



Ocean at the End of the Lane by Neil Gaiman

About the author:

Neil Gaiman was born in Hampshire, UK, and now lives in the United States near Minneapolis. A self-described “feral child who was raised in libraries,” Gaiman credits librarians with fostering a life-long love of reading. He is credited with being one of the creators of modern comics, as well as an author whose work crosses genres and reaches audiences of all ages. He is listed in the Dictionary of Literary Biography as one of the top ten living post-modern writers and is a prolific creator of works of prose, poetry, film, journalism, comics, song lyrics, and drama. Neil Gaiman's work has been honoured with many awards internationally, including the Newbery and Carnegie Medals. His books and stories have also been honoured with 4 Hugos, 2 Nebulas, 1 World Fantasy Award, 4 Bram Stoker Awards, 6 Locus Awards, 2 British SF Awards, 1 British Fantasy Award, 3 Geffens, 1 International Horror Guild Award and 2 Mythopoeic Awards.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.neilgaiman.com>)

About this book:

British National Book Awards Book of the Year (2013), #1 in The New York Times Hardcover Fiction Best Seller list (2013), Goodreads Choice Awards, Fantasy (2013), Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel (2014).

Sussex, England. A middle-aged man returns to his childhood home to attend a funeral. Although the house he lived in is long gone, he is drawn to the farm at the end of the road, where, when he was seven, he encountered a most remarkable girl, Lettie Hempstock, and her mother and grandmother. He hasn't

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thought of Lettie in decades, and yet as he sits by the pond (a pond that she'd claimed was an ocean) behind the ramshackle old farmhouse, the unremembered past comes flooding back. And it is a past too strange, too frightening, too dangerous to have happened to anyone, let alone a small boy.

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

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

Source: HarperCollins Publishers (<http://www.harpercollins.com>)

Discussion Questions:

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



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

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"easier" for people, our narrator especially, to forget certain things that are difficult to reconcile?

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

Source: HarperCollins Publishers (<http://www.harpercollins.com>)

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