

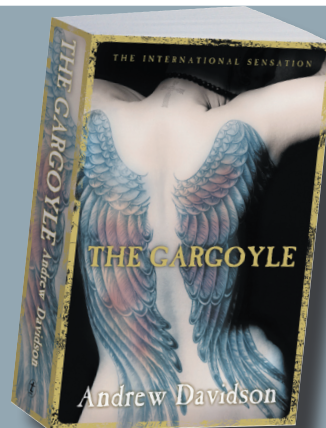
The Gargoyle

Andrew Davidson

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Praise for *The Gargoyle*

'A hypnotic, horrifying, astonishing novel that manages, against all odds, to be redemptive.' Sara Gruen, author of *Water for Elephants*

'The Gargoyle is an epic tale about the transformative power of love, redemption through suffering, the power of creativity and the enduring nature of great literature. It's an intense and fulfilling read and the sort of book you feel compelled to keep reading because you have to know what happens, but at the same time you don't really want it to end. You'll probably have to start at the beginning again once you've finished.' *Good Reading*, Sept 2008

About Andrew Davidson

Andrew Davidson was born in Manitoba, Canada and graduated in 1995 with a BA in English Literature from the University of British Columbia. After working and living in Japan on and off for several years, teaching English and writing English lessons for Japanese websites, he has returned to Manitoba. *The Gargoyle* is his first book.

A reader's introduction to *The Gargoyle*

'It was Good Friday and the stars were just starting to dissolve into dawn.' Delusional from drink and drugs, the nameless narrator loses control of his car. It tumbles down an embankment, crushing his body and trapping him in the burning wreckage. As merciful death appears to arrive, the car shifts once more and slides into a creek, saving his life and sentencing him to Hell.

Burnt beyond recognition, his body removed of toes, fingers, penis and skin; he commences recovery with a single goal in mind. To become well enough to take his own life.

In order to recover he must deal with his psychological scars as well as physical. He must accept that the body he once possessed, one that made him a beautiful porn star, will not return. That he will in fact never have sex again. He must confront the childhood that steered him down this path.

But then Marianne Engel—sculptor of gargoyles—appears. She is convinced that this is the third time he has been burnt. She nursed him the first time, when he was an injured soldier in 14th century Germany and she was a nun at the monastery of Engelthal. Here, she claims, they fell in love. Here they began a journey that is now, finally, moving towards freedom for them both.

Or is Marianne a schizophrenic? A manic depressive? Does it matter?

Through her, the narrator hears stories of love. She takes him into her home and cares for him. For the first time in his life he learns about true passion and the value of friendship.

Like Dante in *The Inferno*, the narrator journeys through Hell and moves towards redemption. Marianne carves at him, separating his past life from his soul. She frees him like she does the gargoyles she sculpts.

The Gargoyle explores the things that give life meaning: love, friendship, art, story, God. It explores the Hells that people experience: loneliness, addiction, fear, powerlessness, poverty, heartbreak and discrimination. It shows that the soul is never beyond redemption.

Questions for discussion

1. Discuss the people in the novel who shape and change the narrator. Discuss chapter XXIX. What do you make of his experiences here? What does this chapter show about his journey towards redemption? In what ways does the narrator act as a catalyst for change in other people?
2. In what ways does the novel suggest, through stories of both past and present, that socioeconomic factors can impact negatively on the individual?
3. The narrator in *The Gargoyle* recounts at times, his early life as a star in pornographic films. However, as Francesco, tells him, he never knew passion until he met Marianne. Discuss what you consider to be the most passionate and erotic moments in the novel.

4. In the stories told by Marianne, there is reference to the four Greek classical elements of the physical world: water, air, fire and earth. These are elements that shape our lives. Why might the author have included these elements in his stories?
5. In what ways is food symbolic in the novel?
6. Love might connect people, but the different perceptions of God have divided them throughout history. Discuss the different representations of God in the novel.
7. How does Marianne's relationship with God change over the course of her life?
8. 'All history is just one man trying to take something away from another man, and usually it doesn't really belong to either of them.' Is this view too pessimistic?
9. Do you believe that Marianne is mentally ill? Does it matter? What does the novel say about the value of mentally ill people in society?
10. In what ways is gender restrictive in the novel? In what ways do the characters break the restrictions placed on them by class and gender?