadows and into the other side. And what ends up being there is pretty crazy on one hand, and pretty traditional on the other hand, and all thoroughly acceptable by the time you get to that point, having been so well prepped - might we even say subtly, slowly indoctrinated - by Hunt throughout the preceding pages.

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## **Ioana says**

Samantha Hunt is a poet of the most insightful, lyrical, soul-wrenching order. I am simply blown by the ways in which she strings words together- truly, as one of her characters puts it at one point - challenging the "tyranny of fiction". I am no poet myself so I am not going to pretend that I can write an analysis or otherwise render Hunt's style. What I can say is that, as a practical-scientifically minded person who teaches math for a living, I absolutely *crave* the soulfulness, joy/melancholy, ecstasy, sensuousness of the artistic... spirit (?), embodied so holistically in this work.

Of course, to me, math is art, but that's not usually how I practice it (ah, standardized testing, Common Core, etc, etc, inane quantitative measures of intangible things). So in my "spare time" such as it is during the school-year (no children yet, which is why I still have some), I try to inspire (inhale, motivate myself) what creative energy I can (usually by reading fiction).

This is one of those books that amply and even overflowingly fills the well depleted by my profoundly non-artistic day-to-day existence. Reading *Mr. Splitfoot*, I am fully immersed in a chaotic but attuned, blunt and melodious, simple yet so profound soup/dance/game/orchestra of words. Words that, in their at times discordant ways, birth an illusion (reality?) that is more true than most things I encounter in my daily trudging. This book is a hauntingly resonating, masterfully written artistic masterpiece.

But it is also so much more than that, for the perspectives it presents, for the setting and content. Or perhaps, this work is art *because* of the ways it approaches the eternal questions (what is meaning? death? being a mother? told through the fevered dream-like narrative of an ex-cult member/family). A critic somewhere wrote that Hunt writes "from the margins". Indeed - this is not a story that takes place from within the comfort of that which most of us take for granted: a caretaker (or mother), a home, a steady job/income, a more or less "typical" way of interaction with the world around us. It's the story of abandoned children, well-meaning but religiously deranged individuals, "unnatural" (unconventional) attachments, con-men, people doing everything to survive, and others trying to make meaning after deeply troubled childhoods.

For me, the content and perspectives were much needed jolt out of my insanely undeserved comfortable existence (the job, the cats, the house, the car, the food supply, the safety and comfort). If you've seen *Winter's Bone*, the mood Hunt builds is a bit like that. Not quite the same, but I haven't read or encountered anything like *Mr. Spitfoot* before, so it's difficult to draw parallels. It's just so ... quintessentially out-the-mainstream, marginalized *American* (American gothic, according to critics). And yet, despite, or perhaps because of, the characters' outsider-status, Hunt's writing helps us understand our own quests, troubles, ghosts, desires so much more clearly than we would if we were observing our self-imposed system from the inside.

I absolutely LOVED this book to pieces, but although I would highly recommend it to everyone for its educational and artistic power, I couldn't guarantee that you will enjoy this - I would only hold some kind of hope. A bit like how I wave my hands around excitedly about math in class; while I win some converts every year, to many more of my students I am probably just the crazy math teacher. This book is not for everyone, and you may find it frustrating, especially since, as I mentioned, it's not written in a conventional style (basically, a poem in narrative form), and in general challenges all conventions through its characters, the setting, perspectives, etc. If you like your stories to stand on solid ground, I am just the crazy person waving my hands around right now. But, to each his own - life is awesome *because* each one of us basks in a different light.

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### **sappho\_reader says**

If this book had a soundtrack I imagine it would be early Tori Amos jamming hard on the piano in angst and melancholy similar to her Little Earthquakes. Reading this was a psychotic head trip into the obscure: lunatic religious cults, spiritual con artists, and a ludicrous road trip. It's part Fight Club with the popular culture references and NOS4A2 with the creepy overtones, but mostly it was the humor that struck me. I loved the dual narrative and how they both intertwined at the end. Basically I loved everything.

#### **The best blurb ever from the back cover:**

"I get the chills. Is it a true story? Is it a sad story? It's what people want. It has a lot of good energy and people, people will like it. It's intriguing because a person will know there's something two-sided. It's a good one."

Charlotte Bronte (speaking through a medium)

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### **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

This got fairly kooky at the end, a little woo-woo, a wee bit whacked, and one very important mystery was *very* obvious to me the whole time, but for a good bit, this book was kind of saving my g.d. life all the same. A young woman and her aunt just felt like run-ang, but the young girl was pregnant, so they walked instead. For a long time. Strange happenings happened strangely. In an alternate timeline, kids grappled with life on a cult-y farm for wayward children before taking off with a charming con artist to live life in the big, open world where mysteries forever abound and wonders reach as far as the eye can see and...shit. Oh, and you fund this by exploiting other people with dead children by talking to their "spirits." Ah, the romance of the road! Bandit life! Plots merge and things happen. I'm not sure why, but it was absolutely what I needed in the midst of a hard-ish time.

Anyway, it was pretty good.

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### **Rebecca says**

"All stories are ghost stories," Samantha Hunt proclaims in her quirky third novel about the crossover

between motherhood and mysticism. In a dual storyline that takes in fundamentalist cults, unlikely mediums and a pregnant woman's pilgrimage, Hunt asks whether one can ever believe in the unseen. *Mr. Splitfoot* has the offbeat charm of Scarlett Thomas's work. While the plot ultimately feels like a bit of a jumble, its vision of unexpected love and loyalty remains compelling. "The End's always coming," but it is how one lives in the face of brutality and impending extinction that matters.

See my full review on the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* website.

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### **debra says**

I don't know how to rate this. This was an engaging, somewhat surreal and suspenseful story that was related in a split account linking past and present. The narrative contained many interesting disparate, mysterious characters and themes. I assumed, incorrectly, these elements would eventually come together into a cohesive whole. Upon completion, however, I realized that I was supposed to reflect on the enigmatic significance of random details and discern the similes, metaphors, symbolism, and whatever else they were supposed to be representative of. My reaction was a very predictable "WTF, I don't care enough to analyze and propose possible meanings and discussions about this ~~shit~~ nope sticking with shit, and another WTF and a GTFOH" for emphasis. Hence, my dilemma in choosing a star rating.

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### **Linda says**

This was an impulse read and also a page-turner! The layout of the novel with chapters going back and forth between two women and time-periods made it very easy to read "just one more chapter". The story is classified as horror, but I'm not sure I would put it in that genre, but there are definitely other-worldly elements, ghosts and trying to figure out what is real or not. And the book just got better as I neared the end.

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### **Althea Ann says**

Ruth and Nat are two teenagers stuck in a religious group home in upstate New York. Unsure what they'll do when they turn 18 and 'age out' of the Love of Christ! facility, Ruth is ready to consider desperate measures to find some kind of future for herself and her best friend. An option turns up when the two meet a traveling con man, Mr. Bell, who suggests that they start profiting off Nat's reputed ability to speak to the dead - one he's so far only used to scare and entertain the fellow foster kids at the home. Mr. Bell also comes from an unusual religious background, we learn - his father was the leader of an apocalyptic cult. Is this commonality of experience the reason he's drawn to Ruth and Nat, or is there a different agenda behind his seeking them out?

Intercut with Ruth & Nat's story is one that unfolds some 20 years later. Cora is a seemingly ordinary young woman with a normal job and life. She knows that her mother didn't have a good childhood, but those foster homes and abuse seem very far in the past. But when her boyfriend reacts very, very badly to the news that Cora is pregnant, an emotional crisis point is reached. Just at that moment, Cora's enigmatic but long-idolized Aunt Ruth appears. Refusing or unable to speak, Ruth leads Cora on a long walk through New York State, with no known destination.



I picked up this book because of the comparison to Kelly Link, but I didn't quite feel the similarity there. Rather, I felt that this book was very much written in the style of a great deal of contemporary post-apocalyptic lit-fic. It's not apocalyptic (although there is that apocalyptic cult), but the way it is written makes modern life feel apocalyptic. The fact that all the characters are alienated from modern society (either emotionally or through forced isolation) contributes significantly to this, as does the narrative's occasional tips into the realm of the bizarre. The themes of the book are also ones that are present in much of the post-apoc genre.

I liked the book, and moreover, appreciated that it was very well-crafted. I didn't emotionally love it, however... perhaps just because of the high unpleasantness quotient.

Many thanks to HMH and NetGalley for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinion is solely my own.

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### **Amanda says**

This was brilliant. Was it a ghost story or a dream or a con or.... well you'll just have to decide that for yourself. If you don't like ambiguity in your endings you won't like this one but if you do this is a gem. Lot's of authors use the alternating chapters/timeline but Hunt's execution is perfect if somewhat unsettling. It was very easy to get lost in which timeline you were in.

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