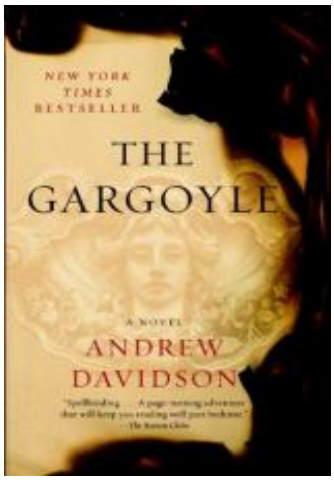
The Gargoyle

by Andrew Davidson



About the Book

An extraordinary debut novel of love that survives the fires of hell and transcends the boundaries of time.

The narrator of **The Gargoyle** is a very contemporary cynic, physically beautiful and sexually adept, who dwells in the moral vacuum that is modern life. As the book opens, he is driving along a dark road when he is distracted by what seems to be a flight of arrows. He crashes into a ravine and suffers horrible burns over much of his body. As he recovers in a burn ward, undergoing the tortures of the damned, he awaits the day when he can leave the hospital and commit carefully planned suicide --- for he is now a monster in appearance as well as in soul.

A beautiful and compelling, but clearly unhinged, sculptress of gargoyles by the name of Marianne Engel appears at the foot of his bed and insists that they were once lovers in medieval Germany. In her telling, he was a badly injured mercenary and she was a nun and scribe in the famed monastery of Engelthal who nursed him back to health. As she spins their tale in Scheherazade fashion and relates equally mesmerizing stories of deathless love in Japan, Iceland, Italy, and England, he finds himself drawn back to life --- and, finally, in love. He is released into Marianne's care and takes up residence in her huge stone house. But all is not well. For one thing, the pull of his past sins becomes ever more powerful as the morphine he is prescribed becomes ever more addictive. For another, Marianne receives word from God that she has only twenty-seven sculptures left to complete --- and her time on earth will be finished.

Already an international literary sensation, **The Gargoyle** is an **Inferno** for our time. It will have you believing in the impossible.

Discussion Guide

1. The Gargoyle begins with arguably one of the most stunning opening scenes in contemporary literature. How was the author able to make horrifying details alluring? What was your initial reaction to these images?

2. How were you affected by the narrator?s voice and his ability to address you in an intimate, direct monologue? How did his storytelling style compare to Marianne?s? In what ways did these tales balance reality and surrealism?

3. Arrows form a recurring symbol throughout the novel. What are their various uses as tools of war and of love? What makes them ideal for Marianne?s stories?

4. What medical aspects of the narrator?s treatment surprised you the most? Did his gruesome journey change the way you feel about your own body?

5. How did Marianne?s experience of God evolve and mature throughout her life? How do you personally reconcile the concept of a loving God and the reality of human suffering?

6. Marianne uses her body as a canvas. What messages does it convey? How does the narrator ?read? bodies before his accident, both in front of the camera and while picking up less-dazzling strangers?

7. Discuss the role of ghosts and memory in **The Gargoyle**. In what ways does the past repeat itself? How are the characters shaped by past circumstances? When are their painful cycles to be broken?

8. What does Marianne?s copy of **The Inferno** indicate about the value of books beyond their content? In what way can a book also be an art object, or an artifact of history?

9. Eventually, Nan reveals her own burn scars. What motivates the novel?s healers?including Nan, Marianne, Sayuri, and Gregor? Whom does the narrator heal?

10. Discuss the role of money throughout **The Gargoyle**. What kept Jack honest? What did it mean for Marianne, a woman, to have far more money than the men in her life, both in the 14th century and in the contemporary storyline?

11. How did you interpret the narrator?s own Dante-esque tour, described in Chapter Twenty-nine? Was he hallucinating, in the throes of withdrawal while he kicked the bitchsnake of morphine, or did he journey to an underworld? Or both? Was Marianne a mere mortal?

12. The novel closes with Marianne?s departure and the marriage of Gregor and Sayuri. The narrator grapples with guilt, trying to understand whether he could or should have saved Marianne. What enabled Gregor and Sayuri to recognize and nurture their love for one another? What determines whether a relationship will become exhausted or perpetually revitalized? Is fate or willpower the greater factor?

13. An old adage, evidenced particularly in Shakespeare?s works, states that a comedy ends with a marriage, while a tragedy ends with a death. Given that **The Gargoyle** ends with both a marriage and a death, what does it say about the work?

Author Bio

Andrew Davidson was born in Pinawa, Manitoba, and graduated in 1995 from the University of British Columbia with a B.A. in English literature. He has worked as a teacher in Japan, where he has lived on and off, and as a writer of English lessons for Japanese Web sites. THE GARGOYLE, the product of seven years' worth of research and composition, is his first book. Davidson lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Critical Praise

"**The Gargoyle** is purely and simply an amazement, a riot, a blast. It's hard to believe that this is Andrew Davidson's first novel: He barrels out of the chute with the narrative brio and confidence, not to mention the courage, of a seasoned master. This book plucks the reader off the ground and whirls her through the air until she shouts from sheer abandonment and joy. What a great, grand treat."

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