

environment, and he attempts to make it natural. He refers to his cobbled together pool path as a river. Rivers often represent life's journey, and with each pool signaling a stage in Merrill's crumbling life, Cheever clearly draws on this symbolic history. However, the river Merrill creates is artificial. It's not a true river; it's a poor imitation of one. Likewise, Merrill's life, in this environment, is artificial. He doesn't engage with the people in his life, his own aging, or the consequences of his actions.

"The Swimmer" disrupts the notion of water adventure narratives as far-away fantasies, bringing the story much closer to home. The adventure novels of nautical literature aren't normally set in the protagonist's backyard, but Cheever does precisely that, emphasizing the adventure to be had in everyday life. Merrill imagines untamed waters in his own neighborhood and sets out on them like an old-time adventurer. He refers to himself as a "legendary figure,"¹⁵⁵ an "explorer,"¹⁵⁶ and a "pilgrim."¹⁵⁷ Merrill is a suburban explorer. As he plots his path, he thinks in terms of imaginary maps and charts and even refers to the stars to orient himself. He sets out on an unknown course and encounters hardships that test his physical and emotional strength. Like Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, Merrill sets out on a journey in an attempt to reach the safety and familiarity of home. However, he loses his way and arrives in unfamiliar territory. Through this story, Cheever domesticates the adventure story and demonstrates that adventures can occur anywhere, from the suburbs to the subconscious.

FICTION: NEIL GAIMAN'S "DOWN TO A SUNLESS SEA" (2013)

Biography and Background

As a child, *New York Times* bestselling British author Neil Gaiman (b.1960) immersed himself in a world of fiction, gravitating toward authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Ursula K. LeGuin.¹⁵⁸ Gaiman's early love for reading inspired him to pursue a writing career. He became a journalist and began publishing interviews and book reviews. In 1984, Gaiman published his first book, a biography of the band Duran Duran. Soon after, he switched gears and began working on a graphic novel with artist Dave McKean.¹⁵⁹ Over the last several decades, Gaiman has produced several comics, and he continues to publish



Writer Neil Gaiman, photographed in 2009.

By Kyle Cassidy - Own work, CC BY 2.5,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7050005>

in the genre, most recently working on an expansion of *The Sandman Universe*. However, his works are not limited to just graphic narratives. In the 1990s, he began writing novels, including *Good Omens* (with Terry Pratchett, 1990) and *Neverwhere* (1996). In the early 2000s, he published two of his more popular books: *American Gods* (2001) and *Coraline* (2002). Gaiman's work, like the works of his early favorite authors, tends to be dark fantasy fiction. He often includes allusions to other literary works and historical events. He also enjoys incorporating elements of horror into his work—including his children's books. Gaiman claims:

Fear is a wonderful thing, in small doses... It's always reassuring to know that you're still here, still safe. That nothing strange has happened, not really. It's good to be a child again, for a little while, and to fear—not governments, not regulations, not infidelities or accountants or distant wars, but ghosts and such things that don't exist, and even if they do, can do nothing to hurt us.¹⁶⁰

He believes that there is a certain comfort in fear and horror stories.

In 2013, Gaiman published his horror story "Down