

## “Snow, Glass, Apples” by Neil Gaiman

Neil Gaiman is a popular English fantasy writer. He is probably most famous for the graphic novel *The Sandman*. My favorite novel of his is *American Gods*, in which he imagines that the strength of a god depends on how many worship him or her and that even in America, there are enough devotees of Odin to sustain an American version of that god, called “Mr. Wednesday” in the novel. Many of Gaiman’s works have been made into movies or TV shows.

In “Snow, Glass, Apples” we have another retelling of a fairy tale from a different point of view, in this case from that of the “wicked” queen. If you didn’t catch which fairy tale this is, look at the last two words of the story.

The story is told in first person in the voice of the queen, who is also a witch. However, it turns out that her stepdaughter is a vampire.

As the story is told, most readers will begin to suspect that they already know the story being told. There will be echoes of childhood readings and perhaps memories of a Disney animation. Gaiman is aware of this, and so a kind of double vision is created. Some of the details of the story correspond to the fairy tale and the animation. Others are new and troubling. Our alliances are conflicted because we are used to a wicked queen, but she is now telling her side of the story and trying to convince us that she is a wise ruler attempting to save herself and her people from a monster. Are we persuaded? That is an interesting question. There is considerable tension between the story we know and the story we are reading.

The story opens with the realization that the queen has made mistakes. One of her abilities is to see the future and to see faraway things in mirrors and other reflective surfaces. She saw the king coming to her and she saw part of what was going to happen.

Read opening paragraphs

Unlike the fairy tale or the animated film, this story is sexually explicit and even deals with necrophilia. Is the sexually explicit detail necessary to the story, or is it merely sensationalistic or prurient?

The details of the witchcraft that create the poison apples are new to this story.

Read from bottom of 131.

The story explores the binary of life and death. The princess’s beating heart above the queen’s bed signifies life in death. It stops beating after the poison apples have been administered. It begins again when the prince brings the princess back to “life.” It would seem that the princess cannot be finally killed, though it seems that the queen can be. The queen suffers a fate that she had imagined for the princess.

The queen cites the opinion of her people several times. On 129 she says “My people claimed that I ruled them with wisdom.” However, on 134, when the prince arrives, she says that the late king was her true lover, “No matter what they say.” And the vampire princess and her prince are clearly able to turn public opinion against the queen,. She says, “They have told the people bad things about me, a little truth to add savour to the dish, but with many lies.” 132

So ultimately, the question remains, "Are we persuaded?" Is the queen a wise ruler with a monstrous stepdaughter or a wicked witch justifiably burned alive?