

His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood and Other Stories

Poppy Z. Brite

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Contains four short stories from Swamp Foetus:

His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood

The Sixth Sentinel

Calcutta, Lord of Nerves

How To Get Ahead in New York

His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood and Other Stories Details


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From Reader Review His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood and Other Stories for online ebook

N.J. Ramsden says

Not bad, but not great. Chuck in some seedy local flavour, some deliberate and slightly self-conscious oddness, some thick mist and a bit of sweat, and hey presto. It's a bit more Live and Let Die than some kind of New Orleans Lovecraftian thing, despite the attempts of the prose to veer that way. Oh well.

Daren says

This book contains four short stories taken from the book Swamp Foetus, and published as a Penguin 60. The first two stories are set in New Orleans, the third in Calcutta, India, the final story in New York. All are tales in the fringes of society, dealing in the supernatural and with darker sexual themes.

I really enjoyed the writing style of the first three stories - they were very atmospheric, very descriptive, and written in dark situations.

I never like giving plot summaries on short stories, as it takes too much from the story, but lets just say tomb robbing, heads in jars, absinthe, the lord of Nerves, open graves, sorcerer's jewellery, the Goddess Kali, buried treasure, New Orleans swamps all feature in this short book.

The first three stories were 4*, the last only 2*, but 4* overall.

Dyrgripen says

Review here

Andrew says

This is another of the penguin 60s collection I picked up and one I have been eager to read. Poppy Z Brite has been an author I have heard referred to many times and as such I was keen to explore.

The stories are suitably dark and disturbing as I would have expected - I am not sure if these are taken from a larger anthology or collection but they are so atmospheric with such an ease and confidence I have not seen for some time I raced through them eager for.

They are hard to describe since in doing so would give away their impact and would not do them justice all I can say is that I wish I had read them sooner.

That said as part of reading the work of a new author I like to explore their lives and their other works and I must admit that the life of Poppy Z Brite is as colourful and incredible as you can imagine. IF ever you ask

yourself where does a particular author get their inspirations from all can say is that this is the creation of one amazing imagination.

Brittany says

It was a decent book the only thing I didn't like was as soon as I got interested in the story it would end.

Rhonda says

There's some incredibly descriptive writing to be found in this dark collection of short stories. PZB easily dishes up some of the grittiest, most accurate snapshots of New Orleans' French Quarter as I've ever read, as she captures the seamy underworld of several cities and the people who inhabit them.

Well done!

Melissa Jackson says

Contrary to the hideously misleading synopsis posted on this site, Poppy's collection of short stories takes us to an underworld of evil, lust, pain and passion. Highlighted by more fantastic adjectives than I could dream of, the tales are dark and terrible while sustaining a strong sense of the beautiful through the way she brilliantly wields her words. Not for the squeamish, just right for the gothic.

lethe says

These four stories confirm my suspicion that Poppy Z. Brite is not for me. The least unpleasant story: How to Get Ahead in New York.

Pippa says

Goth

Filip Peringer says

The stories are so edgy that I cut my fingers reading each page. And I was reading on a laptop!

Paul Bard says

Calcutta, City of Nerves is worth reading for the prose rather than the "story". Is there a story? I mean, who hasn't thought about Kali that way?

The title story is worth reading several times. It made me burst out laughing in public and I had to read it immediately again to amend my astonishment.

The second story, about the girl and ghost, is a Hawthorne-esque yarn which satisfies and is sound as a tale, but as a story, it lacks any set-up for its ending; we have no way of knowing about the twist ending, and therefore no surprise, but only the mild pleasure of being treated cavalierly by the author.

The fourth and last story bored me.

I gave this book away immediately so I cannot refer back to it. Had I valued it higher I would have kept it so it's not my genre. However, if I were into that genre, I might give it a higher rating because of fandom. But only the first story is truly remarkable.

Traveller says

Good day, Ladies and Gentlemen, today we'd like to introduce you to a new pair of literary specialists, just graduated from Bullford, and full of things they want to say.

With no more ado, I shall hand over the discussion to Asterisk and Obstalisk.

ASTERISK: Thank you! Yes, we certainly have a lot to say.

OBSTALISK: *burp* Yeah! What are we gonna talk about today?

ASTERISK: We're going to use some short stories (or perhaps a short story) by Poppy Z.Brite to wax forth on some aspects of Gothic fiction, or even maybe Southern Gothic fiction, because she actually falls into the latter genre.

OBSTALISK: Huhuhuhuh *snort* you mean that goth lady who isn't a lady anymore.

ASTERISK: What do you mean, not a lady?..oh, that. Shut up, Obstalisk!

OBSTALISK: Why? It's true! She's not hiding it, she's...

ASTERISK: *Gives O a backhander* We're not here to gossip, but to talk about literature. I would like to talk about how Poppy Z. Brite uses sensual and conceptual contrasts and liberal use of metaphors and imagery in *His Mouth will Taste of Wormwood* to add a fresh, poetic and disturbing element to her rendering of the Southern Gothic style, and uses contrasts as a method of heightening a sense of the transgressive.

OBSTALISK: Yuck! Those stories are all yuck yuck yuckyuck ! Good Goodreads people, don't listen to him, these are... *OW!*

ASTERISK: The titular piece is obviously styled after the Gothic genre of fiction, since it contains typical ingredients of the latter. Jerrold Hogle, in a book called *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, defines some of the key characteristics of Gothic fiction as follows:

...a Gothic tale usually takes place in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island ...

OBSTALISK: Oooh, and she does use places like graveyards and crypts and deserted scary temples with huge sexy scary goddesses – hey almost as scary as that huge Ahmah-zone dame! -and deserted train stations...

ASTERISK: Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story.

OBSTALISK: Ghosts, you mean.

ASTERISK: Well, not only ghosts. Jerrold says: *These hauntings can take many forms, but they frequently assume the features of ghosts, specters, or monsters (mixing features from different realms of being, often life and death) that rise from within the antiquated space, or sometimes invade it from alien realms, to manifest unresolved crimes or conflicts that can no longer be successfully buried from view. It is at this level that Gothic fictions generally play with and oscillate between the ..*

OBSTALISK: OMG, you're making my head hurt, shut up shut up shut up!!!

ASTERISK: As Jerrold Hogle says: *It is at this level that Gothic fictions generally play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural – often siding with one of these over the other in the end, but usually raising the possibility that the boundaries between these may have been crossed, at least psychologically but also physically or both...*

OBSTALISK: Stop! What do you mean!!~!??

ASTERISK: I mean they have ghosts and zombies and vampires and so on, but that the...

OBSTALISK: What has vampires and ghosts and zombies?

ASTERISK: Gothic fiction does.

OBSTALISK: So are the Twilight books Gothic fiction then?

ASTERISK: Ermmmm errrr... Obstalisk, please stop interrupting me!!

OBSTALISK: No really, they have vampires... okay, I don't know if they have zombiez, but don't werewolves count? They're way cooler than zombiez anyway!

ASTERISK: Tssk! Now where was I? I was saying you get terror gothic and you get horror gothic. And I was wanting to say that the titular story of this little selection is a good example of classic Southern horror gothic. In the story, a lot of the language used is of a florid, descriptive nature, reminiscent in its decadent flair of Oscar Wilde.

It is also strongly reminiscent in style and setting of the classic gothic fictions of Poe and Lovecraft.

OBSTALISK: Wait! Hold on, what's the difference between Southern Gothic and Northern Gothic?

ASTERISK: No, no, no "Northern" Gothic. Southern Gothic is set in the US South, like, for instance Tennessee or Mississippi, or New Orleans, or...

OBSTALISK: Oooh, ok, where you get voodoo stuff.

ASTERISK: Well, it doesn't have to include voodoo, actually. In much of Southern Gothic, the "horror" is more of a psychological nature. Lovecraft and Poe were both *technically* Southern Gothicers, depending on how you define it... because, well, it's difficult, because the stories were not ...well, Poe's stories are sort of set in a no-man's land.

...and Poppy Brite's stories are set all over the place, even one in India. But anyway, the first story in the book, the titular story of the collection, is definitely set in the South, in New Orleans. That's sort of a special sub-genre of Gothic fiction which I find very interesting.

But what I was going to say before I got interrupted, is: This is what Jerrold Hogle says about horror Gothic: *it confronts the principal characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms (including the repressions) of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences.*

OBSTALISK: Revolting, yes! You can say that again, the stuff she writes is really revolting, don't listen to Asterisk's boring twaddle, she writes about dead people and zombies eating live people right through into their innards, and...

ASTERISK: Well, of course it is revolting, that is the entire point!

OBSTALISK: In any case, is this a review of Jerrold's book, or of Poppy's stories?

ASTERISK: Sigh, whatever. Well, if old Jerrold didn't make it clear enough, then maybe I can tell you what another expert says, and THIS guy is big into gothic lit. Among many writings on Romanticism and Gothic fiction, he wrote a book called Gothic (*Gothic: The New Critical Idiom*).

According to Fred Botting:

“ [In classic gothic fiction] *the excesses and ambivalence associated with Gothic figures were seen as distinct signs of transgression. Aesthetically excessive, Gothic productions were considered unnatural in their under-mining of physical laws with marvellous beings and fantastic events.*

Transgressing the bounds of reality and possibility, they also challenged reason through their overindulgence in fanciful ideas and imaginative flights. Encouraging superstitious beliefs, Gothic narratives subverted rational codes of understanding and, in their presentation of diabolical deeds and supernatural incidents, ventured into the unhallowed ground of necromancy and arcane ritual.

The centrality of usurpation, intrigue, betrayal and murder to Gothic plots appeared to celebrate criminal behaviour, violent executions of selfish ambition and voracious passion and licentious enactments of carnal desire. Such terrors, emerging from the gloom of a castle or lurking in the dark features of the villain, were also the source of pleasure, stimulating excitements which blurred definitions of reason and morality ...

OBSTALISK: zzzzz...zzzzzZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

ASTERISK: Hey! Cut that out! *kick*

OBSTALISK: OW! Hey! But you're boring! Boooooorrring.

ASTERISK: *sulks* Well, that wasn't me, that was Fred Botting. And I don't find him boring at all!

OBSTALISK: Well, I do, so shut up already and talk about the guts and the zombiez and the voodoo and the...

ASTERISK: In the stories, we are made privy to rather shocking revelations, and this is where the typical Gothic element of dissolution, of moral decay and depravity comes into play, and one of the core elements of gothic fiction, namely transgression.

In Brite's work we see elements of transgression in the themes of the flouting of moral taboos, the supernatural and a preoccupation with death. Brite keeps using contrasts to heighten the sense of transgression, interspersing her text with incongruent images where she juxtaposes wholesomeness with decay, where the ugly and dissolute is emphasised as it is contrasted with the pure and beautiful. The narrators in the stories tend to use a lot of imagery and metaphorical language, erm,...

OBSTALISK: Stop talking like the two people you just quoted! Can't you just be a regular guy and say these stories are as depressing as shit! They want to make you just ... I dunno, creep back into bed and put your head under the covers... they make you uncomfortable like maggots are crawlin' under your skin...

ASTERISK: Ah, now that you mention that, I noticed that throughout the stories, the narrator intermingles areas and objects of anxiety with that of tranquillity and beauty: this creates a feeling of growing unease in the reader, and heightens the emotional response in the reader, very similar to that which is invoked by the imagery of poetry.

OBSTALISK: Lalalalala!! I'm closing my ears, and I want to tell you, Goodreaders, that you mustn't read these stories, they are yucky yucky yuck yuck

ASTERISK: Aha! Well, I think in that case, we can confirm that the author successfully weaves a web of contrasting metaphor that has the result of invoking an emotional response in the reader that is quite similar to the reading of poetry, and that the macabre juxtaposed with the sublime leaves the reader with a disturbing sense of unease.

OBSTALISK: Lalalalalalalalala

ASTERISK: ...and I think these stories should be awarded 4 stars.

OBSTALISK: WHAT!!! Are you NUTS!!! These should not get even one star!!

ASTERISK: Hmmm, would you be willing to compromise on 3 stars then?

OBSTALISK: Well, for a family-size box of KenXcensoredX Fried Chikkun...

ASTERISK: Done!

Kristin says

Poppy ALWAYS gets 5 stars, and that's just how it is.

Coenraad says

As I dislike horror, I was not going to like this book. But was I wrong! Let me tell you, Poppy Z. Brite knocks you out of the park with her horribly horror-filled stories. In 'His mouth will taste of wormwood' two friends explore things to lift them out of their jadedness, but bite off more than they can chew when they take up grave robbing. The ghost as first-person narrator in 'The sixth sentinel' falls in love with a New Orleans hooker. In the final tale, 'How to get on in New York', two country bumpkins arrive in The Big Apple for a music gig; their experience amongst the poor of the city is portrayed as horror, although on a different level as in the other texts. The third story, 'Calcutta, Lord of nerves', deal with the behaviour of the dead in Calcutta. It is particularly gross and horror-laden, costing the small collection its fifth star, but still I was too mesmerised by the writing to stop reading. I may not explore her oeuvre in full as I would like to with other newly discovered writers in the Penguin 60s, but I am thankful for this unusual trip outside my comfort zone.

Incidentally, Poppy Z. Brite is alphabetically the first of 15 female authors (25%) on the list of Penguin 60s.

Poppy Z. Brite vertel gruwelverhale wat my uit my gemaksonne ruk. Hoewel die ervaring soms té intens, grieselrig en grillerig is, sleur sy haar lesers mee met ongewone karakters en die besonderhede waarmee sy hulle en hul wedervaringe opteken. Ek gaan nie noodwendig nou haar versamelde werke aanpak nie, maar die monster uit haar werk was verfrissend.
