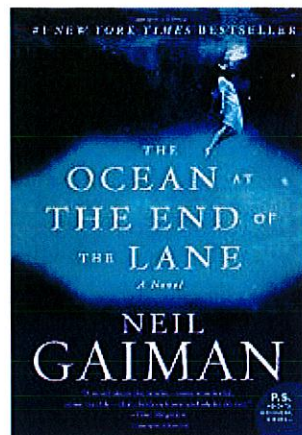


The Ocean at the End of the Lane

by Neil Gaiman



About the Book

Sussex, England. A middle-aged man returns to his childhood home to attend a funeral. Although the house he lived in is long gone, he is drawn to the farm at the end of the road, where, when he was seven, he encountered a most remarkable girl, Lettie Hempstock, and her mother and grandmother. He hasn't thought of Lettie in decades, and yet as he sits by the pond (a pond that she'd claimed was an ocean) behind the ramshackle old farmhouse, the unremembered past comes flooding back. And it is a past too strange, too frightening, too dangerous to have happened to anyone, let alone a small boy.

Forty years earlier, a man committed suicide in a stolen car at this farm at the end of the road. Like a fuse on a firework, his death lit a touchpaper and resonated in unimaginable ways. The darkness was unleashed, something scary and thoroughly incomprehensible to a little boy. And Lettie --- magical, comforting, wise beyond her years --- promised to protect him, no matter what.

A groundbreaking work from a master, THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE is told with a rare understanding of all that makes us human, and shows the power of stories to reveal and shelter us from the darkness inside and out. It is a stirring, terrifying and elegiac fable as delicate as a butterfly's wing and as menacing as a knife in the dark.

Discussion Guide

1. It would be easy to think of the Hempstocks as the "triple goddess" (the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone) of popular mythology. In what ways do they conform to those roles? In what ways are they different?
2. The narrator has returned to his hometown for a funeral (we never learn whose). Do you think that framing his childhood story with a funeral gives this story a pessimistic outlook, rather than an optimistic one?

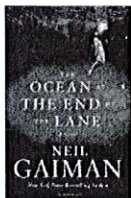
3. Because the narrator is male and most of the other characters are female, this story has the potential to become a stereotypical narrative where a male character saves the day. How does the story avoid that pitfall?
4. The story juxtaposes the memories of childhood with the present of adulthood. In what ways do children perceive things differently than adults? Do you think there are situations in which a child's perspective can be more "truthful" than an adult's?
5. One of Ursula Monkton's main attributes is that she always tries to give people what they want. Why is this not always a good thing? What does Ursula want? How does Ursula use people's desires against them to get what she wants?
6. Water has many roles in this story --- it can give and take life, reveal and hide. How does it play these different roles?
7. One of the many motivators for the characters in this story is loneliness. What characters seem to suffer from loneliness? How do adults and children respond to loneliness in different ways? In the same ways?
8. On page 18, the narrator tells us that his father often burnt their toast and always ate it with apparent relish. He also tells us that later in life, his father admitted that he had never actually liked burnt toast, but ate it to avoid waste, and that his father's confession made the narrator's entire childhood feel like a lie: "it was as if one of the pillars of belief that my world had been built upon had crumbled into dry sand." What other "pillars of belief" from childhood does he discover to be false? How do these discoveries affect him? Are there any beliefs from your own childhood that you discovered to be false?
9. When the narrative returns to the present, Old Mrs. Hempstock tells our narrator, "You stand two of you lot next to each other, and you could be continents away for all it means anything" (p. 173). What does she mean by this? Why is it "easier" for people, our narrator especially, to forget certain things that are difficult to reconcile?
10. Though the narrator has a sister, he doesn't seem to be particularly close to her. Why do you think it is that he has trouble relating to other children? Why do you think his sister is not an ally for him?

Author Bio

Neil Gaiman is a *New York Times* bestselling author of more than twenty books for adults and children, including the novels NEVERWHERE, STARDUST, AMERICAN GODS, ANANSI BOYS, CORALINE and THE GRAVEYARD BOOK; the *Sandman* series of graphic novels; and MAKE GOOD ART, the text of a commencement speech he delivered at Philadelphia's University of the Arts.

He is the recipient of numerous literary honors, including the Locus and Hugo Awards and the Newbery and Carnegie Medals. 1.8 million people follow him on Twitter.

Born and raised in England, Neil Gaiman now lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with his wife, the rock star Amanda Palmer.



(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0062255657/ref=as_li_tf_il?ie=UTF8&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=0062255657&link_code=as3&tag=litl-20)

The Ocean at the End of the Lane

Neil Gaiman, 2013

HarperCollins

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Summary

Sussex, England. A middle-aged man returns to his childhood home to attend a funeral. He is drawn to the farm at the end of the road, where, when he was seven, he encountered a most remarkable girl, Lettie Hempstock. He hasn't thought of Lettie in decades, and yet sitting by the pond (a pond that she'd claimed was an ocean), the unremembered past comes flooding back.

Forty years earlier, a man committed suicide in a stolen car at this farm at the end of the road. Like a fuse on a firework, his death lit a touchpaper and resonated in unimaginable ways. The darkness was unleashed, something scary and thoroughly incomprehensible to a little boy. And Lettie—magical, comforting, wise beyond her years—promised to protect him, no matter what.

A groundbreaking work from a master, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is told with a rare understanding of all that makes us human, and shows the power of stories to reveal and shelter us from the darkness inside and out. A stirring, terrifying, and elegiac fable as delicate as a butterfly's wing and as menacing as a knife in the dark. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—1960
- Where—Portchester, Hampshire, England, UK
- Education—N/A
- Awards—*See below*
- Currently—Lives near Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Early life

Gaiman's family is of Polish and other Eastern European Jewish origins; his great-grandfather emigrated from Antwerp before 1914 and his grandfather eventually settled in the Hampshire city of Portsmouth and established a chain of grocery stores. His father, David Bernard Gaiman, worked in the same chain of stores; his mother, Sheila Gaiman (nee Goldman), was a pharmacist. He has two younger sisters, Claire and Lizzy.

After living for a period in the nearby town of Portchester, Hampshire, where Neil was born in 1960, the Gaimans moved in 1965 to the West Sussex town of East Grinstead where his parents studied Dianetics at the Scientology centre in the town; one of Gaiman's sisters works for the Church of Scientology in Los Angeles. His other sister, Lizzy Calcioli, has said, "Most of our social activities were involved with Scientology or our Jewish family. It would get very confusing when people would ask my religion as a kid. I'd say, 'I'm a Jewish Scientologist.'" Gaiman says that he is not a Scientologist, and that like Judaism, Scientology is his family's religion.

Gaiman was able to read at the age of four. He said...

I was a reader. I loved reading. Reading things gave me pleasure. I was very good at most subjects in school, not because I had any particular aptitude in them, but because normally on the first day of school they'd hand out schoolbooks, and I'd read them-which would mean that I'd know what was coming up, because I'd read it.

One work that made a particular impression on him was J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* from his school library, although it only had the first two books in the trilogy. He consistently took them out and read them. He would later win the school English prize and the school reading prize, enabling him to finally acquire the third book in the trilogy.

For his seventh birthday, Gaiman received C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. Years later, he said...

I admired his use of parenthetical statements to the reader, where he would just talk to you.... I'd think, 'Oh, my gosh, that is so cool! I want to do that! When I become an author, I want to be able to do things in parentheses.' I liked the power of putting things in brackets.

Narnia also introduced him to literary awards, specifically the 1956 Carnegie Medal won by the concluding volume. When he won 2010 Medal himself, the press reported him recalling, "...It had to be the most important literary award there ever was" and observing, "if you can make yourself aged seven happy, you're really doing well – it's like writing a letter to yourself aged seven."

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was another childhood favourite, and "a favourite forever. Alice was default reading to the point where I knew it by heart." He also enjoyed "Batman" comics as a child.

Gaiman was educated at several Church of England schools, including Fonthill

School in East Grinstead, Ardingly College (1970–74), and Whitgift School in Croydon (1974–77). His father's position as a public relations official of the Church of Scientology was the cause of the seven-year-old Gaiman being blocked from entering a boys' school, forcing him to remain at the school that he had previously been attending. He lived in East Grinstead for many years, from 1965–1980 and again from 1984–1987. He met his first wife, Mary McGrath, while she was studying Scientology and living in a house in East Grinstead that was owned by his father. The couple were married in 1985 after having their first child, Michael.

Early Writings

As a child and a teenager, Gaiman read the works of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, James Branch Cabell, Edgar Allan Poe, Michael Moorcock, Ursula K. Le Guin, Harlan Ellison, Rudyard Kipling, Lord Dunsany and G. K. Chesterton. He later became a fan of science fiction, reading the works of authors as diverse as Alan Moore, Samuel R. Delany, Roger Zelazny, Robert A. Heinlein, H. P. Lovecraft, Thorne Smith, and Gene Wolfe.

In the early 1980s, Gaiman pursued journalism, conducting interviews and writing book reviews, as a means to learn about the world and to make connections that he hoped would later assist him in getting published. He wrote and reviewed extensively for the *British Fantasy Society*. His first professional short story publication was "Featherquest", a fantasy story, in *Imagine Magazine* in May 1984, when he was 24.

When waiting for a train at Victoria Station in 1984, Gaiman noticed a copy of *Swamp Thing* written by Alan Moore, and carefully read it. Moore's fresh and vigorous approach to comics had such an impact on Gaiman that he would later write; "that was the final straw, what was left of my resistance crumbled. I proceeded to make regular and frequent visits to London's Forbidden Planet shop to buy comics".

In 1984, he wrote his first book, a biography of the band Duran Duran, as well as *Ghastly Beyond Belief*, a book of quotations, with Kim Newman. Even though Gaiman thought he did a terrible job, the book's first edition sold out very quickly. When he went to relinquish his rights to the book, he discovered the publisher had gone bankrupt. After this, he was offered a job by *Penthouse*. He refused the offer.

He also wrote interviews and articles for many British magazines, including *Knave*. As he was writing for different magazines, some of them competing, and "wrote too many articles", he sometimes went by a number of pseudonyms: Gerry Musgrave, Richard Grey, "along with a couple of house names". Gaiman ended his journalism career in 1987 because British newspapers can "make up anything they want and publish it as fact."

In the late 1980s, he wrote *Don't Panic: The Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Companion* in what he calls a "classic English humour" style. Following on from that he wrote the opening of what would become his collaboration with Terry Pratchett on the comic novel *Good Omens*, about the impending apocalypse.

Comics and Graphic Novels

After forming a friendship with comic book writer Alan Moore, Gaiman started writing comic books, picking up "Marvelman" after Moore finished his run on the series. Gaiman and artist Mark Buckingham collaborated on several issues of the series before its publisher, Eclipse Comics, collapsed, leaving the series unfinished. His first published comic strips were four short "Future Shocks for 2000 AD" in 1986-7. He wrote three graphic novels with his favorite collaborator and long-time friend Dave McKean: "Violent Cases", "Signal to Noise", and "The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch". Impressed with his work, DC Comics hired him, and he wrote the limited series "Black Orchid". Karen Berger, who later became head of DC Comics's Vertigo, read "Black Orchid" and offered Gaiman a job: to re-write an old character, The Sandman, but to put his own spin on him.

"The Sandman" tells the tale of the ageless, anthropomorphic personification of Dream that is known by many names, including Morpheus. The series began in December 1988 and concluded in March 1996: the 75 issues of the regular series, along with an illustrated prose text and a special containing seven short stories, have been collected into 12 volumes that remain in print.

In 1989, Gaiman published "The Books of Magic" (collected in 1991), a four-part mini-series that provided a tour of the mythological and magical parts of the DC Universe through a frame story about an English teenager who discovers that he is destined to be the world's greatest wizard. The miniseries was popular, and sired an ongoing series written by John Ney Rieber.

In the mid-90s, he also created a number of new characters and a setting that was to be featured in a title published by Tekno Comix. The concepts were then altered and split between three titles set in the same continuity: "Lady Justice, Mr. Hero the Newmatic Man, and Teknophage". They were later featured in *Phage: Shadow Death* and *Wheel of Worlds*. Although Gaiman's name appeared prominently on all titles, he was not involved in writing of any of the above-mentioned books (though he helped plot the zero issue of *Wheel of Worlds*).

Gaiman wrote a semi-autobiographical story about a boy's fascination with Michael Moorcock's anti-hero Elric of Melniboné for Ed Kramer's anthology *Tales of the White Wolf*. In 1996, Gaiman and Ed Kramer co-edited *The Sandman: Book of Dreams*. Nominated for the British Fantasy Award, the original fiction anthology featured stories and contributions by Tori Amos, Clive Barker, Gene Wolfe, Tad Williams, and others.

Asked why he likes comics more than other forms of storytelling Gaiman said "One of the joys of comics has always been the knowledge that it was, in many ways, untouched ground. It was virgin territory. When I was working on Sandman, I felt a lot of the time that I was actually picking up a machete and heading out into the jungle. I got to write in places and do things that nobody had ever done before. When I'm writing novels I'm painfully aware that I'm working in a medium that

people have been writing absolutely jaw-droppingly brilliant things for, you know, three-four thousand years now. And you go, well, I don't know that I'm as good as that and that's two and a half thousand years old. But with comics I felt like I can do stuff nobody has ever done. I can do stuff nobody has ever thought of. And I could and it was enormously fun."

In 2009, Gaiman wrote a two-part "Batman" story for DC Comics to follow "Batman R.I.P." It is titled "Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?" a play off of the classic Superman story "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?" by Alan Moore. He also contributed a twelve-page "Metamorpho" story drawn by Mike Allred for Wednesday Comics, a weekly newspaper-style series.

Novels

In a collaboration with author Terry Pratchett (best known for his series of *Discworld* novels), Gaiman's first novel *Good Omens* was published in 1990. In recent years Pratchett has said that while the entire novel was a collaborative effort and most of the ideas could be credited to both of them, Pratchett did a larger portion of writing and editing if for no other reason than Gaiman's scheduled involvement with "Sandman".

The 1996 novelization of Gaiman's teleplay for the BBC mini-series *Neverwhere* was his first solo novel. The novel was released in tandem with the television series though it presents some notable differences from the television series. In 1999 first printings of his fantasy novel *Stardust* were released. The novel has been released both as a standard novel and in an illustrated text edition.

American Gods became one of Gaiman's best-selling and multi-award winning novels upon its release in 2001. A special 10th Anniversary edition was released, with the "author's preferred text" 12,000 words longer than the original mass-market editions. This is identical to the signed and numbered limited edition that was released by Hill House Publishers in 2003. This is also the version released by Headline, Gaiman's publisher in the UK, even before the 10th Anniversary edition. He did an extensive sold-out book tour celebrating the 10th Anniversary and promoting this edition in 2011.

In 2005, his novel *Anansi Boys* was released worldwide. The book deals with Anansi ('Mr. Nancy'), a supporting character in *American Gods*. Specifically it traces the relationship of his two sons, one semi-divine and the other an unaware Englishman of American origin, as they explore their common heritage. It debuted at number one on *The New York Times Best Seller* list.

In late 2008, Gaiman released a new children's book, *The Graveyard Book*. It follows the adventures of a boy named Bod after his family is murdered and he is left to be brought up by a graveyard. It is heavily influenced by Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. As of late January 2009, it had been on the *New York Times Bestseller* children's list for fifteen weeks.

As of 2008, Gaiman has several books planned. After a tour of China, he decided to write a non-fiction book about his travels and the general mythos of China. Following that, will be a new 'adult' novel (his first since 2005's *Anansi Boys*). After that, another 'all-ages' book (in the same vein as *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book*). Following that, Gaiman says that he will release another non-fiction book called *The Dream Catchers*. In December 2011, Gaiman announced that in January 2012 he would begin work on what is essentially, *American Gods 2*.

Literary Allusions

Gaiman's work is known for a high degree of allusiveness. Meredith Collins, for instance, has commented upon the degree to which his novel *Stardust* depends on allusions to Victorian fairy tales and culture. Particularly in *The Sandman*, literary figures and characters appear often; the character of Fiddler's Green is modelled visually on G. K. Chesterton, both William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer appear as characters, as do several characters from within *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. The comic also draws from numerous mythologies and historical periods. Such allusions are not unique to Sandman; *Stardust*, for example, also has a character called Shakespeare.

Clay Smith has argued that this sort of allusiveness serves to situate Gaiman as a strong authorial presence in his own works, often to the exclusion of his collaborators. However, Smith's viewpoint is in the minority: to many, if there is a problem with Gaiman scholarship and intertextuality it is that "...His literary merit and vast popularity have propelled him into the nascent comics canon so quickly that there is not yet a basis of critical scholarship about his work."

David Rudd takes a more generous view in his study of the novel *Coraline*, where he argues that the work plays and riffs productively on Sigmund Freud's notion of the Uncanny, or the Unheimlich.

Though Gaiman's work is frequently seen as exemplifying the monomyth structure laid out in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Gaiman says that he started reading *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* but refused to finish it: "I think I got about half way through *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and found myself thinking if this is true – I don't want to know. I really would rather not know this stuff. I'd rather do it because it's true and because I accidentally wind up creating something that falls into this pattern than be told what the pattern is."

Awards

British Fantasy Award

British Sci-Fi Awards (2)

Bram Stoker Awards (4)

Carnegie Medal

Eisner Awards (19)

Geffen Awards (3)

Hugo Awards (4)

International Horror Guild Award

Locus Awards (5)
Nebula Awards (2)
Newberry Medal
Mythopoeic Awards (2)

(Author bio from Wikipedia. Retrieved 9/27/2013.)

Book Reviews

The protagonist, an artist, returns to his childhood home in the English countryside to recover his memory of events that nearly destroyed him and his family when he was seven. The suicide of a stranger opened the way for a deadly spirit who disguised herself as a housekeeper.... Gaiman has crafted a fresh story of magic, humanity, loyalty, and memories "waiting at the edges of things," where lost innocence can still be restored as long as someone is willing to bear the cost.

Publishers Weekly

(Starred review.) Gaiman mines mythological typology--the three-fold goddess, the water of life (the pond, actually an ocean)—and his own childhood milieu to build the cosmology and theater of a story he tells more gracefully than any he's told since *Stardust*...[a] lovely yarn.

Booklist

(Starred review.) From one of the great masters of modern speculative fiction: Gaiman's first novel for adults since *Anansi Boys* (2005). An unnamed protagonist and narrator returns to his Sussex roots to attend a funeral.... Memories begin to flow.... Forty years ago...a South African opal miner, gambled his fortune away, then committed suicide in the Hempstock farmyard. Something dark, deadly and far distant heard his dying lament and swooped closer.... [I]t reappears as his family's new housekeeper, the demonic Ursula Monkton.... Poignant and heartbreaking, eloquent and frightening, impeccably rendered, it's a fable that reminds us how our lives are shaped by childhood experiences, what we gain from them and the price we pay.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

1. It would be easy to think of the Hempstocks as the "triple goddess" (the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone) of popular mythology. In what ways do they conform to those roles? In what ways are they different?

2. The narrator has returned to his hometown for a funeral (we never learn whose). Do you think that framing his childhood story with a funeral gives this story a pessimistic outlook, rather than an optimistic one?

3. Because the narrator is male and most of the other characters are female, this

story has the potential to become a stereotypical narrative where a male character saves the day. How does the story avoid that pitfall?

4. The story juxtaposes the memories of childhood with the present of adulthood. In what ways do children perceive things differently than adults? Do you think there are situations in which a child's perspective can be more "truthful" than an adult's?

5. One of Ursula Monkton's main attributes is that she always tries to give people what they want. Why is this not always a good thing? What does Ursula want? How does Ursula use people's desires against them to get what she wants?

6. Water has many roles in this story—it can give and take life, reveal and hide. How does it play these different roles?

7. One of the many motivators for the characters in this story is loneliness. What characters seem to suffer from loneliness? How do adults and children respond to loneliness in different ways? In the same ways?

8. On page 18, the narrator tells us that his father often burnt their toast and always ate it with apparent relish. He also tells us that later in life, his father admitted that he had never actually liked burnt toast, but ate it to avoid waste, and that his father's confession made the narrator's entire childhood feel like a lie: "it was as if one of the pillars of belief that my world had been built upon had crumbled into dry sand." What other "pillars of belief" from childhood does he discover to be false? How do these discoveries affect him? Are there any beliefs from your own childhood that you discovered to be false?

9. When the narrative returns to the present, Old Mrs. Hempstock tells our narrator, "You stand two of you lot next to each other, and you could be continents away for all it means anything" (p. 173). What does she mean by this? Why is it "easier" for people, our narrator especially, to forget certain things that are difficult to reconcile?

10. Though the narrator has a sister, he doesn't seem to be particularly close to her. Why do you think it is that he has trouble relating to other children? Why do you think his sister is not an ally for him?
(Questions issued by the publisher.)

top of page (summary)

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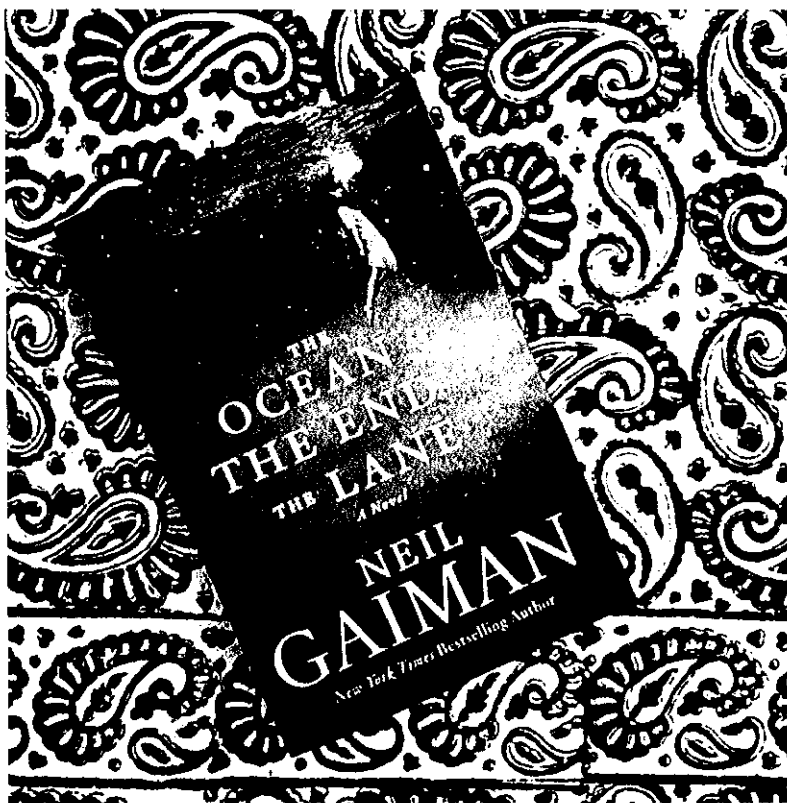
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THE LITERARY LUNCHBOX

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Virtual Book Club: The Ocean At The End Of The Lane By Neil Gaiman

Amina | August 29, 2013



Welcome to the second ever PAPER/PLATES book club meeting! Join in the discussion by leaving comments below this post. This time around, we're discussing Neil Gaiman's latest novel *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. The first book for adults from Gaiman since 2005's *Anansi Boys*, *Ocean* is a middle-aged man's flashback to the horrors and adventures of his childhood. The story is practically believable despite the truly mystical and fantastical events that dance across its pages. It is an exploration of childhood, fear and friendship, among other things, that will make you question and perhaps even confront the things that intimidate you.

Let's discuss *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* in the comments.

Discussion questions

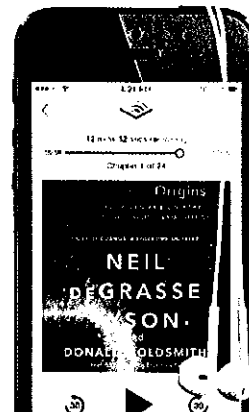
(Warning: spoilers! If you haven't read *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* yet, buy your copy [here](#).)

- Did you like this story? Why or why not?



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- Gaiman describes this as a book for adults. What sets it apart from novels for young adults?
- What were some of the most compelling themes and motifs?
- What role did names play in this novel? Why did the reader never learn the narrator's name?
- How did this novel comment on age?
- How literally did you take the novel (i.e. the hole in his foot)?
- What role did money play?
- Which character did you like the most, and why?
- Did you find the villain scarier in her human or non-human form?
- What does this novel say about memories — their value and their trustworthiness?

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These are just some questions to get you started. Feel free to add your own in the comments! As always, this discussion will be as good as we make it, so please don't hold back in your opinions.

In: Literary

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COMMENTS (6)

Newest First

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Frances O'Brien A year ago

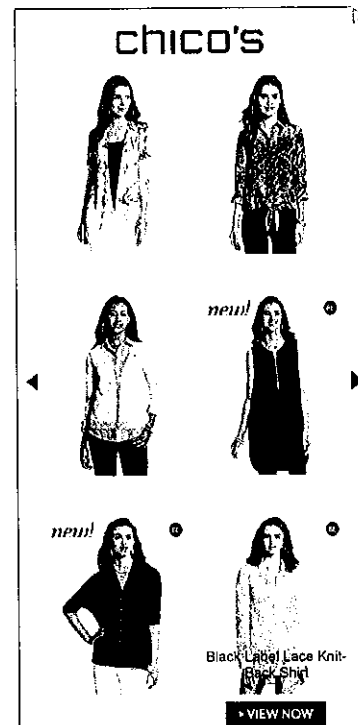
I read this book about a month ago. It will be our neighborhood book for discussion this Tuesday evening. I do not know the answer to these questions: What was the sacrifice that the narrator was not prepared to make in order to defeat evil? Another question that haunts me is: Whose funeral had the narrator been attending and presenting the eulogy before he set out to drive around the country side where he had grown up?

Laura 8 months ago

I wonder if the funeral was for his father. It may have been the event that stirred the childhood memories, no matter how incomplete.

Kimberly Ashley A year ago

I just finished reading this book and really glad I came across it. Two themes that really stuck out to me were perception and memory. It was referred to many times throughout the book that many people see



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things in different ways, and things are not always as they seem. Having the child as a narrator allowed the novel to show how a child would perceive adult problems in a child like way. The narrator viewed Ursula as a monster and a villain as he was trying to cope and make sense of the fact that his father was having an affair with this woman and was essentially tearing their family apart. His friendship with Lettie allowed him to better understand and cope with the issues he was facing within his family by also facing his fears (Ursula). Later, it is learned that the narrator does not remember the events that happened to him as a child, and the elderly woman states throughout the book, it's better that he doesn't.

Throughout the book you also see the deterioration of the relationship between the narrator and his father, showing that the child is also struggling with his new feelings of anger/ pain towards his father while also struggling with handling the affects of the affair.

I feel that this book is best suited for an adult audience as it gives a very unique way to show the differences between how adults and children perceive life events and their different ways of coping and handling such feelings and occurrences.

shares

Kim A year ago

The memory stuff in the book, like Caryn says, is dealt with in a way grown-up readers will better appreciate, but a precious younger reader could still find plenty to enjoy in the story. When I was a child, I had a hard time figuring out why/how books about children were not always FOR children, when it seemed like books about adults were always FOR adults. It seemed rather unfair, that there should be books about kids written for adults, when they already had all the books about grownups.

I thought Ursula Monkton was a purely detestable creature, far more terrifying as a governess than in her true form (which I kind of imagined looking like a sting ray?). I reviled her the way I reviled Dolores Umbridge when I read *The Order of the Phoenix* as a teenager. Props to Gaiman for making me actually hate a fictional character -- it's been a long time since a book has given me so severe a reaction.

The TBR List: August 30 | PAPER/PLATES A year ago

[...] We're discussing Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* in our Virtual Book Club. Stop by and leave a [...]

Caryn A year ago

I actually loved that this was a book meant for adults, narrated by a child. It has never made sense to me how strictly we put books in a box based on their narrator's ages. Even though a child could easily read and enjoy *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, some older life experiences are required to really appreciate the layers in which Gaiman addresses memory, money, and happiness.

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The Ocean at the End of the Lane by Neil Gaiman

He writes for young readers (*Coraline* is a marvel of the writer's craft, a breathtaking adventure for young readers that is utterly terrifying for adults), children (*The Day I Traded My Dad for Two Goldfish* and *The Wolves in the Walls* are characterized by a surreal whimsy that delights readers of Maurice Sendak and his ilk) and short-story aficionados (*A Study in Emerald* is a glorious pastiche of both Sherlock Holmes and the Lovecraftian Cthulhu Mythos).

His two episodes of *Doctor Who* are the finest of the past few seasons, and his 2012 convocation speech at Philadelphia's University of the Arts has become an internet sensation, and was just published as a Chip Kidd-designed hardcover as *Make Good Art*.

Nothing, however, prepares the reader – no matter how devoted, no matter how knowledgeable – for Gaiman's new novel, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. To say that it is his finest book is too easy. It is, but it is also unlike anything he has ever written before. Truth be told, it is unlike anything anyone has ever written before – though it does reside firmly within the mainstream of writing for children and writing about childhood. At heart, it traces the moment that marks the end of childhood innocence and the transition into adulthood.

But while it deals with the stuff of childhood, it is not a children's book. Rather, it uses childhood, and the conventions of writing for children and young adults, for adult ends. Much like Lev Grossman, who, in *The Magicians*, unpacked the tropes of popular fantasy (a college for witches and wizards!) and used *The Magician King* to explore the "wonders" of a beloved fantasy world (his Fillory is the spitting image of Narnia), Gaiman uses and overturns elements of children's literature. In his case, it's a keenly British, Boy's Own-style magical adventure being simultaneously embraced and subverted to reveal truths that the young are (mercifully) ill equipped to understand. As in Stephen King's *It*, or his story *The Body*, which was adapted to film as *Stand By Me*, (and, for that matter, *NOS 4A2*, the stunning new novel by Joe Hill, King's elder son), the discoveries and realizations of childhood are only fully processed and contextualized long after its end.

As parents like to say, "You'll understand when you grow up."

The Ocean at the End of the Lane – which Gaiman originally intended as a short story for his wife, musician Amanda Palmer – draws heavily on Gaiman's own childhood in rural Sussex, England. The novel begins with its unnamed narrator returning to his hometown for a funeral. With a few hours to pass between service and reception, he drives through the town, grown unfamiliar through the passage of years, then out, on a road that becomes more familiar the further he goes: "The slick black road became narrow, windier, became the single-lane track I

remembered from my childhood, became packed earth and knobbly, bone-like flints. ... It felt like I had driven back in time. That lane was how I remembered it, when nothing else was.”

He stops the car at the end of the lane, in front of the Hempstocks’ farmhouse. When he was a boy, the farm was home to Old Mrs. Hempstock, her daughter Mrs. Hempstock, and 11-year-old Lettie Hempstock, who claimed the duck pond in back was the ocean, and that her family had crossed it to come to England. The house, he recalls, was mentioned in the Domesday Book, the 11th-century survey of England, rooting the place in a millennia of history. To the narrator, though, it’s just a house, “in all its dilapidated red-brick glory.” The door is answered by Mrs. Hempstock, who at first the narrator mistakes for her mother; too many years have gone by for Old Mrs. Hempstock to still be the same as he remembers her from his childhood. But that’s not right either: “I remembered Mrs. Hempstock, Lettie’s mother, as a stout woman. This woman was stick-thin, and she looked delicate. She looked like her mother ...”

With this, the narrator, and the reader, are slipping imperceptibly, moment by moment, out of the quotidian world and into something other, something deeper. It’s not quite mythology, not quite fairy tale, not quite dream, though it draws on elements of all three (along with history, literature and the like) for its force. The Hempstock women may be just a farm family, but there are secrets beneath the surface, hints of a past they will not share, powers they are slow to reveal. They will remind readers of the pagan Triple Goddess, manifest as maiden, mother and crone, or of the Fates (who were a crucial element of *The Sandman*), who spin, measure, and cut the thread of life. This resonance, however, may not be conscious; one need not be a scholar of myth or fairy tale to grasp the references. The use of powerful archetypes within such a realistic narrative allows the story to gain power at a sub- (or perhaps super-) logical level: The reader understands deeply, even if she is unable to explain it rationally. Which, in a sense, is a metaphor for the novel’s broader power.

Sitting at the edge of the duck pond, the narrator finds himself remembering pieces of his childhood he had forgotten. As he muses, “Childhood memories are sometimes covered and obscured beneath the things that come later, like childhood toys forgotten at the bottom of a crammed adult closet, but they are never lost for good.”

The Ocean at the End of the Lane is the story of what happened to the narrator at the age of 7, following the death of the opal miner who his family had taken in as a boarder, which leads to his first introduction to the Hempstocks. No, I’m not going to describe what happens; doing so would unnecessarily rob the reader of the singular joy of discovery. Suffice it to say that Gaiman fans will find their faith reaffirmed, their passion rekindled, while newcomers to the writer will understand, within a few dozen pages, just why their geeky friends rave so.

It is a story of brilliant, at times near-crippling, emotional resonance. Gaiman captures, with deceptive simplicity and writerly prestidigitation, the full flavour of childhood, and the lingering, bittersweet pain of its loss. We can all recall how huge and wondrous the world seemed when we were children, and how small, and at times helpless, we felt within it. It is that memory, elusive and often incomprehensible, that informs our adult feeling, in darker moments, that the world is too small, too flat, too grey. We may be large, but the world we live in is tiny.

Or so it seems, until we are reminded that there was once an ocean in a duck pond, that there were worlds on the other side of the fence we could explore, simply by crossing that border. Without a wrong word, or an overblown sentiment, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is such a reminder. Through Gaiman's words, we become the children we once were, the innocents we assumed we had lost, this time bringing the awareness of our adult lives with us. That depth, that understanding, makes our innocence all the more precious.

Of course, we must lose it again. That is, after all, what *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is about – and yes, you will suffer that pain, that bittersweet tearing of the heart – but the reminder lingers. And lingers. And in the aftermath, in the time after the pages close, the world is a brighter, stranger, bigger place.

Victoria writer Robert J. Wiersema is the author of *Before I Wake* and *Bedtime Story*.

June 27, 2013

It All Floods Back

By BENJAMIN PERCY

THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE

By Neil Gaiman

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“Childhood memories are sometimes covered and obscured beneath the things that come later, like childhood toys forgotten at the bottom of a cramped adult closet,” Neil Gaiman writes in his slim, dark dream of a new novel, “The Ocean at the End of the Lane.” “But they are never lost for good.” Who we used to be sometimes seems like a faint shadow of who we are now, but Gaiman helps us remember the wonder and terror and powerlessness that owned us as children.

The novel begins when a man, the narrator, returns to his childhood home in Sussex, England, where he long ago knew a girl named Lettie Hempstock. When he rambles through her farm, when he follows the trail to the duck pond, he might as well be traveling through time. Memories are waiting all around, beckoning him, and when he tosses a hazelnut into the water, the ripples carry across his mind as he remembers “everything.”

First, that he and Lettie used to call the pond the ocean. Anyone who has ever returned to a childhood home after so many years knows how small everything seems now, how outsize everything seemed then. A king bed turns out to be a twin. A cavernous fort turns out to be

a cramped, dusty burrow beneath the stairs. An ocean turns out to be a duck pond.

Or maybe not. Maybe it actually is the ocean. And maybe Lettie's grandmother really can make the moon full every night, maybe she *has* been alive long enough to have witnessed the Big Bang.

When the narrator remembers his life 40-odd years ago, when he was 7, he remembers magic. A magic first unleashed by a lodger who steals the family car, drives to the end of the lane, runs a hose from the tailpipe to the window and fills his lungs with smoke. The suicide stirs ancient powers, chief among them a nanny named Ursula Monkton, who appears sometimes as a beautiful gray-eyed woman and other times as a "thing" with a face like ragged rotting cloth and limbs like broken mainsails.

Ursula seduces the narrator's family, and he is the only one who recognizes her as a monster. His sole hope lies at the end of the lane, where the powerful good-hearted Hempstocks live — 11-year-old Lettie, her mother and grandmother — on a farm that is a portal to other worlds.

The narrator is frightened, as you would expect, but he has been frightened his whole life; he sleeps with the door open and the hallway light on. He has been alone, too; no one comes to his seventh birthday party. We all know the vulnerability of childhood, when terrors lurked in the dark and bossy, moody adults judged our every move like impossible gods. This novel is at its most powerful and frightening when it exaggerates that defenselessness, as when the father kicks down the door of the bathroom, fills the tub with cold water and shoves his disobedient boy beneath the surface while

Ursula observes them with her rotting-cloth eyes. “People kept pulling their faces off to reveal new faces beneath,” the narrator observes of the adults in his life.

He finds consolation in books, in adventures and fantasies. They offer him the cues and answers the human world cannot. Lewis Carroll is quoted more than once, appropriate given Gaiman’s Mad Hatter imagination and the novel’s rabbit hole imaginings. “They taught me most of what I knew about what people did, about how to behave. They were my teachers and my advisers.”

Gaiman has said much the same in interviews, and it’s interesting to consider how he and other fantasy writers have inherited and revised the genre. Anyone attracted to fairy tales and fables should check out the stories and criticism of Kate Bernheimer. I’ll bastardize some of her thoughts here by saying that the fairy tale normalizes magic. If a baby turns into a pig or a wolf speaks in a pleasing baritone or a star descends from the sky and changes into an elderly woman with three wishes to spare, the characters do not question the illogic of the circumstances but freely accept that the surreal is real.

Rarely does someone say, “This can’t be happening,” in a Karen Russell story, a Kevin Brockmeier story, an Aimee Bender or Matt Bell story. Because Gaiman’s adult narrator is unreliable — he admits to chasms in his memory — and because he is describing his adventures as a fanciful 7-year-old who spends his days lost in books, the reader can effortlessly accept the extraordinary made ordinary. Whether it is real, or the wild dreams of childhood, doesn’t matter so much. Because to a child the jungle gym is a pirate ship, the

shadow in the closet is a monster, the pennies in the belly of the piggy bank *are* gold. Imagination is reality.

As a writer, there are two ways you can go about this. Give in to whimsy. Let the imagination run free. Werewolves attend boarding school (as in Russell's "St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves"); a black obelisk descends on Earth (Brockmeier's "Ceiling").

Alternately, you can try to persuade the reader that magic is perfectly reasonable. Patrick Rothfuss, whose fantasy novels rival those of George R. R. Martin, spends a great deal of time explaining his magic system. There is an almost slippery science behind the spells and potions, so convincingly described the reader feels enchantment within reach.

I wondered about this — whimsy versus logic — when reading Gaiman. It feels rather curmudgeonly to say, but I'm not sure you can have it both ways. Gaiman talks about "Dark Matter, the material of the universe that makes up everything that must be there but we cannot find," and riffs his way into a kind of quantum physics school of magic. This aligns nicely with the Hempstocks' ability to snip out pieces of time, channel energy, remember the Big Bang. But then something more whimsical will pop up, as when a character mentions that Cousin Japeth "went off to fight in the Mouse Wars." That sort of silliness feels like a slight to the more substantial world-building Gaiman has achieved.

Though marketed to adults, this book would be equally at home on a young adult bookshelf. Aside from one scene of sex (described abstractly and confusedly through the eyes of a 7-year-old), it feels like a family-friendly nightmare, its tenor akin to that of Gaiman's

Newbery-winning “Graveyard Book.” The two novels are close cousins in other ways as well. A young boy faces horror and finds himself expelled from his family, alone and insecure. He befriends a girl who grants him access to another world. He finds sanctuary in a supernatural family. He flirts with supernatural powers that aren’t fully reachable to them. And in the end, as the protagonists grow into men, they lose their ability to access the extraordinary.

This is not a reductive summary — each novel is a distinct treasure — but an effort to highlight a preoccupation: Gaiman is especially accomplished in navigating the cruel, uncertain dreamscape of childhood.

There is a moment, toward the end of this novel, when the narrator drops into the duck pond (or ocean, as the Hempstocks call it), and his mind melts and achieves a kind of transcendent understanding: “I saw the world I had walked since my birth and I understood how fragile it was, that the reality I knew was a thin layer of icing on a great dark birthday cake writhing with grubs and nightmares and hunger.”

Which replicates the experience I have whenever reading one of Gaiman’s books. His mind is a dark fathomless ocean, and every time I sink into it, this world fades, replaced by one far more terrible and beautiful in which I will happily drown.

Benjamin Percy’s new novel, “Red Moon,” was published in May.

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June 10, 2013

Uncharted Waters: Joe Hill Explores Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

By Robin A. Rothman

*Editors Note: As you'll see from the first line of his introduction through to his last fantastic question, horror author Joe Hill has tremendous respect for Neil Gaiman's work. In this exclusive discussion of Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*--one of our own top picks for June's *Best Books of the Month*--Hill explores both the real and the imaginary inspirations behind some of the novels most compelling details.*



by Joe Hill

You know the facts already, and if you don't, man, have you missed out:

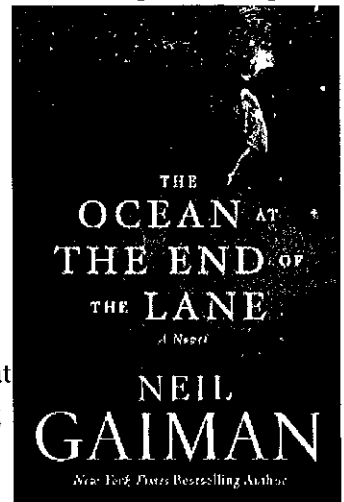
If Neil Gaiman wrote nothing but *Sandman*, his award-winning comic series, he would still have the stature of a Bradbury or a Tolkien. *Sandman* was not just the best, most daring, and most moving comic of its time; it was and is probably the best, daringest, movingest comic of any time.

Gaiman followed with an epic, *American Gods*, which--along with Michael Chabon's *The Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, and Jonathan Letham's *Fortress of Solitude*--shattered the

artificial barrier between genre and literature, inspiring the best writers of my own generation to slip the shackles of realism and take a chance on fantasy. *Gods* was a kind of uncorking and a flood of fever-dreams poured forth afterward. *Coraline* was only the scariest book for children ever written, and it led to a phantasmagoric movie that soars like a modern Wizard of Oz. *The Graveyard Book* reads like if Charles Addams wrote *The Jungle Book*, and deservedly was awarded the Newbery Medal. And Gaiman's episodes of *Doctor Who* stand among the most keenly felt and inventive chapters in that show's storied 50-year history.

So now here is *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*--an overpowering work of the imagination, a quietly devastating masterpiece, and Gaiman's most personal novel to date. I had a chance to talk to him about it. Here are some things we said:

Joe Hill: Not long after a grotesque and tragic shock, the young boy at the heart of the novel meets Lettie Hempstock, her mother, and her grandmother. We soon discover that Old Mrs. Hempstock can snip bits out of time; Lettie's mother can see things happening elsewhere; and at one point, Lettie herself can be found hauling around an ocean in a bucket. These aren't the first women to wander through your stories, deforming reality as they go. Would the story have been different if it was a house of three guys? Could that even have worked?



Neil Gaiman: It would have worked, yes, although it would have been a very different sort of book. The farm men I knew as a boy were a taciturn lot, and they weren't much for talking. I like that the Hempstock women are chatty, and welcoming.



I think I got to take all the things I loved about my grandmothers' kitchens when I was a boy, the



feeling that food was always there and that always somehow meant family and meant love, and transmute that into something rather stranger. And less Jewish.

I went for the women partly because I liked the idea of grandmotherly energy, and because the original inspiration for the Hempstock family, when I was about 8 years old, was having read a story of Henry Kuttner's called "Pile of Trouble" about the Hogben family, an Appalachian family of mutants--and all the Hogbens were men. (There is a Ma Hogben, but she never says or does much.) I thought about the farm down our lane that was mentioned in the Domesday Book, and wondered what would happen if the people who lived there had been there for the last thousand years. So the Hempstocks had been composting in my head since I was a small boy, waiting for their story to be told. Sometimes other Hempstocks would show up in other books, but they weren't the real Hempstocks, the ones in the farm at the end of the lane.

JH: Have there been women in your life who seemed especially prone to warping reality?

NG: My wife, Amanda, is terribly good at warping reality. She is like a bowling ball on a rubber sheet, and you find yourself living in her universe, doing things that are completely unexpected or unimaginable for you, but you blink and you're up on a stage singing, or wearing a peculiar wig, or writing a book filled with feelings and emotion, or doing something equally as unlikely.

My daughters, Holly and Maddy, are each good at warping reality in their own unique ways. Maddy's world is prettier and simpler than mine, Holly's has more hats in it.

JH: There's another woman in this story who goes nibbling holes out of our world: Ursula Monkton, who comes to work as a nanny--a kind of anti-Mary Poppins--for our hero's parents. But really, why is Ursula Monkton so bad? She only wants to help people!

NG: I agree with you. And Ursula Monkton, wherever she is, agrees with you a lot. It's just that people are fragile, and the ways Ursula wants to help them are ways that break them, or drive them to madness, or worse. It's one thing to want money, but if you find yourself choking on a coin as you wake, the money is slightly less desirable.

Ursula Monkton (or, as I tend to think of her, the thing that calls herself Ursula Monkton) was a glorious and scary thing to write, and she took me by surprise. The Ocean at the End of the Lane was going to be a short story until Ursula Monkton decided to follow our hero home...

JH: How much of The Ocean at the End of the Lane is invention... and how much is the remembered truth of your own childhood?

NG: Imagine a mosaic picture of a house in the country: lots of red and blue and yellow and black and brown and white and a dozen different shades of green tiles which make a beautiful picture if you stand back far enough.

All the little red squares are true--true things, true places, true feelings. But the red squares aren't the picture. All the rest of it is lies and stories, often within the same sentence.

I hoped that I was able to write an emotional truth, but even though the landscape of the story is the landscape of my childhood, the family isn't really my family, and none of the things that happened to our hero happened to me. Well, none of the big things, anyway. I didn't even know why our white Mini went away until over thirty years after it happened.

JH: Our hero has only a single weapon to hold back the darkness--his books. What were your weapons as a child?

NG: Books. They were more of an armour and an escape route than they ever were a weapon, really, though. Books are defensive, not offensive (unless you're the puzzled adult trying to make the kid with the book interact). I loved all books that I could read, and I never knew if I was ready for it until I tried to read it, so I tried to read everything. My mother had lots of her childhood books on our bookshelves, so I read those and had great fun putting imaginary versions of them into Ocean.

There were other weapons. I was bright, and I could use that as a weapon: words can wound, whatever those sticks and stones sayings claim about them never hurting, and I could use them if I had to.

I really wanted a catapult, because kids in books had catapults, but they were regarded as things you could put people's eyes out with, and I do not believe I ever had a catapult.

JH: It was only after I finished the novel that I realized--with quite a bit of shock--that the narrator doesn't have a name. He remains, throughout, an indefinite 'I.' And we are told early in the story that names have power and special significance; they can be used against you. Who is this guy? Does he even know himself?

NG: I'm sure he knows his name. In the first draft, in the handwritten manuscript, Ursula Monkton calls him by his name, but I took that out in the second draft. It seemed right that he's--not nameless, but has no reason to tell us his name.

Names do have power in this book, and naming things and people was something that fascinated me. None of his family have names, after all. They just have roles.

JH: There's a lot of wonderful food writing in this book. I had to put the thing down several times to rummage desperately through my fridge. Can you give us the recipe for the Hempstocks' lemon pancakes? Please don't let that part be make-believe.

NG: There is no make-believe in cooking. There were few things I took as much fun in cooking, when I was a boy, as pancakes. (I liked making toffee, too, because it was a little like a science experiment.)

Right. The night before you are going to make them, you mix:

1 cup of ordinary white flour

2 eggs

a pinch of salt

2 1/2 cups of milk and water (a cup and a half of milk and a cup of water mixed)

1 tablespoon of either vegetable oil or melted butter

(You'll also need some granulated sugar, and a couple of lemons to put on the pancakes, along with other things like jams and possibly even maple syrup because you're American.)

Put the flour and salt in a mixing bowl. Crack the eggs in and whisk/fork the egg into the flour. Slowly add the milk/water mixture, stirring as you go, until there are no lumps and you have a liquid the consistency of a not too thick cream.

Then put the mixture in the fridge overnight.

Grease or butter or oil a non-stick frying pan. Heat it until it's really hot (377 degrees according to one website, but basically, it has to be hot for the pancake to become a pancake. And these are crepes, French style, not thick American round pancakes).

Stir the mixture you just took from the fridge thoroughly because the flour will all be at the bottom. Get an even, consistency.

Then ladle some mixture into the pan, thinly covering the whole of the base of the pan. When the base is golden, flip it (or, if you are brave, toss it). Cook another 30 seconds on the other side.

For reasons I do not quite understand (although pan heat is probably the reason), the first one is always a bit

disappointing. Often it's a burnt, sludgy, weird thing, (always, in my family, eaten by the cook) (which was me). Just keep going, and the rest will be fine.

Sprinkle sugar in the middle. And then squeeze some lemon juice in, preferably from a lemon. Then wrap it like a cigar and feed it to a child.

(You can experiment with other things in the middle, like Nutella, or jam, or even maple syrup--but remember that these pancakes are not syrup-absorbent like American style pancakes.)

This is a very peculiar interview, Joe. Let me know how the pancakes come out.

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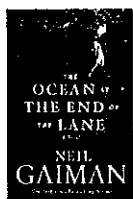
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by Neil Gaiman

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Neil Gaiman, one of the world's most beloved fantasy authors, has won the Hugo and Bram Stoker awards, and the Newberry Medal — and now he's written his first novel for adults in eight years.

The Ocean at the End of the Lane opens with an Englishman — never named — who returns to the Sussex town where he grew up. More specifically, he returns to the house he lived in as a boy, and suddenly, he's lost in memories of the time his family's lodger (a down-on-his-luck opal miner) stole their car, ran over their cat, and accidentally woke up a dark energy that threatened to swamp the world. Luckily for both the boy and the world, a

slightly older girl named Lettie Hempstock, who lived at the titular end of the lane, stepped in to save the day.

Before all that happens, though, the miner replaces poor little kitten Fluffy with an older, snarlier cat — a sort of metaphor for the overall story. "This is a book that, on the outside, could appear very cute," Gaiman tells NPR's Scott Simon. "I actually had to decide, well, there's a lot of stuff in here that kids would like, but it's obviously not a children's book, even though it has the lovely fluffy stuff, it has claws."

Interview Highlights

On deciding to make *Ocean* an adult book

"Really, I kept a sort of open mind until I got to the very end, and then looked at what I'd done. ... It was meant to be just about looking out at the world through the kind of eyes that I had when I was 7, from the kind of landscape that I lived in when I was 7. And then it just didn't quite stop. I kept writing it, and it wasn't until I got to the end that I realized I'd actually written a novel. ... I thought — it's really not a kids' story — and one of the biggest reasons it's not a kids' story is, I feel that good kids' stories are all about hope. In the case of *Ocean at the End of the Lane*, it's a book about helplessness. It's a book about family, it's a book about being 7 in a world of people who are bigger than you, and more dangerous, and stepping into territory that you don't entirely understand."

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On being the little boy who lived in books

"When I was 7, my proudest possession would have been my bookshelf 'cause I had alphabetized all of the books on my bookshelf. I'd got to the point where I'd persuaded my parents to let me go to the local library in my summer holidays, and they would actually drop me off with sandwiches at the library, and I would just head into the children's department at the back and just start reading my way through it. It was the best place in the world."

On being a journalist

"I was never a very good journalist, but I loved being a journalist, and I loved it because it taught me two really, really important things about writing. It taught me

compression: If I was interviewing somebody, and I talked to them, and I'd wind up with 3,000 words, 4,000 words, and I'd need to get that down, I learned how to compress what they'd said while still keeping speech patterns, which became incredibly important later when I was writing comics. And even more important than that, I learned about deadlines.

"I do remember once, getting a phone call one evening from an editor, saying, 'Your book review, it's due in tomorrow.' And I said, 'No no no no no, it's due in on Tuesday.' And they said, 'Yes, today is Monday.' And I hadn't written it, and I looked around the room and I couldn't see the book. And I said, 'What happens if I don't get it in?' And they said, 'Well, then we'd have a blank page, and we'd have to run a little photograph of you, with your address and your telephone number that anybody could call up if they wanted to find out what that book was like.' And that concentrated the mind wonderfully."

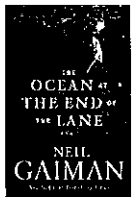
On writing in different voices

"That's part of the job, I think ... when I was growing up, some of my favorite writers, the people I respected the most, were the ones who did everything, you know. A good writer should be able to write comedic work that made you laugh, and scary stuff that made you scared, and fantasy or science fiction that imbued you with a sense of wonder, and mainstream journalism that gave you clear and concise information in a way that you wanted it. It always seemed to me that that was what a writer should do. You have all these amazing tools; it's up to you what kinds of tunes you play on them, and you want to play all the tunes. As I grew older, I was fascinated to realize that actually, society to some extent frowns on those of us who like messing about in an awful lot of different sandboxes. From my perspective, I just love being able to do everything. I think a good writer should be able to do everything. And if you can't do everything brilliantly, at least you should have a bash."

A Deceptively Simple Tale Of Magic And Peril In 'Ocean'

by ANNALEE NEWITZ

June 17, 2013 2:00 PM ET



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With *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, best-selling fantasy author Neil Gaiman has written his first adult novel in almost a decade. It's a deceptively simple tale that feels like escapism — until you realize that it isn't.

Ocean is told from the point of view of a melancholy but successful artist returning to his childhood home in Sussex, England. On a lark, he visits an old farm where he played as a boy, and is suddenly overwhelmed by memories of being entangled in a magical conflict with roots stretching back before the Big Bang.

When he was 7, our unnamed protagonist spent all his time memorizing Gilbert and Sullivan songs, reading countless books and playing with his new kitten. Though fantasy worlds help him escape from the indifference of his family and classmates, he can't help but notice that things are rough in the adult world. Like many other people in the neighborhood, his parents

are strapped for money. To make ends meet, they have to take in boarders.

One of those borders is a down-on-his luck gambler who kills the boy's kitten in an accident, and shortly thereafter kills himself in the family car. These tragedies unleash an ancient malevolence that seems to feed on the town's collective, gnawing desire for money — with disastrous results, especially for our protagonist. But they also bring him into contact with an 11-year-old (or maybe billion-year-old) girl named Lettie Hempstock, who lives with her mother and grandmother on an old farm at the end of the eponymous lane.

Gaiman evokes feelings of warmth and safety as ably as he does anxious terror, and the Hempstock farm is ground zero for everything comforting in the boy's life. Gaiman hints that it might even be the safest spot in the whole universe. Lettie and her family are kindly creatures who exist outside of time, partly in order to prevent destruction from malevolences like the one unleashed by the suicide.

The struggle between Lettie's family and this evil force takes on darkly beautiful, dreamlike proportions. But every fantasy scenario is shot through with the tragedies of human reality, and even as the magic builds, so too does our knowledge that this boy and his family are deeply broken in ways that are all too mundane.

More Neil
Gaiman



This is a fairly short novel in a genre known for its doorstoppers (including Gaiman's own *American Gods*), and that's to its



Author
Interviews
**Gaiman's
New
'Ocean' Is
No Kiddie
Pool**



Author
Interviews
**Interview:
Neil
Gaiman
Turns His
Grad
Speech Into
'Good Art'**

**Interview: Neil Gaiman's
Ghostly Baby-Sitters
Club** Oct. 17, 2008

benefit: The story is tightly plotted and exciting. Reading it feels a lot like diving into an extremely smart, morally ambiguous fairy tale. And indeed, Gaiman's adult protagonist observes at one point that fairy tales aren't for kids or grownups — they're just stories. In Gaiman's version of the fairy tale, his protagonist's adult and child perspectives are interwoven seamlessly, giving us a sense of how he experienced his past at that time, as well as how it affected him for the rest of his life.

Perhaps the one problem in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is that we never quite understand why Lettie decides to protect our protagonist. Does she feel sorry for him? Is he especially imaginative and brave? Or do the Hempstocks simply go through a phase where they bond with a random human? We never know — and the narrator never knows either.

But this mystery, though frustrating, is also the source of this book's bittersweet emotional power. Now in his middle age, the protagonist has to ask himself whether his simple, mortal life justified a magical showdown. Like all the fantastical ideas in *Ocean*, this one has a real-world analogue. None of us ever really knows whether the people we become as adults are worth the love and protection given to us when we were too young to repay it in kind. And we have to grow old and die without ever knowing the answer. This is a novel

that manages to balance frenetic action with wistful self-knowledge
— never missing a beat.

Read an excerpt of *The Ocean At The End Of The Lane*

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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

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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 "Troll Bridge"; 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, for "How to Talk to Girls at Parties," 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*; Locus Award for Best Short Story, 2012, for "The Case of Death and Honey"; Audible.co.uk Audiobook of the Year, Specsavers National Book Awards, and Specsavers Book of the Year, both 2013, both for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*.

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: Michael Richard, Holly Miranda, Madeleine Rose Elvira. **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*.
- (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.

"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-Guipill (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.

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.

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 Avary) *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.

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.
- (Co-illustrator) *The Dreaming: Beyond the Shores of Night*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1997.
- (Co-illustrator) *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 (pt. 1), Rob Leigh (pt. 2), Phil Balsman (pts. 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. Contributor to *The Sandman Companion*, DC Comics (New York, NY), 1999, and has contributed prefaces and introductions to several books. Gaiman's works, including the short story "Troll Bridge," have been represented in numerous anthologies. Contributor to newspapers and magazines, including *Knave*, *Punch*, *Observer*, *Sunday Times* (London, England) 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 Blindings*, 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; *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. 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).

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. This 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, actor/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 Incorrigible 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 reader, 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 quickly remarrying 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--that the Frost Giant has changed into an eagle, a fox, and a wolf because he, the Frost Giant, 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 by 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 further 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." Barthelmess also thought that young readers "will devour this one, with or without milk." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic also had a high assessment of this 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 Ray 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." Likewise, a *Publishers Weekly* writer felt that Gaiman "has crafted a fresh story of magic, humanity, loyalty, and memories." *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."

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."

He noted that, in *Sandman*, even readers unfamiliar with the Norse god Loki or the three-headed spirit of Irish mythology "sort of half-know; there's a gentle and sort of delightful familiarity with these tales. It feels right. And I think that's probably the most important thing. Giving people this stuff, pointing out that it can be interesting, but also pointing out what mythologies do know. And how they affect us." 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."

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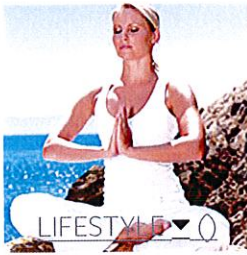
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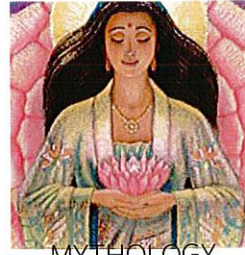
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THE GODDESS MECA BLOG

The Triple Goddess Myth

POSTED BY MARY ON SATURDAY 07 SEPTEMBER 2013 IN THE MYTHOLOGY CATEGORY.

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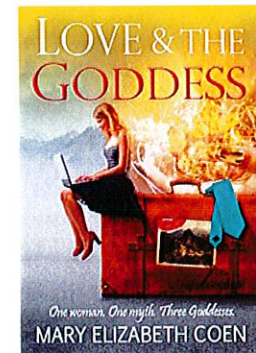
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The Triple Goddess by Susan Seddon Boulet

MY BOOK



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The Triple goddess myth is one of the most enduring and fascinating of the Greek myths. Anyone wishing to understand female archetypes will be drawn to this story. It's the reason I wanted to include references to it in my debut novel 'Love & the Goddess'.

Who are they?

The three goddesses Persephone, Demeter and Hekate are the original triple goddess, each an aspect of the one great goddess:- Persephone the maiden, Demeter the mother and Hekate the crone or older goddess. They also represent the three phases of a woman's life and are regarded as archetypes common to all women.

This is a simplified version of their story: -

Demeter, goddess of the harvest was respected as an earlier version of mother earth; - As a nurturing mother, she generously tended to the earth in order that we mortals could enjoy the benefits of her rich harvest all year round. Demeter's daughter Persephone enjoyed helping her mother and often accompanied her as she worked in managing the soil, crops and nature itself.

As Persephone matured, she grew into a beautiful young woman, catching the eye of would be suitors. One day while helping her mother, she wandered off into a meadow to pick some wild flowers. Distracted by the colours and beauty of the flowers, she did not notice the ground abruptly opening behind her. Hades, god of the underworld had been watching for an opportunity to seize her for his bride. Out of a hole in the earth he sprang from his chariot to snatch her, slinging her over his shoulder to drag her down into the underworld, land of the dead. After they disappeared the hole covered over leaving no trace for anyone to see where Hades had emerged from.



(http://www.goddessmeca.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/hades_and_persephone_by_merensheritra-d32wy3c.jpg)
The original Beauty & the Beast - Hades and Persephone

Distraught when she could not find her daughter, Demeter wandered throughout the earth trying to find out what had happened to her child. Since Zeus king of the Gods was the father of Persephone she implored him to assist her, but he would not interfere since he did not wish to meddle in the affairs of Hades, who was also his brother.

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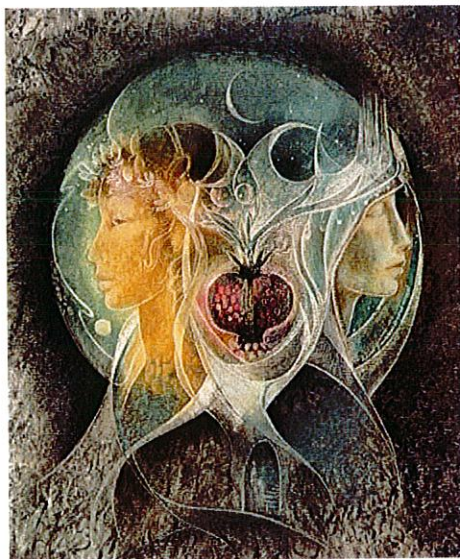
Demeter met the crone Hekate, goddess of the dark side of the moon and patroness of witches. Hekate told her that she had heard Persephone calling out one day, and that Helios the sun god confirmed he had seen Persephone's abduction by Hades. Demeter went off to complain to Zeus who refused to intervene, so Demeter withdrew from her role as goddess. Without her, no crops could grow and the resulting famine threatened the extinction of the human race.



(http://www.goddessmeca.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/img_hekate.jpg)
The goddess Hekate from an ancient Greek image.

Eventually Zeus declared that Hades would have to let Persephone go. Hades argued that if she had eaten anything while in the underworld she would not be able to return to earth. Since Persephone had eaten six pomegranate seeds, it was agreed that she would have to spend six months every year in the underworld as the bride of Hades, but she could return to earth for the remaining half of the year. While Persephone is in the underworld, her mother mourns and refuses to allow crops to grow until she welcomes her daughter back again. Such is the explanation for the lack of growth we encounter in the earth during Autumn and Winter. In contrast Spring and Summer see a time of renewal when Persephone returns to be with her mother.

For more information read my blog **Goddess in the Greek Pantheon:** -
<http://tinyurl.com/m4svwbo>



(<http://www.goddessmeca.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/PersephoneDemeter.jpg>)
Demeter & Persephone by Susan Seddon Boulet

The story is simple yet the complexity lies in the character of each goddess. Persephone represents youth and innocence on the one hand (our inner child), yet there is a suggestion of lost innocence in her abduction – and some would say the 'rape' by Hades. Demeter represents the Mother archetype, nurturing and caring. Hekate represents the older wiser woman with the alchemical power to transform the trials of life, grief and sorrow into the gold of wisdom.

All three goddesses of the Greek Pantheon have extremely strong connections to the three worlds; – the underworld is observed in the person of Hades and the themes of sex, loss and death. Metaphors linking them to Earth are maternal values, nurturing and the Earth itself. Their connection to the metaphysical or upper world lies in the themes of rebirth, healing/transformation, magic, dreams and prophecy figuring prominently in their myths.

Persephone, Demeter and Hekate are shining examples of the true nature of the great Goddess, understanding the light and dark elements of life and death. They are independent and extremely powerful. We, as women all embody the maiden, mother and crone.

Take the Goddess quiz to find out your prominent archetype:- <http://tinyurl.com/k57lktz>

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