

Neverwhere Discussion Questions

1. In the first chapter, before Richard leaves for London from Scotland and months before he meets Door, a woman tells him he has a good heart and that "Sometimes that's enough to see you safe wherever you go... But mostly, it's not." In what other ways does *Neverwhere* present the dilemma that kindness and safety are unrelated?
2. London Below is made up of people who have fallen through the cracks. As an outsider to London who dislikes drawing attention to himself, does Richard belong in London Below? Is it his meek disposition and sense of displacement that drew him there in the first place?
3. Why do you think Richard sees Door on the sidewalk when Jessica does not? Is it indifference to his fiancée and to his life in general that opens him up to Door and her world?
4. Why is Door so attached to Richard when he is clearly in over his head? When Mr. Croup asks the marquis de Carabas why she permits the "upworlder" to travel with her, the marquis responds that "it's sentimentality on her part." Do you agree?
5. Discuss trust among the characters in the novel, particularly in relation to the Angel Islington and the marquis de Carabas. Why does Door implicitly trust de Carabas, and does Richard trust him as well or just go along? As a reader, do you trust the Angel's intentions early on in the novel?
6. Is Hunter's betrayal out of character for her? Do her actions at the end of her life redeem her?
7. Why does the girl who escorts Richard to the Floating Market, Anaesthesia, fail to make it across Night's Bridge? Hunter says that the bridge is only noises in the dark, and the only harm is done by one's own fear and imagination. Is it Anaesthesia's fear that takes her? And why didn't the same happen to Richard?
8. What traits about London Below strike you most? Conversely, how does Gaiman portray London Above? Are both worlds presented with positive and negative aspects? Are they direct opposites of each other?
9. Old Bailey talks about how no one lives in the city now, and London Above is presented as somewhat sterile and cold. London Below, on the other hand, is a

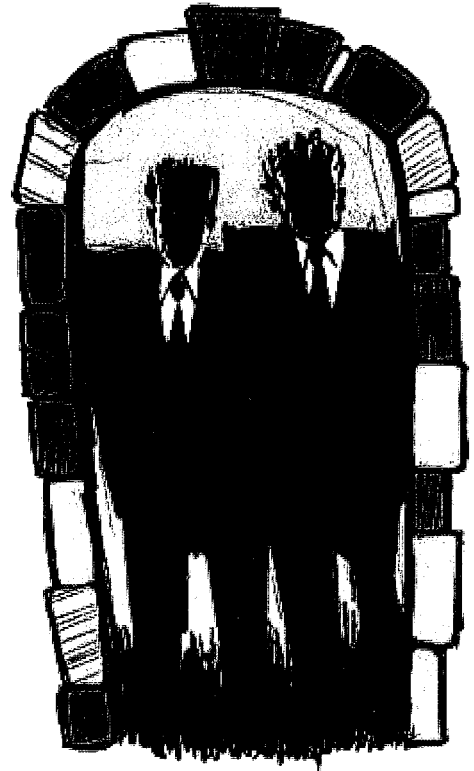


Illustration by Jay Ryan

throwback to less sanitized city living, but is presented in a more attractive way in the end. What about the novel is a commentary on urban life?

10. Do you think that despite his original fear and reluctance, Richard comes to enjoy himself in London Below? If so, when?
11. When Richard has to undergo "The Ordeal" at the Black Friars' it's suggested that he's been imagining all of London Below after a nervous breakdown of some kind in the "real" world. Do you think it's possible that London Below is only a product of Richard's imagination?
12. At the end of the book, why does Richard choose to return to London Below? Does his newfound position as a hero in London Below make him more or less vulnerable?





About the Author

Full text biography:

Neil Gaiman

Birth Date : 1960

Known As : Gaiman, Neil Richard

Place of Birth : United Kingdom,Portchester

Nationality: British

Occupation : Writer

Table of Contents:

Awards

Personal Information

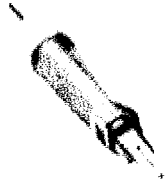
Career

Writings

Media Adaptiones

Sidelights

Related Information



about this author

Awards:

Mekon Award, Society of Strip Illustrators, and Eagle Award for best graphic novel, both 1988, both for *Violent Cases*; Eagle Award for best writer of American comics, 1990; Harvey Award for best writer, 1990 and 1991; Will Eisner Comic Industry Award for best writer of the year and best graphic album (reprint), 1991; World Fantasy Award for best short story, 1991, for "A Midsummer Night's Dream"; Will Eisner Comic Industry Award for best writer of the year, 1992; Harvey Award for best continuing series, 1992; Will Eisner Comic Industry Award for best writer of the year and best graphic album (new), 1993; Gem Award, Diamond Distributors, for expanding the marketplace for comic books, 1993; Will Eisner Comic Industry Award for best writer of the year, 1994; Guild Award, International Horror Critics, and World Fantasy Award nomination, both 1994, both for *Angels and Visitations: A Miscellany* and short story; GLAAD Award for best comic of the year, 1996, for *Death: The Time of Your Life*; Eagle Award for best comic, 1996; Lucca Best Writer Prize, 1997; *Newsweek* list of best children's books, 1997, for *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*; Defender of Liberty Award, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, 1997; MacMillan Silver Pen Award, 1999, for *Smoke and Mirrors: Short Fictions and Illusions*; Hugo Award nomination, 1999, for *Sandman: The Dream Hunters*; Mythopoeic Award for best novel for adults, 1999, for *Stardust: Being a Romance within the Realms of Faerie*; Nebula Award nomination, 1999, for screenplay for the film *Princess Mononoke*; Hugo Award for best science fiction/fantasy novel, Bram Stoker Award for best novel, Horror Writers Association, and British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) Award nomination, all 2002, all for *American Gods*; BSFA Award for best short fiction, Elizabeth Burr/Worzalla Award, Bram Stoker Award, Horror Writers Association, Hugo Award nomination, and Prix Tam Tam Award, all 2003, all for *Coraline*; script *Signal to Noise* received a SONY Radio Award; Hugo Award for Best Short Story, 2004, for "A Study in Emerald"; Bram Stoker Award, 2004, for *The Sandman: Endless Nights*; August Derleth Award, 2006, for *Anansi Boys*; Locus Award for Best Short Story, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, and for Best Collection, for *Fragile Things*; Newbery Medal, Locus Award for best young adult book, Hugo Award for best novel, all 2009, and CILIP Carnegie Medal, 2010, all for *The Graveyard Book*; British Fantasy Award, 2010, for *Batman: Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?*; Locus Award, and Shirley Jackson Award, both 2011, both for *The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains: A Tale of Travel and Darkness with Pictures of All Kinds*; Shirley Jackson Award for Stories, 2011; Ray Bradbury Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation, 2011, and Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, 2012, both for *Doctor Who* episode; Specsavers National Book Awards, Specsavers Book of the Year, British National Book Awards winner, both 2013, and Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel, 2014, all for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*; Locus Awards, 2016, for best novelette, for "Black Dog," and for best collection, for *Trigger Warning: Short Fictions and Disturbances*;

Hugo Awards for best graphic story, and Dragon Award for best graphic novel, both 2016, both for *The Sandman: Overture*.

Personal Information:

Born November 10, 1960, in Portchester, England; son of David Bernard (a company director) and Sheila (a pharmacist) Gaiman; married Mary Therese McGrath, March 14, 1985 (divorced, 2008); married Amanda Palmer, January 3, 2011; children: (first marriage) Michael Richard, Holly Miranda, Madeleine Rose Elvira, (second marriage) Anthony. **Politics:** "Wooly." **Religion:** Jewish. **Avocational Interests:** "Finding more bookshelf space." **Memberships:** Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (board of directors), International Museum of Cartoon Art (advisory board), Science Fiction Foundation (committee member), Society of Strip Illustrators (chair, 1988-90), British Fantasy Society. **Addresses:** Agent: Merilee Heifetz, Writer's House, 21 W. 26th St., New York, NY 10010.

Career Information:

Freelance journalist, 1983-87; full-time writer, 1987--.

Writings:

GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMIC BOOKS

- *Violent Cases*, illustrated by Dave McKean, Titan (London, England), 1987, Tundra (Northampton, MA), 1991, Dark Horse Comics (Milwaukee, OR), 2003.
- *Black Orchid* (originally published in magazine form in 1989), illustrated by Dave McKean, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1991, illustrated by Dave McKean; lettered by Todd Klein, 2012.
- *Miracleman, Book 4: The Golden Age*, illustrated by Mark Buckingham, Eclipse (Forestville, CA), 1992.
- *Signal to Noise*, illustrated by Dave McKean, Dark Horse Comics (Milwaukee, OR), 1992.
- *The Books of Magic* (originally published in magazine form, four volumes), illustrated by John Bolton and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1993, deluxe edition, 2013.
- *The Tragical Comedy, or Comical Tragedy, of Mr. Punch*, illustrated by Dave McKean, VG Graphics (London, England), 1994, Vertigo/DC Comics (New York, NY), 1995, also published as *Mr. Punch*, 20th anniversary edition, 2014.
- (Author of text, with Alice Cooper) *The Compleat Alice Cooper: Incorporating the Three Acts of Alice Cooper's The Last Temptation*, illustrated by Michael Zulli, Marvel Comics (New York, NY), 1995, published as *The Last Temptation*, Dark Horse Comics (Milwaukee, OR), 2000.
- *Angela*, illustrated by Greg Capullo and Mark Pennington, Image (Anaheim, CA), 1995, published as *Spawn: Angela's Hunt*, 2000.
- *Stardust: Being a Romance within the Realms of Faerie*, illustrated by Charles Vess, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1997-98, text published as *Stardust*, Spike (New York, NY), 1999, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2012.
- (Author of text, with Matt Wagner) *Neil Gaiman's Midnight Days*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Green Lantern/Superman: Legend of the Green Flame*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2000.
- *Harlequin Valentine*, illustrated by John Bolton, Dark Horse Comics (Milwaukee, OR), 2001.
- (With Dave McKean, Jonathan Carroll, David Drake, Alisa Kwitney, Michael McClure, Rachel Pollack, Ian Sinclair, Karl Woelz, and Ashley-Jayne Nicolaus) *Bento: Story Art Box*, Allen Spiegel Fine Arts (Plantation, FL), 2001.
- *Murder Mysteries* (based on play of the same title, also see below), illustrated by P. Craig Russel, Dark Horse Comics (Milwaukee, OR), 2002.
- (With Andy Kubert) *Marvel 1602*, Marvel Comics (New York, NY), 2004.
- (With Dagmara Matuszak) *Melinda*, Hill House (Ossining, NY), 2004.
- (With Dean Motter) *Mr. X Volume 2 (Mister X)*, IBooks (Brentwood, CA), 2005.
- *Stardust: The Visual Companion: Being an Account of the Making of a Magical Movie*, screenplay by Jane Goldman & Matthew Vaughn, Titan (London, England), 2007.

- *Eternals*, Panini (Kent, England), 2007.
- *The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch*, Dark Horse (Milwaukee, OR), 2007.
- *The Dangerous Alphabet*, illustrated by Gris Grimly, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Batman: Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?*, illustrated by Andy Kubert, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Superman: The Black Ring, Volume One*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2011.
- *Death*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2014.
- (With Lorenzo Mattotti) *Hansel & Gretel: A Toon Graphic*, Toon Graphics (New York, NY), 2014.
- *Free Country: A Tale of the Children's Crusade*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2015.

"SANDMAN" SERIES

- *Sandman: The Doll's House* (originally published in magazine form), illustrated by Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 1-8), illustrated by Sam Keith, Mike Dringenberg, and Malcolm Jones III, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Sandman: Dream Country* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 17-20; includes "A Midsummer's Night's Dream"), illustrated by Kelley Jones, Charles Vess, Colleen Doran, and Malcolm Jones III, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Sandman: Season of Mists* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 21-28), illustrated by Kelley Jones, Malcolm Jones III, Mike Dringenberg, and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1992.
- *Sandman: A Game of You* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 32-37), illustrated by Shawn McManus and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1993.
- *Sandman: Fables and Reflections* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 29-31, 38-40, 50), illustrated by Bryan Talbot, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Death: The High Cost of Living* (originally published in magazine form, three volumes), illustrated by Dave McKean, Mark Buckingham, and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Sandman: Brief Lives* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 41-49), illustrated by Jill Thompson, Dick Giordano, and Vince Locke, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Sandman: World's End* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 51-56), illustrated by Dave McKean, Mark Buckingham, Dick Giordano, and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1994.
- (Author of text, with Matt Wagner) *Sandman: Midnight Theatre*, illustrated by Teddy Kristiansen, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1995.
- (Editor, with Edward E. Kramer) *The Sandman: Book of Dreams*, HarperPrism (New York, NY), 1996.
- *Sandman: The Kindly Ones* (originally published as *Sandman*, Volumes 57-69), illustrated by Marc Hempel, Richard Case, and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1996.
- *Death: The Time of Your Life*, illustrated by Mark Buckingham and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1997.
- (Author of commentary and contributor) *Dustcovers: The Collected Sandman Covers, 1989-1997*, illustrated by Dave McKean, Vertigo/DC Comics (New York, NY), 1997, published as *The Collected Sandman Covers, 1989-1997*, Watson-Guptill (New York, NY), 1997.
- *Sandman: The Wake*, illustrated by Michael Zulli, Charles Vess, and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1997.
- (Reteller) *Sandman: The Dream Hunters*, illustrated by Yoshitaka Amano, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1999.
- *The Quotable Sandman: Memorable Lines from the Acclaimed Series*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2000.
- *The Sandman: Endless Nights*, illustrated by P. Craig Russell, Milo Manara, and others, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Absolute Death*, Vertigo (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Annotated Sandman, Volume Three: The Sandman #40-56*, DC Comics/Vertigo (New York, NY), 2014.
- *Annotated Sandman, Volume 4*, DC Comics/Vertigo (New York, NY), 2015.
- *The Sandman: Overture Deluxe Edition*, DC Comics/Vertigo (New York, NY), 2015.

OTHER FICTION

- (With Terry Pratchett) *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch* (novel), Gollancz (London, England), 1990, revised edition, Workman (New York, NY), 1990, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2006.
- (With Mary Gentle) *Villains!* (short stories), edited by Mary Gentle and Roz Kaveney, ROC (London, England), 1992.
- (With Mary Gentle and Roz Kaveney) *The Weerde: Book One* (short stories), ROC (London, England), 1992.
- (With Mary Gentle and Roz Kaveney) *The Weerde: Book Two: The Book of the Ancients* (short stories), ROC (London, England), 1992.
- *Angels and Visitations: A Miscellany* (short stories), illustrated by Steve Bissette and others, DreamHaven Books and Art (Minneapolis, MN), 1993.
- *Neverwhere* (novel), BBC Books (London, England), 1996, Avon (New York, NY), 1997.
- *Smoke and Mirrors: Short Fictions and Illusions* (short stories), Avon (New York, NY), 1998.
- *American Gods* (novel), William Morrow (New York, NY), 2001.
- (Reteller) *Snow Glass Apples*, illustrated by George Walker, Biting Dog Press (Duluth, GA), 2003.
- *Anansi Boys*, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2005.
- (With Si Spencer), *Books of Magick: Life during Wartime*, illustrated by Dean Ormston, colored by Fiona Stephenson, lettered by Todd Klein, Comcraft, cover art by Frank Quitely, consultation by Neil Gaiman, Timothy Hunter, created by Neil Gaiman and John Bolton, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Fragile Things* (stories), Headline (London, England), 2006.
- (With Michael Reaves) *InterWorld*, Eos (New York, NY), 2007.
- (With Al Sarrantonio) *Stories*, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2010.
- (Creator of story, with Michael Reaves) *The Silver Dream: An InterWorld Novel*, written by Michael Reaves and Mallory Reaves, HarperTeen (New York, NY), 2013.
- *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2013.
- *The Truth Is a Cave in the Black Mountains: A Tale of Travel and Darkness with Pictures of All Kinds*, illustrated by Eddie Campbell, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2014.
- (With Michael Reaves) *Eternity's Wheel: An InterWorld Novel*, HarperCollins Publishers (New York, NY), 2015.
- *Trigger Warning: Short Fictions and Disturbances*, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2015.

SCREENPLAYS

- (With Lenny Henry) *Neverwhere*, BBC2 (London, England), 1996.
- *Signal to Noise*, BBC Radio 3 (London, England), 1996.
- *Day of the Dead: An Annotated Babylon 5 Script* (originally aired as the episode "Day of the Dead" for the series *Babylon 5*, Turner Broadcasting System, 1998), DreamHaven (Minneapolis, MN), 1998.
- *Princess Mononoke* (motion picture; English translation of the Japanese screenplay by Hayao Miyazaki), Miramax (New York, NY), 1999.
- *MirrorMask*, Destination Films/Samuel Goldwyn Films, 2005.
- (With Roger Avey) *Beowulf*, Warner Bros., 2007.

FOR YOUNG READERS

- *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* (picture book), illustrated by Dave McKean, Borealis/White Wolf (Clarkson, GA), 1997, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Coraline* (fantasy), illustrated by Dave McKean, Bloomsbury (London, England), HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2002.
- *The Wolves in the Walls* (picture book), illustrated by Dave McKean, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Blueberry Girl*, illustrated by Charles Vess, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Odd and the Frost Giants*, illustrated by Brett Helquist, Bloomsbury (London, England), 2008, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2009.
- *The Graveyard Book*, illustrated by Dave McKean, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2008.

- *Crazy Hair*, illustrated by David McKean, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Instructions*, illustrated by Charles Vess, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2010.
- *The Tales of Odd*, Bloomsbury Publishing (London, England), 2010.
- *Chu's Day* (picture book), illustrated by Adam Rex, Harper (New York, NY), 2013.
- *Fortunately, the Milk*, illustrated by Skottie Young, Harper (New York, NY), 2013.
- *Chu's First Day of School* (picture book), illustrated by Adam Rex, Harper (New York, NY), 2014.
- *Chu's Day at the Beach* (picture book), illustrated by Adam Rex, Harper (New York, NY), 2015.
- *The Sleeper and the Spindle*, Harper/HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2015.

OTHER

- *Duran Duran: The First Four Years of the Fab Five* (biography), Proteus (New York, NY), 1984.
- *Don't Panic: The Official Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy Companion*, Titan (London, England), Pocket Books (New York, NY), 1988, revised edition with additional material by David K. Dickson published as *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams and the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Titan (London, England), 1993.
- *Warning: Contains Language* (readings; compact disc), music by Dave McKean and the Flash Girls, DreamHaven (Minneapolis, MN), 1995.
- (Illustrator, with others) *The Dreaming: Beyond the Shores of Night*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1997.
- (Illustrator, with others) *The Dreaming: Through the Gates of Horn and Ivory*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1998.
- *Neil Gaiman: Live at the Aladdin* (videotape), Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (Northampton, MA), 2001.
- (With Gene Wolfe) *A Walking Tour of the Shambles* (nonfiction), American Fantasy Press (Woodstock, IL), 2001.
- *Murder Mysteries* (play), illustrated by George Walker, Biting Dog Press (Duluth, GA), 2001.
- *Adventures in the Dream Trade* (nonfiction and fiction), edited by Tony Lewis and Priscilla Olson, NESFA Press (Framingham, MA), 2002.
- *Creatures of The Night*, Dark Horse (Milwaukee, OR), 2004.
- *A Screenplay*, Hill House (Ossining, NY), 2004.
- (Creator, with John Bolton) *Carla Jablonski, Reckonings*, Eos (New York, NY), 2004.
- (Author of introduction) Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Poems & Tales*, illustrated by Mark Summers, Barnes & Noble (New York, NY), 2004.
- (With David McKean) *The Alchemy of MirrorMask*, Collins Design (New York, NY), 2005.
- *The Sandman Presents Thessaly: Witch for Hire*, illustrated by Shawn McManus, colored by Pamela Rambo, lettered by Nick J. Napolitano (part 1), Rob Leigh (part 2), Phil Balsman (parts 3-4), cover art by Tara McPherson; the Sandman is created by Gaiman, Kieth, and Dringenberg, Thessaly is created by Gaiman and McManus, DC Comics (New York, NY), 2005.
- *M Is for Magic*, illustrated by Teddy Kristiansen, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2007.
- *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, Wildside Press (Rockville, MD), 2007.
- *Neil Gaiman on His Work and Career: A Conversation with Bill Baker, Rosen* (New York, NY), 2008.

EDITOR

- (With Kim Newman) *Ghastly beyond Belief*, Arrow (London, England), 1985.
- (With Stephen Jones) *Now We Are Sick: A Sampler*, privately published, 1986, published as *Now We Are Sick: An Anthology of Nasty Verse*, DreamHaven (Minneapolis, MN), 1991.
- (With Alex Stewart) *Temps*, ROC (London, England), 1991.
- (With Alex Stewart) *Euro Temps*, ROC (London, England), 1992.
- (With Maria Dahvana) *Unnatural Creatures*, illustrated by Briony Morrow-Cribbs, Harper (New York, NY), 2013.

Also author of the comic book *Outrageous Tales from the Old Testament*. Creator of characters for comic books, including Lady Justice; Wheel of Worlds; Mr. Hero, Newmatic Man; Teknophage; and Lucifer. Coeditor of *The Utterly*

Comic Relief Comic, a comic book that raised money for the UK Comic Relief Charity in 1991. Has also written episodes for the *Doctor Who* television series. Contributor to *The Sandman Companion*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1999, and has contributed prefaces and introductions to several books. Gaiman's works have been represented in numerous anthologies. Contributor to newspapers and magazines, including *Knave*, *Punch*, *Observer*, *Sunday Times*, and *Time Out*. Gaiman's books have been translated into other languages, including Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Spanish, and Swedish. He has written scripts for the films *Avalon*, *Beowulf*, *The Confessions of William Henry Ireland*, *The Fermata*, *Modesty Blaise*, and others.

Media Adaptions:

The Books of Magic was adapted into novel form by Carla Jablonski and others into several individual volumes, including *The Invitation*, *The Bindings*, and *The Children's Crusade*, issued by HarperCollins (New York, NY). *Neverwhere* was released on audio cassette by HighBridge (Minneapolis, MN), 1997; *American Gods* was released on cassette by Harper (New York, NY), 2001, and has been optioned for film; *Coraline* was released as an audiobook read by the author, Harper (New York, NY), 2002; *Two Plays for Voices* (*Snow Glass Apples* and *Murder Mysteries*) was released as an audiobook and on audio CD, Harper (New York, NY), 2003, and adapted as a comic by P. Craig Russell, Dark Horse Books, 2014. Several of Gaiman's works have been optioned for film, including *Sandman*, by Warner Bros.; *The Books of Magic*, by Warner Bros.; *Death: The High Cost of Living*, by Warner Bros.; *Good Omens*, by Renaissance Films; *Neverwhere*, by Jim Henson Productions; *Chivalry*, by Miramax; *Stardust*, by Miramax and Dimension Films; and *Coraline*, by Pandemonium Films. *Coraline* was adapted to film, released by Focus Features, 2009. *Signal to Noise* was made into a stage play by NOWtheater (Chicago, IL); *The Graveyard Book* was adapted as a two-volume comic by P. Craig Russell, Harper, 2014.

Sidelights:

An English author (now living in the United States) of comic books, graphic novels (text and pictures in a comic-book format published in book form), prose novels, children's books, short fiction, nonfiction, and screenplays, Neil Gaiman is a best-selling writer who is considered perhaps the most accomplished and influential figure in modern comics as well as one of the most gifted of contemporary fantasists. Characteristically drawing from mythology, history, literature, and popular culture to create his works, Gaiman blends the everyday, the fantastic, the frightening, and the humorous to present his stories, which reveal the mysteries that lie just outside of reality as well as the insights that come from experiencing these mysteries. He refers to the plots and characters of classical literature and myth--most notably fairy tales, horror stories, science fiction, and traditional romances--while adding fresh, modern dimensions. In fact, Gaiman is credited with developing a new mythology with his works, which address themes such as what it means to be human; the importance of the relationship between humanity and art; humanity's desire for dreams and for attaining what they show; and the passage from childish ways of thinking to more mature understanding. Although most of the author's works are not addressed to children, Gaiman often features child and young-adult characters in his books, and young people are among Gaiman's greatest and most loyal fans. The author has become extremely popular, developing a huge cult-like following as well as a celebrity status. The author perhaps is best known as the creator of the comic-book and graphic-novel series about the Sandman. The character, which is based loosely on a crime-fighting superhero that first appeared in DC Comics in the 1930s and 1940s, is the protagonist of an epic series of dark fantasies that spanned eight years and ran for seventy-five monthly issues. Gaiman introduces the Sandman as an immortal being who rules the Dreaming, a surreal world to which humans go when they fall asleep. As the series progresses, the Sandman discovers that he is involved with the fate of human beings on an intimate basis and that his life is tied intrinsically to this relationship. The "Sandman" series has sold millions of copies in both comic book and graphic novel formats and has inspired companion literature and a variety of related merchandise.

As a writer for children, Gaiman has been the subject of controversy for creating *Coraline*, a fantasy for middle-graders about a young girl who enters a bizarre alternate world that eerily mimics her own. Compared to Lewis Carroll's nineteenth-century fantasy *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for its imaginative depiction of a surreal

adventure, *Coraline* has been questioned as an appropriate story for children because it may be too frightening for its intended audience. Gaiman also is the creator of picture books for children, such as *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*, a comic-book-style fantasy about a boy who trades his dad for two attractive goldfish, and *The Wolves in the Walls*, which features a brave girl who faces the wolves that have taken over her house. His young-adult novel *The Graveyard Book* won the Newbery Medal in 2009. The author's adult novel *American Gods*, the tale of a young drifter who becomes involved with what appears to be a magical war, was a critical and popular success that helped to bring Gaiman to a mainstream audience. Among his many works, Gaiman has written a biography of the English pop/rock group Duran Duran; a comic book with shock-rocker Alice Cooper that the latter turned into an album; a satiric fantasy about the end of the world with English novelist Terry Pratchett; comic books about Todd MacFarlane's popular character Spawn; and scripts for film, television, and radio, both original scripts and adaptations of his own works. Gaiman wrote the English-language script for the well-received Japanese anime film *Princess Mononoke*; the script of the episode "Day of the Dead" for the television series *Babylon 5*; and both a television script and a novel called *Neverwhere* that describes how an office worker rescues a young woman who is bleeding from a switchblade wound and is transported with her to London Below, a mysterious and dangerous world underneath the streets of England's largest city. Throughout his career, Gaiman has worked with a number of talented artists in the fields of comic books and fantasy, including John Bolton, Michael Zulli, Yoshitaka Amano, Charles Vess, and longtime collaborator Dave McKean.

As a prose stylist, Gaiman is known for writing clearly and strongly, using memorable characters and striking images to build his dreamlike worlds. Although his books and screenplays can range from somber to creepy to horrifying, Gaiman is commended for underscoring them with optimism and sensitivity and for balancing their darkness with humor and wit. Reviewers have praised Gaiman for setting new standards for comic books as literature and for helping to bring increased popularity to both them and graphic novels. In addition, observers have claimed that several of the author's works transcend the genres in which they are written and explore deeper issues than those usually addressed in these works. Although Gaiman occasionally has been accused of being ponderous and self-indulgent, he generally is considered a phenomenon, a brilliant writer and storyteller whose works reflect his inventiveness, originality, and wisdom. Writing in *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost, and Gothic Writers*, Peter Crowther noted that when Gaiman "is on form (which is most of the time), he is without peer. ... His blending of poetic prose, marvelous inventions, and artistic vision has assured him of his place in the vanguard of modern-day dark fantasists." Keith R.A. DeCandido of *Library Journal* called Gaiman "arguably the most literate writer working in mainstream comics." Referring to Gaiman's graphic novels, Frank McConnell, writing in *Commonweal*, stated that the author "may just be the most gifted and important storyteller in English" and called him "our best and most bound-to-be-remembered writer of fantasy."

Born in Portchester, England, Gaiman was brought up in an upper-middle-class home. His father, David, was the director of a company, while his mother, Sheila, worked as a pharmacist. As a boy, Gaiman was "a completely omnivorous and cheerfully undiscerning reader," as he told Pamela Shelton in an interview for *Authors and Artists for Young Adults (AAYA)*. In an interview with Ray Olson, writing for *Booklist*, Gaiman recalled that he first read *Alice in Wonderland* "when I was five, maybe, and always kept it around as default reading between the ages of five and twelve, and occasionally picked up and reread since. There are things Lewis Carroll did in *Alice* that are etched onto my circuitry." Gaiman was a voracious reader of comic books until the age of sixteen, when he felt that he outgrew the genre as it existed at the time. At his grammar school, Ardingly College, Gaiman said he would get "very grumpy ... when they'd tell us that we couldn't read comics, because 'if you read comics you will not read OTHER THINGS.'" He asked himself, "Why are comics going to stop me reading?" Gaiman proved that his teachers were misguided in their theory: he read the entire children's library in Portchester in two or three years and then started on the adult library. He told Shelton: "I don't think I ever got to 'Z' but I got up to about 'L.'"

When he was about fourteen, Gaiman began his secondary education at Whitgift School. When he was fifteen, Gaiman and his fellow students took a series of vocational tests that were followed by interviews with career advisors. Gaiman told Shelton that these advisors "would look at our tests and say, 'Well, maybe you'd be interested in accountancy,' or whatever. When I went for my interview, the guy said, 'What do you want to do?' and I said, 'Well, I'd

really like to write American comics.' And it was obvious that this was the first time he'd ever heard that. He just sort of stared at me for a bit and then said, 'Well, how do you go about doing that, then?' I said, 'I have no idea--you're the career advisor. Advise.' And he looked like I'd slapped him in the face with a wet herring; he sort of stared at me and there was this pause and I went on for a while and then he said, 'Have you ever thought about accountancy?'" Undeterred, Gaiman kept on writing. He also was interested in music. At sixteen, Gaiman played in a punk band that was about to be signed by a record company. Gaiman brought in an attorney who, after reading the contract being offered to the band, discovered that the deal would exploit them; consequently, Gaiman refused to sign the contract. By 1977, he felt that he was ready to become a professional writer. That same year, Gaiman left Whitgift School.

After receiving some rejections for short stories that he had written, Gaiman decided to become a freelance journalist so that he could learn about the world of publishing from the inside. He wrote informational articles for British men's magazines with titles like *Knave*. Gaiman told Shelton that being a journalist "was terrific in giving me an idea of how the world worked. I was the kind of journalist who would go out and do interviews with people and then write them up for magazines. I learned economy and I learned about dialogue." In 1983, he discovered the work of English comic-strip writer Alan Moore, whose *Swamp Thing* became a special favorite. Gaiman told Shelton: "Moore's work convinced me that you really could do work in comics that had the same amount of intelligence, the same amount of passion, the same amount of quality that you could put in any other medium." In 1984, Gaiman produced his first book, *Duran Duran: The First Four Years of the Fab Five*. Once he had established his credibility as a writer, Gaiman was able to sell the short stories that he had done earlier in his career. In 1985, Gaiman married Mary Therese McGrath, with whom he has three children: Michael, Holly, and Madeleine (Maddy). At around this time, Gaiman decided that he was ready to concentrate on fiction. In addition, the comics industry was experiencing a new influx of talent, which inspired Gaiman to consider becoming a contributor to that medium.

In 1986, Gaiman met art student Dave McKean, and the two decided to collaborate. Their first work together was the comic book *Violent Cases*. Serialized initially in *Escape*, a British comic that showcased new strips, *Violent Cases* was published in book form in 1987. The story recounts the memories of an adult narrator--pictured by McKean as a dark-haired young man who bears a striking resemblance to Gaiman--who recalls his memories of hearing about notorious Chicago gangland leader Al Capone from an elderly osteopath who was the mobster's doctor. As a boy of four, the narrator had his arm broken accidentally by his father. In the office of the osteopath, the boy was transfixed by lurid stories about Chicago of the 1920s but, in the evenings, he had nightmares in which his own world and that of Capone's would intersect. As the story begins, the adult narrator is trying to make sense of the experience.

According to Joe Sanders, writing in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, the narrator "discover[s] that grownups are as prone to uncertainty, emotional outbursts, and naïve rationalization as children. The boy is delighted, the grownup narrator perplexed, to see how 'facts' change to fit an interpreter's needs." Writing in London's *Sunday Times*, Nicolette Jones called *Violent Cases* "inspired and ingenious," while Cindy Lynn Speer, writing in an essay on the author's Web site, dubbed it "a brilliant tale of childhood and memory."

At around the same time that *Violent Cases* was published in book form, Gaiman produced the comic book *Outrageous Tales from the Old Testament*, which is credited with giving him almost instant notoriety in the comic-book community.

Gaiman teamed with McKean again to do a limited-run comic series, *Black Orchid*, the first of the author's works to be released by DC Comics, the publisher of the original "Superman" and "Batman" series. A three-part comic book, *Black Orchid*, features an essentially nonviolent female heroine who fights villains that she hardly can remember.

Gaiman then was offered his choice of inactive DC characters to rework from the Golden Age of Comics (the 1930s and 1940s). He chose the Sandman. Originally, the character was millionaire Wesley Dodds who hunted criminals by night wearing a fedora, cape, and gas mask. Dodds would zap the crooks with his gas gun and leave them sleeping until the police got to them. When Gaiman began the series in 1988, he changed the whole scope of the character. The Sandman, who is also called Dream, Morpheus, Oneiros, Lord Shaper, Master of Story, and God of Sleep, became a thin, enigmatic figure with a pale face, dark eyes, and a shock of black hair. The Sandman is one of the

Endless, immortals in charge of individual realms of the human psyche. The Sandman's brothers and sisters in the Endless are (in birth order) Destiny, Death, Destruction, the twins Desire and Despair, and Delirium (formerly Delight); Dream (the Sandman) falls between Death and Destruction.

In the "Sandman" book *Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes*, Gaiman introduces the title character, the ageless lord of dreams, who has just returned home after being captured by a coven of wizards and held in an asylum for the criminally insane for seventy-two years. Dream finds that his home is in ruins, that his powers are diminished, and that his three tools--a helmet, a pouch of sand, and a ruby stone--have been stolen. He finds his missing helpers and the young girl who has become addicted to the sand from his pouch; he also visits Hell to find the demon who stole his helmet and battles an evil doctor who has unleashed the power of dreams on the unsuspecting people of Earth. Dream comes to realize that his captivity has affected him: he has become humanized, and he understands that he eventually will have to die. In *Sandman: The Doll's House*, Dream travels across the United States searching for the Arcana, the stray dreams and nightmares of the twentieth century that have taken on human form; the story is interwoven with a subplot about a young woman, Rose Walker, who has lost her little brother. In *Sandman: Dream Country*, Gaiman features Calliope, a muse and the mother of Dream's son, Orpheus; the story also brings in a real character, the actor and playwright William Shakespeare. In *Sandman: Season of Mists*, Dream meets Lucifer, who has left his position as ruler of Hell and has left the choice of his successor to Dream.

Sandman: A Game of You features Barbara (nicknamed Barbie), a character who had appeared in *Sandman: The Doll's House*. Barbie is drawn back into the dream realm that she ruled as a child in order to save it from the evil Cuckoo, who plans to destroy it. *Sandman: Fables and Reflections* is a collection of stories featuring the characters from the series and includes Gaiman's retelling of the Greek myth of Orpheus. In *Sandman: Brief Lives*, Dream and Delirium embark on a quest to find their little brother Destruction, who exiled himself to Earth three hundred years before. *Sandman: World's End* includes a collection of tales told by a group of travelers who are waiting out a storm in an inn. *Sandman: The Kindly Ones* brings the series to its conclusion as Hippolyta (Lyta) Hall takes revenge upon Dream for the disappearance of her son. Lyta, who has been driven mad by anger and grief, asks the help of the title characters, mythological beings also known as the Furies. The Kindly Ones take out Lyta's revenge on Dream, who succumbs to their attack. The tale comes full cycle, and Dream's destiny is joined with that of humans in death. In the final chapter of the series, *The Wake*, a funeral is held for Dream; however, as Gaiman notes thematically, dreams really never die, and Dream's role in the Endless is taken on in a new incarnation. The Sandman also appears in a more peripheral role in *Sandman: The Dream Hunters*, a retelling of the Japanese folktale "The Fox, the Monk, and the Mikado of All Night's Dreaming."

Next to the Sandman, Death, Dream's older sister, is the most frequently featured and popular character in the series. Death is charged with shepherding humans who are about to die through their transitions. Once a century, she must come to Earth as a sixteen-year-old girl in order to remind herself what mortality feels like. In contrast to Dream, who characteristically is isolated, brooding, and serious, Death, who is depicted as a spike-haired young woman who dresses like a punk rocker or Goth girl, has a more open and kindly nature. Death is featured in two books of her own, *Death: The High Cost of Living* and *Death: The Time of Your Life*. In the first story, she helps Sexton, a teen who is contemplating suicide, rediscover the joys in being alive as they journey through New York City and, in the second, she helps Foxglove, a newly successful musician, to reveal her true sexual orientation as her companion Hazel prepares to die. Death and the rest of the Endless are also featured in *The Sandman: Endless Nights*, in which Gaiman devotes an individual story to each of the seven siblings.

Writing in *Commonweal* about the "Sandman" series, Frank McConnell stated: "'Sandman' is not just one of the best pieces of fiction being done these days; ... it emerges as *the* best piece of fiction being done these days." McConnell stated that what Gaiman has done with the series "is to establish the fact that a comic book can be a work of high and very serious art--a story that other storytellers, in whatever medium they work, will have to take into account as an exploration of what stories can do and what stories are for." The critic concluded: "I know of nothing quite like it, and I don't expect there will be anything like it for some time. ... Read the damn thing; it's important." Peter Crowder, writing in *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost, and Gothic Writers*, noted that, with the "Sandman" series of comic books,

Gaiman "has truly revolutionized the power of the medium." Crowder called the various volumes of collected stories "almost uniformly excellent, and any one of them would make a good starting point for those readers who, while well-versed in the field of Gothic prose literature, have yet to discover the rare but powerful joy inherent in a great comic book." In 1996, DC Comics surprised the fans of "Sandman" by announcing the cancellation of the series while it was still the company's best seller; however, DC had made this arrangement with Gaiman at the beginning of the series. "Sandman" has sold more than seven million copies; individual copies of the stories also have sold in the millions or in the hundreds of thousands. "A Midsummer's Night's Dream," a story from *Dream Country*, won the World Fantasy Award for the best short story of 1991. This was the first time that a comic book had won an award that was not related to its own medium, and the event caused an uproar among some fantasy devotees. The "Sandman" stories have inspired related volumes, such as a book of quotations from the series, and merchandise such as action figures, stuffed toys, trading cards, jewelry, and watches.

In 1994, Gaiman told Ken Tucker in *Entertainment Weekly*: "Superhero comics are the most perfectly evolved art form for preadolescent male power fantasies, and I don't see that as a bad thing. I want to reach other sorts of people, too." In 1995, he told Pamela Shelton: "If you're too young for 'Sandman,' you will be bored silly by it. It's filled with long bits with people having conversations." Speaking to Nick Hasted in the *Guardian* in 1999, Gaiman said, "Right now, as things stand, 'Sandman' is my serious work. ... It is one giant, overarching story, and I'm proud of it. Compared to 'Sandman,' all the prose work so far is trivia." In 2003, Gaiman wrote an introduction to *The Sandman: King of Dreams*, a collection of text and art from the series with commentary by Alisa Kwitney. He commented: "If I have a concern over *The Sandman*, the 2,000-page story I was able to tell between 1988 and 1996, it is that the things that have come after it, the toys (whether plastic and articulated or soft and cuddly), the posters, the clothes, the calendars and candles, the companion volume, and even the slim book of quotations, along with the various spin-offs and such--will try people's patience and goodwill, and that a book like this will be perceived, not unreasonably, as something that's being used to flog the greasy patch in the driveway where once, long ago, a dead horse used to lie. The ten volumes of 'The Sandman' are what they are, and that's the end of it."

Throughout his career, Gaiman has included young people as main characters in his works. For example, *The Books of Magic*, a collection of four comics published in 1993, predates J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series by featuring a thirteen-year-old boy, Tim Hunter, who is told that he has the capabilities to be the greatest wizard in the world. Tim, a boy from urban London who wears oversized glasses, is taken by the Trenchcoat Brigade--sorcerers with names like The Mysterious Phantom Stranger, the Incurable Hellblazer, and the Enigmatic Dr. Occult--on a tour of the universe to learn its magical history. Tim travels to Hell, to the land of Faerie, and to America, among other places, each of them showing him a different aspect of the world of magic. He also searches for his girlfriend, Molly, who has been abducted into the fantasy realms; after he finds her, the two of them face a series of dangers as they struggle to return to their own world. At the end of the story, Tim must make a decision to embrace or reject his talents as a wizard. *The Books of Magic* also includes cameos by the Sandman and his sister Death.

Writing in *Locus*, Carolyn Cushman remarked: "It's a fascinating look at magic, its benefits and burdens, all dramatically illustrated [by John Bolton, Scott Hampton, Charles Vess, and Paul Johnson], and with a healthy helping of humor." Speaking of the format of *The Books of Magic*, Michael Swanwick, writing for *Book World*, noted: "The graphic novel has come of age. This series is worth any number of movies."

In 1994, Gaiman produced *The Tragical Comedy, or Comical Tragedy, of Mr. Punch* (also published as *Mr. Punch*), a work that he considers one of his best. In this graphic novel, which is illustrated by Dave McKean, a young boy is sent to stay with his grandparent by the seaside while his mother gives birth to his baby sister. While on his visit, the boy encounters a mysterious puppeteer and watches a Punch and Judy show, a sometimes violent form of puppet-theater entertainment. Through a series of strange experiences, he ends up rejecting Mr. Punch's promise that everyone in the world is free to do whatever they want.

Sanders, writing in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, called *Mr. Punch* "perhaps Gaiman and McKean's most impressive collaboration," while Crowder called it "an impressive work, rich not only in freshness and originality but also in compassion, Gaiman's hallmark. ... The collective impact is literally breathtaking." Writing in *Commonweal*,

Frank McConnell noted: "This stunning comic book-graphic novel--whatever--is easily the most haunting, inescapable story I have read in years."

In 1996, Gaiman and McKean produced their first work for children, the picture book *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*. In this tale, a little boy trades his father for two of his neighbor's goldfish while his little sister stares, horrified. When their mother finds out what has happened, she is furious. She makes the children go and get back their father who, unfortunately, has already been traded for an electric guitar. While on their quest to find him, the siblings decide that their father is a very good daddy after all. The children finally retrieve their father, who has been reading a newspaper all during his adventure. At home, their mother makes the children promise not to swap their dad any more.

Writing in *Bloomsbury Review*, Anji Keating called *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* "a fabulously funny tale" and dubbed the protagonists' journey to fetch their father "delightful." Malcolm Jones, writing in *Newsweek*, predicted that Gaiman and McKean "may shock a few grandparents. ... but in fact the most shocking thing they've done in this droll story is to take the illegible look of cutting-edge magazines like *Raygun* and somehow make it readable."

In 2003, Gaiman and McKean produced a second picture book, *The Wolves in the Walls*. In this work, young Lucy hears wolves living in the walls of the old house where she and her family live; of course, no one believes her. When the wolves emerge to take over the house, Lucy and her family flee. However, Lucy wants her house back, and she also wants the beloved pig-puppet that she left behind. She talks her family into going back into the house, where they move into the walls that had been vacated by the wolves. Lucy and her family frighten the usurpers, who are wearing their clothes and eating their food. The wolves scatter, and everything seems to go back to normal until Lucy hears another noise in the walls; this time, it sounds like elephants.

In her *Booklist* review of *The Wolves in the Walls*, Francisca Goldsmith found the book "visually and emotionally sophisticated, accessible, and inspired by both literary and popular themes and imagery." Writing in *School Library Journal*, Marian Creamer commented that "Gaiman and McKean deftly pair text and illustration to convey a strange, vivid story," and predicted: "Children will delight in the 'scary, creepy tone.'"

Gaiman's first story for middle-graders, *Coraline*, outlines how the title character, a young girl who feels that she is being ignored by her preoccupied parents, enters a terrifying, malevolent alternate reality to save them after they are kidnapped. The story begins when Coraline and her parents move into their new house, which is divided into apartments. Left to her own devices, bored Coraline explores the house and finds a door in the empty flat next door that leads to a world that is a twisted version of her own. There, she meets two odd-looking individuals who call themselves her "other mother" and "other father." The Other Mother, a woman who looks like Coraline's except for her black-button eyes and stiletto fingernails, wants Coraline to stay with her and her husband. Tempted by good food and interesting toys, Coraline considers the offer. However, when the girl returns home, she finds that her parents have disappeared. Coraline discovers that they are trapped in the other world, and she sets out to save them. The Other Mother, who turns out to be a soul-sucking harpy, enters into a deadly game of hide-and-seek with Coraline, who discovers new qualities of bravery and resolve within herself. Before returning home, Coraline saves herself, her parents, and some ghost children who are trapped in the grotesque world.

After its publication, *Coraline* became a subject of dispute. Some adult observers saw it as a book that would give nightmares to children. However, other observers have noted that the children of their acquaintance who read the book consider it an exciting rather than overly frightening work. A reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* noted that Gaiman and illustrator McKean "spin an electrifyingly creepy tale likely to haunt young readers for many moons. ... Gaiman twines his tale with a menacing tone and crisp prose fraught with memorable imagery ..., yet keeps the narrative just this side of terrifying." Writing in *School Library Journal*, Bruce Anne Shook commented: "The story is odd, strange, even slightly bizarre, but kids will hang on every word. ... This is just right for all those requests for a scary book." Stephanie Zvirin, writing in *Booklist*, added that Gaiman offers "a chilling and empowering view of children, to be sure, but young readers are likely to miss such subtleties as the clever allusions to classic horror movies and the references

to the original dark tales of the Brothers Grimm." A critic in *Kirkus Reviews* found *Coraline* "not for the faint-hearted--who are mostly adults anyway--but for stouthearted kids who love a brush with the sinister, *Coraline* is spot on." *Coraline* has won several major fantasy awards and has become an international best-seller.

Since his success with *Coraline*, Gaiman has continued to focus his writing for younger readers, producing both picture books for the young and novels for more mature readers. In *Blueberry Girl*, illustrated by Vess, Gaiman produces "a rich and beautiful prayer for a girl," as a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor noted. The prayer is issued by three figures hovering above a dancing girl, representing the three ages of woman: the young woman, a mother, and a crone.

The *Kirkus Reviews* writer felt that Gaiman's verses are "lovely, sinuous and sweetly rhyming, piling on blessings." These blessings focus on the young girl being able to find her own way in life and her own truths. Wendy Lukehart, writing for *School Library Journal*, praised the "fresh approach" Gaiman and Vess take in this poem to an unborn child. "Fans of Gaiman and Vess will pounce on this creation," concluded a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer.

For middle-grade readers, Gaiman produced a book focusing on Norse mythology. In *Odd and the Frost Giants*, Odd, the twelve-year-old protagonist, decides to leave his home in a Viking settlement and seek solitude in nature. He has had difficult time recently with the death of his father in a Viking raid and his mother's remarriage to a man Odd cannot stand. Added to this is the accident that left one of Odd's legs crippled. It is spring, but still cold, when Odd heads off for the wilderness to live on his own in a cabin. Soon he has interactions with various animals, helping a bear to free its paw in one instance. After helping the animals, Odd learns that they are actually gods--Thor, Odin, and Loki--whom the Frost Giant has changed into an eagle, a fox, and a wolf because he wants to woo the spring goddess Freya and desires no competition. Thus he has banished the trio from the godly realm of Asgard. Odd conspires to get the gods back to their proper home by using a rainbow bridge. In Odd's subsequent encounter with the Frost Giant, the youth is able to outwit the giant.

A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer found this a "simple but well-done tale," while *School Library Journal* contributor Lauralyn Persson called it "a thoughtful and quietly humorous fantasy." Persson went on to observe that young readers will appreciate "Gaiman's simple and graceful writing, and the satisfying conclusion." Higher praise came from a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor who termed *Odd and the Frost Giants* a "winner," as well as a "sweet, wistful, slyly funny novella." *Horn Book* reviewer Joanna Rudge Long felt that "Gaiman's narration is impeccable" in this myth-inspired fantasy. Likewise, *Booklist* contributor Ian Chipman praised Gaiman's "deft humor, lively prose, and agile imagination" in this novella.

Writing for younger readers in *Crazy Hair*, Gaiman delivers a "surreal poem," according to *School Library Journal* reviewer Lukehart, about a young girl's encounter with a strange man who has long and wavy hair. Bonnie, the young girl, learns that cockatoos inhabit the man's locks along with gorillas, tigers, and sloths. Eventually Bonnie herself becomes an inhabitant of this mysterious person's hair.

A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer thought that "fans of Gaiman and McKean's ... twisted humor will welcome this lighter-than-usual addition." Similarly, Chipman, writing for *Booklist*, termed *Crazy Hair* "another chaotic picture book popping with bright collage and multimedia imagery," while a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor called it a "rhymed defense of unshorn locks."

If there were ever any lingering doubt about Gaiman's prowess as a writer for young audiences as well as adults, that was erased with his 2008 young-adult work, *The Graveyard Book*. In addition to taking the prestigious Newbery Medal in 2009, it also won the Locus Award for best young-adult book and the Hugo Award for best novel in the same year. The book features Owen Nobody, better known as Bod, who lives in a graveyard and is cared for by a guardian, Silas, who is neither dead nor living. Bod is befriended and educated by assorted ghosts of teachers, children, workers, and numerous others who form a community for the orphan. Bod cannot leave the graveyard for fear of attack by a man named Jack, the very one who killed Bod's family. In the graveyard, Bod has adventures and faces dangers, from the ancient Indigo Man beneath the hill to the strange and terrible Sleer. He learns things about his own family and about why they were murdered. In the graveyard since he was a toddler, by twelve Bod begins to

understand what he must do to be able to leave the place and rejoin the living.

Reviewers responded warmly to this novel for teens. *New York Times Book Review* contributor Monica Edinger found it "by turns exciting and witty, sinister and tender." Edinger also felt that *The Graveyard Book* "shows Gaiman at the top of his form" and said that it is "a tale of unforgettable enchantment." Writing in the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Don L.F. Nilsen felt that "Gaiman's tale is delightfully spooky, but also heartrending, funny, and instructive at various times." *Spectator* reviewer S.E.G. Hopkin found the work to be "a beautifully constructed book" and noted that "Bod is a charming hero, courageous, considerate and polite in the styles of many centuries." Further praise came from *Independent Online* contributor Tim Martin, who called it a "hugely satisfying little book."

Gaiman returns to the picture-book genre for *Chu's Day*, a "sweet, playful tale about a small panda with an extraordinary knack for inadvertently causing trouble," according to *School Library Journal* contributor Mahnaz Dar. Working with illustrator Adam Rex, Gaiman tells the story of the small panda who has a penchant for sneezing, with rather disastrous results. When his parents take him on an outing one day, they are continually checking on him to make sure that nothing triggers one of his sneezing attacks. They make it safely through a library, with its dusty books, and a restaurant with pepper in the air. However, when they get to the circus, it is all over for little Chu. The dust under the big top tickles his nostrils and he lets go with such a frightening series of sneezes that he brings the circus tent down and spreads chaos through the town. But all is not lost; the story ends happily later in the day with Chu's parents tucking him in for the night.

Booklist reviewer Ann Kelley termed *Chu's Day* a "slight but cute picture book" and went on to praise "Rex's richly detailed illustrations [that] are brimming with fantastic touches." Kelley added: "Anything Gaiman writes is noteworthy." Similarly, Dar called it a "small but delightful dose of fun." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic described the tale as a "modest yet richly colorful day in the life of a small panda who may or may not sneeze," while a *Publishers Weekly* writer noted of this offering that "Gaiman and Rex deliver a classic one-two-three punch."

Gaiman takes inspiration from his earlier book *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* in his middle-grade novel *Fortunately, the Milk*. Noting in a letter to readers that the father of the former tale was not necessarily a fine example of fatherhood, he set out in *Fortunately, the Milk* to present a dad who has some adventures and excitement. The father in this case goes off to the store one morning to fetch milk for his children's breakfast. However, he takes an inordinate amount of time to do so. While the kids wait impatiently, dad is busy being kidnapped by aliens, walking the plank of a pirate ship, and being rescued by a balloon-navigating stegosaurus. Returning to his two little children with milk in hand, he proceeds to entrance them with his adventures. With illustrations by Skottie Young, *Fortunately, the Milk* "reads like an extemporaneous riff by a clever father," according to a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, who also commended Young's "wiry, exuberant b&w caricatures."

Writing in *Booklist*, Thom Barthelmess had similar praise for *Fortunately, the Milk*, noting that the author's "oversize, tongue-in-cheek narrative twists about like the impromptu nonsense it is," and he predicted that young readers "will devour this one, with or without milk." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic had a high assessment of the work, noting that in its scant 128 pages, Gaiman has attempted "to write the only book anyone will need, ever, packing into it every adventure story written in the past 300 years." Writing in *School Library Journal*, Amy Shepherd also lauded this novel for young readers, noting that "Gaiman knocks it out of the park again with this imaginative story," which is "reminiscent of Roald Dahl's titles."

Gaiman's first adult novel in a number of years, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is a work of remembrance and fantasy. An unnamed narrator in his fifties returns to his Sussex, England, hometown to deliver a eulogy. After the funeral, the man begins driving around the countryside and soon arrives at a farmhouse that has a deep significance for him. There lived eleven-year-old Lettie Hempstock with her mother and an old woman they called the grandmother. The narrator was seven when he met Lettie, and their friendship almost killed him and forever altered his life. Now the old grandmother is still at the farmhouse, as is the mother, unchanged; however, there is no sign of Lettie. This takes the man back in time to the frightening events of his youth, when he unwittingly became a gate into the world for evil forces that wanted to destroy it. At the farm, there is a pond, and in the pond back then was a dead

fish that had apparently swallowed an old sixpence. This opened up the world to a malign terror and the boy, helped by the Hempstock women, battled it. The boy ultimately realized that the Hempstocks were protectors of the human world, blocking or fighting such evil forces for ages. And now the middle-aged man must come to terms with memories of his youth.

Booklist reviewer Olson lauded *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, noting that "Gaiman mines mythological typology ... and his own childhood" in this story that is both "gracefully" told and a "lovely yarn [that] is good for anyone who can read it." Similar praise came from a *Kirkus Reviews* critic who noted: "Poignant and heartbreaking, eloquent and frightening, impeccably rendered, it's a fable that reminds us how our lives are shaped by childhood experiences." A *Publishers Weekly* writer felt that Gaiman "has crafted a fresh story of magic, humanity, loyalty, and memories," and *Library Journal* reviewer Henry Bankhead joined the chorus of praise for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, calling it a "slim and magical feat of meaningful storytelling genius." *New Statesman* contributor Alex Hern also had a high assessment of the work, observing: "Gaiman has written a book that reads like a half-remembered fairy tale from childhood. It has the easy flow of a story already heard, deeply known, and slots perfectly into the canon of British magical fiction." For *New York Times Book Review* contributor Benjamin Percy, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is a "slim, dark dream of a new novel," while a *California Bookwatch* reviewer found it "simply enchanting."

With *Hansel & Gretel: A Toon Graphic*, Gaiman has teamed with Lorenzo Mattotti to retell the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale. Filled with dark foreboding, Gaiman's recreation stays true to the plot while exacerbating the story's dark elements. He portrays his sibling protagonists as lost and hapless children who do not know how to help themselves. Mattotti's illustrations also emphasize this aspect of the tale. The story switches back and forth between two pages of Gaiman's prose and two pages of Mattotti's images.

Praising the retelling in *Publishers Weekly*, a critic stated that "Hansel and Gretel have seldom seemed more vulnerable and abandoned." A second *Publishers Weekly* columnist was also impressed, asserting that "Gaiman makes the story's horrors feel very real and very human, and Mattotti's artwork is genuinely chilling." The book was also reviewed in *Kirkus Reviews*, where a columnist advised: "The Grimm version is as frightening as a bedtime story gets, but this version will scare people in new ways." Sarah Hunter, writing in *Booklist*, was also impressed, asserting: "While this isn't a graphic novel per se, Gaiman's fans and lovers of visual storytelling will devour this eerie version of a classic." As Andrea Lipinski pointed out in *School Library Journal*, "Gaiman is an incredibly gifted wordsmith, and his retelling hearkens back to the Grimms's original narrative." Offering further applause in *School Librarian*, Sue Roe cited Gaiman's "clear, spare prose," and then concluded: "This retelling remains true to the nature of fairy tales as warnings about the dark aspects of human nature and the dangers of the world."

Returning to short prose with *Trigger Warning: Short Fictions and Disturbances*, Gaiman presents several new stories and poems that feature Gaiman's trademark fantasy. The collection, which is comprised of twenty-three pieces, focuses on the imaginary and the impossible. One story, a series of vignettes, portrays each month of the year as a different universe. In this manner, Gaiman explores everything from detective tales to pirates and igloos. As is typical of Gaiman's more fantastical works, elements of the dark and macabre feature prominently.

In an ambivalent *London Observer* review, Edward Docx commented: "There is so much that is clever and skilful in among the embarrassments that by the end I was reminded of Paul McCartney, another copiously talented artist, who seems to have no sense of which of his works are breathtakingly good and which breathtakingly bad." *Booklist* correspondent Chris Francis was far more positive, noting that readers who enjoy "Gaiman's delightfully dramatic minstrel's-tale-by-the-campfire style will love everything in *Trigger Warning*." Andrew O'Hehir in the *New York Times Online* was laudatory as well, and he declared that "Gaiman draws power not just from his storytelling gifts but also from his ability to work the crowd. He's like a conjurer who shows us how the magic trick is worked, joins us in laughing at its transparency and simplicity, and makes us believe in it anyway. There are no real monsters, he assures us, only half-forgotten fears we have clad in ill-fitting masks. ... All the while we wait eagerly for Gaiman to pull off the masks, so we can see the familiar glitter of their eyes." Commending the collection in the *New Statesman*, Frank Cottrell Boyce admitted: "Reading this collection feels like looking over the shoulder of someone whose browser has a thousand and one tabs open. Here's a potential episode of *Doctor Who*; there's a piece of Sherlock fan

fiction, a fairy tale, David Bowie, Saint Columba. But all these clicks and hits are linked to one place--a good story, which is 'the purest and most perfect thing' a writer can create, as Neil himself says. There are tales in this collection that are as pure and perfect as anything you'll ever read."

In his interview with Pamela Shelton, Gaiman said: "What I enjoy most is when people say to me, 'When I was sixteen I didn't know what I was going to do with my life and then I read *Sandman* and now I'm at university studying mythology' or whatever. I think it's wonderful when you've opened a door to people and showed them things that they would never have *known* they would have been interested in." Gaiman finds it satisfying to introduce his readers to mythology. He told Shelton: "You gain a cultural understanding to the last 2,500 to 3,000 years, which, if you lack it, there's an awful lot of stuff that you will simply never quite understand." In an interview with Nick Hasted in the *Guardian*, Gaiman stated: "What I'm fighting now is the tendency to put novelists in a box, to make them write the same book over and over again. I want to shed skins. I want to keep awake. I definitely have a feeling that if I'm not going forward, if I'm not learning something, then I'm dead."

Related Information:

BOOKS

- *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Gale (Detroit, MI), Volume 19, author interview with Pamela Shelton, 1996, Volume 42, 2002.
- *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 261: *British Fantasy and Science Fiction Writers since 1960*, Gale (Detroit, MI), 2002.
- Kwitney, Alisa, *The Sandman: King of Dreams*, introduction by Neil Gaiman, Chronicle Books (San Francisco, CA), 2003.
- *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost, and Gothic Writers*, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1998.

PERIODICALS

- *Bloomsbury Review*, July-August, 1997, Anji Keating, review of *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*, p. 21.
- *Booklist*, August, 2002, Ray Olson, "The Booklist Interview: Neil Gaiman," p. 19, and Stephanie Zvirin, review of *Coraline*, p. 1948; August, 2003, Francisca Goldsmith, review of *The Wolves in the Walls*, p. 1989; December 1, 2004, Ray Olson, review of *Creatures of the Night*, p. 643; August 1, 2005, Ray Olson, review of *Anansi Boys*, p. 1952; July 1, 2006, Ray Olson, review of *Fragile Things*, p. 38; April 15, 2007, Kathleen Isaacs, review of *M Is for Magic*, p. 38; September 1, 2007, John Peters, review of *InterWorld*, p. 114; March 1, 2008, Thom Barthelmess, review of *The Dangerous Alphabet*, p. 72; May 15, 2008, Ray Olson, review of *The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch*, p. 27; March 15, 2009, Ian Chipman, review of *Crazy Hair*, p. 64; July 1, 2009, Ian Chipman, review of *Odd and the Frost Giants*, p. 61; November 1, 2012, Ann Kelley, review of *Chu's Day*, p. 75; April 1, 2013, Ray Olson, review of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, p. 32; April 1, 2013, Sarah Hunter, review of *Unnatural Creatures*, p. 80; May 1, 2013, John Peters, review of *The Silver Dream: An InterWorld Novel*, p. 88; July 1, 2013, Thom Barthelmess, review of *Fortunately, the Milk*, p. 74; April 15, 2014, Thom Barthelmess, review of *Chu's First Day of School*, p. 52; September 1, 2014, Sarah Hunter, review of *Hansel & Gretel: A Toon Graphic*, p. 114; March 1, 2015, Chris Francis, review of *Trigger Warning: Short Fictions and Disturbances*, p. 31; April 1, 2015, review of *Eternity's Wheel: An InterWorld Novel*, p. 68.
- *Book World*, April 7, 2002, Michael Swanwick, "Reel Worlds," p. 3.
- *California Bookwatch*, June, 2006, review of *Anansi Boys*; December, 2006, review of *Fragile Things*; January, 2007, review of *MirrorMask*; August, 2013, review of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, p. 8; April, 2015, review of *Trigger Warning*.
- *Commonweal*, December 2, 1994, Frank McConnell, review of *Mr. Punch*, p. 27; October 20, 1995, Frank McConnell, review of "Sandman," p. 21; June 19, 1998, Frank McConnell, review of *Neverwhere*, p. 21.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, June 24, 1994, Ken Tucker, review of "Sandman," pp. 228-229; September 29, 2006, Marc Bernardin, review of *Fragile Things*, p. 86.

- *Guardian* (London, England), July 14, 1999, Nick Hasted, "The Illustrated Man," interview, p. 12.
- *Horn Book*, September, 2007, Claire E. Gross, review of *InterWorld*, p. 575; July, 2008, Claire E. Gross, review of *The Dangerous Alphabet*, p. 434; November, 2009, Joanna Rudge Long, review of *Odd and the Frost Giants*.
- *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 27, 2009, Fritz Lanham, "The Graveyard Book Wins 2009 John Newbery Medal; Author Says There's Also Stuff There for Adults," p. 8.
- *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, September 1, 2009, Don L.F. Nilsen, review of *The Graveyard Book*, p. 79.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, June 15, 2002, review of *Coraline*, p. 88; July 15, 2005, review of *Anansi Boys*, p. 754; July 15, 2006, review of *Fragile Things*; June 1, 2007, review of *M Is for Magic*; April 1, 2008, review of *The Dangerous Alphabet*; June 15, 2008, review of *Coraline*; August 15, 2008, review of *The Graveyard Book*; January 15, 2009, review of *Blueberry Girl*; May 1, 2009, review of *Crazy Hair*; September 15, 2009, review of *Odd and the Frost Giants*; November 15, 2012, review of *Chu's Day*; March 15, 2013, reviews of *The Silver Dream* and *Unnatural Creatures*; April 1, 2013, review of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*; July 1, 2013, review of *Fortunately, the Milk*; June 1, 2014, review of *Chu's First Day of School*; August 1, 2014, review of *Hansel & Gretel*; February 1, 2015, review of *Trigger Warning*; February 15, 2015, review of *Chu's Day at the Beach*; March 1, 2015, review of *Eternity's Wheel*; July 15, 2015, review of *The Sleeper and the Spindle*.
- *Kliatt*, July 1, 2007, George Galuschak, review of *Eternals*, p. 34; July 1, 2008, Ellen Welty, review of *M Is for Magic*, p. 28; July 1, 2008, George Galuschak, review of *The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch*, p. 32.
- *Library Journal*, September 15, 1990, Keith R.A. DeCandido, review of *The Golden Age*, p. 104; May 15, 2005, Steve Raiteri, review of *Marvel 1602*, p. 100; August 1, 2005, Ann Kim, review of *Anansi Boys*, p. 67; September 1, 2006, Anastasia Diamond, review of *Fragile Things*, p. 140; June 1, 2013, Henry Bankhead, review of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, p. 97.
- *Locus*, April, 1993, Carolyn Cushman, review of *The Books of Magic*, p. 29.
- *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, June 1, 2005, Charles De Lint, review of *Creatures of the Night*, p. 28; March 1, 2006, Charles De Lint, review of *Anansi Boys*, p. 33; February 1, 2008, Charles De Lint, review of *InterWorld*, p. 28; February 1, 2008, Charles De Lint, review of *M Is for Magic*, p. 29.
- *New Statesman*, June 21, 2013, Alex Hern, review of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, p. 41; February 20, 2015, Frank Cottrell Boyce, "Distraction Techniques," p. 48.
- *Newsweek*, December 1, 1997, Malcolm Jones, review of *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*, p. 77.
- *New York Times Book Review*, February 15, 2009, Monica Edinger, review of *The Graveyard Book*, p. 15; June 30, 2013, Benjamin Percy, review of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, p. 14.
- *Observer* (London, England), February 8, 2015, Edward Docx, review of *Trigger Warning*.
- *Publishers Weekly*, June 24, 2002, review of *Coraline*, p. 57; October 25, 2004, review of *Marvel 1602*, p. 30; March 14, 2005, review of *Melinda*, p. 47; April 18, 2005, review of *Books of Magick: Life During Wartime*, p. 46; July 18, 2005, review of *Anansi Boys*, p. 180; September 5, 2005, review of *Fragile Things*, p. 131; July 17, 2006, review of *The Last Temptation*, p. 41; May 14, 2007, review of *Eternals*, p. 41; July 9, 2007, review of *M Is for Magic*, p. 54; July 30, 2007, review of *InterWorld*, p. 84; April 28, 2008, review of *The Dangerous Alphabet*, p. 137; December 15, 2008, review of *Blueberry Girl*, p. 52; June 1, 2009, review of *Crazy Hair*, p. 46; August 17, 2009, review of *Odd and the Frost Giants*, p. 62; November 26, 2012, review of *Chu's Day*, p. 51; April 1, 2013, review of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, p. 46; April 8, 2013, review of *Unnatural Creatures*, p. 66; July 15, 2013, review of *Fortunately, the Milk*, p. 171; August 25, 2014, review of *Hansel & Gretel*, p. 107; June 8, 2015, review of *The Sleeper and the Spindle*, p. 62; July 20, 2015, review of *Hansel & Gretel*, p. 188.
- *School Librarian*, spring, 2015, Trevor Dickinson, review of *Chu's First Day of School*, p. 27; summer, 2015, Sue Roe, review of *Hansel & Gretel*, p. 104.
- *School Library Journal*, August, 2002, Bruce Anne Shook, review of *Coraline*, p. 184; September, 2003, Marian Creamer, review of *The Wolves in the Walls*, p. 178; January 1, 2006, Matthew L. Moffett, review of *Anansi Boys*, p. 172; March 1, 2006, Lisa Goldstein, review of *MirrorMask*, p. 222; January 1, 2007, Emma

- Coleman, review of *Fragile Things*, p. 164; August 1, 2007, Beth Wright, review of *M Is for Magic*, p. 116; November 1, 2007, Emily Rodriguez, review of *InterWorld*, p. 122; May 1, 2008, Susannah Richards, review of *The Dangerous Alphabet*, p. 98; July 1, 2008, Alana Abbott, review of *Coraline*, p. 119; January 1, 2009, Wendy Lukehart, review of *Blueberry Girl*, p. 74; June 1, 2009, Wendy Lukehart, review of *Crazy Hair*, p. 86; October 1, 2009, Lauralyn Persson, review of *Odd and the Frost Giants*, p. 126; January, 2013, Mahnaz Dar, review of *Chu's Day*, p. 78; August, 2013, Leigh Collazo, review of *The Silver Dream*, p. 162; June, 2013, Liz Overberg, review of *Unnatural Creatures*, p. 122; October, 2013, Amy Shepherd, review of *Fortunately, the Milk*, p. 102; September, 2014, Andrea Lipinski, review of *Hansel & Gretel*, p. 137.
- *Spectator*, November 1, 2008, S.E.G. Hopkin, review of *The Graveyard Book*, p. 43.
 - *Sunday Times* (London, England), July 15, 1990, Nicolette Jones, review of *Violent Cases*.
 - *Voice of Youth Advocates*, August, 2013, Lisa Martincik, review of *Unnatural Creatures*, p. 75.

ONLINE

- *Guardian Online*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/> (October 25, 2008), Patrick Ness, review of *The Graveyard Book*; (July 3, 2013), "The Ocean at the End of the Lane by Neil Gaiman."
- *Independent Online*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/> (November 2, 2008), Tim Martin, review of *The Graveyard Book*.
- *Los Angeles Times Online*, <http://articles.latimes.com/> (June 13, 2013), Rebecca Keegan, "The Writer's Life."
- *Neil Gaiman Home Page*, <http://www.neilgaiman.com> (November 19, 2015), Cindy Lynn Speer, "An Essay on Neil Gaiman and Comics."
- *New York Times Online*, <http://www.nytimes.com/> (March 3, 2015), Andrew O'Hehir, review of *Trigger Warning*.
- *NPR Online*, <http://www.npr.org/> (June 15, 2013), "Gaiman's New 'Ocean' Is No Kiddie Pool."*

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, 2016

Gale Database: Contemporary Authors Online

Gale Document Number: GALE|H13451324

Source Citation: "Neil Gaiman." 2016. Books & Authors. Gale. Farmington Community Library. 28 Jun 2017 <http://bna.galegroup.com/bna/start.do?p=BNA&u=lom_metronetmnfc>

© 2017 Cengage Learning



The Internet Writing Journal

[Writers Write](#)
[Readers Read](#)
[Watchers Watch](#)
[Gamers Game](#)
[Books](#)
[Classifieds](#)
[Follow Us](#)

A Conversation With Neil Gaiman

by Claire E. White

The Internet Writing Journal, [March 1999](#)

Tweet

Like 30

Bestselling novelist [Neil Gaiman](#) has not exactly had the normal author's experience. For one thing, his fans treat him more like a rock star than an author, lining up hours before a signing or reading appearance. Media handlers hand out numbers to the hundreds of fans -- who have been known to faint upon meeting him. Gaiman modestly attributes the fainting to the rigors of standing in line for hours, but the more likely explanation for the passion he seems to inspire lies in his dark good looks, mesmerizing voice, trademark wit, and brilliant writing. The rock star connection is also easy to make when you hear his good friend [Tori Amos](#) singing about him on her albums *Little Earthquakes*, *Under the Pink* and *Boys for Pele*.



Gaiman was born in 1960 in Portchester, England. An avid reader, he knew early on that writing was the way he wanted to make a living. After stints as a journalist and freelance writer (his work appearing in *Time Out*, *The Sunday Times*, *Punch* and *The Observer*), he tried his hand at writing comics. Soon after, the graphic novel series for which he is best known, the *Sandman* series, was born. *Sandman* has won every major industry award, including the 1991 World Fantasy Award for best short story, making it the first comic ever to be awarded a literary award. In its later years, *Sandman* outsold *Superman* and *Batman* comics. *Sandman* sells over a million copies a year; the collections have sold over 750,000 copies in trade paperback and hardback. Warner Brothers has optioned *Sandman*, and it is currently in development.

He was also co-ordinator and co-editor of The Utterly Comic Comic Relief, which raised £45,000 for the Comic Relief charity in 1991. He was co-author with Terry Pratchett, of *Good Omens*, a bestseller in the U.K. Other books include the cult hit *Ghastly Beyond Belief* (1985) and *Don't Panic* (1987), and, as editor, a book of poetry, *Now We Are Sick*. His essays have appeared in *Horror: 100 Best Books* and *100 Great Detectives*. *Neverwhere* (Avon, 1998), is a darkly comic urban fantasy set in London about an ordinary man who, after helping a wounded girl he finds on the street, finds himself in an alternate London while he is fast losing visibility in the real world. *Neverwhere* was a television series produced by the BBC, which was also written in novel format. As a novel, *Neverwhere* was a bestseller, garnered critical acclaim. *Neverwhere* is slated to be made into a feature film by Jim Henson Productions. Neil has also ventured into children's literature, with marked success. *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* (White Wolf Publishing, 1997), was selected by *Newsweek* as one of the Best Children's Books of 1997, and by Scholastic for inclusion in its recommended reading list.



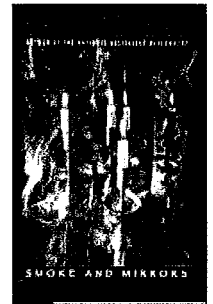
His work has appeared in translation in Italy, Spain, Holland, Norway, Germany, France, Brazil, Sweden, and Finland. His most recent novels published in the U.S. are *Smoke and Mirrors* (Avon, 1998), an anthology of short stories and *Stardust* (Spike, 1999), a charming and funny fantasy about finding your heart's desire. After finding the perfect, Gothic style house, he moved from Britain to Minnesota, where he now lives with his wife and three children. When he's not writing, touring or seeing to the myriad film projects he has in development, you can find him spending time with his wife, collecting computers and cats, reading aloud to two young daughters or donating his time to the cause about which he is passionate: freedom of speech for artists and writers. Neil spoke to us about how he got his start as an author, how he creates his novels, and what it was like going on tour with [Tori Amos](#).

What did you like to read when you were growing up?

Anything. I was a reader. My parents would frisk me before family events. Before weddings, funerals, bar mitzvahs, and what have you. Because if they didn't, then the book would be hidden inside some pocket or other and as soon as whatever it was got under way I'd be found in a corner. That was who I was...that was what I did. I was the kid with the book. Now having said that, I tended to gravitate towards anything fantastical be it SF, be it fantasy, be it horror, be it ghost stories or anything in that territory. But I was definitely the kind of kid that read anything. The great thing about being in school in England back then was that the schools were all very old. And the schools being fairly old meant that you were actually dealing with a school library that was endowed sometime in the 1920s. That was the last time they went out on a big book buying expedition. And a few things had turned up in the 30s. I'd get to read these almost forgotten authors. I'd sit up there devouring the complete works of Edgar Wallace or G.K. Chesterton. In fact, I remember my first encounter with *Lord of the Rings* was the first two books in battered old hardcovers. *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*. It was all they had in the library, so I read them over and over again, wondering how it ended. And when I was about twelve I won the school English prize and they said, "What would you like as a present? You get a book." I said please can I have the *Return of the King*, so that I can find out what happens.

I understand that you also spent time as a journalist in your early years. How do you get your start?

Well, to start off, when I was writing fiction I was failing to sell the fiction that I was writing. I was very young. Although I did not choose to believe at the time that it was anything to do with lack of talent. I thought that it was to do with who I knew and what I knew, and so on and so on and so forth. In retrospect, I'd say that was wrong. Recently, I was talking to a Hollywood producer and he was saying, "Did you ever write a Sherlock Holmes thing?" Well I wrote a Sherlock Holmes thing when I was about twenty and I've still got it in a file somewhere. I pulled out the file and started reading the stuff in there and realized that if anybody handed me that stuff now and said "Do I have a writing career in front of me?" I'd say, "Learn a trade." So that was scary. I was failing to sell stuff and I was getting lots of rejection slips back. I got up one morning and I said, Ok, either I have no talent -- which I do not choose to believe for reasons of personal pride -- or I am going about this the wrong way. I really don't know how the world works, so from tomorrow morning I am going to be a freelance journalist. I'm going to learn how the world works and I'm going to learn how publishing works. I'm going to figure all this stuff out for myself. And that was what I did. I was very lucky because I made this decision at a time in England when lots and lots of magazines and newspapers were getting stuff done by freelancers. Coincidentally, around the time that I stopped, they stopped. There was no freelance work in England for around five years. These days there's lots and lots of freelance work, although they are still getting paid the same amount we were back in 1984. Remembering how hard it was to make a living back then, I wonder how do these people do it now?



[Click here](#) for ordering information.

So I went out and bought myself a copy of the *Writer and Artist Yearbook*, bought lots of magazines and got on the phone and talked to editors about ideas for stories. Pretty soon I found myself hired to do interviews and articles and went off and did them. I thought, "Gee, it was easy to talk them into letting me do this. I wonder if they're going to actually let me go through with this?" I wound up for years after on my typewriter. Back when I had my typewriter, I had a little quote from Muddy Waters on it which said, "Don't let your mouth write no checks that your tail can't cash." This was a reminder that I was very good at talking myself into things, be it book contracts, articles or whatever. Then I'd have to find out if I could do it. Kind of the wrong way around, but it always worked very well for me. That feeling of sort of terrified adrenaline. Ok here I am with a book contract, what do I do now? I was first asked who I'd worked for and what I'd done. I have to confess that I lied appallingly. I listed all the people I'd like to write for, figuring that there was no way this editor was going to ring up every other editor in the world and say, "Has this guy ever written for you?" Although what is very, very peculiar is now, looking back at it, over the next five years I did write for absolutely everybody on my list. Which means that, although I thought at the time that I was lying, I was merely slightly anachronistic. Temporally challenged. So I was a journalist and wrote about three nonfiction books and would occasionally publish short stories, of which its probably most significant that at least three of those first few short stories have never been republished in any collection. Because they were awful. How they got published, I don't know. But I did actually put two of them into my short story collection *Angels of Visitation*. The one called "We Can Get Them For You Wholesale" and there was one called "The Case of the Four and Twenty Blackbirds." Because "We Can Get Them For You Wholesale" proved to be an astonishingly popular story, it was the only one of them that eventually made into *Smoke and Mirrors*.

I don't know if proud is the right word, but I am somebody who does not, on the whole, have the highest regard for my own stuff in that when I look all I get to see are the flaws. That's one reason why I love collaborating so much, because on something collaborative I can look at it and enjoy it. Whereas on something that's mine I tend to look at it and ask, "Why did I put that comma there?" I look at *Smoke and Mirrors* now and I'm feeling very satisfied with it, very pleased. It's a nice, serious big short story collection that the reviews of which amused me enormously, which normally doesn't happen. Kingsley Amis once said about how he handled bad reviews, "I let them spoil my breakfast, but I don't let them spoil my lunch." I'm somebody who can actually have his lunch spoiled by a bad review. But they don't spoil my dinner!

But your reviews have been marvelous.

Yes, the reviews have been marvelous. In the case of *Smoke and Mirrors*, it's the thing that I've enjoyed most of all. And what I've really enjoyed is that every single reviewer picks out something which is, as far as they are concerned, the highlight of the book, and then (in the way of all reviewers) picks out something that probably was undeserving of being collected. Except that, as the reviews keep coming in, everybody's choice of what the highlight of the book is changes. One person's highlight of the book is another person's, "Why on *Earth* did you put that in there?" Which wound up leaving me feeling very comfortable about the book. It's a big enough, serious enough book, and there are enough things in there. Nobody is expected to like everything in there, not even me. But everybody seems to like the book itself, which, for a collection of short fiction, is amazing. Normally, publishing a collection of short fiction these days is akin dropping rose petals into the Grand Canyon and waiting to hear the boom. In the case of *Smoke and Mirrors*, there really has been a little boom on it. I had this strange conversation with my publishers recently when I was in New York to do one of the signings. I asked, "What are the plans for bringing it out in paperback? When are we doing that? Is it going to be a trade paperback or a mass market?" And they said, "We don't have any plans." I said, "What do you mean you don't have any plans?" And they said, "Well, it's still selling in hardcover. Right now, we're not doing anything. We're loving the fact that its selling and its selling steadily, and it's now in its third printing." Which for a short story collecting in this day and age is astonishing.

Yes. It's a very deep collection, I thought.

Everybody seems to have a favorite story or whatever. I love it as a collection. I love the fact that we did all this clever stuff. For example, because they sent me the cover early enough, we were able to figure out a back cover photo that matched with the front cover picture. And do all that kind of stuff...

which was just fun. One rarely gets to do that kind of thing. I just feel very good about the package.

Yes. Especially with your background with *Sandman* and as an artist. You seem like a very visual person to me. So I would imagine that the covers, although they are important to all writers, they probably *really* affect you.

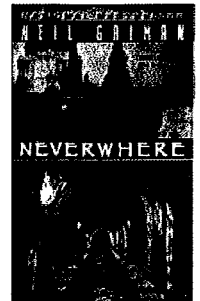
They really, really do. That's very true. And the package affects me. You know, the whole design, the whole feel of what you're getting. I always like the idea that you're giving people slightly more in some way than they're paying for. Which is why I got such a kick out of hiding a story in the Introduction.

Ah, Yes. "The Wedding Present."

Yes, "The Wedding Present." Not everybody who buys this book will even see it. The people that skip introductions will miss it entirely. They will never know that there was another story they could have read. Which I love. Packaged joy. I like the idea of doing that.

I'd like to move back in time a little bit. Let's talk about *Neverwhere*. I understand that project came about actually for British Television. So did you write the story for television or did you write the novel first? I've read the novel, but I haven't seen the television series.

Well, you haven't missed anything. The first thing I wrote was the TV script. And then they started making the film. As I started going, I would have these conversation with the producer when he'd say, "Ok, Neil, just to let you know we've lost this scene. This location just fell through." Or, "We've lost this scene; the episode is running too long." Or, "When filming this scene the actor broke his leg running down a tunnel, and you're going to have to write him out of the rest of it." All of which happened. Every time he would say something like that, I would say, "Its ok, I'll put it back in the novel." The novel, for me, was my way of asserting control. Saying, "No, *this* is what I meant." Suddenly I had control over the costumes again. Control over the things that I didn't have any control over on the TV screen. On the one hand, you'd spent a few years writing the story. On the other hand, what's being made is not entirely the thing in your head. You've lost the power that you have writing novels or writing comics. Which is the power of "Because I Say So." You know, why is this character doing that? *Because I say so.*



[Click here](#) for ordering information.

Because you see it that way in your mind.

Yes. Why is this character wearing this? Because that is what he is wearing. All of a sudden, you are dealing with a costume lady who doesn't necessarily see things your way. Now, I'm not asserting here that my way is right and the way of the director, or the costume lady, or the camera man or whatever is wrong. That's not even the issue. The issue here is simply the power of Because I Say So. I think that's what I was missing. So, for me, the novel was very much a way of being able to put that back. It was to go back to a world over which I had complete and utter control. And so I did and I wrote the novel. And then I wrote the novel again, having written it once for the U.K. I then wrote it again for America. Great fun, because I got to treat London as a slightly more imaginary and unreal place the second time through. It's funny because Americans occasionally get slightly huffy at me when I tell them that I've written *Neverwhere* more than once. On occasion, there is a slight sort of huffiness as if "What, you don't think we're bright enough to have read the English version?" And that's not actually it at all. In fact, I think the American version is a much better book for me than the English version. In the English version, I could say something like "he walked down Oxford street, " and know that everybody reading my book knows that Oxford street is a large metropolitan street in the central west-end of London filled with large shops. I don't expect anybody in Kansas to know that. If somebody in Kansas read that, they might think, "Oxford Street, maybe it's a street with a University on it or something." I would not make fun of that person for thinking that. They don't know -- nor should they. So what I tried to do was, in the American version, just add information, add details. Sometimes I'd hide the details or the information in the book. In the English one there is a joke which is at one point, one character says "We're going to this market but its in a really nasty area of London." And the hero says, "Where's that?" And she says, "Knightsbridge." Which is very funny if you know London, then you know this is the nicest area of London. But people who haven't been to London merely know that they are missing a joke there.

Did you change any dialogue?

Yes. I changed some of the dialogue. It's been interesting talking to Americans about this who, again, get a little bit huffy, asking, "What? We aren't good enough to get the words?" But that's not the point. For example, in the English version Richard, our hero, meets Door, our, for want of a better word, heroine. He stumbles over her bleeding on the *pavement*. In the American version, he stumbles her over bleeding on the *sidewalk*. English people ask me, "Why did you change that?" And I say, "Because it's a word that means two different things. The English word pavement literally means sidewalk. In America pavement is the paved area; it's actually the road. If I left her bleeding on the pavement in the American version, for reasons of cultural superiority, she would be in a different place. People would understand it differently." I wanted the story to be understood and to be read the same. There was definitely a certain amount of work done on both sides. I also wound up with an editor who didn't like a couple of sequences, especially one

sequence. The American version I'd say is about 10,000 words longer and 1,000 words shorter than the English one. My favorite version of the book (I think you'd like it) is called the international version, which so far has gotten printed in several foreign countries. The French version and the Dutch version actually contain something closer to a complete text. Just to confuse everybody.

The hero of *Neverwhere* is Richard Mayhew. How did you go about creating him? He seems to have elements of Everyman. Things just keep happening to him. Did you sit down and plan him out, or did he just evolve as you wrote the story?

Well, a little bit of both. C.S. Lewis wrote an essay all about heroes and Everyman, where he said that, "It is very, very important that a hero in a novel not be too odd. How odd events strike odd people is an oddity too much." He pointed out that in *Through the Looking Glass* that Wonderland would not have been anywhere so interesting had Alice not been so dull, so plain. If Alice had been in any way interesting herself, it would have been a much less interesting book. And I thought, "you've got to try." It seems like a nice position to begin a book from. I wanted a hero who was not a hero. I wanted somebody who was a little bit everybody, someone who was not the kind of person who would make the list if you were putting together a hero roster, but who was going to get by on essentially a good heart and good intentions, which were going to get him into deep trouble, but perhaps get him out again as well. I don't know that I planned him. It was much more a matter of knowing how the story started. When I began the book, I had more than the beginning in my head, but not an awful lot more than the beginning. I knew that he was going to stumble across this girl. I knew that truly no good deed would go unpunished. And that he was going to wind up losing his life, his identity and everything else. His fiancée would dump him, and that he would very rapidly stop existing as far as everybody else was concerned. I had Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar in my head, and the marquis. I figured we'd meet Hunter sooner or later. But that was it. That's what I had to go on when I started the book and when I started writing the script. Most everything else turned up along the way. These are the things I discovered as I wrote.

What are your writing habits like? Do you use the computer to write? How do you create?

It depends. It depends very much on the project. It would be easier to tell you the kind of writer that I'm not. I remember once being at a pub at a convention in England with a very well known fantasy author. I was saying, "Do you realize there are writers out there who are at their desks at 9 o'clock every morning, look up at 12:00, take an hour off for lunch and they're back there at 1, they go till 5:30 and that's it for the day? They don't write anymore. Now if you wanted to do that, why not get a *real* job?" And this well-known, famous, probably richer than I am fantasy writer said "Well I was always at my desk at 8:30, instead of 9. But other than that, you've just described my work day."

I've interviewed a number of authors who work that way.

I don't understand it! I mean, why not get a real job? It's got to be easier. (laugh) As far as I'm concerned, the entire reason for becoming a writer is not having to get up in the morning. It's not writing when you don't want to, and writing late at night if you want to. I'm a fairly undisciplined writer. I'm the kind of writer who, if a deadline is looming and I'm not there yet, will go off and take a room for a couple of weeks in a cheap hotel somewhere that I don't know anybody, and do nothing but put my head down and finish the book or the project. It depends on what I'm writing as to how I actually write. *Stardust* was written in longhand because I wanted to inject the kind of feeling to recreate the kind of sentence structure, emotion, the whole thing that people had in, say, the 1920s. I wanted a slightly archaic voice. Most of all, I didn't want to do what I know that I do when I'm working on a computer. I work on a computer as if I'm working in clay. You put down the kind of thing that you mean and then you look at that for a few seconds. And then you work into it, you delete this word, you add that word. You change the tense. You decide that isn't quite what you meant and you use a thesaurus or whatever. There is no discontinuity. There is no break between your first and second draft. There *is* no first or second draft. What you have is an ongoing, improving first draft. With *Stardust*, I wanted to write a novel that could have been written, with perhaps the exception of two rather mild sex scenes, one moment of ultraviolence and the word "fuck" written very small, it could have been written in the 1920s.

The narrator's voice is marvelous in that book. And it is very different in tone.

It was that voice that I wanted to get. It was for that voice that I used the fountain pen. I bought myself a proper honest to goodness fountain pen for that book. It was a breeze. Partly, I suppose, to fake myself into that mindset -- to go to that place. It was a lovely way of getting to that voice and getting to that place in my head. Then when I finished it in first draft, I actually got to properly do a second draft. Which I never get to do, normally. One could actually concentrate with *Stardust*, which is not something that I would normally concentrate on. Because, if one is writing novels today, concentrating on the beauty of the prose is right up there with concentrating on your semi-colons, for wasted effort (laugh). This is not even said with any particular grumpiness. It's not something anybody notices or particularly cares about. Nobody is out there saying, "What beautiful prose!" But, having said that, nobody is looking for it -- but people *do* respond to it. When I was on this signing tour (my giant Signing Tour From Hell which finished yesterday), I loved the fact that people kept coming up to me and saying, "I'm reading it out loud." I'm reading it out loud to my girlfriend at night. Or to my wife. Or I'm reading it to the kids. Just people who are responding to the rhythms, and responding to the beats of the words and wanting to read it aloud, feeling they were almost missing something if they weren't. And engineering ways in order so to do. Which I thought was lovely. I got a genuine thrill out of that.

Speaking of your signing tours. I know you've been doing a lot of appearances lately. What's the oddest thing that's happened to you at a signing?

Oh, that's sort of a hard one to tell. Partly because I get such astonishingly nice fans.

Some of whom have been known to faint, the way I hear it.

Well, yes occasionally some of them get a little wobbly. To be honest, I tend to attribute that much more to having stood up for four hours. You know, building it up in their heads as something. It would be the people that if you wandered over and said "Hi" you could have a nice conversation with them.

"If you're asking why I'm out there fundraising, why I'm out there manning the barricades, and why I'm willing to do whatever I can to support the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund...[it's] Because I come from a country without the First Amendment. Because most countries in the world don't have a First Amendment. There are erosions of freedom that occur at the borders of literature. The battles that many people assume were fought and won many years ago are still being fought."



[Click here](#) for ordering information.

But they've been standing in line for four hours building up in their heads wondering, "What *am* I going to say when I meet him?" They're thinking, "What can I say that will be good enough?" But yes, you occasionally get the fainting. The weirdest thing on this tour occurred in Romans at Pasadena, quite early on in the tour. When a young lady, she was actually number one in the line. At most of the signings what we actually did was hand out numbers. Just to control the crowd much better.

Like concert tickets.

Yes. It means you don't have to stand in line the full four hours. Which means, you've got 200 or 400 people. Much better to give more numbers as they get there. Because you're going to move them in and out of line anyway for the reading. It works very well. This girl was number one. She must have been there since 3 o'clock that day. At the end of the signing she comes over -- she'd been waiting around very patiently -- and she says, "Will you do me a big favor?" I said, "Well, what it is?" She says "Will you draw something with a sharpie on my back?" (You know, those indelible black pens). I said, "What kind of thing do you want me to draw?" She said, "Well, I think of myself as a pirate, so would you draw something piratical on my back?" So I drew a little pirate skull and crossbones on her back for her.

Was she wearing a shirt?

Yes, she lifted her shirt up so I could do the little skull and crossbones on her back.

Did she like it?

Well, she said, "Thank you very much," as soon as I'd finished. "Now I'm going to the tattooist to get it tattooed on." I said "Well, at least see it first. At least sleep on it. It's a sharpie. It will still be there tomorrow. At least sleep on it before you get it tattooed on." But I strongly suspect she did go straight down to an all-night tattooist to get the little skull and crossbones drawing tattooed on. So that was probably the strangest thing this tour.

That is unusual! I understand you also went on tour with Tori Amos.

Yes, last year. That was fun.

What was that like?

Rock and roll stars have it much better than writers when they're on a tour. Chiefly, I suppose, because rock stars are doing what they do when they get to a strange city. I'm not a signer, I'm a writer. Although through years of practice I'm getting to be quite a good signer. I really am. I'm not a signer. I'm a writer, and that is the reason why I actually do readings now. I pretty much insist on the readings. It at least gives me something I can derive a small amount of aesthetic enjoyment out of, rather than just sitting there for four hours saying, "Gwendolyn. What a lovely name; how do you spell it?" But what's fun if you're a rock star is you stumble off stage at midnight. Well, you stumble offstage at eleven, by midnight you get to climb on a giant tour bus. You go to sleep on the tour bus and sometime around 3 or 4 in the morning you wake up somewhere else, you stumble out, stumble into a hotel and wake up at about eleven. And then you have a few hours of your day before the sound check and the whole day begins. Whereas, if you're a writer, you stumble out of your singing at 11:30 p.m.. You get back to your hotel, praying that room service didn't stop at eleven. And you set your alarm for five-to-six because you have a 10-past-six checkout because you're a going to be getting on a plane to the next city where you are met by a very nice, efficient media handler lady who will take you to a TV station, a radio station or to your next interview. That's the biggest difference, I think. But the most important difference of all is that, if you are musician, every night you get to play music to people, but if you are writer every night you get to sign somebody's books. I mean the best part of it. I shouldn't sound as if I'm begrudging it or grumbling about it. The part that I enjoy most is a weird two-fold thing. When you're writing, what you hear is abstract numbers. It's a lovely thing to know you've sold 60,000 *Neverwheres* in hardcover or you've done 300,000 in paperback, or you've done 100,000 of this or a quarter-million of that. That means nothing. Those are numbers. They don't mean anything. They're just numbers. They're numbers that sort of translate into royalty checks. What is so wonderful about going on a signing tour is the numbers translate suddenly into *people*. Even though I must have signed for only 2% of the people who bought *Neverwhere* in paperback or whatever. These tiny percentages; they suddenly become real. You get faces. You get to say thank you to them for buying the books. They get to say thank you to you for telling them stories. That is wonderful. That is a magical thing.

"My career has been somewhat like climbing stairs. You know, you learn fairly quickly that everything is sort of the same amount of effort. In many ways, it was much, much harder to get the first book contract. The hardest thing probably overall has been learning not to trust people, publicists and so forth, implicitly. I'm by nature a very trusting person. And its only, very slowly, you sort of learn, 'Well, ok, Publisher X, despite claiming to us that the book was not remaindered, has actually secretly remaindered it into Australia.' "

You're so prolific. Have you ever faced the dreaded writer's block?

Oh, Yes. Continually. But I have good strategies. (laughs)

Will you share some of them with us? (laughs)

Sure. Strategy number one is that I always, or almost always, have at least two or three different things that I'm writing at any one time. In my experience, writer's block is very real. You'll be writing something and suddenly it stops. The characters stop talking. You've been happily just transcribing everything they've been saying, and suddenly they sit down and shut up. Suddenly, you are in deep trouble. It does happen. It's very real. It's not something (in my experience anyway) that happens on everything at the same time. It's just that sometimes a project needs a little time to think, a little time to breathe. So what I tend to do when that happens is I always have two or three other things that I'm doing at the same time. I can just go to one of the ones that's working. Which is how I give this appearance of being prolific. I'm really not. I think of myself as a very lazy author. But it's very nice for me to have more than one thing that I'm doing at a time, and being able to bounce between them. The other thing that I would say about writer's block is that it can be very, very subjective. By which I mean, you can have one of those days when you sit down and every word is crap. It is *awful*. You cannot understand how or why you are writing, what gave you the illusion or delusion that you would every have anything to say that anybody would ever want to listen to. You're not quite sure why you're wasting your time. And if there is one thing you're sure of, it's that everything that is being written that day is rubbish. I would also note that on those days (especially if deadlines and things are involved) is that I keep writing. The following day, when I actually come to look at what has been written, I will usually look at what I did the day before, and think, "That's not quite as bad as I remember. All I need to do is delete that line and move that sentence around and it's fairly usable. It's not that bad." What is really sad and nightmarish (and I should add, completely unfair, in every way. And I mean it -- utterly, utterly, unfair!) is that two years later, or three years later, although you will remember very well, very clearly, that there was a point in this particular scene when you hit a horrible Writer's Block from Hell, and you will also remember there was point in this particular scene where you were writing and the words dripped like magic diamonds from your fingers -- as if the Gods were speaking through you and every sentence was a thing of beauty and magic and brilliance. You can remember just as clearly that there was a point in the story, in that same scene, when the characters had turned into pathetic cardboard cut-outs and nothing they said mattered at all. You remember this very, very clearly. The problem is you are now doing a reading and you cannot for the *life* of you remember which bits were the gifts of the Gods and dripped from your fingers like magical words and which bits were the nightmare things you just barely created and got down on paper somehow!! Which I consider *most* unfair. As a writer, you feel like one or the other should be better. I wouldn't mind which. I'm not somebody who's saying, "I really wish the stuff from the Gods was better." I wouldn't mind which way it went. I would just like one of them to be better. Rather than when it's a few years later, and you're reading the scene out loud and you don't know, and you cannot tell. It's obviously all written by the same person and it all gets the same kind of reaction from an audience. No one leaps up to say, "Oh look, that paragraph was clearly written on an 'off' day."

"I work on a computer as if I'm working in clay. You put down the kind of thing that you mean and then you look at that for a few seconds. And then you work into it, you delete this word, you add that word. You change the tense. You decide that isn't quite what you meant and you use a thesaurus or whatever. There is no discontinuity. There is no break between your first and second draft. There IS no first or second draft. What you have is an ongoing, improving first draft."

Well, that is unfair.

It is very unfair. I don't think anybody who isn't a writer would ever understand how quite unfair it is.

I'm going to move onto a different subject. I understand you've raised money to support the Comic Legal Defense Fund. Why do you feel so strongly about the issues that it represents?

Because I come from a country without the First Amendment. Because most countries in the world don't have a First Amendment. As far as I know it's the only one. The current total of countries in the world with First Amendments is one. You have guaranteed freedom of speech. Other countries don't have that. They have Obscene Publications Acts. They have governments who can tell them what can and what cannot be written. Coming from a country without this thing, I know what an amazing, miraculous, cool, brilliant thing it is. And I also know that it is something that can easily be eroded if it is not safeguarded, or patrolled. A nice, easy place for freedom of speech to be eroded is comics, because comics are a natural target whenever an election comes up. Things are kind of quiet right now, but we've got an election coming up. Which means that I can pretty much guarantee you that at some point over the coming year TV reporters will be standing with graphic novels or comics not aimed in any way at children. Normally these publications have the words "Adults Only" on the cover, or "For Mature Readers" or the equivalent language. They'll be standing in front of a display of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Archie Comics and saying, "You *think* this is what your children are reading, but they are really exposed to this horrible stuff."



So the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is out there preserving and fighting for, and sometimes winning and sometimes losing, the fight for First Amendment rights in comics and, more generally, for freedom of speech. For example, the State of California tax authorities announced that for tax purposes comics were not literature, but were sign paintings, and were to be taxed as sign paintings. It was the longest and most expensive case the Legal Defense Fund fought. We won, which was great.

[Click here](#) for ordering information.

On the other hand, there are cases which still scare me to this day that we lost. I mean the Mike Diana case. Mike Diana was a kid in Pensacola Florida who created a self-published fanzine with a readership of maybe 500 people, most of them swapped zines backwards and forewords with each other. The zine falls into the hands of the local police. A police officer pretends to be a kid into fanzines and buys a copy through the mail from Mike -- who suddenly finds himself spending three nights in jail, charged with obscenity, and then let out on bail. The defense brought famous, expert witnesses from New York and San Francisco. The prosecutor pretty much effectively demolished the expert witnesses standing up there and saying "this stuff is art" by pointing out to the jury that the standards of Pensacola, Florida are not the standards of the gay bath houses of San Francisco or the crack alleys of New York. So they found him guilty of obscenity. Which made him the very first American artist to be found guilty of obscenity for their own work, for making their own art. Now, let me tell you what was imposed upon him. Because this is the bit that I find scary. I find it a little bit scary that they found him guilty of obscenity, but I find it a lot scary that the sentence consisted of three years suspended day in jail sentence, a \$3,000 fine, a journalistic ethics course to be done at his own expense, psychiatric counseling to be imposed at his own expense, 1000 hours of community service, and he was not allowed within ten feet of anybody under than age of eighteen. Bear in mind, this was a kid that worked in a convenience store. And finally, and this one is the *piece de resistance*, (which never made any newspapers, nobody was interested, because its comics and nobody cares about comics) Michael was forbidden under the terms of his sentence to draw anything that anybody might find obscene. The local police force was ordered to make 24-hour spot checks of his place of residence to make sure that he was not "committing art." You know, to ensure that he wasn't drawing things for his own amusement while he was on the telephone and then tearing them up. The police were empowered, entrusted and ordered to break into his house 24-hour days and

make random spot checks to make sure that he was not committing art. Now, we took the course to appeals court. Although we didn't get it overturned, the court at least allowed Mike to move to New York to do his sentence in New York. Where, to be totally honest, the police have better things to do than to break into people's houses at four in the morning to make sure they're not drawing. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, who declined to hear it. Now considering this is the first case of an American artist being convicted of obscenity and, given the nature of the sentence, you would of thought they would have heard it. But they didn't. If you asking why I'm out there fundraising, why I'm out there manning the barricades, and why I'm willing to do whatever I can to support the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund -- that's why. Because things like that happen. There are erosions of freedom that occur at the borders of literature. If things like that can occur for somebody drawing comics in a way they probably couldn't if it was a novel published by a major novelist (or even a minor novelist publishing something through a real house) it's because those battles have been fought and won. The battles that many people assume were fought and won many years ago are still being fought.

Have you personally ever had any of your work censored?

Yes. I once when I was young nearly sent a Swedish publisher to jail for a bible story. I was involved in a comic called *Outrageous Tales from the Old Testament* where we retold, with a straight face, stories from the Old Testament. I told a story from the book of Judges, in which a man's wife is to quote the bible "whoring about on him." And he sent her away and then he goes and gets her back from her father. He misses her. They stop off in this little village over night. The townsfolk gather around on the road to Bethlehem, which is where they are and say, "That man that came to you tonight. Throw him out so that we may have sex with him. We want to rape him." And this man says "No. No. No. I will not. That would be a terrible thing. That would be a violation of all the laws of hospitality. And he's my guest. But I'll tell you what. He has a wife with him and I have a virgin daughter whose never known any man. You can have them." They get known and abused all night and are left dead on the doorstep the next morning. When the guy gets up the morning he finds his wife dead on the doorstep and takes her home and cuts her into thirteen bits and into twelve locks and sends one to each of the tribes of Israel. So I told that story and did it fairly straight, and next thing I knew I had a Swedish publisher about to go to jail because there is a Swedish law forbidding the depiction of images of violence against women. That particular bible story is filled with images of violence against women. I think it was more or less only the fact that it was from the bible and told completely straight that got him off.

Let's turn to another subject. How has being a father affected your work?

Well, I suppose chiefly I get to steal from them. Both of my kids picture books. The one that I'm just about to do now and the last one I did, *The Day I Swapped My Dad the Two Goldfish* I completely stole them from my two kids. As I did with the next book. *The Day I Swapped My Dad the Two Goldfish* came about because my son looked at me one day when I was saying something horrible and unreasonable to him like, "Isn't it time you went bed?" He was about eight and he looked up me and his lower lip trembled and he said "I wish I didn't have a Dad." He said, "I wish I had something good, like some goldfish." He then stomped off to bed angrily. I thought, "What a great idea!" The seed having been planted in the back of my head, five years later I sat down and wrote *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* which then turned up on the *Newsweek* list of best books. The biggest thrill I've got from *The Day I Swapped My Dad For Two Goldfish* is just the fact that its turning up now on the Scholastic edition that kids bring home with them from school. You know if you have a young kid with the list of books they take home from school. That's where it is. It's on that list. I love that. The great corrupting of the youth of America.

Not just of England (laugh). What do you feel like the greatest challenge you've had to face in your professional life so far?

I honestly don't know. My career has been somewhat like climbing stairs. You know, you learn fairly quickly that everything is sort of the same amount of effort. In many ways, it was much, much harder to get the first book contract. The hardest thing probably overall has been learning not to trust people, publicists and so forth, implicitly. I'm by nature a very trusting person. And its only, very slowly, you sort of learn "Well, ok, Publisher X, despite claiming to us that the book was not remaindered, has actually secretly remaindered it into Australia.

Did that happen to you?

Oh, yes. Things like that. And Publisher B, instead of actually invoking the clause that says "whereby they have to sell off the remainders" had claimed that what they are actually doing is technically not remaindering but deep discounting them, so that they don't have to do that, and so forth. Slowly you learn that you really have to make sure that you have good people looking out for you, and that you think of *everything*. (laughs) Which is very alien to me. It's not how I think.

It's sort of counter-intuitive to a creative personality, I think.

No. I agree completely. I was always so relieved that anyone wants to publish anything I've written. In many ways I feel like the biggest challenge hasn't come yet. Because, if pressed, I would confess that what I'm really scared of is that one day somebody will knock at the door and they'll have a clipboard. They'll say, "Mr. Gaiman?" And I'll say "Yes." They'll say, "It says here that you get to make stuff up and get paid for it." I'll say, "Yes." "And it says here that you can do anything you want. You can go and do fantasy and you can do real fiction and you can do TV, films, whatever you want." And I'll say, "Yes." And they say, "Well it's over. It's done. We've caught up with your game, Sir. You are going to have to go and get a real job. And work normal hours."

"As far as I'm concerned, the entire reason for becoming a writer is not having to get up in the morning. It's not writing when you don't want to, and writing late at night if you want to."

You mean like the two villains from *Neverwhere*?

Yes, Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar show up and they say "It's over. You are now going to have to get a real job." I will have gone to that point, seemingly expecting that this writing thing would go on for ages. I'd then think, "Well, it's a fair cop." I would go off and have to get a real job and get up the morning and wear a suit. I suppose I'd secretly make some things up in my head for myself before I went to bed at night, or before I go to sleep anyway lying in bed, sort of making up little stories. But I'd never be able to tell anybody. That's the thing I'm scared of.

It's not going to happen.

Well, I hope not.

What are your pet peeves in life? Do you have any pet peeves?

I'm not terribly peevy. What are my pet peeves? I don't know really. I wish you could get better radio in America. I wish somebody would give NPR the money to be a real radio station. I'm fairly peeveless. I suppose, right now coming off this tour, I'm not so much peeved as I'm actually kind of thrilled that I can do a signing tour on which I got to break records in most of the stores that I signed at. Yet I'm still managing to do this while somehow still remaining one of those authors who hears, "Oh you write books. What name do you write under?" I feel like I'm getting away with something, because I'm doing it all under the radar right now. So in some ways its kind of a peeve because you think, "Well, wouldn't it be nice if you went into a store and this actually translated itself into people knowing who you are and so on and so forth." (laughs). On the other hand, this is not something that I particular worry about. I think I'm astonishingly lucky to be where I am at this point.

What projects are you working on now?

Well, once I've finished recovering from the signing tour, there are a couple of things. There's a children's book that should have been finished by December that's been sitting on hold now for a couple of months. I'm actually feeling very guilty because I left four kids locked in a closet, three of them have been dead for years and years and years. I'm feeling guilty. They've been in there for months and I have to go and get them out. Then there's a big novel and various sorts of other things. Like getting *Neverwhere* the movie, which looks like its now starting to gather some serious momentum. The movie is with Jim Henson Productions and Dimension Films.

What's the latest word on the *Sandman* movie?

It's not something I have any control over. Its one of those things when I did the deal to write *Sandman* it was in those antediluvian days when all rights were owned by D.C. Comics, who is owned by Warner Brothers, which means Warner controls *Sandman*. I wish things were different, but they're not.

So that's sort of the end of *Sandman* for right now, as far as you're concerned?

Well, yes. I may do a little tenth anniversary project to say thank you to my editor who really wants me to. Karen Berger at D.C. Comics. She's always been the single most terrific editor anybody could ever want. If the time is there, I will do her a little Japanese *Sandman* story.

Marvelous. And what's the word on the Phantom Princess film?

Ah, *Princess Mononoke*. I don't know what title it will eventually come out under when it comes out.

How's that coming? That's in production, isn't it?

Yes, I wrote the English translation. It has a wonderful cast, including: Claire Danes, Minnie Driver, Billie Bob Thornton, Billy Crudup and Gillian Anderson. With such a fantastic cast, one hopes for the best dialogue one can give them. It comes out sometime this summer from Miramax.

**Is there anything else that you'd like to say to your fans?**

Mostly, I'd just like to say thank you for coming out in such hordes during the signing tour. The most amusing thing I heard was that we'd actually broken the previous record in this store in Portland we signed in. Powell's of Portland, which is a wonderful store. An astonishingly wonderful, huge store. In fact, the previous signing record there had been set by Martha Stewart. Thank you to everybody for breaking the Martha Stewart record. When I heard about that I was enormously amused.

Shop Related Products

Neverwhere

\$7.17 ~~\$7.99~~

(2082)



The Sandman Vol. 1: Preludes & Nocturne...

\$15.79

(507)

Ads by Amazon

The Sandman Library, Volume 3:
Dream Co...\$7.80 ~~\$44.99~~

(139)



Stardust

\$19.99

(5420)

More from Writers WriteWhite
House
Bans CNN,
LA Times,
NY Times
and Politico