



The Atrocities

Jeremy C. Shipp

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Jeremy Shipp brings you *The Atrocities*, a haunting gothic fantasy of a young ghost's education

When Isabella died, her parents were determined to ensure her education wouldn't suffer.

But Isabella's parents had not informed her new governess of Isabella's... condition, and when Ms Valdez arrives at the estate, having forced herself through a surreal nightmare maze of twisted human-like statues, she discovers that there is no girl to tutor.

Or is there...?

The Atrocities Details

Date : Published April 17th 2018 by Tor.com

ISBN :

Author : Jeremy C. Shipp

Format : Kindle Edition 104 pages

Genre : Horror, Gothic, Fantasy, Novella, Fiction, Paranormal

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From Reader Review The Atrocities for online ebook

Schizanthus says

How can a novella with such a brilliant concept and deliciously creepy execution wind up with such a blah ending?! I feel like I was taken on a trek up a treacherous mountain with the promise of an incredible view at the summit only to find out that someone built a wall blocking the view.

I was hooked from the first two sentences:

Turn left at the screaming woman with a collapsing face. Turn right at the kneeling man with bleeding sore the size of teacups.

What a wonderful hedge maze! What an amazing house, with its artwork of silent screams, wings of human fingers, headless figures on stained-glass windows, faces distorted and malformed.

What an intriguing story! A governess who is hired to teach a young girl who “*isn’t coping well with this new phase of her existence.*” A governess who comes with her own baggage.

I came to this house to escape empty rooms.

A generous employer who ensures their employees’ comfort with luxuries including eighty-four-inch high definition televisions in their rooms. Parents who catered to their daughter’s every whim.

There was such a foreboding atmosphere permeating this novella. There’s something not quite right with the characters and with the information the governess is given. There’s a sort of queasy uncertainty throughout the story, where the line between what’s real and what isn’t blurs for the governess and the reader alike, exacerbated by the unsettling dream sequences.

I was captivated by this story until the very end when I realised that not one of my bazillion outstanding questions were going to be answered for me. I know there are authors that don’t like to spoon feed their readers, preferring them to actually use their brain and imagination to reach their own conclusions, and I’m okay with that up to a point. This didn’t feel like that sort of ending. This felt like there was a strict deadline and about ten minutes before the deadline, realising that there was no way all of the questions could possibly be answered satisfactorily, the author just said, “Yeah, that’ll do.”

I wanted to learn more of the backstories for each character. I wanted more emotion when outrageously weird things happened rather than a ho-hum response. I wanted to know minor, possibly insignificant things like why Mr and Mrs Evers shouldn’t be phoned after 7pm. I wanted to know the details of the ‘accident’. I wanted to know what it was that Mrs Evers was **really** experiencing throughout the story. I wanted to know the significance of some of the details of the dreams. I want to know which characters are currently alive. I wanted to know **what happened after the final sentence!** And so much more.

I can’t remember the last book that had me so psyched and then stole the hope of a satisfying resolution from me. Based on the ending alone I’d be giving this novella 2 stars because I was so disappointed. Based on

everything that lead up to it I'd be inclined to give it 5 stars but that was when I thought the questions I had would wind up with weird and wonderful answers. So I'm splitting the difference and rounding up to 4 stars with the hope that at some point the author will do a Q&A session to fill in some blanks. I came really close to giving it 3 stars but I loved too much of the story to able to go through with it.

I also have to say that the creepy hedge maze and that amazing house were so extraordinary that I need to move in immediately (after evicting the current tenants, of course). I would also buy and read an extended version of this story if it ever became available and I am keen to read about more of the weird and wonderful things living in this author's imagination.

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

"You see, Ms. Valdez, we require a governess with very specific qualifications. And this goes beyond a mastery of math and science and linguistics."

Ms. Danna Valdez is summoned to a gothic mansion filled with grotesque artwork to tutor a girl who has died.

But no one told her about the special circumstances of her pupil before she arrived.

"Isabella isn't coping well with this new phase of her existence. A few months ago, she started breaking things. At first it was only a lamp or a vase every few weeks, but things are... escalating." pg 29

Within the mansion lives Mr. Evers, an artist and the creator of many of the grotesques, and his wife, Mrs. Evers, a cook named Robin and a gardener/handyman named Raul.

The emotionally-charged atmosphere of the place gives Danna nightmares as soon as she arrives. And something seems to be a little off...

The premise of this story was very exciting, but I didn't enjoy its execution or ending.

The grotesque artwork seemed to hold more meaning than I was able to glean from it.

"The parishioners would stop and reflect on each Atrocity. And what would they see? Not a hideous statue. They would look beyond the violence and suffering to the metaphysical core of the image. They would see a manifestation of God's power." pg 13

The artwork is creepy, disturbing and sets the scene. But it didn't make the story.

"Each canvas houses an emaciated figure draped in tattered strips of gossamer. Wings made of human fingers spread out from their backs, and their ashen skin stretches tight over their bones like shrinkwrap." pg 16

Recommended for readers who prefer complex imagery over plot development.

Michelle says

What a strange little book this is.

Danna Valdez is summoned to Stockton House to home school young Isabella. Upon arrival she finds she has to navigate her way through a labyrinth of Atrocities. These are hideous sculptures of depraved images. When she is finally greeted at the front door and is shown around the mansion she can't help but feel eyes upon her. The artwork throughout the house is just as sinister as the Atrocities she met outside. These images have the ability to cause horrific nightmares. When she finally meets Mr. & Mrs. Evers her feelings are only magnified by this eccentric couple. The thing they forgot to mention to Ms. Valdez is that their daughter, Isabella, is actually dead yet roaming the halls still.

This book is very dark and disturbing. Mr. Shipp can certainly set the scene. If you are a fan of horror and the bizarre then this is definitely a book to check out. At just over 100 pages I was able to bang this out in just a couple hours this morning. It was a nice change of pace to my typical thrillers I tend to devour.

I'm not ashamed to admit that the beautiful cover of this novella is actually what grabbed my attention. It's perfect!

Thank you to NetGalley and Tor.com for providing me with a digital ARC in exchange for my honest review.

Lindsay says

Another excellent addition to the tor.com novellas line with a beautifully atmospheric haunted house story.

Danna Valdez is a governess hired to tutor Isabella but on arriving at the Stockton House she finds herself navigating a maze of grotesqueries to find a gothic mansion almost as bizarre as the maze. The Stocktons are weird, their servants nearly as strange and their daughter ... well, she's a ghost.

The language used to describe all of the monstrous artwork is lush and conveys most of the creepy atmosphere with the rest coming from the bizarre inhabitants of the Stockton house. The ending is an interesting one that can be read in a couple of different ways. Well worth a read.

Konstantin says

The plot of this book is very similar to that of last year's movie *Voice from the Stone*. An employer who is a sculptor; an obsession with stone; a secretive gardener and a seemingly good housekeeper; and the mother hearing the voice of her absent child - as opposed to the reverse concept in the movie.

So this attempts at being labyrinthine and atmospheric (drawing inspiration from, presumably, Shirley Jackson), but the only puzzle to me was how the book with such an unoriginal plot and a lackluster ending could possibly get published in 2018. The pseudo-gothic atmosphere gets a modern update as Shipp casually references flashlight apps, Viber and Hyundai - perhaps he thought himself quirky, witty or clever? I'm not sure.

Overall, this is a fast-paced book (more of a novella, really) with mediocre writing and bland, done-far-too-many-times characters.

The title pretty much sums it up.

Bob Milne says

A haunting, grotesquely beautiful, atmospheric work of Gothic horror, *The Atrocities* didn't play out quite as I expected, but it's those final twists that elevated it from memorable to unforgettable.

Jeremy C. Shipp throws a lot at the reader in the opening pages, with the walk through the hedge maze more surreal than some stories in their entirety, but that's just setting the stage.

Turn right at the woman sliced into twelve pieces. Please don't touch the statues. Please don't litter.

Inside the house, things are just as creepy and unsettled, with the people just as odd as their surroundings. Part of what makes it so compelling is the quiet, understated narration of Ms. Danna Valdez, who never judges, never condemns, and never critiques. It's not that she's innocent or blind, she just has the mild, reserved personality of a proper governess.

Where the story begins to get really weird - and this is as much as I will say about the plot - is with the introduction of Isabella, the troubled young girl she is there to teach and guide.

"You can't see her, can you? I was afraid you wouldn't. Most people can't. You see, um. You see, Isabella passed away in February."

That is a serious what-the-hell moment there, but the way it's handled is brilliant. Shipp plays the story close to the chest, holding back the truth about Isabella until the very end. Is she a ghost? Did she ever really exist? Is she truly dead? Those are just a few of the questions we ask ourselves, especially as Danna's nightmares cause us to question just how reliable a narrator she is, and as the quirks of the family and the staff have us wondering just how much they know.

Beneath all of the Gothic trappings, however, this is a poignant story about the heavy, suffocating burden of grief. Death, loss, and mourning define everything about this, from *The Atrocities* in the garden, to the house itself, to Mr. and Mrs. Evers, and even to Danna, who we slowly come to understand has her own grief to haunt her.

I knew that Mrs. Evers was sick with grief, but now she seems away with the fairies, as they say.

While I thought I knew where this was all headed, just as I was patting myself on the back for being so clever, Shipp triggered a trap door, revealing yet another layer to the horror. An absolutely brilliant ending, and one that haunts you even more, the longer you think about it.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Disclaimer: I received a complimentary ARC of this title from the publisher in exchange for

review consideration. This does not in any way affect the honesty or sincerity of my review.

destiny ??? [howling libraries] says

Turn left at the screaming woman with a collapsing face. Turn right at the kneeling man with bleeding sores the size of teacups.

What an incredibly atmospheric, beautiful, *haunting* little read this was.

Ms. Valdez is such a kindly narrator; despite being faced with absolutely bizarre circumstances, she never judges, only views the world around her with wary curiosity and, at times, heart-aching pity. She knows the pain of loss too well to be terribly surprised by the nature of her new occupation, and her lack of shock at the entire scenario was a refreshing touch.

What exactly am I doing here? I came to this house to escape empty rooms.

Early in the story, we see that Ms. V has suffered a terrible grief of her own, and it's all too similar to the reasons why she was called upon to teach poor, lost little Isabella. Despite how obvious her loss is in the story - particularly in her fever-like nightmares - I appreciated that Jeremy's storytelling never dwells upon it long enough for it to be too heavy, or to take away the eerie nature of Stockton House.

A little voice tells me to turn back, but a little voice always tells me to turn back.

My favorite thing about this story wasn't how interesting the narrative was, or how devastatingly haunting the portrayals of grief were; it was the writing, and how genuinely eerie and grotesque it became at times. The atrocities that the story is named for are horrifying statues depicting tragic Biblical moments, and Stockton House itself is filled with its owner's paintings. The writing quality behind these descriptions is impeccable, transporting you directly into the dim, quiet hallways of the estate, where something slightly wicked seems to constantly hide just out of sight.

I would recommend this to anyone who enjoys tragic, gothic stories about ghosts, and doesn't mind a great deal of nightmarish visuals and scenery.

Thank you to Tor.com Publishing for sending me this ARC in exchange for an honest review!

Sheila says

2 stars. It was OK.

Things I liked:

1. The cover! It's fabulous!
2. The first 25% of the book--the description of the house and garden--was creepy and gothic. Great setup, and a great premise for a book.
3. It was really fast to read.

Things I didn't like:

1. The ending. It just sort of drifted off.
2. A lack of depth. Things were hinted at but never explained.
3. Though I expected, from the cover and description, that this would be a gothic novel, it's more like a dark fantasy or even surreal/weird fiction. Not what I expected.

I received this review copy from the publisher on NetGalley. Thanks for the opportunity to read and review; I appreciate it!

Veronique says

This novella had plenty of potential: a creepy house full of gruesome artwork and even weirder people. Is Isabella truly a ghost or is her mother impersonating her out of emotional/psychological hardship? What is haunting Danna? All very Gothic in feel. The language was rich, especially when describing all the unsettling elements, and built the tension nicely. However, all the modern references kept jarring me out of the narrative. Also, I would have preferred a little more depth.

Fiona says

Turn left at the screaming woman with a collapsing face. Turn right at the kneeling man with bleeding sores the size of teacups. If you come across a big-breasted bear with a child's head in her jaws, you're going the wrong way...Turn right at the woman sliced into twelve pieces. Please don't touch the statues. Please don't litter.

3.5 stars rounded up for all the promise in this weird and enticing novella from Jeremy Shipp. The first half? Three-quarters even? while rushed in places, were doing so well on pulling me in and capturing my curiosity and love of odd. Unfortunately - for this book, I really think it needed to be expanded past novella and into full-blown book.

So much is introduced that is mysterious and intriguing and really begging to be explored; our narrator's past is hinted at and glimpsed very briefly. The atrocities themselves and this house they surrounded and infiltrated with their twisted faces and bodies - even Princess is sadly deprived of all the page time that should have been hers (that capybara definitely knew more than she was letting on).

I did love this book, I just wanted to love it and get to know it more. The extra story is already there, hinted at and left unexplored; and I think given the time and space to do so that Jeremy Shipp could have turned this from a good, short, interesting read, into a spectacular and mindbending work of horrific art - an atrocity itself, in all its glory.

Diane S ? says

Curiouser and curioser. Danna didn't fall down a rabbit hole, nor did she follow a rabbit, but she did answer an ad to be a teacher, one with strange instructions. She did have to find her way through a strange maze, full of extremely strange and gruesome statues, to arrive at the house. There were no rrsbbits but there were rats that seemed alive one minute, and the next plastic. Her student wasn't from Wonderland, but maybe somewhere else just as strange if not stranger. There was no Queen of hearts but there was a man who thought he was king of all. She didn't lose her head, but almost lost something more valuable.

Seriously what did I just read? Gothic horror where nothing is as it seems. Mind bending, but a quick and different read.

Sadie Hartmann Mother Horror says

Review originally published on Cemetery Dance Extras Oct. 24th, 2018

When a novella starts off with a line like, "Turn left at the screaming woman with a collapsing face," I'm going to sit up a little straighter in my chair and pay close attention. And that was my reading posture during the duration of time it took me to get to the one hundredth page. Focused.

Captivated.

This story is not for the lazy reader, and I don't mean that it's too intellectual or complicated, I just mean that this was new territory, and I needed to pay attention. Almost immediately, I was immersed in the rich, gothic atmosphere. The protagonist, a governess named Ms. Valdez, winds her way through a disturbing hedge maze to find herself on the steps of the Stockton House — the destination of her newly acquired job.

Once Ms. Valdez enters the premises, the reader is taken on a very strange, dreamlike (nightmarish) journey that I can only compare to a Guillermo del Toro-esque adult version of Alice in Wonderland.

The reader is forced to either enjoy the ride, or question everything. My recommendation, if you want to enjoy the book, is to just be a willing spectator to Shipp's imaginative prose. Suspension of reality is required.

Shipp definitely takes some risks with the story that I'm sure some readers will feel are a little jarring. One minute you're reading about a stained glass window depicting a parade of headless humans carrying their own skulls, and the next minute a character is marveling at the beauty of a colorful butterfly or randomly listening to the theme song of Who's the Boss. I was tempted to be put off by it, but the writing is so compelling and Jeremy C. Shipp is so talented, I found myself easily ignoring my own pestering questions.

My only real complaint is with the ending — I'm not really sure if that was the resolution the author was heading towards all along; it felt a little hurried or unfocused in comparison to the micro-precision intentionality of the rest of the book. But despite that small issue, my last thought as I closed the book and stared at the beautiful cover one more time was, "I cannot wait to read another story by this author." Lucky

me, Bedfellow, which comes out in November, is waiting for me on my nightstand.

Lata says

A governess is hired to teach a young girl, who she is told is a ghost. Weird, creepy and a little unnerving in spots; the house is full of disturbing art and items, while the family seems a little strange. 3.5 stars.

Taryn says

"Turn left at the screaming woman with a collapsing face. Turn right at the kneeling man with bleeding sores the size of teacups. If you come across a big-breasted bear with a child's head in her jaws, you've gone the wrong way."

The Evers are looking for someone to teach their troubled young daughter who has already scared off two governesses. When Danna Valdez arrives at the job interview, she immediately notices that the eccentric Evers' family will not be ordinary employers. As she approaches their home, she's forced to walk through a hedge maze filled with statues depicting biblical horrors. Mr. Evers insists that the statues are "more than mere grotesqueries." He says if you "look beyond the violence and suffering to the metaphysical core of the image," you'll see "a manifestation of God's power." Horrific art fills every corner of the house; canvases with disfigured people adorned with "wings made of human fingers spread out from their backs" and "ashen skin [stretched] tight over their bones like shrink-wrap" line the hallway. Undeterred by the home's ghastly appearance, Danna takes the job but soon discovers the horrors in the home extend beyond the gruesome decor.

A little voice tells me to turn back, but a little voice always tells me to turn back.

Before Danna even arrived at the Evers' home, grief and guilt had trapped her in the middle ground between the living and the dead. A tiny voice inside her head is always tempting her back to the darkness, but she forces herself to keep going. Her simultaneous existence in both a living nightmare and a house filled with chthonic decor makes it difficult to separate her surreal dreams from reality. When Danna is finally forced to look in the mirror, she sees a haunted face she doesn't recognize. She spots something familiar in Mrs. Evers, which triggers an instinctive need to help. **The characters are forced to confront their demons, in both the psychological and physical realm.** Some of those "demons" actually see themselves as benevolent forces. Danna is repeatedly tested throughout the story, much like the subjects of the statues in the hedge maze. Mr. Evers insists that his employees have "unstained" souls that are "impenetrable to damnation." **Will Danna be able to see past her own flaws and tap into her "equally powerful strengths" in a home where any perceived shortcoming can result in one's downfall?**

What exactly am I doing here? I came to this house to escape empty rooms.

I loved the **haunting atmosphere** and **creepy imagery**! The nightmarish decor immediately summoned visions of Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son* in my head. The **descriptive passages** made it so easy to visualize the surroundings, regardless of how bizarre things got. However, I feel lukewarm about the characters and the story. **While the ending was set up well, the last act was over so quickly that I didn't feel like I had a complete picture of what was happening or why.** Part of that is because I never truly understood Mr. Evers. There's something about the meaning of the story that I can't quite grasp, but these are the words and concepts swirling around in my head: virtue/fiend, judgment/compassion, power, conformity, control, rebellion, faith, the Old Testament, and the distortions of a fanatic. I think this novella would've worked even better as a full-length novel.

If you love creepy houses, this book is well worth the experience! It's only 112 pages, so I recommend reading it in one sitting on a dreary day. The first few pages are available at Tor.com. I think it's best to avoid reading the description of this book because it spoils some of the moments of discovery that I enjoyed.

I received this book for free from NetGalley and Macmillan-Tor/Forge. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review. It's available now!

Tim says

Disappointing. Extremely disappointing. I really wish I could just go off on a tirade dismantling this book from the start of the review to finish, but the problem is that the book it is not all terrible; there are moments of utter genius, and that makes the situation even worse as it *should* have been amazing.

The plot sounds ingenious. A little girl dies, and her ghost lingers in the manor the family owns. The parents hire a governess to continue the little girl's education, despite the fact that seemingly the mother is the only one who can see the ghost. Is this a story of madness or a haunted house story? It's a great set up.

It also has a wonderful opening. One of the best I've ever read.

"Turn left at the screaming woman with a collapsing face. Turn right at the kneeling man with bleeding sores the size of teacups. If you come across a big-breasted bear with a child's head in her jaws, you're going the wrong way.

...

Turn right at the woman sliced into twelve pieces. Please don't touch the statues. Please don't litter."

These are instructions for making one's way through the hedge maze in front of the manor. The statues are the "atrocities" from the title. This scene is wonderful, and truly intrigued me as to what would happen next.

The other thing I think the book did really well was how it dealt with grief. Mrs. Evers is tragic in her grief, and leads one to question if the haunting is in her head. Even better though is the hints that we get about our own narrator. It's clear that she's dealing with loss too, and as I pieced together what happened in her past, I found myself impressed with how lonely of a book this was.

"A little voice tells me to turn off my phone and keep sleeping, but a little voice always tells me to keep

sleeping.”

It's very melancholy and quite touching.

What else does the book do right? Not a thing.

From here on out spoiler warning, because I will talk about major plot points, but frankly I wish I would have known these before hand as I would have probably passed on the book. I leave the choice to look up to you dear reader.

(view spoiler)

In closing: despite all the promise, this one is the definition of a “meh” read. I should probably give it a 2 stars, as aspects are wonderful, but the book is such a let down overall and feels like it is made on a broken promise given the plot description and the opening scene. An extremely bitter 1/5 stars.