FUNGUS: A POEM IN *5* ACTS

ACT 1**: The Well**

You can think about a word that means all the other words

You can see the name of the word that means all the other words at the bottom of a vast well

You can see the name of a world at the bottom of a vast well

You can see nothing at the bottom of a vast well

Let's revise this well

Let's change our point of view from you to we

We do not look into wells

We look into holes

We do not look into holes

We look into gutters

We look into blanknesses

Let's pretend the well is a hole and let's fill the hole with worlds

You can see a list of holes at the bottom of a vast well

You can see nothing

The devil is at the bottom of the vast well

The house is at the bottom of the vast well

I live in the house at the bottom of the vast well and it is filled with fungus

The walls of the house are filled with fungus

This is a play about a house at the bottom of a vast well, it is a play about a house that is filled with fungus

The fungus in the house is talking fungus, it speaks a language of deterioration, it speaks a language of separation and erosion

There are translators who specialize in translating the language of the fungus for those who visit the house

The fungus traps those who live in the house

This is a play about a house that traps everybody inside of it

The house talks and talks and when you think you are able to leave the house you go out to the yard and stare into the bottom of a vast well and you see yourself within the house filled with fungus at the bottom of a vast well

You can see light at the bottom of the vast well

You can see magic at the bottom of the vast well

You can see a fungus man stuck to another fungus man at the bottom of a vast well

The fungus man does a trick for the children who live in the house, your house, filled with fungus at the bottom of the vast well

How do you dispose of me, the fungus man asks the children

We dispose of you by being intimate, they chant in unison

We dispose of you by attaching your face to the end of the world, they chant in unison

The man's face is sitting at the end of the world next to a mountain filled with a hideous form of light

The light is a siren, it is a warning, the mountain is a warning about the fungus, the fungus is a warning about the body, the body is a warning about the verbs, the verbs are a warning about everything the fungus reveals

ACT 2: **Self-Portrait with Fungus**

Let's write this in the present tense, says the fungus

Let's recite this in the present tense, says the fungus

What is time, anyway, to a fungus, when you are trying to be the kind of fungus that brings down an entire civilization?

The fungus leaked all over the walls

The fungus crawled all over the floors

The fungus was not always visible

The invisible fungus reminded us of our loneliness

The invisible fungus reminded us of our country

The invisible fungus reminded us of our melancholy

I was sitting so pretty, sang the invisible fungus to the children

I was sitting so pretty then suddenly they wanted to kill me

But I'm a fungus, sang the fungus, I can only be killed with things you cannot spell

It is impossible to conceptualize a sound that has no sound, says the fungus by way of explanation

It is impossible to conceptualize a value that does not exist, says the fungus by way of declaration

It is impossible to conceptualize a word that has no relationship to a language

The fungus was feeling melancholically and when it was sufficiently melancholic it summoned the children to the sitting room

The fungus was feeling melancholically and when it was sufficiently melancholic it summoned the servants to the library

The fungus was feeling melancholically and when it was sufficiently melancholic it summoned the killers to the kitchen

I can be silent for as long as you would like me to be silent, sang the fungus to those whose bodies it was about to infect

I can hang out for just a little while longer, sang the fungus, for I have no desire to change

I have no desire to change myself, sang the fungus to its fungal comrades

And I have no desire to change anyone else, sang the fungus

I simply want to make a list, sang the fungus

I want to make a list of all the bodies I must occupy

This list, sang the fungus, is a lyrical list, and when you sing it you will be reminded of just how horrible it is to use words to describe the things you experience

I will make a list and together we will read the list, sang the fungus, and this will be the center of our story

ACT 3: **The House**

A house

This is a house

In this house there are children and they are not allowed to speak except when spoken to

They follow the rule

Speak only when spoken to

The children are always getting lost because no one is ever speaking to them

They just sit in the house not being spoken to as the fungus eats away at their bodies

They cannot participate in the life of the house because no one is ever speaking to them and they do not know what to do because they are just sitting there deteriorating, not being spoken to

They cannot participate in the house and every moment they don't say something the children sink deeper into the fungus

No, the fungus sinks deeper into the children

The house cannot stop the fungus unless the children speak but they are not allowed to speak unless they are spoken to and since they are rarely spoken to they rarely speak as the house grows slyly slick with fungus

The fungus does not like words

The fungus does not like when words are used to describe things

The fungus does not like when words are used to describe needs

The fungus does not like when words are used to invoke more words

It is impossible to feel ambivalence in the face of this fungus

This fungus makes everyone have feelings about the impossibility of confronting the fungus

In our inability to confront the fungus we feel despair, think the children, but they do not have the language to communicate their despair because they are not in the habit of using words

They do not use words because they are not allowed to speak unless they are spoken to and none of the children ever starts the conversation because they are afraid that if they start the conversation, if they speak for the sake of being spoken to, then the speaker will fall ill with the disease that grows in every spore of the fungus

At night the children gather in a room and they do not speak to each other

Often they sit in a circle and stare at each other and each of them is thinking some variation of the same thought

Who will speak

Who will speak without being spoken to

Because if one of us can be brave enough to speak without being spoken to then the rest of us will have been spoken to and this will mean that we are able to speak

But they know what happens to those who speak without spoken to

The fungus makes it impossible for them to ever speak again

The children move towards and away from their emotions with an impeccable sense of rhythm and grace and when they are together their wordlessness makes the fungus feel proud of its power

Footnote: the fungus also dislikes writing

The fungus responds to writing by eating the pages of every book or notebook in the house

ACT 4: **Business**

The bourgeoisie will remember my carbuncles until their dying day, wrote Karl Marx, and the house feels the same way

The house has business to conduct

The house makes everyone aware of its fungus

The house makes everyone aware of the voices that live inside its fungus

The house makes everyone see the voices that live inside the fungus

The house feels that a fungus must be seen and heard and heard and seen and the fungus believes that the most interesting thing about seeing and hearing is that sometimes we hear what we see and sometimes we see what we hear and so the fungus likes to make those it infects believe that there is no difference between seeing and hearing

The house knows that the fungus is indistinguishable from the house

The business of the fungus is subtle transformation

The fungus knows that the best way to make all the people in the house deteriorate is to get them to obsessively think the thought: I am deteriorating

It is not important for the fungus if the people are actually deteriorating

For the fungus deterioration is an experience that is internal as much as it is external

The interiority of the fungal deterioration experienced by the people in the house is contagious

When father says I am being eaten alive by a fungus, mother will inevitably tell the children that father is being eaten alive by the fungus and then mother will say: no, no, don't be afraid, the fungus will not eat you alive, children, it only eats mothers and fathers alive, you do not have to worry about being eaten alive by fungus

But later that afternoon mother will say to herself: I am being eaten alive by the fungus, and for a few hours she will resist the urge to tell the children how she is being eaten alive by the fungus

But soon it will be all that she can think about

The only thought she can think is: like father, I too am being eaten alive by the fungus

And although she does not intend to scare the children she will come to see them just as they are about to eat their afternoon snack, and she will say:

Children, I have something important to tell you, and the children will say: mother, now that you have spoken to us, we would like to know:

What can we have for afternoon snack?

And mother will think: snack, snack, I must concentrate on their snack, if I give them their snack and pretend that life is normal then perhaps I will be able to think about something other than the deterioration of my body at the expense of the fungus

Children, she says, you can have crackers, you can have cheese, you can have apples, you can have lemonade

The children come down to the kitchen and sit at the table as she sets out crackers and cheese and apples and lemonade

And they start to eat the crackers and cheese and apples and lemonade and mother goes back up to her room and feels a sense of relief that she has not said to the children the words: I am being eaten alive by the fungus

But the relief is short-lived because as soon as she starts to relax father starts to scream: children, children, we, your mother and I, are being eaten alive by the fungus

Children, do not listen to your mother

Leave this house at once

If you stay in this house, like mother and father, you too will be eaten alive by the fungus

Mother sits in her room crying and screaming at father: what are you doing, why are you saying those things, and father says to mother you are a liar, you are a liar, you must not lie to the children, you must protect the children, the children must leave the house, if they do not leave the house then like us they too will be eaten alive by the fungus

The older children listen to father and run as fast as they can to another house that they hope is not being swallowed up by the fungus

And even though the younger children cannot conceive of a life outside of mother and father, the older children convince most of the younger children to come with them, to run with them, to find a house that is not being eaten alive by fungus

In every version of the story, however, there is always one child who resists

In some versions of the story it is a wise child

In some versions of the story it is a wicked child who decides they cannot leave the house, that they too must be eaten alive by fungus, that if mother and father are going to be eaten alive by fungus then the wicked or wise child thinks that their true and unflappable desire is to stay by their parents' side even if it means being eaten alive by fungus

To be eaten alive by fungus

This is when the fungus is happiest

When it convinces the children that what they really and actually want is to be eaten alive by fungus

This is the business of the house

No one can tell the difference between a child who is being eaten alive by a fungus and a child who simply thinks he is being eaten alive by a fungus

For the house and the fungus this story of fungal deterioration is a story of joy, ecstasy, and love

ACT *5*: **Soliloquy**

At the end of the play the house performs a soliloquy

The house is the only thing left standing and the house is now entirely covered with fungus that is black and brown and green and yellow and which slides up and down the walls and the floors of the house in what the liner notes refer to as:

The sacred dance of the fungus

The sacred dance of the fungus is the subject of the house's soliloquy

As the curtain rises for the final act, the house turns to the audience and asks it to study the sacred dance of the fungus

The audience strains its eyes and most people feel afraid when they see the fungus shimmying across the walls and floor

The house looks at the audience and says what the audience already understands

This is a play about you

This is a play about your fungus

This is a play about the fungus in your walls and the fungus on your floor

This is a play about the sacred dance of the fungus on your walls and on your floor and if there is one thing we hope to accomplish with tonight's performance it is to instill in you a new appreciation for the fungus on your walls and floor

The house does not speak as the overhead lights shine on a patch of black fungus that is swirling and sliding along the wall in such a way that there is no longer any patch of wall that is not entirely covered with fungus

Is it the silence of the fungus or the dancing of the fungus that enchants you most? says the house to the audience

Or do you simply admire about the fungus what you do not admire about yourselves?

However you choose to answer this question, says the house to the audience, the thing you really need to know is that while you think you can tell the difference between evolution and devolution, between composition and decomposition, between good fungus and bad fungus, we, me, the house and the fungus that composes me, that reveals me, that contains me: we want you to know that there is no reason to make such distinctions

The purpose of a human is to be humanly un-human, says the house and the fungus, just as the purpose of a non-barbarian is to be non-barbarically barbarian

I do not intend these last lines to be an epiphany, says the house and the fungus who are now speaking in one shimmering, dancing voice

I simply intend for you to understand that the most important decision you have to make is: should you dance or should you disappear?

Should you dance or should you disappear?

Dance or disappear? Dance or disappear? Dance or disappear? Disappear or dance?

Who among you would like me to dance, says the house, and who among you would like me to disappear?

Who among you is a dancing fungus and who among you is a disappearing fungus?

You will see and you will hear and you will understand and you will not see and you will not hear and you will not understand and in the end you will not be able to understand if there is a difference between seeing and not seeing, between hearing and not hearing, between understanding and not understanding, between disappearing and not disappearing, between dancing and stillness

Take a deep breath, says the house and the fungus

When you go home tonight stare at the walls and at the fungus and take a deep breath and breathe in all of the fungus and all of the walls and ask yourself: do I feel very well, do I feel very well now?

And you will understand that this is the wrong question

And you will dance and disappear and dance and disappear and you will feel very well or you will not feel very well or you will not feel anything at all