



The Tears of Isis

James Dorr

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What is art? To a sculptor it may be the formation of beauty from stone, or some other material; to a writer the forming of words into poetry or prose. The creation or retelling of myths and wonders, bringing to them a new understanding — but beauty as well. To the Elizabethan poet Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Defense of Poesy*, “lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, [the poet -- or, indeed, the artist in general] doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like.” And so it may be proper that the book we have here, *The Tears of Isis*, begins with a poem about a sculptor, a modern Medusa, and concludes with the title story of another sculptor who travels a continent for inspiration, in search of the goddess, “the Weeping Isis,” and ends with discovery of her own self.

But *The Tears of Isis*, the book, is a journey too, encompassing, yes, “forms such as never were in nature,” as not just “*La Méduse*,” but also a man’s soul absorbed by an octopus, vampires both physical and metaphorical, music and retellings of *Cinderella*, an Ancient World caper involving the Golden Fleece of legend, a far-future recasting of *Sleeping Beauty* — one of three stories in *The Tears of Isis* set in the author’s world of the “Tombs,” another “Tombs” tale of the origin of ghouls, cockroaches spawned by war, insects by UFOs, Lovecraftian monsters called forth by candles, a woman who takes in a rat as a pet, the “death planet” Saturn and women who buy birds, the life-cycle of dragons, another “Tombs” story of love and a zombie-like form of revenge, and at last to Isis — her search to create but destroying as well, as is part of her nature, and back full circle to sculptress Medusa who “spoke to her hair at times” and “in her dreams . . . her hair hissed its/ answers.”

Are these tales, then, her doing, the fever dreams of one who both creates and dismantles, who transmutes life itself into stone? And are Medusa and Isis the same, the goddess who, with her consort Osiris, rules over death and life at the same time, taking the form of both nurturing mother and flesh-eating vulture?

It is for the reader to decide.

The Tears of Isis Details

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From Reader Review The Tears of Isis for online ebook

Erin says

This review originally appeared on my blog: <http://erinrbritt.wordpress.com/2014/...>

I had the pleasure of interviewing James Dorr for Author Corner awhile back, and one of the things we discussed was his short story collection, *The Tears of Isis*. I've finally been able to read it (I blame actual employment and graduate school for the delay), and the first thing I want to mention is how beautiful it is. The language Dorr uses as he tells his stories is wonderful. Some of the stories are his takes on fairy tales. Cindy is the most obvious one, but others are Snow White and Sleeping Beauty told as River Red and The Ice Maiden, respectively. What I enjoyed most about these stories is that they employ the same world dynamics. It was nice to go back to this world and read other aspects of it. His versions of the tales are unique and subtle. In fact, with River Red and The Ice Maiden, I didn't realize what they were until after I had finished reading the collection. Some people may not like the delayed connection, and maybe those people who are smarter than I am will make the connection as they read these stories, but I rather enjoyed that I was still appreciating the collection and getting new things from it after the fact. The final story, *The Tears of Isis*, was the most sublime (Burke) for me. I had the most powerful reaction reading it, a mix of horror, disgust, and fascination, and I think it was well placed within the collection.

If you're looking for some new reading material, I'd suggest grabbing a copy of this book.

tyto says

I received this from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

A really unique collection of short stories that mixes mythology, fantasy, science fiction, horror, and fairy tales in a strange blend. The prose is great, and the world-building is fantastic. Glad I took a chance with this one, I will definitely be reading more by James Dorr!

Christine Rains says

A well written collection of short stories to chill you to your core. Ghouls, insects, vampires, and gods. Tantalizing bits taken from Egyptian mythology and woven into highly original tales.

These stories aren't for the fainthearted. James Dorr knows how to spin a tale of horror. It's not just in the gore or the odd characters, but the way he can twist the plot and shock you with the frightening truth. Dorr has a quirky style that makes this collection unlike any other.

The stories that stood out for me were "Waxworms" and "Moons of Saturn." Two not so earthly tales. "The Bala Worm" was a wonderful modern fantasy piece about dragons with an amusing twist. And the title story, "The Tears of Isis" created dark images in my mind of a disturbed artist whose unconscious is revealed in her work.

This book is for lovers of truly dark fiction.

Rena Mason says

THE TEARS OF ISIS is a well-written collection of stories that transcend time, places, and events, which are all connected in one way or another, even if just by a name. The individual works are dark fantasy/horror stories that are both intense and thought-provoking. I enjoyed the collection and look forward to reading more by this author.

Vincenzo Bilof says

James Dorr's greatest gift is his versatility, and this collection is a showcase for his storytelling prowess and writing skill. While reading Tears of Isis, I was reminded of the old Heavy Metal cartoon; Dorr's storytelling never ventured into the same exploitative style, but instead, each story was written with a different style, almost as if each piece were written by a different writer. I think the greatest challenge with a story collection is keeping the reader interested enough to read all of the stories. Most authors have a familiar style that fans of their work can connect with; even the short story masters, like Lovecraft and Barker, arguably maintained similar writing styles throughout their narratives.

Tears of Isis is interesting because the storytelling methods are diverse. I wanted to see what Dorr was going to do next. Here are stories of the grotesque, and stories of personal horror. I will tell you that, as someone who really hates going to the dentist, Dorr inspired me to invest in a lot of expensive dental hygiene products to make sure I never have to go back to the dentist again. It seemed that Dorr decided to tackle a familiar horror trope—or even popular horror film—with each of his stories, but make them HIS. You might be familiar with many of the concepts, but each story felt original. One particular story involving cockroaches was predictable, but there was still a slight twist, and the author didn't hide the fact that he seemed to know what the reader would expect—and still, it was intense. How did he pull this off?

Some stories bordered on the poetic, but I will say this: all of them entertained. I didn't feel like I was drowning in prose. Each character seemed distinct, and most importantly, interesting. I've gone through many anthologies where I paused between stories for an extended period of time, but for Tears of Isis, I couldn't help but see what Dorr had up his sleeve in the next story. Even though each story was distinct, I felt like there was a sense of "mythology," as the title might suggest. As if each story presented a museum-like gallery of horror stories that were a homage to a fear-mythos. Yes, there's a twisted fairy tale. A fantasy-esque story. A vampire story. Even telling you these things... I feel as if I am somehow spoiling it for you. STORE TEETH is my favorite in this collection, but it was hard to choose this one as my "favorite," because it didn't stand out in stark contrast to the others as superior in any way... I just loved it. I feel that Tears of Isis raises the bar significantly for expectations in a collection of horror stories.

Mary Hartshorn says

I really tried reading this book. When I couldn't get into it, I put it down for a day or two before trying again. The author's writing is very good, only this book is just not for me. I just could not get into the story even after reading Maria's story.

Carla Peele says

I won an Advanced Reader's Copy (or ARC) of this book on Goodreads.com, and I was quite excited, as the back cover description looked so very promising! I was expecting myth to mix with faerie tale... Ick. Not so much.

It was confusing, for one-- the stories were far too rushed and most characters never properly introduced, so that the story was over and you never understood who they were; in fact, some were mentioned by name with no precursory or following explanation as to whom they were at all.

For another thing, much of it was just...disgusting to me, and for supposing to be referencing familiar stories, it should have been easier to tell which story one was referencing (save the one where it flat tells you which.).

I was sorely disappointed.

Marne Wilson says

It would be very easy to discount this story collection at first glance, as the cover art practically screams "I must be self-published!" and the back cover blurb is long on pretentious language and short on plot description. But I'm glad I didn't judge this book by its cover and actually made it far enough to read the stories inside, which were surprisingly good. Then again, it shouldn't really be surprising, considering that almost all these stories were previously published in speculative fiction magazines, some of them as long ago as the mid-90's. My favorites were the title story, in which a sculptress recovers her suppressed memories through an exploration of Egyptian mythology; "The Bala Worm," a recounting of a modern-day dragon hunt; and "The Christmas Rat," a charming but sardonic holiday tale. Dorr's work straddles the fine line between fantasy and horror, and some of the tales here are quite morbid, but he is definitely worth a read if you're interested in the darker side of speculative fiction.

(Note: I received my copy of this book from a Goodreads First Reads Giveaway.)

Bill says

What an excellent collection this is! And so dark, just the way I like my fiction to be. Included are weird reworkings of a couple of fairy tales (which are weird enough in their original versions!) There are also three stories set in the same world, a place that seemed to me to be a combination of ancient times and feverish nightmare! One of the fairy tale stories is set in this world in fact, a bizarre take on the Sleeping Beauty legend. Another in this series features ghouls! Other plots feature dragons, rats and other pets, and candles capable of conjuring strange and dangerous monsters reminiscent of Lovecraft's imagined horrors. Every one of these tales is compelling and surprising, but I think I would have to say my personal favorite was the title story, the last in the collection, wherein a troubled sculptor in the planning stages of her next work of art takes a disturbing journey through her past, only to find (step by step) that the truth about what happened is far more horrifying than her terrible but inaccurate memories.

William Cook says

5.0 out of 5 stars

Beautiful depiction of the dark and tragic soul of humanity

May 11, 2014

This review is from: The Tears of Isis (Paperback)

James Dorr's third collection of short fiction, 'The Tears of Isis,' is a fantastically varied and eclectic selection of some of Dorr's finest work. His last collection, 'Darker Loves: Tales of Mystery and Regret,' was excellent also, although I do prefer 'Tears . . .' for its diversity and almost poetic use of prose. The stories therein range from the grotesque, the Gothic, and the almost beautiful depiction of the dark and tragic soul of humanity. This collection is rich with allusion and aestheticism at every corner; the astute reader will realize that Mr Dorr is taking us on a tour of his own labyrinthine gallery, with an emphasis on the Gothic and the moribund. The homage to Edgar Allan Poe that precedes the first piece should give you fair indication that there will be darkness, requiring no less than a blood-red candle to light your way.

The collection begins with a poem, 'La Meduse,' which alludes to the stories ahead with its tapestry of Gothic imagery and classical mythology, juxtaposed next to modern imagery and references. As is the twisting, turning, serpents that crown the ancient image of horror - Medusa; so too, writhes and hisses a grim mortality in each one of Dorr's stories that follow. Unpredictable, dangerous almost, in their risky narratives, and deadly in their precise intent towards the unwary reader, the 17 short stories will leave your appetite suitably whetted for more. Also within the collection you will find Dorr's deft and inventive interpretations of classically morbid folktales, titled River Red (Snow White) and The Ice Maiden (Sleeping Beauty); both fascinating, for their twists and turns on the origin stories and for the stories themselves.

The two stories that stand out for me are the first and the last in the collection, but that is not to take away anything from that which sits between. 'In the Octopus's Garden,' a surreal horror story unfolds to its sublime conclusion. Almost Kafkaesque in its stark portrayal of a mind bursting with insanity as it deals with the bodily transformation and, ultimately, realization that the soul is housed in a vessel reeking of horror - very wet horror! Once again, mythology and allusion meld together in prose that is poetic and almost classical, yet bound together with the visceral sensation of graphic modern horror.

The final story, 'The Tears of Isis,' completes the collection with a superb tale that echoes the poem that begins the collection, ala Medusa as a sculptress of sorts. While the story trope is similar in that a deadly sculptress/aesthete leaves a trail of victims in her wake (an obvious parable being that of the writer, creating works of art; each story representative of a creation soaked in horror), the story is undoubtedly of the present and deserves recognition as a powerful psychological horror story, that pushes the boundaries of contemporary dark fiction.

Despite the frequent mythological and classical references, this collection is not archaic; it is reverent to the horror fiction of the past as well as being progressive in style and scope and in that respect it is a canonical work, representing a writer in full command of his impressive literary prowess. After reading twice, the stories seem to get better and reveal further layers of depth and meaning. If you like dark fiction that is both intelligent and pulls no punches, give 'The Tears of Isis' a chance and you will not be disappointed. Highly recommended.

Natasha Ewendt says

Is there anything better than a short story collection that pulls you in from the very first line? The Tears of Isis is intelligently written, evocative and engrossing. James Dorr is a fabulous wordsmith who weaves words in such a way that you can't help but be lulled into the story. His ability to take on new perceptions and POVs and drag the reader inside them in such a short space of time is exceptional. All these unique, surprising stories are different to each other yet subtly threaded together. I like a different spin on dark themes and mythology and every story has one. Each tale has a killer twist, deep dark intrigue and/or something disturbing to make you shiver. The Tears of Isis features inventively told modern takes on ancient myths and classic legends along with all-new original ideas. Inspiring.

Christine says

I was able to have the opportunity of reading 'The Tear Of Iris' as an ARC (Advanced Reader's Copy) on Goodreads.

It was unfortunate that I found the book disappointing. I had hopes that it would be pretty good, but originally had expectations for it. The cover may look unappealing to some but somehow it intrigued me into reading the collection of short stories. I found the blurb misleading. When I first read it I thought it had potential since I like twisted fairy tales and adventure. Unfortunately, I thought that the blurb had no relation with the stories. I thought the stories would be a twisted version of classics, but not in this case.

It personally took me a while to get through the collection of stories since I would read one, then put it down and not pick it up for a while. I thought the stories were too short and didn't have any connections or relevance between stories. Although the ideas of the stories were good, I found them really confusing and was annoyed that there was no background to the story and its characters. Out of the 19 stories only one caught my liking, 'Bottles', I like my Vampire tales.

I was overall disappointed but glad to have read something a little different, even though the writing could have been improved a tad.
