

Trigger Warning Study Guide

Trigger Warning by Neil Gaiman

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Plot Summary

Trigger Warning is the 3rd collection of short fiction by Neil Gaiman, celebrated author of such works as *The Sandman*, *The Graveyard Book*, and *Coraline*. Trigger Warning contains not just short stories but some poetry as well. In the Introduction, Gaiman explains that the themes that connect the majority of the works within the text are death, abuse, and fear. He goes on to explain that these themes are examples of things that generally warrant trigger warnings at the beginning of possibly offensive or troubling fiction.

The majority of the works within the text are stand-alone pieces of fiction and not connected to any of Gaiman's previous works. "Black Dog" is the sole exception. The protagonist of "Black Dog" is Shadow Moon, the main character of Gaiman's 2001 novel, *American Gods*. "Black Dog" story takes place a year after the events of the aforementioned novel, nevertheless the story can be understood without having read the previous prior text.

Inversely, the story "Nothing O' Clock," takes place within the universe of the BBC's popular science fiction program "Doctor Who." Due to this, the story in question may be hard to understand without prior knowledge of the show.

There are four poems within the book. The first, "Making a Chair," uses an extended simile, comparing the act of writing to building a manufactured chair. "My Last Landlady," is a character's recollection of his encounter with a deranged landlady. The penultimate poem, "Observing the Formalities," regards the nature of certain human practices and how they are simply unnecessary formalities. The final poem is "In Relig Odhrain," a retelling of a story about a sixth-century Irish Saint.

The remainder of the works are quite different in subject matter and form. For example, "A Calendar of Tales" is the result of an experimental and collaborative writing project involving Twitter-based content suggestions. The form of the piece "Orange" is quite peculiar as well. The implied setting of the work is some sort of interrogation, and interestingly, the reader is only privy to the answers of the character, Jemima Glorfindel Petula Ramsey. In addition, the story "The Return of the Thin White Duke," is based off of one the alter-egos of famous recording artist David Bowie.

The remainder of the works generally follow the standard short story format of a shorter but complete work of prose that tells at least one complete plot. Some, like "The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains" (which was previously published as a short graphic novel) and The others are typical of Neil Gaiman's other work—stories of the supernatural, the weird, and the deadly.



Introduction

Summary

Gaiman begins his Introduction by discussing the nature of triggers. These triggers are words or subjects that may cause one to feel uncomfortable. Gaiman describes them as “monsters in the cupboard” that everyone has somewhere within their mind. He states that having trigger warnings in works meant for children is acceptable, but continues on by claiming that trigger warnings for adults are completely unnecessary. This is because these triggers serve a purpose. They help make us more aware of the world regardless of how much they may hurt us. He ends this section by giving the reader his own trigger warning, by stating that the works within contain things such as violence, abuse, and cruelty (just to name a few).

In the final section of Gaiman’s Introduction, he recalls the directions that a flight attendant once gave to him and the other travelers. These directions were the standard “put on and secure your mask before assisting others.” He argues that people already wear masks when we interact with others and that we should help others regardless of this. This section ends with a very short piece of fiction about a creature called the Shadder, who only strikes when it is its victim’s time.

Analysis

In his introduction, the author is adding his voice to the trigger warning argument. This is a controversy that has been argued in many places, from the publishing house to the university. The basis of this argument is simple: should teachers or authors include trigger warnings before teaching or beginning a book? Many argue that these warnings are evidence of society’s increasing sensitivity. Gaiman states that they should not exist in adult texts, because a warning makes what would be considered the trigger much less effective. The triggers help form us while possibly hurting us, and this is a part of life. Interestingly enough, Gaiman then includes a trigger warning for his readers. The warning is rather general and, given what has preceded it, seems to be a satirical or ironic gesture.

The symbolism of “The Shadder” is the driving force for this particular work. We do not see the Shadder, even though it is always present during every part of our life. At some point, the Shadder will strike us, but only when we are ready for it. The Shadder is a symbolic representation of death. Essentially, the Shadder is inevitable just like death. This implies a sort of supernatural predestination regarding death; the human has little-to-no control over when the Shadder, or death, takes them. The author seems to leave out that people themselves can cause death through their own willful acts, such as the cases of murder or suicide.



Discussion Question 1

What is at stake when issuing a trigger warning, according to Gaiman?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Gaiman chose to include a trigger warning immediately after criticizing their use?

Discussion Question 3

What is the model of death that "The Shadder" represents? What does this model assume about death? What role do people have in death according to this model?

Vocabulary

profound, continuum, anthology, hodgepodge, forage



“Making a Chair”

Summary

“Making a Chair,” the first poem in the book, compares the act of writing fiction to that of making a chair. The speaker is a writer who is preparing to write a novel. The speaker describes that he did, in fact, construct the chair in the room he is in. He goes on to describe the steps that he took, such as using the screws and adjusting the armrests (this is not easy). A radio is playing in the room and an Orson Wells broadcast is playing on it. His character, Henry Lime, meets a woman and other characters, has sex with the woman and solves the mystery all within the time span of the program. The speaker ends the poem by stating that writing a book should come with directions, just like a chair. The writer explains that he will finish the book just as he finished making the chair; he will follow the warnings on the directions (like a chair has) and complete his task.

Analysis

In the poem, the speaker uses an extended simile to explain the hurdles that exist when writing a book. The writer makes it very clear that these hurdles exist, by first mentioning that sometimes the manufacturer gives you the wrong sized screws. This could symbolize a variety of things, from the relationship between the writer’s ability and the task, or perhaps the difficulty for some people to write within certain genres. The connection between the Orson Wells program and the act of writing is temporal. You can do many things during the span of a radio program as it is edited and written with time in mind. The author could mean two things by this. First, that it takes quite a long time to write a book, or that novels take much longer to give the narrative or meaning to the reader. Finally, the writer acknowledges the warnings because there are things you should not do with a book or a chair.

The structure of this poem is rather straightforward but does involve some repetition. The author begins many of the poem’s lines with “I” and “and.” This structure seems to correspond with the repetition found in the directions one would find in the directions to building a chair. As this repetition is involved in the speaker’s writing and also within the directions to building a chair, the speaker makes it even more explicit that the act of writing is like making a chair. This first poem also sets the precedent for Gaiman’s further use of enjambment within his poems.

Discussion Question 1

Do you agree that writing is like building a chair? Is there a better simile for this?



Discussion Question 2

What do you think the speaker truly means about the warnings on the directions in reference to writing?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe writing a book should come with directions or is it too abstract?

Vocabulary

dame, penetrate



“A Lunar Labyrinth”

Summary

The speaker in this story is a traveler who enjoys visiting roadside attractions. The attractions he has seen before are quite dull, such as a Stonehenge-like structure made of tires. However, his favorite attractions are “dead places.” The speaker recalls seeing a footnote on a travel website referencing something called the Lunar Labyrinth. He searches for this and eventually finds and hires a guide to show him to the labyrinth.

They begin the journey while the moon is barely visible in the night sky. During the walking trip, the guide begins to tell the narrator about the history of the labyrinth; the local townsfolk, both young and old, able and disabled would venture through the maze until the full moon was in the sky. The young children of the town would stay away due to a rumor that a child saw a “torturer.” The visitors would do a variety of things in the cave, such as have sex, visit the fountain in the center, and if they were older children, try to scare each other. He briefly mentions the story of Theseus, seemingly for no particular reason.

The “cripples” who visited the maze would choose their own path, rather than having their caretakers guide them. After speaking about the disabled visitors, the guide somewhat changes subjects. He tells the narrator that his sister once had “a woman’s condition.” She tried to cure this by reaching the center of the maze on a night of a full moon and making her way back while making no missteps. She eventually gave birth to a “thing,” which soon died, but the mother lived.

Eventually, the townsfolk burned the labyrinth down for unknown reasons. Just as the narrator asks the guide if there is a full moon, they reach the labyrinth. The walls, made of hedges, still stand. The guide explains that they are made of rosemary, and the rosemary is for remembering. The guide explains that the speaker has a chance to survive, but he must make it to the center of the maze and come back, making no missteps. The narrator turns around and the guide is gone. When he turns back around, he sees a dog-like shape howl at the moon. Someone tells him to run.

Analysis

The story told by the guide is similar to a traditional European or American folk-tale. The guide begins his stories about the labyrinth while seeming very distant from its history. However, as the story goes on he tells a personal story about his sister and her experience with the labyrinth, implying that he was alive before the maze burned down. This brings up many questions regarding the nature of the guide. It is clear that he is some sort of lycanthropic creature, but his age and origin are unknown. The author also leaves what the “thing” that the sister birthed a mystery. The werewolf represents the human race’s natural fear of monsters (just as wolves tend to do in other fiction).



Remembrance is a main subject in this story. The guide makes it seem that all of his stories happened so long ago, but he remembers them. The hedges of the maze also connect to the concept of remembrance. The guide states that the rosemary hedges' main purpose is to remember. This could imply that the maze is actually sentient. The townsfolk seem to be quite happy with the maze before burning it down. The burning of the maze could symbolize a change in the nature of the maze or its invasion by the werewolf. The guide does briefly mention the minotaur in the story of the Greek Labyrinth of Crete which was guarded by a fierce minotaur. However, the author leaves all of these allusions and temporal mysteries to the reader's imagination.

Discussion Question 1

Rosemary is used as a symbol for remembrance. What do you think this means about the nature and origin of the maze?

Discussion Question 2

What other legends are similar to the story about the guide's sister?

Discussion Question 3

The townsfolk once enjoyed the maze. Why do you think this is? What changed?

Vocabulary

minotaur, cordon-bleu, canoodling



“The Thing About Cassandra”

Summary

The story begins with the narrator, Stuart Innes, a model and painter, at a stag party with his childhood friend Scallie. Stuart and Scallie had recently reconnected through social media after a long period of no communication after Scallie joined the Royal Air Force. During his tenure in the RAF, he injured his ankle and was discharged. Not long after this he went through a nasty divorce. Eventually, Stuart and Scallie depart from the party and reminisce about Stuart's old girlfriends. The name Cassandra is brought up and jogs Stuart's memory, as he has not thought of this name in quite some time. According to Scallie, Cassandra was the girl who took Stuart's virginity. However, this cannot be true as Stuart made-up Cassandra. Regardless of this, Scallie states that Cassandra asked about him on Facebook.

When Stuart and Scallie go their separate ways, Stuart recalls his childhood. When he was a teenager, all of his friends had girlfriends while he did not. In order to remedy this, Stuart made up a girl; he also stole a photograph of a girl from a photo booth as supposed evidence of this. He lied about this to not just his friends but his mother as well. When Stuart was supposed to be on dates with Cassandra he went to the movie theatre by himself (around this time is where Stuart states he took his virginity). Eventually, Stuart manufactures a story that Cassandra's parents had to move to Canada, resulting in the end of their relationship. However, he kept a drawing he made of Cassandra on his ceiling which was lost in a move.

In the present, Stuart is questioned by his mother about his sexuality. He states he is not gay. His mother then tells him that she saw Cassandra at the grocery store (she knew what she looked like based on the drawing). Cassandra seemed to somehow remember Stuart. Later, during one of Stuart's gallery showings a woman causes a disturbance and ruins one of his more expensive paintings that was marked at 30,000 pounds instead of 3,000 pounds. This creates a large demand for his work due to the circumstance. Stuart learns that this disturbance was manufactured by the owners of the gallery and that the woman was Cassandra. Stuart and Cassandra finally interact.

Cassandra and Stuart reconnect. Stuart claims that he made Cassandra up. She argues the contrary; that she made him up. She reveals her possession of his drawing of her and states that she went to his old house and retrieved it. Soon, they decide to have sex while reminiscing about the first adults they remember liking and their first memories. As the two are about to have sex the point of view changes to Cassandra. She rises and looks to the man-shaped outline on the bed that was once Stuart. She gets a taxi and hopes that there is a check in her purse and realizes that she misses Stuart.



Analysis

The story opens with Stuart and Scallie; this eventually makes the readers question Scallie's existence. When Scallie brings up Cassandra, Stuart realizes the lengths he was willing to go as a child to have love. However, this first time Cassandra is mentioned, Stuart believes that Scallie is simply mistaken.

The next section attempts to make the reader feel great sympathy for Stuart. He lied to everyone, causing him to go to the cinema alone, while his friends had real romantic relationships. This sequence makes it apparent, from Stuart's perspective, that Cassandra is 100% imaginary, and that it is possible that Scallie, and later Stuart's mother, just saw the woman in the picture that he stole from the photo booth. Regardless, Stuart recalls the made-up dates and experiences that he shared with Cassandra. Later, we learn that for Cassandra, all of this happened. This tries to make the reader question who, if anyone, is actually real. Throughout the majority of the story we learn about Stuart's life and then the author implies that all of it may be imaginary.

The purpose of this plot twist is not to just get the reader to question who or what is real, but to question reality itself. It is possible that the author is alluding to the many-worlds interpretation, which is popular among sci-fi writers. With this in mind, it is possible that the author is implying that both Cassandra and Stuart are equally as real. This would mean that the universe within Cassandra's point of view and the universe within Stuart's point of view run parallel within a multiverse. The author even makes the reader question this, as this does not explain the ash outline on Cassandra's bed. She also mentions that other things will turn to ash, but it is unclear whether she is being literal.

Discussion Question 1

The story questions reality. How would you define reality? Does it conform with the nature of the stories definition?

Discussion Question 2

Who was the first adult you remember liking? What is your first memory? What does this say about how remembrance works?

Discussion Question 3

Stuart lied about Cassandra in order to fit in with his friends. Would you say boasts like this are common in today's male relationships?

Vocabulary

inviolable, fortnight, representational (art style)



“Down to a Sunless Sea”

Summary

The story begins with the narrator describing the Thames, the river that runs through London. This river is very dirty, and no one drinks from it, not even animals like the Mudlarks. He continues by contending that once raindrops touch London, it becomes dirty like the river. The narrator sees a woman walking near the docks; she is looking towards the ships as she has done for years. She speaks to the narrator and explains that her son wanted to be a sailor. She objected, as her husband had never come back from a sea voyage (she explains that he is either dead or in Amsterdam).

Her son runs away and becomes a sailor on a ship with possible ill omens associated with it. A storm hit and the surviving sailors fled on a lifeboat. Eventually, as hunger set in, they drew lots and began eating their fellow sailors. The son is one of the eaten sailors, but the surviving first mate, a friend of her husband and her lover, brought the mother one of his bones. The mother reveals that the son's father is actually the mate, and she explains that he ate his son. As a result, the father fills his pockets with stones and walks into the sea, drowning himself. She explains that she put the bone on a necklace to remember them by and asks if the narrator would like to touch it.

Analysis

This story is a play on a common folktale involving lost sailors. The traditional tale involves a woman's love going off to sea to earn a fortune for his family, but he never returns. The sea, as a symbol, represents the negative aspects of the unknown, as some sailors do not return. The woman then becomes distraught and looks out to sea, waiting for her love to return. He never does and the woman eventually dies. In some of these stories, the woman's ghost then haunts the place where she stood in wait. Gaiman changes this, making the woman not distraught, but possibly insane.

The author also combines the folktale with the story of a London court case entitled *R vs. Dudley and Stevens*. In this case, a ship sank, resulting in the sailors escaping in lifeboats. They eventually resorted to cannibalism. When they returned, they were charged with murder, creating a controversy on whether participating in cannibalism in order to survive is considered a true murder. The court gave the sailors the death penalty, but they were then released six months later.

Gaiman also changes the chaste widow archetype that is traditionally associated with these maritime tales. The woman's first husband dies at sea but she does not stay chaste. She instead finds a lover and bears a child. Gaiman also uses the Thames as symbol for the dirty nature of the city of London.



Discussion Question 1

Think about similar stories regarding cannibalism. Is cannibalism ethical during a survival situation?

Discussion Question 2

The narrator talks about the Thames at the beginning of the story. How does this relate to the sea?

Discussion Question 3

What other stories play off of folktales in this fashion? What does this say about the society where the folktale originated as well as contemporary society?

Vocabulary

stormcrow, Thames, lots (noun)



“The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains”

Summary

The story begins with the narrator asking if he can forgive himself for hating his red-haired daughter when he had thought she had run away. He states he searched for her for more than ten years to no avail.

The next sections begin with the narrator searching for a man named Calum MacInnes. He goes to MacInnes' homestead and meets the man's son and tells him a story about the time some criminals came to find him. It is revealed to us that the narrator is a dwarf. His wife asks “a boy” to go fetch him, however the boy is actually the narrator, therefore confusing the criminals. The speaker asks MacInnes to guide him to the cave in the Black Mountains. MacInnes agrees but states that he will not go inside, nor help him with carrying the treasure within. MacInnes is hired and they begin traveling. Soon after, they run into a fortune teller. She states that he should stay away, should avoid gold but not silver, and that there is death in the narrator's past and future. The seer also predicts that MacInnes will return to where he began while being higher than most men but without a grave. The narrator makes note that Calum's right hand looks to have been badly burnt long ago. After a few days, MacInnes and the narrator reach a croft house. MacInnes asks the woman in the house to give them hospitality and she obliges; when her husband gets home, he initially says nothing. That night, the man both has sex with and beats his wife.

They leave and Calum recalls the time he ventured into the cave and received treasure. He got enough gold for a house and his wife's marriage purse and buried the rest. He also reveals that the gold has a curse associated with it. When they settle down for the night, the narrator argues that everyone can reach the truth no matter what path they take. Calum disagrees; he contends that the truth is the cave in the Black Mountains. During this statement, the narrator explains to the reader that he is incredibly old and much older than any human.

That night, Callum puts a knife to the narrator's neck. Calum elaborates that he does not trust the narrator as previously he noticed that the dwarf can run much faster than he, a full grown human, can. Eventually the situation is resolved and they continue. Calum then brings up the story that the dwarf told his son. He reveals that he knows the real story, and that the dwarf actually killed all of the men. That night, the dwarf sobs in his sleep. Calum questions this and the dwarf deflects it. The reader learns that he was dreaming of his dead daughter, Flora. During this conversation, MacInnes brings up that he has not had a dream since leaving the cave when he was younger. They soon encounter the mist associated with the Black Mountains. This mist creates reflections of MacInnes and the narrator, confusing the narrator.



Calum explains that the islanders of the Black Mountains do not go to the cave because they think it is evil. However, the cave does not feed on evil, it feeds on something else that causes the world to become “flat.” The dwarf reveals why he wants the gold. He intends to give it to a king across the sea so he can return and bring prosperity to the land.

The two begin discussing if they have ever killed a woman. The dwarf has not, but McInnes did indirectly. McInnes used to be reaver; one day when he was stealing cattle, a red haired girl chased after him. McInnes tied her to a rosebush and left her to die. The dwarf finally enters the cave, after McInnes explains that he cannot bring his weapon. The spirit of the cave reveals that it gives people what they want in exchange for part of their souls. It then reveals itself in the form of the corpse of the narrator’s daughter, tied to a thorn bush. The spirit also shows the dwarf that Calum will attack the dwarf once he leaves the cave. The spirit does not give the dwarf gold, but a blade instead. The dwarf reveals that McInnes killed his red-haired daughter Flora. He leaves the cave and attacks McInnes. They fight and fall down part of the mountain. Calum breaks his leg in the fall and begs the narrator to come back for him. The Narrator agrees that he will return in a year. The narrator feels darkness creeping into his mind.

Analysis

The main literary device used in this work is foreshadowing. The majority of this stories’ foreshadowing lies in the predictions of the fortune teller. The fortune teller explains that there is death in the dwarf’s past and future. We eventually learn this is true through the revelation that the dwarf killed men. The future death is shown at the end of the story, when he leaves Calum to die. The seer also explains that the narrator should avoid gold and that silver is his friend. Once the narrator reaches the cave he does not get the gold that most people seek, but a blade instead. Through this, the dwarf is not seeking gold, but looks for a silver or steel blade instead.

Calum’s fortune also has elements of foreshadowing. The fortune teller explains that he will return to where he began, while being higher than most men, but with no grave. The seer also sees a man and a woman in a tree. Calum returns to where part of his soul was taken, the Black Mountains. This most likely caused him to be a destructive reaver later in life. Technically, he does end up being higher than most men. He is left on a mountain, which has a higher elevation than most places. He does not have a grave because the narrator leaves him to die. Finally, the woman in the tree is Flora, tied to the thorn bush by Calum. When Calum falls down the mountain, he lands onto a bush as well. He is the man in the tree.

The subtler use of foreshadowing is the identity of the woman Calum ties to the bush. Throughout the entire story, the narrator mentions that his daughter had red hair. This is brought up again, when Calum explains that the girl he tied up also had red hair. While it is possible for two people within a story to have red hair, the repeated mentioning of this is used to make the reader remember and finally put the pieces together at the end.



As the narrator is a dwarf and the gold is cursed, it is clear that Gaiman is alluding to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. In this work, a dwarf seeks cursed gold that eventually corrupts him. Just like in Tolkien's work, the gold symbolized greed and the corruptive nature of this greed. It takes part of your soul. However, at the end of the story, it is clear that it is not actually the gold that corrupts. The dwarf feels darkness seeping into his mind at the conclusion of the story. He did not gain wealth, but revenge. Therefore, revenge, or the obsessive seeking of a thing, corrupts. Gaiman also uses the dwarf as a symbol for ancient wisdom (similar to Tolkien) as, in fiction, dwarves tend to live much longer than humans while also having many abilities that humans do not.

The cave, in this story, represents the quest for and the concept of truth. The dwarf embarks on a long quest to find the truth, just as humans have been doing for ages. The cave is actually the truth, as, as far as we know, the cave tells him the truth, which leads to him getting his revenge.

Discussion Question 1

It is clear that this story is inspired by the work of Tolkien. What other aspects seem to allude to Tolkien's work?

Discussion Question 2

How would you describe the narrator beyond his size? What is he? What kind of person is he, is he good or bad?

Discussion Question 3

How is the cave in the Black Mountains "truth"?

Vocabulary

dirk, reaver, rockfall



“My Last Landlady”

Summary

This poem begins with the speaker saying that his old landlady was quite bad compared to the current one that he is speaking to. The old landlady rented out parts of her bed and breakfast to tenants. She would tell the tenants not to look at the sea, as it is bad luck. She explained that people came to her house to forget their problems. This is something that the English do. She compared this to someone chopping their girlfriend up because she is pregnant or someone poisoning the banker they are sleeping with. The narrator stayed in the house for three weeks before telling the landlady that he intended to leave. The landlady gave the narrator a drink of whisky and tried to seduce him. He later attempted to knock on her bedroom door. The narrator then passed out instead, clearly drugged. He awoke later and noticed the landlady filling his pockets with rocks. She later drowned him.

Analysis

The poet uses vague poetic language to disguise who the new landlady actually is. This causes the reader to believe that the speaker is alive and well and simply complaining about his former landlady. This is clearly proven false once the reader realizes that he is dead. The new landlady is actually the sea where his body resides.

The poem also uses foreshadowing to hint the reader to the speaker's fate. The different actions that the landlady describes as things the English do are rather morbid in nature. A third of them end up with someone's death. She ends this explanation by asking, “Why do they stand so still?” These two statements by the landlady subtly hint to the reader that the landlady is quite deranged.

The poem involves no rhyme and contains lines of varying lengths. This portrays a type of stream of consciousness narrative that one may find in other literary recollections. Also, like “Making a Chair,” “My Last Landlady” uses enjambment. Here, the enjambment contributes to the poem's similarities to a stream of consciousness narrative, as it does not contain many pauses.

Discussion Question 1

What is the landlady saying when she explains the things that she says the British do? Is she commenting on British society or herself?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Gaiman placed this poem in a bed and breakfast?



Discussion Question 3

What did the landlady mean when she stated that “People come to the beach to forget their problems”?

Vocabulary

whit, channel (noun, like “The Channel”), notes (noun, not letters)



“Adventure Story”

Summary

This story begins with the narrator complaining that his mother would describe minuscule experiences as “adventures.” He explains that she used to do this until his father died which caused his mother to not leave the house as often.

While cleaning out his father’s things from, his childhood home, the narrator finds a red stone idol. He asks his mother about it and she explains it is something he obtained while he was in the army (he was stationed in Germany, but he found the idol in Kazakhstan). According to the mother, he once stated that he should not have kept it because people were once after it, however those people died when pterodactyls downed their plane. The narrator questions this because pterodactyls are extinct, but his mother brushes it off. She goes on to tell the narrator that these people deserved it due to what they did to the Aztecs in 1942 (long after the Aztec civilization was destroyed). The mother further elaborates, stating that the father met some sort of priestess of the pursuer’s civilization; she clarifies that these people were not quite aliens but more like werewolves.

The next day, the son asks the mother about it again. She further explains that the father told her about this during their honeymoon. He asks to see the idol again, and the mother states that she already threw it out, and that it was with the trash people now. The story ends with the mother recalling an “adventure” at the grocery store.

Analysis

In this story, the narrator experiences a process of learning about his father after he has already died. According to the narrator's mother, his father went on adventures that were seemingly out of a paperback adventure novel or a movie. Gaiman chooses to leave the mother’s explanations vague enough and her attitude disinterested enough to leave the possibility that these adventures actually happened. This creates a dichotomy of attitudes towards these adventures. The son is initially skeptical due to the extinction of pterodactyls and the inclusion of alien werewolves and 20th century Aztecs. Regardless of these factors, the mother explains it in an incredibly matter-of-fact way implying that she completely believes that these events took place. At the end of the story, it is possible that the son begins to believe that the seemingly fictional adventures actually took place, but unfortunately the idol is thrown in the trash, removing the product and element of the mystery. The moral of this story seems to be that one should take advantage of the opportunity of learning about their parents’ experiences, as it may change their opinions and perspectives about the world.



Discussion Question 1

The mother's retelling of her husband's adventures are quite matter-of-fact. Does she seriously believe these stories or is she just reiterating the way they were initially told?

Discussion Question 2

The mother very briefly mentions her husband's friend who would occasionally visit their home. What is his impact on the stories she tells?

Discussion Question 3

The end of this story is rather bitter; the idol is lost even though it may be rare and mystical. Do you think the loss of the idol makes the adventures any less important to the son?

Vocabulary

pterodactyl, dodgily, pence



“Orange (Third Subject’s Responses to Investigator’s Written Questionnaire.) EYES ONLY”

Summary

The story consist of only an individual’s answers to an investigator’s questions as the actual wording of the questions is not provided. The answers summarize Jemima Glorfindel Petula Ramsey’s recollection about the strange happenings between her family and her sister.

The speaker's sister, Nerys, began putting on tanning creams when she turned 13 and started reading teen magazines and listening to Britney Spears; she was ridiculed for her orange complexion. Eventually, a foreign package arrived with a substance in a container similar to a jam jar. Nerys applied this substance and began to illuminate with an orange glow and decided that the rest of her family must refer to her as My Immanence or The Vehicle. She also developed powers including levitation and the ability to control the minds of her family which stopped them from fleeing. The only person who was allowed to leave was Pryderi, the brother, so he could buy dark chocolate (the only thing Narys would eat).

The mother decided to turn a hose on her daughter to no avail. Eventually, someone one alerted the fire department, thinking that Nerys’ orange glow was due to a fire. The firefighters arrived and Nerys vaporized them. After a few more ineffective solutions, aliens abducted the entire household. They took Nerys away, gave the mother products for her home business, and provided the brother with a glass skateboard. The government confiscated these things.

It is revealed that Jemima is actually being questioned by some sort of government agents. The aliens state that they will return Nerys if they can and fly into space.

Analysis

While this story is quite fantastical, it also parodies the changes that children go through when they become teenagers. It is no coincidence that Nerys goes through this drastic change when she turns 13 years of age. This change begins with the teen magazines and Britney Spears’ music and concludes with her alien form. Many of Nerys’ actions mirror the type of behaviors that a child goes through when going through puberty. First, she gives herself a new identity and forces her family to accept it. She then goes on to lash out against her family by limiting their freedom; this is similar to the anger that is commonly associated with puberty. She further demonstrates her anger when she massacres an entire team of firefighters.



At the end of the story, Nerys is taken away by the aliens, possibly to be worshipped as a deity of some sort. This mirrors the concerns of teenagers regarding their self-image and the opinions of others. She clearly cares about the opinions of others prior to this point, due to the fact that she applies the tanning cream to seem more outwardly attractive. The aliens, as if it was a product of Nerys' fantasy, accept Nerys as a supreme being and take her away from her family and those who do not understand her, just as many teenagers may wish to happen (well something similar anyway).

Discussion Question 1

It is implied that Jemima is younger than Nerys. Is it possible that Jemima is simply misunderstanding the stage of life that she has not yet entered (puberty)?

Discussion Question 2

What is Gaiman trying to accomplish by only providing the answers to the questions?

Discussion Question 3

What other age-based parallels can you identify in Nerys' or Her Immanence's behavior?

Vocabulary

immanence, materialized, luminous



“A Calendar of Tales”

Summary

“A Calendar of Tales” is a collection of very brief short stories. These short stories are the product of an experiment that Gaiman performed which involved his Twitter followers providing him with an idea for each month; Gaiman then wrote a short story for each month using one of his followers’ ideas. As there are twelve short stories, the summaries will be broken up by month/story.

“January Tale”: This is a science-fiction story involving time-traveling soldiers. A new soldier arrives on a battlefield where human soldiers are fighting “the enemy.” He meets a fellow soldier named Twelve who is a veteran in these types of wars. After they shoot at sharp-toothed, gray-green enemies, they are transported to a forest in a different time. The new soldier asks where the enemies come from. Twelve explains that they “hide behind the seconds.” Twelve asks if the new soldier was briefed. The younger soldier explains that all they told him was that he was going to be fighting for a year. Twelve clarifies that he will be fighting for a year, but it is going to be a year worth of fighting between multiple temporal battlefields. Twelve is grabbed by a tentacle enemy and the new soldier saves him with a rocket launcher. After this he is transported to the place “where the old-years go” and tells another soldier that the new soldier will do just fine.

“February Tale:” The narrator begins by describing a girl in a yellow rain-coat walking on the beach clearly searching for something. He asks her what she is looking for. She explains that she is searching for her grandmother’s pendent, as the pendant would “take the grandmother home again.” The narrator asks if the grandmother is still alive, she explains that she is but does not talk much. The man reveals that he has the pendent and gives it to the girl. The narrator internally explains that the grandmother is his sister. When the girl leaves he swims upward into the sky, being pulled by his own pendent.

“March Tale:” The story tells of a girl named Mary who wants to be a pirate, but her mother discourages her. The narration then shifts to telling the story of another woman named Anne. Mary first sailed with her father while wearing boy’s clothes and eventually took to the sea after her father settled down. She came back three years later with a baby. The town did not suggest that this girl, Annie Riley, was actually the famous pirate, Anne Bonny. The story shifts back to the mother and the daughter, revealing that the mother is thinking about the previous recollection. The girl’s discouraging mother is actually Anne Riley, and therefore Anne Bonny.

“April Tale:” The story opens with the narrator’s father gambling with some talking ducks. The father used to fool the ducks and win the bets, but they no longer humor his bets. The child suggested that he needed to get the ducks to trust him again. He tried and succeeded. The next time he gambled with the ducks, the ducks won everything



except for his underwear. The narrator explains that this was the instance where she learned to not trust ducks.

“May Tale:” This story consists of the narrator receiving weird packages and letters in the mail. Some of these things included a Mother’s Day card (the narrator is not a mother), Action Comics #1, and some letters with phrases like “Normal Service will be resumed as soon as possible. Honest.” None of these things have anything to do with the narrator. The next year, the deliveries start all over again.

“June Tale:” This story involves a child narrator explaining that her parents often disagree. They disagree politically, and debated the naming of their children. At some point, the father wanted a fridge in the garage while the mother wanted a sauna. They had both installed. Interestingly enough, the narrator notices the mother going to the garage and the father to the sauna.

“July Tale:” A man’s wife leaves him so he builds an igloo made of books. He likes it there. Eventually he gets hungry and cuts a hole in the floor. He fishes out a fish made of books. He goes outside and sees that the world is made of books. His wife appears and they watch the Northern Lights.

“August Tale:” Two men watch the result of a nearby forest fire. They talk about how eucalyptus seeds need fire in order to germinate. The television and radio tells them to leave; they do not. They remark on the complacency of human beings. The fire gets too close and they flee to a creek. From the creek they see bird-like flames reaching out into the sky. The narrator likens them to a phoenix.

“September Tale:” The narrator explains that his mother had a ring with a lion’s head on it that she would use to perform magic. After she died he wore it but often lost it. However, each time he lost the ring, it would return to him. Later, he loses the ring and decides to move to Brazil. Presently there has been no sign of the ring, but he worries about the next time it will return.

“October Tale:” The narrator, a genie, narrates the last time he was summoned from his lamp. A woman summoned him and asked for no wishes because she had everything she needed, confusing the genie. She gave him tea. Soon after, he moved in with the woman and developed a relationship with her. In bed, she asked him what he would wish for if he summoned a genie. He explained that he would not wish for anything because he had everything he needed.

“November Tale:” A terminally ill woman name Eloise buys a brazier and a hat. As she gets sicker she decides there are personal things that you cannot throw away or give to your loved ones. These things must be burnt. She burns photographs (of her dead dog) and letters (especially the ones from college when she had a relationship with a professor). She eventually throws her medical information into the brazier, walks into her house, looks in the mirror and notices that she looks both familiar and new. She puts on the red hat.



“December Tale:” A homeless woman meets herself from the future. This future self is no longer homeless and tells the past self that it gets better. The past self asks the future self to take her home. She states that she cannot because home is not yet there for her. After this, she reveals that she no longer has to buy a train ticket so she can jump onto the tracks.

Analysis

“January Tale”: This story deals with the relationship between time and war. There are two things that always exist: time and war. The enemies may change and the times may be different but the two concepts always coincide.

“February Tale”: A keepsake is the main focus of this story. The girl in the yellow rain-coat is not aware of the significance of the pendant but searches for it anyway because the grandmother stated that it was valuable to her. At the end of the story we learn why; she needs the pendant to return to the sky. Keepsakes can be valuable to different people for different reasons, regardless if others understand why.

“March Tale”: This story’s central focus is a child’s lack of awareness about her mother’s past. Anne discourages her daughter during the occasions where she talks about pirates, even though she was, in fact, a pirate. However, being a pirate is quite a difficult and violent profession, and, therefore, Anne does not wish the same life on her daughter. The story explains that there are reasons that parents raise their children in certain ways. Here, the sea represents an escape from traditional gender roles.

“April Tale”: The moral of this tale is that you probably should not intentionally attempt to take advantage of someone. The father tries to trick the ducks because he had won bets against them in the past. He wants to repeat this success, but they no longer trust him. His attempt fails and he loses everything.

“May Tale”: This story focuses on the random nature of life. The narrator receives random packages and letters that almost have no impact on her greater life, but they just happen. The narrator cannot stop these things from happening and does not, because life and the randomness associated with it exists anyway.

“June Tale”: The parents in this story disagree but many of their arguments seem rather arbitrary. Regardless of these disagreements the parents still marry each other and eventually secretly concede to the other’s new rooms. With this in mind, Gaiman attempts to make it clear that many people have the outward behavior of constant disagreement, but many times it is for show.

“July Tale”: This story deals with the seemingly magical relationship between humans and books. The narrator retreats into the book-world after being mentally injured by the separation between him and his wife. The factor that cements the coping purpose of this book world is the appearance of the narrator’s wife at the end. In this world, the narrator’s ideal world, they were never separated.



“August Tale”: This story plays on the theme of complacency mentioned by one of the speakers. The story makes it very clear that the two men are complacent as they do very little to escape from the forest fire until it may be too late. Rebirth is also very apparent in this story. The eucalyptus seeds germinate after encountering a fire, just as the plants that created the seeds did before them. The plants continue to burn and grow again similar to the rebirthing of the phoenix.

“September Tale”: The ring within this story acts as a symbol of the mother it belonged to. The son cannot lose the ring just as he cannot lose the impact that the character’s mother had on him. It is unclear why the narrator actually wants to escape the ring, and therefore the mother’s influence, but it is doubtful that moving to Brazil will work.

“October Tale”: This story proclaims that it is entirely possible to be satisfied with life. The genie does not initially believe this, as all of his previous summoners had wished for something expensive or elaborate. The woman changes all this. After a long period of time, the woman shows the genie that one can find things to satisfy oneself in life; it just requires finding someone special.

“November Tale”: When Eloise buys the brazier, she realizes the purifying nature of fire. She realizes that she is terminally ill and cannot pass certain things to her family once she dies, so she throws them in the fire. After burning the pictures and finally the medical records, she looks in the mirror and discovers that she has changed. She is purified and looks much healthier than she did before. It is unknown whether the burning cured her illness, but it certainly changed her in some way.

“December Tale”: This story is a direct response to the “It Gets Better” movement which originated on the Internet in the late 2000s. This movement was aimed at individuals who were in states of depression and those contemplating suicide. The goal of the movement was to assure these individuals that their lives will improve and to not take any drastic life altering actions. The homeless woman learns this first-hand when she encounters her happy future-self. This future-self assures the woman that it will get better, leading to the woman abandoning her ideas of suicide.

Discussion Question 1

Are there any recurring themes in this series of stories?

Discussion Question 2

Gaiman uses a variety of characters from many age and social groups within these stories; are there any he left out? Why do you think this is?

Discussion Question 3

What is effective about these collaborative stories? What is not?

Vocabulary

vainly, monochrome, floes



“The Case of Death and Honey”

Summary

“The Case of Death and Honey” is a short story that takes place within the world of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s “Sherlock Holmes.” This story takes place partially towards the end of Holmes’ detective career. The work consists of two interwoven stories that shift back and forth at different points in the story. The summaries below explain each story separately,

The first storyline centers around Sherlock Holmes. He has become bored with investigating regular crimes. He exclaims that while reading crime reports in the newspaper, he can figure out who committed the crime before he is done reading. Afterwards, he visits his brother Mycroft. Holmes explains that his brother is sick, most likely due to his weight and indulgent lifestyle. Mycroft recommends that he try to solve the mystery of death, as it would be a much more interesting experience than solving an everyday murder. Holmes and Watson attend Mycroft’s funeral, Holmes makes requests regarding content in Watson’s latest story (about Holmes’ investigations), and leaves for China as he believes he will find the mystery there. He does and plans to tell Watson about his discovery in a disguise.

The other story takes place in China. Old Gao and his cousin are beekeepers and honey merchants. Gao’s brother explains that a “barbarian” has come to town and will pay him to look at his unusual bees (they are black and aggressive bees). The “barbarian” (an Englishman) arrives and uses a Bunsen burner to heat their tea. The man rents one of Gao’s beehives and begins drawing the bees and experimenting on their honey. Eventually the Englishman finds what he needs and returns to England. The Englishman was Holmes and the death-fighting mystery is Gao’s bees’ honey.

Analysis

The interweaving of the stories is used to lead the reader to the fact that the Englishman in China is Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is not just dealing with the mystery that Mycroft suggests but he is also attempting to cope with the mortality of his friend Watson. Mycroft was only in his 50s, which means Holmes and Watson are not that much younger. By the time Holmes leaves China, he suggests that he is much older than when the story started and questions whether Watson is still alive. Holmes seems rather selfless in this regard. He does not explicitly mention that he is trying to solve the mystery of death for himself, but instead for two other reasons. The first is the challenge. At this point, Holmes and Watson have been solving crimes for quite a long time. He explains that he has gotten bored and finds a more challenging mystery with death. He is not trying to lengthen his own life, but instead he seeks the answer just to be challenged and possibly help his friend Watson.



It is implied that Sherlock has also helped Gao. Not only does Sherlock give Gao a year's worth of wages, but he also leaves some of the slurry from the bee experiments. He drinks this and presumably gains whatever benefits Sherlock's honey provides. This honey represents life itself. Honey is basically the key to human survival, due to its association with pollination. Not only does honey provide Sherlock with the mystical solution to death, but in reality, it is the secret to human life on Earth. This version of Sherlock is quite different than the Holmes in popular entertainment media, as that particular version is portrayed as a sociopath. It is possible that Gaiman is attempting to make Holmes more likable or that Sherlock Holmes has just gotten kinder with age.

Discussion Question 1

Compare Gaiman's Sherlock to the ones you have experienced in pop culture. What is similar? What is different?

Discussion Question 2

Think about what bees do in nature. What are the parallels between this and what their honey (Gao's bees specifically) is used for in this story?

Discussion Question 3

How would you describe the relationship between the brothers Sherlock and Mycroft?

Vocabulary

slurry, propolis, dotage



“The Man Who Forgot Ray Bradbury”

Summary

This short story consists of an unnamed speaker telling the audience about the memory problems he is having. When he was a student, many of his things would go missing, like his boots, shaving cream, and candles. Now that he is older, he is losing words. However, he usually finds the word if he can explain the concept to himself. He does remember some things, like who the Greek character Icarus, Shakespeare, and Benjamin Kublesky are. He vaguely recalls a great author who was from the same town as Kublesky - Wakugen, Illinois. He recalls seeing his picture on his books and some of the stories he had written, but he cannot remember who this person is. He asked a friend if he remembered these stories, but the friend denies their existence. The speaker becomes very distraught that he cannot remember this writer and states that he would allow his own name to be forgotten if that would mean that the lost writer's name would be remembered. He asks God for this.

Analysis

Gaiman is proclaiming his love and respect for Ray Bradbury, the influential science-fiction author (Gaiman actually wrote this as a gift for Bradbury's 91st birthday. Bradbury died soon after). The speaker makes many allusions to Bradbury's works without actually mentioning his name which continues with the story's theme of forgotten words and people. In a way, this story is proclaiming that we should not let authors like Bradbury be forgotten. People remember canonized authors like William Shakespeare and a variety of actors and movie characters but cannot recall influential writers. Bradbury is clearly one of Gaiman's biggest influences and is incredibly important to him. It is possible that the speaker in this story is a mouthpiece for Gaiman, suggesting that, Gaiman too, would sacrifice the memory of his name in order to prevent Bradbury's from being lost.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think we only remember certain things? For example, why do we forget writers but remember movie characters?

Discussion Question 2

Gaiman alludes to Bradbury's work multiple times. Identify them and determine what purpose they serve in the story.



Discussion Question 3

Why does the speaker blame God towards the end of the story? Explain his reasoning.

Vocabulary

okapi, veldt, meager



“Jerusalem”

Summary

This story opens with the narrator airing his frustrations regarding the vacation he and his wife took to Jerusalem. His wife does not share in his frustrations. He leaves to walk the dog and recollects the experience.

The couple hired a guide to show them around the town. They came upon doors with markings on them, and the husband asked what they meant. The guide explained that the markings welcomed pilgrims home from their pilgrimage to Mecca. The husband told the guide that no one makes pilgrimages to London (their hometown). The guide also explained that the city should be bombed completely in order to solve the Palestine-Israel conflict. The guide explained the Jerusalem syndrome - a strange mental illness that is only contractible in Jerusalem and disappears once someone leaves. The syndrome causes people to wrap sheets around their bodies and preach (about God and the greatness of Jerusalem) in the streets. The wife contracted the syndrome and recovered once they left the city.

The story shifts back to the present. The man returns home and finds his wife missing and the sheets removed from the bed. He realizes that she has contracted Jerusalem syndrome again and vows to listen to her this time.

Analysis

Before the story begins, a William Blake quote appears. This quote alludes to the relationship between England and Jerusalem. It alludes to England's attempt to appropriate Jerusalem. Its connection to the story lies in the relationship between the speaker and Jerusalem. He is quite annoyed that Jerusalem is nothing like England. Clearly, the appropriation has failed.

The story outlines the narrator's struggle to accept the importance or mystical nature of places like Jerusalem. In fact, Jerusalem represents the deep mysticism that humans are unable to understand. He briefly mentions that he does not believe in a god and finds pilgrimages very strange. However, it is clear that the place has some sort of power which can result in good or bad outcomes. The guide and the husband exchange words about the Palestine-Israel conflict, and the guide explains that the conflict is negative and should end. The guide argues that to do this, the city should be bombed by nuclear weapons until the desert is radioactive. On the other hand, cities like Jerusalem do have positive aspects. Pilgrims find spiritual value in traveling to places like Jerusalem and Mecca; the husband does not understand this because he is not religious and does not live in a holy city. Eventually, he does realize this once his wife contracts Jerusalem syndrome a second time. He finally accepts that there is something special about holy cities.



Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the wife contracts the syndrome a second time? Does this have to do with Israel or London?

Discussion Question 2

Is it possible that the wife is just a victim of the placebo affect? Does she just contract the syndrome because she was made aware of it?

Discussion Question 3

What makes a city holy? What textual evidence can you find that would help define London or Jerusalem as holy?

Vocabulary

Herod, hostel, crusade



“Click-Clack the Rattlebag”

Summary

The majority of the story takes place while an unnamed narrator is walking a child to their bedroom. The child asks the man, who is a writer, to tell him a bedtime story once they get there. The man does not know what story to tell, so the child suggests a story about the Click-Clacks. The man does not recognize this so the child explains. Click-Clacks are creatures that look like what someone does not expect. They come out of the shadows, grab their prey, bring it to their lair, and drink it. The child also explains the Rattlebags. The Rattlebags are actually the remains of their prey blowing in the wind. When they finally get to the top floor they head towards the attic; the two still cannot decide on a story. The boy asks the man to explain what he did today. The man explains that he was just in the building waiting for his girlfriend to arrive, as she just inherited a large dark house. When the attic door is opened, the man can hear the click-clack, the sound of the Rattlebags. The man thinks about running but his fingers lead him in.

Analysis

The story explores the nature of things we are afraid of. The attic represents this, as it is full of darkness and danger. The boy alludes that the reason the Click-Clacks are so scary is because you do not know what they look like, as they look like what you do not expect. The man does not realize that the boy is not just telling him a scary story, but instead is explaining his fate. At the end of the story, it is clear that the child is actually a Click-Clack and his form is due to the fact that the man would never expect a child to be a Click-Clack. It is implied that the man's girlfriend also fell victim to the vicious Click-Clack, as the man has been waiting for her for quite some time. It is quite possible that the click clack sounds of the Rattlebags inside the attic are caused by the hanging remains of his girlfriend blowing in the wind.

Discussion Question 1

What is so scary about the unexpected?

Discussion Question 2

How does the boy hint that he is actually a Click-Clack? Was the man justified in not figuring out the boy's identity?



Discussion Question 3

How would you explain the character of the man? What does it mean that he is a writer but is unable to tell the child any stories?

Vocabulary

precocious, unrelenting, sagely



“An Invocation of Incuriosity”

Summary

The story opens with a narrator explaining that many flea markets exist in his home state of Florida. He recalls a certain flea market he went to that was built in an old aircraft hangar. A particular man with sunglasses began setting up shop within this flea market, selling carvings of animals that, to the narrator, seemed alien. After questioning the man about these animals, the narrator asks the man if he would like some food. He answered affirmatively and they decided to meet at a Denny's across the street. The strange man arrived 50 minutes after the narrator arrived.

The narrative then shifts to a different world. This alien world is home to Balthasar the Tardy and his son, Farfal. One day, the sun begins to disappear, and Balthasar tells his son that it is time. Balthasar takes his son through a locked door in their house which leads to a colorful room with a casement in the middle. Balthasar instructs his son to go through the casement.

On the other side, Farfal realizes that he is in another world. He questions his father why he never questioned why Balthasar spent so much time in the strange room; the father answers that the Invocation of Incuriosity caused him to not think too much about it. In this world, Balthasar is very wealthy; he makes this wealth by going to times like Farfal's home and bringing things back that would be valuable in this strange world.

Balthasar explains that they are actually in the past, millions of years before Farfal was born. The sun shines bright in the sky. Balthasar decides that Farfel will act as his servant and not his son, because technically he is millions of years younger than his sons in this time. Soon, a disgruntled customer appears and Balthasar flees through the casement, he ends up in Farfal's time period where the death of the universe is swallowing everything. The customer begins attacking Balthasar's sons and attempts to break down the walls of their home.

As a last resort, Farfal steps through the casement to a completely different time. It is revealed that the carver at the flea market is Farfal and that he is trying to find another casement in order to go to the beginning of the universe.

Analysis

This work is similar to some of the previous stories in this book. Farfal is telling a story and reveals that the subject of the story was actually him all along. This type of narrative is similar to that of the Click-Clack in “Click-Clack the Rattlebag.” Gaiman does something similar in “The Case of Death and Honey,” but that story's clues are much more apparent. Another similarity between this story and “Click-Clack” is that Gaiman attempts to trick the reader into thinking that the person hearing the story is the story's protagonist. For example, in “Click-Clack,” a large amount of character development is



given to the narrator so it is implied that the narrator will eventually tell the child a story. In “An Invocation,” this is done much less explicitly. We are not given many details about the character who narrates the beginning of the story, but due to convention, the reader assumes that the narrator is the protagonist.

A recurring motif in this story is the “Nothing.” This is the darkness that destroys the sun of Farfal’s world and later consumes his home and father. By having the father end up in the temporal period where the darkness is finally consuming everything alludes to the idea that you cannot escape the future or the end. This is a popular motif in stories about time-travel, but Gaiman contests this. Farfal does escape the eventual destruction of the universe. He even wants to travel to the time when the universe began. Farfal proves that if you take action, something does not have to be inevitable.

In this story, darkness represents non-existence or nothingness, a recurring symbol in this work’s stories. Another symbol is the casement. The magical casement represents Farfal’s home. At points, he wants to use the casement to return to his original home, but cannot. Later in the story, the casement brings him to his new home, Florida.

Discussion Question 1

Compare this to other stories about time travel (in this book or otherwise). How does Gaiman change the conventions of this type of story?

Discussion Question 2

How would you describe Balthasar’s character? Should Farfal be happy that he saved him from the darkness?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think happens after the story ends? How do you think the original narrator would respond to the tale he was just told?

Vocabulary

invocation, temporal, befitted, casement



“And Weep, Like Alexander”

Summary

This very brief story opens with a man walking into a bar. This man, named Obediah Polkinghorn, explains that he is an uninventor. Essentially, he modifies the fabric of creation and plucks things from existence. Most recently, he erased the British band Queen from existence because it was stuck in someone's head. Polkinghorn goes on to claim that he has uninvented all kinds of things, such as flying cars, teleporters, telepathic translators, and jetpacks. Someone asks if he could erase nuclear power. Obediah explains that he cannot do this because it was invented before he was born and doing this may ultimately prevent his birth. When Polkinghorn is almost finished with his whisky, everyone begins pulling out their smartphones and begin to not pay attention to anyone in the bar. The story ends with Obediah stating that he will have to uninvent the smartphone for the good of all people.

Analysis

A popular philosophical question is “if you could go back in time and prevent something from happening, what would it be?” This story is playing with this very question. However, Obediah seems to believe that he is the authority regarding uninventing. It is unclear what gives him the power to uninvent and what right he has to perform uninventing. The reader can assume that he is actually uninventing for the good of man, as man is still obviously around when Obediah walks into the bar. The story also alludes to the popular idea in science-fiction regarding accidentally preventing one's birth. In order to ensure this does not happen, Obediah does not uninvent anything created before his birth. It must be noted however, that a good number of other people may have never been born because of Obediah's uninventing practices.

The title of this work comes from a popular phrase regarding the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great. Obediah states that since he has done such a great job at uninventing appropriate things, he weeps like Alexander. The phrase originates from the Greek born Roman historian Plutarch who wrote “he (Alexander) wept, for there were no more worlds to conquer.” In context of this work, Obediah thinks that he has no things left to uninvent, or, in a way, no worlds left to conquer. That is until he realizes that he must uninvent the smartphone. He determines this when the bar patrons seem to begin to solely focus on their phones rather than each other. It is clear that with this, Gaiman is commenting on the negative effects modern technology such as smartphones have on human relationships and how we interact with one another.

Discussion Question 1

Is Obediah acting ethically when he uninvents things?



Discussion Question 2

The story contains the idea that cellphones are a bane to mankind. Why does Obediah think this?

Discussion Question 3

Look at the dialogue between Obediah and the bar patrons. How would you describe their relationship? Is Obediah being condescending?

Vocabulary

emolument, telepathic, massless



“Nothing O’Clock”

Summary

Note: This story assumes you know the basic premise of the BBC television program “Doctor Who.” As the program has been on since the 1960s, the lore is quite extensive. This summary will explain the basics as the plot progresses, but this story makes more sense if the reader is quite familiar with the television program.

The story opens with an explanation of a prison built by the Time Lords (The Doctor’s race). This prison was built far outside of what humans know as time and many precautions were taken in its construction. All except one. An earthquake shook the prison, making it possible for a dangerous alien known as the Kin to escape into time. There was no one to prevent this from happening as all of the Time Lords were dead - except for one, The Doctor.

The narrative shifts to a British family (the Brownings) in 1984. The child of the family, Polly, tells her father that a man at the door wants to offer him 750,000 pounds for the house, far more than the market value. The father is skeptical but goes to the door. A man in a rabbit mask asks the father to ask him what time it is. He does and it causes a physical reaction in the rabbit man. The two men make the deal and the masked man tells the father to be out of the house by Saturday. After this, Polly goes upstairs to write in her diary. On Saturday, a woman in a cat mask knocks on the door and asks the family if they have removed everything from the house and asks the family to ask her what time it is. They do, causing a physical reaction in the cat woman.

The story jumps to The Doctor and Amy Pond (The Doctor’s companion, as he often travels with humans) in the TARDIS (The Doctor’s time machine. They recollect on their previous adventure of confiscating a “squigglywatsit” from the Skeleton People. They land the TARDIS in England during the year 2010. As they step out, Amy hears a voice in her head informing her that the planet has been purchased by the Kin. Oddly, Amy also notices that there are no humans around at all. The Doctor determines that there are actually no humans on Earth at all. The Doctor becomes alarmed and travels to 1984 to prevent the Kin from purchasing Earth. Back in 1984, the Brownings notice that the majority of the businesses and houses in their town are being sold for large sums of money. Polly realizes that she forgot her diary in the house that is now owned by the masked people. The house is untouched and Polly notices masks of famous people like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Polly opens the cupboard to find her diary and finds a man in a wolf mask within. He states that he was reading her diary and asks her to ask him what time it is. She does, and the wolf man responds with the word “dinner” and eats Polly.

The Doctor sets up the TARDIS in 1984 with a sign inviting people to give him mysteries. Amy Pond explores and finds Prince Charles in the newsagent’s office. Eventually, Mr. Browning knocks on the TARDIS and asks The Doctor to find his



daughter. Amy asks if she could have gone back to their old house. Amy and The Doctor go to the house, and The Doctor realizes that Amy should beware of masks. As The Doctor explores, Amy finds Polly who asks her to ask her what time it is. She does and realizes that Polly is just someone in a Polly mask. The Doctor arrives in the room and realizes that it is the Kin. The Doctor explains that the Kin is just one being, and it travels very briefly in time to disguise itself and appear multiple places at once. The Kin has been recycling money through time which explains how it gained a vast amount of wealth. The Doctor asks why they would buy Earth, and the Kin respond by telling him the purpose was to attract The Doctor, the final Time Lord.

Amy and The Doctor escape, and Amy recommends they go to the beginning of time (The Big Bang) so the Kin cannot find them. The Doctor realizes that Amy is just the Kin in an Amy mask, and that the Kin want to go to the beginning of time so they can populate the entire universe just as they did on Earth. When they get to the beginning, the Kin steps out. The Doctor reveals that they actually arrived right before the beginning, before time existed. The Doctor leaves the Kin trapped, with no time to escape to.

Analysis

In this story, Gaiman is following the standard format of the show "Doctor Who." He is quite familiar with this format as Gaiman previously wrote episodes for the show. Due to this, the format is used in order to appear to the reader as similar to an episode of the show. This story also does something similar to episodes of the show by alluding to the previous adventures of The Doctor without showing them on screen.

In "Nothing O'Clock," the concept of the traditional alien invader is manipulated. The Kin do not want to destroy the Earth or personally murder all of the humans, it just wants to take revenge on The Doctor, the last member of the race that imprisoned it. Gaiman also makes many allusions within this work. Firstly, at two points in the story, The Doctor references an alien version of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears"; this story has the same premise as the human version, the difference is that it involves aliens. The reader expects this to be relevant to the story and that the Kin would roughly play out the plot of this children's tale. However, it does not. Instead, it is much more similar to "Little Red Riding Hood," as made clear by the wolf-masked man eating Polly.

Masks play a prominent role in this story as well. For some reason, many of the humans in this story cannot see through the Kin's masks. However, both The Doctor and Amy eventually see through them. This is because they are not blinded by money. The humans comply with the Kin because they are offering a vast amount of wealth. Eventually, the humans are so blinded by money, that they go extinct, as made clear when The Doctor notices that lack of humans in 2010. Darkness, like in "Invocation," symbolizes nothingness. The Kin are transported to before the beginning of time, where absolutely nothing exists, just darkness, the definition of nothingness.



Another symbol within this story is Polly's diary. The diary is the source of all of the secrets that Polly deems important. She risks her life in order to retrieve it from The Kin. The diary is the stand-in for the secrets we hold close to ourselves.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Polly care so much for her diary? Why did the wolf-masked man read it?

Discussion Question 2

Is there any significance in the setting of 1984?

Discussion Question 3

Think about how The Doctor interacts with humans. What does he think of them? How?

Vocabulary

lupine, genocide, implacably



“Diamonds and Pearls: A Fairy Tale”

Summary

A girl is made an orphan after her mother dies. Her father remarries but eventually dies as well, leaving the girl with her stepmother. One day, the stepmother gives the girl \$20 to get buy her some drugs. The girl grabs an apple on the way out. On the way, the girl gives a dog water and gives a hooker the apple. When she reaches the dealer, the girl complains that the drug den is dirty and cleans it. After buying the drugs, the hooker asks her for the drugs because she was going through withdrawal; the girl complies. When she arrives home, the stepmother hits her and notices that the girl's tears turned into diamonds and a ruby came out of her mouth. The stepmother locks the girl away and sells the jewels.

Later, the stepmother sends her biological daughter to go buy her drugs. On the way, she ignores the hooker and kicks the dog. When she gives her mother the drugs, reptiles and amphibians begin appearing from her mouth, including dangerous creatures like pythons. The dangerous creatures kill the mother and the daughter. The orphan girl hears all of this and says nothing. As she is starving to death she begins to speak. She states that beauty is truth as a final jewel falls to the floor. After the jewel makes impact, silence fills the room.

Analysis

This story includes and manipulates many conventional fairy tale themes and motifs. The first and most obvious is the girl becoming an orphan and having to live with her evil stepmother (in some fairy tales, evil stepsisters replace the stepmother). Gaiman then goes on to manipulate the innocent subject matter of the fairy tale. The girl's quest is filled with crime, drugs, and profanity. After she completes this quest, it is revealed that she has some sort of magical abilities causing the stepmother to manipulate and take advantage of her. The girl's stepsister also fits the character of a fairy tale's evil stepsister, as she is evil. Towards the end of the story, the evil stepmother and stepsister are actually killed, creating a much more brutal ending than in canonized Western fairy tales. It is also implied that the girl dies of hunger at the end. This strays from the traditional “happily ever after” ending that is usually included in the fairy tales that Gaiman is playing off of. It is clear that Gaiman is attempting to satirize the fairy-tale genre by twisting its elements into a much darker narrative.

The story also contains dueling symbols. These are the jewels and the reptiles and amphibians. The jewels that come from the orphan's mouth represent the special nature and worth of the orphan, which the step-mother attempts to exploit. The reptiles and amphibians represent quite the opposite. These animals symbolize the vile and evil nature of the stepmother and stepdaughter. Symbols like this one appear in many other works, including the Bible (think the talking Serpent).



Discussion Question 1

What other works of fiction satirize fairy-tales in this way?

Discussion Question 2

What is the moral of this story? Is there one?

Discussion Question 3

What do you make of the different things that emerged from the two girls (jewels and animals)? What do they represent?

Vocabulary

unravished, blasphemy, banded



“The Return of the Thin White Duke”

Summary

The main character of this story is The Thin White Duke, one of singer-songwriter David Bowie's many alter-egos. The Duke has ruled over the kingdom for a very long time until a subject, brought from the dungeon, referred to him as a monster. The Duke admits that he may be a monster. One of his servants, an information beetle, asks what would make The Duke happy, and the Duke replies with “I need a heart.”

Later, a small winged creature approaches The Duke asking him to save her queen. His advisors, the information beetle and the serpent, advise against this, but he decides otherwise. The Duke then mounts his battle-steed and rides off. The steed advises him that this adventure is most likely a trap. The Duke agrees but continues on. When they reach the kingdom of the Queen, the palace guardians, very beautiful creatures, attempt to seduce The Duke. The Duke resists and eventually reaches the Queen. The Queen tells him that he must answer three questions in order to receive anything he desires.

She asks these three questions: What is bigger than the universe? What is greater than a king? What can never be taken back? The Duke answers with, the mind, monarchy, and his word. These are wrong. The Queen reveals that the answer to all three questions is the heart. Regardless of this, the Queen informs him that he can stay with her, just as his predecessors did until they died. The Duke realizes that he cannot be a Duke and have a heart at the same time, so he walks into the mist where, the Queen tells him, he will lose his identity and arrive in a different kingdom. When he arrives on the other side, the reader learns that The Duke is now a musician who is thinking about writing a song with a two-syllable title. He humors the word monster and discards it.

Analysis

In this story, Gaiman is utilizing the structure of the heroes' journey. The hero, The Duke, is motivated to journey into the unknown, resist temptation, obtains what he wants, and lives happily. However, this is slightly different than the traditional journey, because what he wants is to not be himself and to be able to care. By speaking about the man from the dungeon, the narrator implies that the Duke has previously been a brutal and cruel ruler, and that he wishes to change that. Not only does the Duke not care about others, but he also does not care for himself. When he is warned that this quest is most likely a trap, he shrugs it off. When the Queen initially threatens him with death, he does not initially have an adverse reaction to it. It is not until he arrives on the other side of the mist does he begin to care about something. This thing is music.

By the title of the story, it is implied that the person The Duke transforms into is David Bowie. The evidence for this lies in the song he wishes to write, as many Bowie songs start with words containing two syllables. In addition, along with Ziggy Stardust, The



Thin White Duke is one of the alter-egos of David Bowie. The transformation into the legendary artist David Bowie and gaining the ability to care are the rewards for The Duke's rewards for completing his journey. Gaiman uses this part of the narrative to imply that Bowie actually gained this alter-ego through supernatural means.

Discussion Question 1

Based on what we are told, what do The Duke's advisors think of him? Are they fearful or respectful?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the purpose of the Queen's palace. Others have visited the palace before, so what is the palace's greater purpose?

Discussion Question 3

Other than the ways mentioned above, describe how this story differs from the traditional heroes' journey.

Vocabulary

neural, discontent, reincorporated



“Feminine Endings”

Summary

The narrator of the story is a busker in a non-English foreign town. This busker makes money by standing in the city pretending to be a living statue. This living statue has become infatuated with a young woman, and this narration is the contents of his letter to her.

Initially, it seems like an innocent attraction, but it soon it is clear that it is much more sinister. It is clear that he is under the impression that she feels the same way as he does for her. The statue starts telling the reader details about the woman’s life that he should not know, such as her choices in undergarments, her relationships with her family members, and whether or not she is being chaste. The reader begins to realize that he knows this information because he is stalking her.

It began with the statue man figuring out her email and social media passwords. He then began using this information to try to “know” her, and eventually he was speaking to her family members. By the end of the story, the statue speaks of his plan of obtaining her by putting the letter in her house and standing still in the room until he notices her.

Analysis

Gaiman uses this form of narration to lead the reader into a gradual understanding regarding the motives and psychology of the busker. As the narration is technically a letter, we only are privy to his side of the story and we are not told whether she is infatuated with the busker as he thinks she is. The narrative slowly gives details making the busker seem more and more unhinged. We learn that he lives alone, spends much of his time cyber-stalking the woman, and believes that he will one day obtain her.

The title of the story derives from a briefly mentioned exchange when a person refers to the statue using a female gendered noun. The busker immediately ties this back into the woman by recalling a time where she uttered a statement of confusion due to the language’s (the actual language is unknown) gendered object pronouns. The story is also a reference to Gaiman’s wife, American songwriter and author Amanda Palmer, who started her performance career as a living statue street busker.

Like in "Nothing O'Clock," the woman's diary represents personal and important secrets. The busker reads these secrets, giving weight to the busker's violation of privacy.

Discussion Question 1

What makes the busker think that his feelings for the woman are mutual?



Discussion Question 2

Other than the aforementioned explanation of gendered pronouns, how does language have an effect on the story's plot?

Discussion Question 3

Clearly something is wrong with the busker. What is his endgame? What do you think he does after the story ends?

Vocabulary

busker, statuesque, schematic



“Observing the Formalities”

Summary

This very short story consists of an unnamed speaker complaining that no one observes the formalities anymore. The instance that sets the speaker off is that she was not invited to a child’s Christening. These formalities that she is complaining about consist of eating with mouths open, interrupting others, inviting people to events, and being late. As the story progresses, it is implied that the real reason the woman is upset is that all of the potential godmothers were invited to the Christening, but she was not. She proclaims that she would make the child’s future “tidy and polite.” She ends by musing that they probably would have invited her to the funeral.

Analysis

At the beginning of this story, the reader is given a red herring regarding the motivations of the speaker. The speaker makes it seem like she is frustrated with the state of politeness and tradition in the contemporary society. By the end of the story, it is clear that this is not true and that the speaker is just upset that she was not in consideration for becoming the child’s godmother. The story makes us question individual motives when something is complained about. It is difficult to tell whether someone actually has a problem with a concept or perhaps they may have just been slighted and are airing their frustrations.

The author tends to use very aggressive verbs (gawk, prick, hush, deplore) and aggressive adjectives (dull, useless, rancorous). These types of words make the poem seem quite like a letter of complaint. This poem is also full of enjambment, like many Gaiman's other poems.

Discussion Question 1

What does the speaker mean when she contends that “they” would have invited her to the funeral?

Discussion Question 2

What adjectives does the speaker use that supports the idea that she was personally slighted?

Discussion Question 3

What is the point of briefly mentioning the speaker’s sister?

Vocabulary

rancorous, raucous, punctuality



“The Sleeper and the Spindle”

Summary

This fairytale-esque story begins with three dwarves traveling to a mountain pass in order to obtain expensive commodities for a queen. The narrative briefly switches to this queen, who is soon to be wed but does not seem very excited about; she sees it as just another step towards death (she will either die in domesticity or battle).

The dwarves arrive at a taproom. The taproom patrons explain that they cannot move toward the mountain pass as much of the further area is subject to a plague of sleep. The patrons go on to explain that a child was cursed to sleep forever once her finger was pricked, and at the moment her finger was pricked, others began falling asleep. The girl and the plague sufferers had not woken up, yet not died or aged. However, the curse can be reversed if the sleeping girl is kissed.

The dwarves are not afraid of this sleep plague because dwarves only sleep twice a year. They abandon their travels to the mountainside and inform the queen of this plague. This interests the queen, as she had once fallen asleep for an entire year in a glass coffin and eventually woke up. The queen decides to travel to the city where the sleeping girl resides. This town is now home to a large thorn barricade separating the outside of the girl's home from the inside. She gathers her armor and sword, postpones her wedding and leaves. She had traveled with the dwarves years ago when she was much younger.

On their travels to the city, they encounter many sleeping people. Suddenly, the sleepers begin mouthing words and then speaking towards the queen.

The story shifts to the castle where the girl and an old woman resides. The woman has been living with the sleeping girl for quite a long time. In order to survive, she has been killing the sleeping mammals in the winter to preserve their meat. When the travelers reach the city they find more sleeping people. The dwarves notice that spider webs have formed on them (the dwarves recall seeing the webs in the prior town as well). This means that the spiders do not fall asleep.

The sleeping people eventually give the travelers chase. When they reach the castle, the queen burns down the thorn barricade by burning the remains of prior adventurers. When they reach the tower they learn that the situation is not how it seems. The queen kisses the sleeping girl and learns a terrible truth. The sleeping girl was actually a witch who pricked a girl's finger with a spindle, stealing her sleep and youth. The previously mentioned old woman is the girl and the sleeping girl is the witch. The old woman stabs the girl with the spindle, killing her.



The curse ends, and the travelers tell the newly awoken townspeople to take care of the old woman, as she is their savior. The dwarves destroy the spindle and the queen decides to continue to travel with the dwarves rather than be married.

Analysis

This story, like “Diamonds and Pearls,” is a twist on the traditional fairytale genre. In “The Sleeper and the Spindle,” a beautiful young woman is in danger thanks to an evil being with magic. The parallels between this and classic fairytales like Rapunzel and Sleeping Beauty, are very clear. The differences lie towards the ending. Instead of having one of the male characters kiss the girl in order to break the spell, the queen does it. It must also be noted that the female protagonist in this story is seen as much more independent than the women in traditional fairy tales. She essentially plays the role of both the female royal protagonist and the Prince Charming-esque character. The old woman character also breaks the conventional mold for her type of character. Usually, in stories like these, older female characters are generally portrayed as evil magic users who intend to snuff out the female protagonist. In addition, the young sleeping character switches from her traditional role of the damsel in distress to the antagonist.

The main protagonist does not save the day, as she usually would in traditional fairytales. It is actually the cursed old woman who vanquishes the evil, breaks the curse, and saves the land. Due to this, the old woman is then ascended to a respected, almost royal, position once the queen informs the townsfolk that she saved their lives. It is also important to note that the queen chooses not to get married as traditional female protagonist or queens would. Instead, she keeps traveling with the dwarves with her armor and sword in tow. This, among other details, implies that the queen may actually be a lesbian (another unusual concept in fairy tales). She kisses the girl quite deeply and does not seem to want to be married. She escapes this by continuing her travels and fitting into a more masculine gender role.

The spindle is an incredibly important symbol within this story. The spindle represents control of life, death, and age. The witch uses this spindle to curse the young woman which keeps her young. At the end of the story, the spindle is used as a weapon. This makes the spindle an instrument of death, therefore bringing death to the witch.

Discussion Question 1

Does the fact that the queen may be a lesbian change the story in any ways?

Discussion Question 2

Does Gaiman allude to any other fairy tales in this story?



Discussion Question 3

Does this story signal a change in fairy tale characters? What other examples make similar changes or reinvents the genre?

Vocabulary

shapely, degenerate, spindle



“Witch Work”

Summary

This short poem is about an elderly witch who lives in a room filled with clocks. She would sell storms, sorrows, and calmed the sea. The narrator explains that he bought three sorrows. The first he gave to his enemy’s child, the second was made into a broth by his wife, and the third remains unused. Regardless of this, the witch’s life is in a box which makes her quite sorrowful. We are not told what makes the witch sad, but she always returns to her house full of clocks.

Analysis

It is quite possible that this story is attempting to give the reader a new perspective on the witch character. In this poem, the witch does not use it for evil, she instead gives the sorrows to others to use. It does not seem that she uses any of her magic to help herself, as she seems quite impoverished and lonely. The speaker implies that she finds happiness in interacting with other people but laments that once the husbands are home from sea, no one buys magic from her. We are not given much information about the witch, so it is possible that this is not the reason she is sad.

Gaiman's use of punctuation in "Witch Work" is quite different than his other poems. Almost all of the stanzas in the poem contain no periods until the end of the very last line. The fifth stanza does break from this pattern. In this stanza, Gaiman uses the periods to establish pauses. As the speaker is explaining to the reader each sorrow the witch gave him, it sounds quite like a list. These pauses cause the reader to stop after each item just as one would do between reading individual items in a list.

Discussion Question 1

What is making the witch sad? Use context clues.

Discussion Question 2

What does the speaker mean in “she kept her life in a box?”

Discussion Question 3

How does this witch differ than those in previous stories in this collection?



Vocabulary

mulberry, harlot, reconcile



“In Relig Odhrain”

Summary

Two Irish priests, Saint Columba and Saint Oran, arrived on the island of Iona. Saint Columba received some sort of dream explaining that in order to keep his church from following down, someone must die. Saint Columba murdered and buried Saint Oran. When Saint Columba returned to say goodbye to Saint Oran's corpse, they found his corpse and brushed the mud off when suddenly Saint Oran came back to life. Saint Oran explained that there is no heaven or hell. Saint Columba reburied and left him.

The legend states that Saint Oran's bones keep the Iona church stable. When Columba died, they initially buried him on Iona but eventually moved him, leaving Oran as the only saint on Iona. The speaker concludes with warning the reader to not try to seek Oran, as his corpse still wanders and speaks his previous revelation.

Analysis

This story is retelling a canonized story about Saint Oran and Saint Columba. Historically, Oran was actually the first Christian to be buried on Iona. The speaker gives a mixed message about the nature of Saint Oran. He seems like a positive figure, as he does keep the church standing. Inversely, he also haunts his graveyard speaking blasphemy (the Christians in this area would consider it to be blasphemy). The story ends with the narrator stating that Saint Oran is actually protecting the other dead on Iona, such as kings and archbishops.

Ultimately, it does not seem like Columba receives any punishment for his actions. He is initially buried on Iona but later moved to a plot near Saint Patrick. This seems like a very respectful privilege to give a murderer. Overall, the concepts of good and evil are very blurry within this story.

As in the previous poems, this poem does use enjambment. The poem also uses a repeated phrase that appears both at the beginning and end of the poem: "on the island of Iona." This not only signals to the reader the beginning and end of the poem, but it also audibly makes the poem sound old, as many poems of antiquity utilize this type of repetition.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Saint Columba not punished for his actions? His actions were clearly known because there is a story about it.



Discussion Question 2

What other religious characters would you compare Saint Oran to?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Saint Oran's ghost tell people that there is no Heaven or Hell?

Vocabulary

entombed, perdition, mattock



“Black Dog”

Summary

Note: This story assumes you have read Gaiman’s novel “American Gods.” If you have not, this story may be rather confusing, therefore you may want to familiarize yourself with the source material before proceeding.

A year after the event of “American Gods,” Shadow Moon is wandering the United Kingdom. He walks into a pub and begins to chat with some patrons about their dogs. During this conversation, the local urban legend is mentioned. This urban legend states that if you see the legendary Black Dog, you die. The landlord of the taproom also shows Shadow a cat corpse in a glass case. The landlord explains that he found it buried in one of the building’s falls, and that the practice of putting animals into the walls of a building was an ancient practice. In addition, the British used to recycle mummified cats for fertilizer. The corpse reminds him of the cat god, Bast, that he met during “American Gods.”

Shadow then makes friends with a couple named Moira and Oliver. They invite Shadow to stay in their house. He accepts. On the way to the house, Moira, Oliver, and Shadow speak about the Black Dog. They explain that its name is Black Shuck and that it is mostly made up. A flash of lightning illuminates the night and Shadow sees something in the distance. Oliver collapses and Shadow carries him home. Shadow offers to call an ambulance but Moira explains that Oliver sometimes has these episodes, and that he will get over it. Before bed Oliver casually states that the Black Dog followed him home.

During his sleep, Shadow dreams of Egypt and cats. A voice asks Shadow what he is running from. Shadow realizes that Bast is speaking to him through his dreams. Outside, they find a footprint of a large dog and blame it on the dog next door. Oliver locks himself in the bathroom. When Shadow forces himself in, it is revealed that Oliver has slit his wrists (among other things). Oliver exclaims that he did this for the dog, and that it must be fed.

Moira convinces Shadow to stay until Oliver is feeling more stable. Shadow drives to a pharmacy and meets someone he had seen at the bar the night before. The woman convinces Shadow to meet her on the hill. They meet and the woman reveals her name is Cassie. They kiss and Cassie reveals that she was once Moira’s lover. Shadow asks about the Black Dog. Cassie explains that the dog was one of the many used in the Wild Hunt, a Scandinavian religious story, and that the dogs belong to Odin, Shadow’s father. Shadow shrugs this off and they speak about an ancient building on the hill. Cassie elaborates that they call the building the Gateway to Hell. Cassie leaves, stating that Oliver and Moira should meet her at a special place. A cat walks up to Shadow and scratches him.



Shadow tells Oliver and Moira that he saw Cassie. The couple become very upset; Moira begins to cry, and Oliver walks away (seemingly eliminating the improvements to his condition). During the night, Oliver lets Shadow follow him to the Gateway to Hell. Oliver states that it is impossible for him to meet Cassie because he gave her to the hill. When they arrive, Oliver begins removing rocks from one of the building's walls. Shadow helps, and they find the corpse of Cassie.

Oliver states that he has to kill Shadow. Oliver tells Shadow to step into the wall. Shadow initially refuses but the Black Dog appears, so he complies. Oliver explains that this building is actually the Temple of the Black Dog. Cassie's ghost tries to convince Shadow to kill Oliver and Bast speaks to him, asking him to act. The dog bites his forearm injuring him. Shadow decides that he will not be influenced by his father's dog and confronts the animal. Ancient cats emerge from the ground and leap at the beast. The animal steps into Oliver and he collapses. Eventually, a town person arrives and calls the authorities. Later, Moira states that Oliver will have to be tried for his crimes. Shadow leaves the town.

Analysis

Before the narrative starts, a riddle appears. This riddle alludes that the living and the dead "live" together, whether the living know it or not.

This story continues the premise of the source novel, "American Gods," which is the alternative universe where gods, old and new, live on Earth with humans. Shadow interacts with more gods and supernatural beings than most humans because he himself is half god (his father was the Norse god Odin and his mother was a human). Other than this, the story follows similar subject matter as the Sherlock Holmes story, "The Hounds of Baskerville." Gaiman alludes to this, by having Shadow quote Holmes when they are discussing the dog paw print. However, while in the Doyle story, the origin of the dogs is revealed to be not supernatural, it is not the case for this story. Also, Like in "Lunar Labyrinth," the wolf represents the human race's fear of monsters.

As the story is a continuation of the novel, Gaiman does allude to many mythological beings and stories. For example, Bast is an Egyptian cat god that he meets in the novel. Her cat-like features are described in every aspect of her being. Shadow even remarks that her voice is feline in town. The story also mentions the Wild Hunt. This allusion's source is a Scandinavian myth where spectral huntsmen and dogs ride through towns causing chasing prey and causing havoc. These huntsmen are commonly associated with Shadow's father Odin.

In this story, Gaiman also works with the motif regarding small towns with big secrets (think "The Lottery"). At first, Shadow does not expect for the town to have any supernatural elements because of the low population, but it is soon proven otherwise. It is also possible that Gaiman is alluding to another short story. In Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," a man is buried alive in catacombs. In this story, a victim is buried alive in a wall. Both buildings that are used in these stories have some sort of ancient



significance and are places where it would be hard to find the body. However, unlike Poe's story, the victims are found and the killer faces consequence.

Ultimately, much of the analysis regarding this story lies within analysis in "American Gods," so a reading of the novel will reveal greater understanding of this story.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Shadow and Bast. Why would Bast look out for Shadow?

Discussion Question 2

How does history play a role in the story? Analyze the background information we are given by the townsfolk.

Discussion Question 3

How would this story have been different if Shadow was not a demi-god?

Vocabulary

pusillanimous, druid, secateurs



Characters

Stuart Innes

Stuart Innes is the protagonist in “The Thing About Cassandra.” Stuart is rather imaginative and self-conscious about his sexual experience and his place among his friends. In order to remedy this, he creates an imaginary girlfriend and lies to his friends and family. He questions this once he meets the imagined girl (Cassandra). It is possible that Stuart is just a person within Cassandra’s imagination.

The Dwarf

The dwarf is the protagonist in “The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains.” This character, who remains unnamed, is a sort of supernatural being. He can run faster and longer than most men even though he is far older than most humans. Through most of the story, he is fueled by grief; however, once it is revealed that his guide is the one who killed his daughter, he is overcome with the need for revenge and kills the guide.

Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes is the protagonist in “The Case of Death and Honey.” Holmes is a revered detective who, during the time of this story, is at the end of his career. After his brother, Mycroft, dies, he decides to solve an even greater mystery: The mystery of death. Holmes is incredibly scientific and motivated, as he even goes to the length of moving to China to solve the mystery.

Farfal

Farfal is the protagonist in “An Invocation of Incuriosity.” Farfal is some sort of alien or ancient humanoid. He is quite satisfied with his simple life until his world begins being consumed by the darkness. He is quite distraught once his father takes him to another time and decides that Farfal will act as his servant instead of his son. After he escapes this new time, he decides that due to what he has seen the darkness do, he wants to get as far away from it as possible; he wants to travel to the beginning of time.

The Doctor

The Doctor is one of the protagonists in “Nothing O’Clock,” and the BBC television program “Doctor Who.” The Doctor is the last surviving member of the alien race known as the Time Lords. The Doctor is actually responsible for destroying his race, as he had to sacrifice them in order to stop the brutal Daleks. The Doctor runs from this memory and instead meanders around time and space while solving problems.



The Duke

The Duke is the protagonist in “The Return of the Thin White Duke.” The Duke, who is supposed to represent David Bowie’s alter-ego The Thin White Duke, is a ruler who is not satisfied with his situation. After being confronted by a subject, he decides that he must find a heart. He fully understands that he cannot rule and have a heart at the same time. This, coupled with his dissatisfaction, causes him to step into the mist, becoming a musician in another time or dimension.

The Busker

The Busker is the speaker in “Feminine Endings.” The busker becomes infatuated with a young woman. However, as the story goes on, it is revealed that there is clearly something unhinged in the mind of the busker. He stalks her and prepares to confront her in her house.

The Queen

The queen is a character in “The Sleeper and the Spindle.” The queen is quite different than many other portrayals of female royalty in fairytale-esque fiction. This story’s queen rides gender lines by wearing armor, using weapons, and kissing women. The queen also decides that she does not want to be wed and leaves to travel with the dwarves.

Shadow Moon

Shadow Moon is the protagonist in “Black Dog” and Gaiman’s previous work “American Gods.” Shadow Moon is a demigod who often has run-ins with gods and supernatural creatures. Moon is rather accepting of this and tends to confront these beings head-on. However, by being half-human, he is subject to human banes, such as fear, lust, and love.

Oliver

Somewhat a villain in “Black Dog,” Oliver seems to be incredibly unhinged or is possessed by the magic of the Black Dog. He kills Cassie and buries her in a wall and intends to do the same to Shadow.

The Traveler

The main character in “A Lunar Labyrinth,” the Traveler is a roadside attraction aficionado who decides to visit a maze after seeing it mentioned on the Internet. He is curious and trusting to a fault.



Speaker ("The Man Who Forgot Ray Bradbury")

Speaker is the unnamed narrator of "The Man Who Forgot Ray Bradbury." He has some sort of memory deficiency and seems to claim that it affects more than just him. He is concerned with society's forgetfulness regarding important stories and authors.

Woman at the Docks

This woman is the character who tells the narrator of "Down to a Sunless Sea" the story involving maritime cannibalism. She seems quite unhinged after her son was eaten at sea. Eventually she reveals that to the first mate that the eaten son was, in fact, his son as well. It is unclear why she does not reveal this sooner.

The Landlady

This woman is the subject of the poem, "My Last Landlady." She murders the narrator after drugging him. It is unclear what caused her to commit murder, but it is implied that the state of British society may be a possible reason.

The Mother ("Adventure Story")

The speaker's mother in "Adventure Story." She tells the speaker about his father's adventures and the source of the mysterious idol. She acts like the father's adventures are normal, regardless of the fact that she thinks things like going to the grocery store count as adventures.

Nerys

Nerys is the speaker's sister in "Orange (Third Subject's Responses to Investigator's Written Questionnaire.) EYES ONLY." Before her exposure to alien materials, she is quite obsessed with 90s icon Britney Spears and tanning. After her exposure, she becomes quite the household tyrant. She is eventually taken away by aliens.

Speaker ("Jerusalem")

The speaker in "Jerusalem" recollects present happenings as well as the vacation he and his wife took to Jerusalem. When they visited Jerusalem, he was very skeptical regarding the powers of the city. By the time the story closes, he becomes more open to this power and searches for his wife.



Speaker ("Click-Clack the Rattlebag")

Readers are told very little about the speaker in "Click-Clack the Rattlebag." He is in the same building as the Click-Clack because he was waiting for his girlfriend to arrive. He seems paternal and trusting towards the Click-Clack which causes his presumed death.

Obediah Polkinghorn

Obediah Polkinghorn is the main character in "And Weep Like Alexander." He is an inventor who has invented the science of inventing. Essentially, he wipes concepts and inventions from existence that hurt humanity in some way. We do not learn why he believes he has the authority to do this, or how he invented this science.

The Orphan

The Orphan is the main character in "Diamonds and Pearls: A Fairy Tale." She lives with her drug addict stepmother who forces her to retrieve drugs for her. After The Orphan goes out of the way to help others, she is punished by the step-mother. She eventually gains the abilities to create precious stones from her body.

Speaker ("Observing the Formalities")

The speaker in the poem "Observing the Formalities" seems rather frustrated with the current state of society, particularly the lack of the observation of societal formalities. He is not invited to a Christening which triggers him into ranting within the contents of the poem.

The Witch

The subject of the poem "Witch Work" lives in a room full of clocks and distributes sorrows to the townsfolk. It is said that she keeps her life in a box which brings her sorrow.

Saint Columba

One of the two priests in the poem "In Relig Odhrain," Saint Columba is murdered by Saint Oran. He miraculously comes back to life and explains that there is no heaven or hell. His corpse still wanders Iona.



Symbols and Symbolism

Darkness

The symbol of darkness consistently is the stand-in or representation of nothingness in multiple stories and poems in this collection. In “Invocation,” the darkness consumes Farfal’s world, creating a place where there is nothing to go back to. At the end of the story, he wants to travel to the beginning of time, before darkness started consuming time periods. In “Nothing O’Clock,” The Doctor brings the Kin right before the beginning of time. Before time crashed into existence, there was nothing. This means that since the universe without time is filled with nothing, there is no method of escape.

Diaries

Diaries, which appear in several works in this book, represent things that are personal or secret. In “Nothing O’Clock,” the contents of the diary are so important that she is driven to go to her old home, now owned by the masked people. The woman in “Feminine Endings” also has a diary, which her stalker reads. By reading it, the busker is able to formulate what type of person she is, as the diary contains the personal aspects of who she is (or so the busker thinks).

The Spindle

The spindle in “The Sleeper and the Spindle,” symbolizes control over life, death, and age. A spindle is a sewing instrument used with thread. Interestingly enough, thread is also used to symbolize life (think the thread in Disney’s Hercules). The witch uses the spindle to propagate the curse. This keeps her young and incapacitates those around her. Ultimately, it is used as a weapon and kills the witch, therefore controlling death.

Casement

The casement in “Invocation,” is used as a symbol for home. The adventure within this story starts when Balthasar and Farfal flee from the darkness through the casement. They arrive in a place that should be Farfal’s home. However, once he must flee again, he looks through the casement as sees his prior home being consumed. He jumps through to another time, going to his new home in present day Florida.

Sea

The sea is used as a symbol for adventure and the unknown. In “March Tale,” the sea is used as an escape from gender roles through great adventures. Inversely, in “Sunless



Sea,” the sea is quite a negative symbol, as those who tend to sail off into it experience misfortune.

The Thames

The Thames river is always mentioned in the context of London itself. In “Sunless Sea,” the Thames represents the dirty state of London and vice-versa. This symbol is quite common in British literature.

The Attic

In “Click-Clack the Rattlebag,” the attic is used to represent darkness and danger. Due to the darkness within the attic, the narrator is not aware of his inevitable fate until he is pulled in. The boy mentions that Click-Clacks have lairs, and we find out that his is the attic. This symbol is common in folktales (think the hero wandering into the cave to fight the monster).

Dwarves

In multiple stories in this text, dwarves represent ancient wisdom. In these stories, the dwarves always know something that the human characters do not, and it generally works out in their favor. The dwarves are also very old, being on Earth much longer than humans, therefore knowing the world and its wonders much better.

Wolves or Dogs

Wolves appear in many stories, and they are always associated with danger. These wolves generally appear as monsters who are at odds with the human characters. For example, the werewolves in “Lunar Labyrinth,” and the Black Dog in “Black Dog.” The human characters naturally fear these beings due to what they commonly represent.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem in “Jerusalem,” symbolizes something deeply mystical that humans cannot understand. The wife is possessed by the Jerusalem syndrome while in the city and is cured after she leaves. Surprisingly, she is repossessed when they return home some time later. Not even those who live in Jerusalem can understand it.

Jewels

In “Diamonds and Pearls: A Fairy Tale,” the jewels originating from the mouth and tears of the orphan symbolize the special nature and worth of the orphan. Not many children



can eject valuable jewels from their body, so it is clear that the orphan has some sort of gift. Through this, the step-mother realizes the worth of her step-daughter and exploits her.

The Cave

The cave in "The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains," as the title suggests, represents the truth. In the narrative, the dwarf takes a long journey, not necessarily to find wealth, but to find the truth, which he eventually does. This represents the journey to find the truth for all of humanity. Humans have been attempting to determine the absolute truth of existence and society for ages, and the journey is not done yet. However, the dwarf does find the truth and gets his revenge.

Honey

Honey, in "The Case of Death and Honey," represents life. Honey derives from bees who obtain nectar from plants. This leads to pollination, which is responsible for the continued existence of many of the fruits and vegetables that humans consume (not to mention the fruits and vegetables that other animals eat). Honey is the key to life, not just in the mysterious sense within the story, but in reality as well.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Reptiles and Amphibians in "Diamonds and Pearls: A Fairy Tale," represent evil. The stepmother and stepdaughter only begin to spew these animals from their bodies after they have exploited the orphan. They do not eject beneficial jewels from their bodies like the orphan, but animals that eventually kill them. This type of symbol can be seen in a great amount of literature, even the Bible (serpent within the story of Adam and Eve).



Settings

The Past

Multiple stories in this collection deal with characters traveling to the past. In these stories, the past is consistently portrayed as being less than ideal compared to the present. Farfal does not like the past as he is treated improperly and the Kin are actually thwarted when the Doctor brings them to the past, as it consists of simply nothing.

United Kingdom

Many of the stories take place within some part of the United Kingdom. These stories tend to express the historical significance of the city and the legendary Thames river. Gaiman places many of his stories in these part of the world as it is his homeland.

United States

Part of "Invocation" takes place within the United States (Florida). It is portrayed as much blunter than the United Kingdom. The history of the country is not highlighted in the way the stories placed within the United Kingdom are. It is clearly more of a backdrop than a true and full setting.

Fantasy Realm

A great deal of stories within this text take place in some sort of fantasy realm. These places usually are similar to ancient Earth but much more mystical. Humans usually inhabit the fantasy realm but are accompanied by more mystical beings such as information beetles, dwarves, and witches.

The Grocery Store

In the novel, many things seem to happen at the grocery store. In "The Thing About Cassandra," Stuart's mother runs into Cassandra at a grocery store, and in "Adventure Story," the mother believes that going to the grocery store is an adventure. It is never explained why so many important things happen here.

The Cave in the Black Mountains

The majority of the narrative in "The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains" is spent traveling to the cave. However, when the dwarf finally reaches the cave, he does in fact



learn the truth. The supernatural nature of the cave informs the dwarf that his guide murdered his daughter and plans to murder him. The cave itself seems sentient.

China

The nation, China, is where Sherlock Holmes finds the solution to the mystery of death in "The Case of Death and Honey." During Holmes' time, China would have most likely been a mysterious place for most Englishmen, but Holmes feels that is where he must go. In China he finds the Chinese bees which contribute to solving the mystery.

Jerusalem

In "Jerusalem," the speaker and his wife take a vacation to the holy city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem seems to have some sort of supernatural power. This power has the ability to possess people while they are in the city. We later learn that this is not actually true, and the city's influence goes far beyond the borders of the city. Jerusalem has been the source of the major conflict between the Israelites and the Palestinians (the guide explains this).

Iona

In "In Relig Odhrain," Saint Oran and Saint Columba visit the isle of Iona. Here, Columba kills Oran. The island seems to have some sort of supernatural power, as Oran is resurrected and claims to know the truth about heaven and hell. Oran is said to still wander the island.

The Pub

In "And Weep, Like Alexander," Obediah Polkinghorn visits a pub and tells the patrons about his ability to uninvent. The pub seems like quite the lively place until the patrons exclusively look at their phones. This causes Polkinghorn to decide to uninvent the smartphone.



Themes and Motifs

Death

Death is usually a motivator for many of the texts' characters. The characters seem to want to avoid death at all costs or acquire vengeance for the death of a loved one. In stories like "Black Dog," Shadow Moon's fear of death as well as his frustrations with his father cause him to stand up to the Black Dog and save his life. Also, in "January Tale," it is apparent that the motivation for fighting the temporal war is to avoid death.

Shadow has more knowledge regarding death than most people, as he has seen that it is not always absolute due to the divine nature of some of the world's inhabitants. The non-absolute nature of death is also symbolically explored in "The Sleeper and the Spindle." The victims of the sleep plague are not dead, but they act as if they are. When the sleepers chase the protagonists, it is very similar to the traditional zombie chase scene. It is clear that beyond the sleepers just being sleep, this sleep-death is incredibly supernatural, as they do not age or rot.

However, these motivations are not always beneficial for all characters involved. Balthasar, from "Invocation," fears death and abandons his son because of it. Once he is confronted by his angry customer, who threatens him and his "real sons" with death he flees. Unfortunately for him, as he leaps into the casement, he is transported to the future where the darkness is finally consuming the entirety of the planet where he presumably dies. His son, Farfal, does not flee and tries to resist for a period. He is rewarded for this and is transported to a time when darkness is not a current threat.

In many of the stories, it is implied that there is no life after death. The vast majority of the characters in non-fantasy settings, do not lament on the afterlife related fate of their loved ones or themselves. In "On Relig Odhrain," Saint Oran reveals to Columba and all those who attempt to disturb him that there is no heaven or hell, therefore being quite contrary to the Christian idea of the afterlife. Ironically, this is quite blasphemous as Oran and Columba are priests. Oran would be privy to this knowledge as he has technically died but rose again. This implies that Oran's claims about death are true.

Time Travel

Gaiman uses the theme of time travel to demonstrate that we as still do not know the nature of fate or time. These questions are ones that humans have struggled with for an incredibly long time. Many characters within the stories travel through time. This causes some interesting implications to become apparent. The first is that within these stories, time is not linear. However, "Invocation" and "Nothing O'Clock" imply different things about the nature of time.

Balthasar's casement is used as a portal to different periods within the same universe. It is also revealed that Balthasar has been raising a family in multiple time periods at the



same time. As both time periods are in the same universe, Balthasar's actions are not making any noticeable changes within the future time period. This could mean that, in this story, time paradoxes cannot occur. Nevertheless, the biggest implication regarding this is that time is fixed, since it cannot be changed. Balthasar could not go back in time and somehow stop the darkness from consuming the universe. In short, there is nothing we can do to change the inevitable future.

"Nothing O'Clock" argues differently. When The Doctor and Amy Pond first arrive in 2010, they notice that the human population is completely absent. The Doctor and Amy eventually solve this by travelling back to 1984 and stopping the Kin, therefore saving the future and the human race. This implies that time is not fixed, and that we can influence what happens in the future. This would mean that the fates involved in the future are not inevitable.

Overall, both of these stories work with time travel in a different way. As the reality of time travel is currently unproven, either of these thematic explanations could be correct. Regardless, Gaiman is attempting to question whether fates are fixed.

Royalty

Gaiman's use of royalty as a motif does not portray the position of royalty in a positive light. It is no coincidence that both royal characters abandon their posts to escape and do something more fulfilling. This is contrary to most conventional portrayals of royalty, as those in works such as Arthurian legends seem to be quite satisfied with their position.

Gaiman's most prominent royal characters the queen from "The Sleeper and the Spindle" and "The Thin White Duke" both see the obligations of royalty rather eye-to-eye.

Firstly, it is apparent that the queen's royal obligation is to marry and rule. Once the queen learns of the sleep plague and the adventure that could result from it, she abandons both of these things. It seems that she does this because it is monotonous and unfulfilling. At the end of the adventure, one would expect for the queen to return to her post, marry, and rule. She does not and continues to travel with her dwarf companions.

The Thin White Duke does something very similar. After he is berated by one of his subjects, he decides to suspend his rule and venture to the kingdom of The Queen. According to the narrator, the Duke has been ruling for quite some time, and he is not at all satisfied due to his lack of heart. Once he meets the Queen, he acknowledges that he cannot rule and have a heart concurrently. He chooses a heart over his title and walks into the mist, abandoning his entire past life.



Reality

Gaiman uses the motif of reality in stories like “The Thing About Cassandra” and “Jerusalem” in an attempt to question the nature of reality itself. In these stories, reality does not work in an easy-to-understand or traditional fashion. Gaiman not only gets the characters to question their own reality, but he invites the reader to question their own as well. Like within the aforementioned theme of time travel, time and fate, like reality, is a concept that humans have struggled with for centuries.

In “The Thing About Cassandra,” the idea of a singular reality is very unclear. Throughout the story, the reader questions whether the character Cassandra is actually the Cassandra that he made up during his childhood. When he realizes that she is, in fact, his imagined girlfriend, Stuart is befuddled and becomes unsure of how imagination or reality functions. Reality gets even more unclear when the reader is told that Cassandra imagined Stuart. This motif puts forward the possibility that there may be no concrete reality.

The protagonist in “Jerusalem” eventually questions his own reality as well. The reader is told at the beginning of the story that the protagonist is not a believer and is quite cynical about the importance of holy cities such as Jerusalem. However, after the second time his wife falls victim to the Jerusalem syndrome, he questions his assertions. At the end of the story, the man decides that his sense of reality may not be the proper one.

The motif of reality is being used to perhaps nudge the reader in questioning their own personal realities. Our view of the world may not always be correct; even our collective view of reality may be incorrect. Ultimately, the thematic element of reality portrays reality in many forms and as something that is almost impossible to understand.

Gender Roles

Gaiman’s stories explore alternatives to what we would consider traditional gender roles, especially regarding women. Gaiman accomplishes this by writing characters that would usually fit within a traditional gender role while having the female character demonstrate characteristics and behaviors that are unusual within these traditional gender roles. While the theme of gender roles is not widespread within the stories, it is still one of the most heavily explored.

In “March Tale,” it is heavily implied that the mother, named Anne, was once the infamous pirate Anne Bonny. The narrator explains that when Anne first began sailing with her father, she had to dress in men’s clothing in order to fit the part. The narrator also implies that one of the reasons Anne Bonny was so infamous is because of the fact that pirates were normally men. It is explained that Anne Bonny was also not a merciful pirate and was most likely rather brutal. Nevertheless, Bonny was actually incredibly successful as a pirate, regardless of her gender.



In “Sleeper and the Spindle,” the queen also defies gender norms. When the queen decides to travel with the dwarves, she arms herself. The queen puts on chainmail armor and retrieves her sword. In traditional fantasy settings, women are generally not warriors. The speaker also recalls the queen’s thoughts about how she would either die in battle or die in childbirth, implying that this may not be the first time the queen has armed herself.

In both stories, female characters are performing more masculine actions and inserting themselves into roles that are usually performed by men. These stories not only seem to be contrary to societal gender roles but gender roles in literature as well; literary pirates (think *Treasure Island*) and literary queens (think *Cinderella*) seem quite different than the aforementioned women.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view within Gaiman's stories are rather straightforward. None of these stories explicitly tell the reader who is narrating. Therefore, the stories within this work would be considered third person limited narrators. This is clear through the lack of use of the "I" pronoun. The poems also have no clear narrator. The only things we can really assume about the narrators are that they are not some sort of higher power, but they do have greater knowledge about the stories' happenings than one individual character. With this in mind, the reader is never really exposed to the thoughts and feelings of more than one character; the narrator tends to hone in on one. This could make some of the stories seem first person-esque, but the lack of clear identification and the other aforementioned factors makes this impossible. The one exception is "October Tale," which is first-person and is narrated by the djinn.

Language and Meaning

As the author is rather popular and his work is widely consumed, the author tends to use language that is easy to understand.

Within the two stories based on already existing works, the author uses language from within the source material. For example, in "Nothing O'Clock," the author assumes the reader knows what a TARDIS is or who the Time Lords are. Also, in "Black Dog," the author uses language that tends to make more sense if the reader has read "American Gods." For example, a character mentions Woden. If the reader has read "American Gods" they would know what or who a Woden is and realize that the character is referring to Shadow's father, Odin.

Ultimately, the language in the work seems to be aimed at least a high-school educated audience with the ability to research things that they do not understand. The language is not as basic as some of Gaiman's works aimed towards children such as "Coraline" or "Chu's Day," but it is not basic either. When Gaiman does use more advanced wordings, it seems that the wording is being used to inform the reader that the character is either odd or intelligent. For example, in "And Weep Like Alexander," the uninventor's language is advanced because he is both odd and seemingly smart. This can also be seen in "The Case of Death and Honey." Sherlock Holmes' dialogue is used as a tool to reveal the brilliant nature of Holmes.

Structure

This book is not structured in a concrete way. The section titles simply designate the titles of the next short story or poem. The poems and stories are not ordered in a particular way, and Gaiman admits this in his "Introduction." The only designator that is



not just a title is that of the introduction. This just explicitly tells the reader that this section introduces the rest of the sections. Some of the stories, like "Jerusalem" and "Black Dog" are preceded by quotes after the title. Usually, these quotes are either thematically similar to the story or somehow fit into the subject matter. Only a handful of the works do this. The only oddity is "Black Dog," which has four sections that split the narrative by the four major plot points.



Quotes

We are all wearing masks. That is what makes us interesting.”
-- Narrator (“Introduction” paragraph 16)

Importance: This quote is Gaiman’s opinion on human interactions and writing. We all pretend something about ourselves.

The heart is greater than the universe, for it can find pity in it for everything in the universe, and the universe itself can feel no pity.
-- The Duke (“The Return of the Thin White Duke” paragraph 32)

Importance: The Duke realizes why his answer was wrong but explains why the heart is the right answer.

Sometimes I think that truth is a place. In my mind, it is like a city: there can be a hundred roads, a thousand paths, that will all take you, eventually, to the same place. It does not matter where you come from. If you walk toward the truth, you will reach it, whatever path you take.”
-- The Dwarf (“The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains” paragraph 35)

Importance: The dwarf explains his opinion of truth which leads his companion to explain his.

I remember Icarus. He flew too close to the sun. In the stories, though, it’s worth it. Always worth it to have tried, even if you fail, even if you fall like a meteor forever. Better to have flamed in the darkness, to have inspired others, to have lived, than to have sat in the darkness, cursing the people who borrowed, but did not return, your candle.”
-- Narrator (“The Man Who Forgot Ray Bradbury” paragraph 12)

Importance: The narrator explains that he is only losing certain things from his memory.

I am only alive when I perceive a challenge.”
-- Sherlock Holmes (“The Case of Death and Honey” paragraph 5)

Importance: This declaration explains Sherlock’s motivation for going to China.

I will not be my father's dog.”
-- Shadow (“Black Dog” IV “The Living and the Dead” paragraph 49)

Importance: This is the defining moment in Shadow’s reasoning to fight the Black Dog.

People would fight over who owns a poisonous desert, if that desert was Jerusalem.”
-- The Guide (“Jerusalem” paragraph 15)



Importance: This quote elaborates on the idea that the powers that cities have are not always good things.

I made a list of inventions the world would be better off without and, one by one, I uninvented them all.”

-- Obediah (“And Weep Like Alexander” paragraph 9)

Importance: This quote explains Obediah’s reasoning for uninventing.

She asked me when I had started feeling a need to grant people’s wishes, and whether I felt a desperate need to please. She asked about my mother, and I told her that she could not judge me as she would judge mortals, for I was a djinn, powerful and wise, magical and mysterious.”

-- The djinn (“Calendar of Tales” “October Tale” paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote explains the woman and the djinn’s initial attitudes.

The lovelorn came, too. The alone. The lunatics-they were brought here, sometimes. Got their name from the moon, it was only fair the moon had a chance to fix things.”

-- The Guide (“A Lunar Labyrinth” paragraph 15)

Importance: This quote foreshadows the end of the story and the traveler's fate.

What if the Kin had all of Time and Space to move through?”

-- The Kin as Amy Pond (“Nothing O’Clock” VI paragraph 22)

Importance: Here, The Kin subtly foreshadows its plan.

In November I received a ransom note telling me exactly what to do if ever I wished to see my uncle Theobald alive again. I do not have an Uncle Theobald, but I wore a pink carnation in my buttonhole and ate nothing but salads for the entire month anyway.

-- Narrator (“Calendar of Tales” “May Tale” paragraph 6)

Importance: Here, the author explains his puzzled feelings towards his situation.