

July 2020

Nation - Terry Pratchett

Genre: Fantasy/alternative history/coming of age story/long fable - a short, simple story, usually with animals as characters, designed to teach a moral truth - the pleasures and pitfalls of escapism.

The moral - think for yourself and question everything

Context:

Published 2008.

Boxing day tsunami - 2004

Person: 3rd

Tense: Past

Perspective/view point: Predominantly from Mau's and Daphne's

Multiple narrative: Two stories going on at the same time.

- Daphne's discovering what it is to be a woman in her own right
- Mau's discovering what it is to be a man in his own right.

Themes:

Science vs religion

What it is to be foreign, or the Other

Language and communication

The meaning of a name - depends on perspective

Racism

Friendship

Ownership

What it is to be a man

What it is to be a woman

The meaning of life - what's the point

What it is to die

What it is to be a nation

What it is to be a community - dependency

The individual vs the system - what it is to be yourself and what it is to be a product of your upbringing

Questioning

Truth/knowledge/wisdom/learning

Ancestry defining who we are

What is the plot?

The main story running through the book that contains the principle themes

- Tsunami destroys pretty much everything in the region
- Mau was saved by being at sea at the time
- Judy washed up in the shipwrecked Sweet Judy
- They gradually come to trust and understand each other. sort of
- Refugees start to arrive including Ataba, the priest, the unknown woman, Pilu, Milo, Cahle and Mrs Gurgle.
- Mau tries to get the god anchors in their right place, but there is a surprising fifth stone
- Ataba tried to destroy the stone and nearly dies in the process, Mau saves him and he too nearly dies in the process
- Daphne goes to the land of the dead to bring Mau back
- They explore the Grandfathers Cave and Daphne discovers that the Nation is possibly the world's oldest civilisation.
- Two mutineers from the Sweet Judy turn up and kill Ataba. Daphne poisons one and frightens away the other one.
- Cox (the ringleader of the mutineers) turns up as chief of the cannibal tribe.
- Cox goes one on one with Mau, and loses. The cannibals flee.
- Henry Fanshaw arrives looking for his daughter
- The Gentlemen of Last Resort turn up and crown Henry King
- Mau does not want his land to become part of the British Empire, so he asks for it to belong to the Royal Society.
- Daphne leaves with her father, but returns as a dead body, years later, so she can come back as a dolphin.

Name some of the sub-plots

Smaller stories that run through the book, but do not ultimately change the principle story

- Gentlemen of Last Resort's journey to the Nation
- Mutineers on the Sweet Judy
- Captain Roberts going down with the Sweet Judy
- Cox becoming Chief
- The unknown woman
- Henry Fanshaw's succession to the crown
- Cookie and his coffin

Name some of the back stories

Back story - past events (before the beginning of the story) that give meaning to current events

- How Imo made the world
- The history of the god anchors
- Daphne's mother dying
- Daphne's life with her father and grandmother
- Mau's life before the tsunami

☞ What is the significance of the grandmothers (including Daphne's)?

Nation grandmothers: **Love, life and goodness.**

They represent mother-nature - what is there before you have anything there (the grandfathers).

"We are the Grandmothers"

"I've never heard of the Grandmothers!"

"Where do you think little grandfathers come from? Every man has a mother, and so does every mother. We gave birth to little grandfathers, and filled them with milk, and wiped their bottoms and kissed their tears away. We taught them to eat, and showed them what food was safe, so that they grew up straight. We taught them the songs of children, which have lessons in them..."

They are looking to bring new life to the Nation.

Daphne's grandmother: **Standards and status**

Her values are those of an Empire. They are attached to status.

They are so removed from the grandmothers on the island that they only have their gender in common.

Change is fine, just so long as it benefits their standing in society.

☞ What is the significance of the grandfathers?

Survival

"...And then we gave them to the Grandfathers, who taught them how to kill other women's sons. The ones who were best at this were dried in the sand and taken to the cave. We went back to the dark water, but part of us remains here in this place where we were born and gave birth and, often, died."

"The Grandfathers shout at Mau all the time!"

"They are echoes in a cave. They remember the battle cries of their youth, over and over again, like the talking bird. They are not bad men. We loved them, as sons and husbands and father, but old men get confused and dead men don't notice the turning of the world. The world must turn. Tell Mau he must roll away the stone."

Survival of heritage, the Nation, religion

Represent the time before. They don't like change, questioning or a challenge to their authority, all of which can jeopardise their survival.

☞ Who had the biggest impact, the grandfathers or the grandmothers?

The grandmother's enable the rolling back of the stone.

Daphne's grandmother realises their power as greater than hers through chewing Mr Gurgle's food.

The Grandfathers can do nothing when the grandmothers put their foot down.

☞ What is the significance of names to Daphne?

Defining who she is and what she thinks: Ermintrude, Daphne, Ghost Girl

Daphne gets to define herself as her family are not there to do it for her.

☞ **What are the significance of tattoos to Mau?**

Define you as a man. Not a man, not a boy = no soul.
Would find it easier to be respected as chief if he had tattoos.
Mau gets to define himself, as the Nation is not there to do it for him.

☞ **Is the Nation at the beginning of the book the same Nation at the end? Or the Nation before the story starts?**

Place, culture, people, spirit?

Some key points in Mau's thinking:

- the island is actually a small place - not too dissimilar to how many British people feel about the UK, particularly as it is drawn bigger on maps (often the size of France or Italy) than it is in real life
- "One person is nothing. Two people are a nation." (p278)

☞ **What do you think to Ataba nearly dying for his religion?**

Ataba doesn't necessarily believe in the religion, but does believe in belief.

☞ **What do you think of Mau nearly dying for Ataba's religion?**

☞ **Why was Cahle "a bit annoyed" when Mrs Gurgle says that it is Daphne who must go and get Mau from the land of the dead?**

☞ **What was the roll of the Sweet Judy?**

She provides for everyone. (p318)
Prow of the ship nailed above the door to the grandfathers' cave. (p390)
"The sweet Judy had a good soul" (p250)

A gift from the gods in exchange for the tsunami?

☞ **Why did Daphne use the term 'darkies' when talking to the mutineers? How did it make her feel? Why?**

☞ **"Ghost girl", "unbaked", "darkie", "cannibals", "savages", all terms used in the book. What do you think about that?**

☞ **This book is set in the 1860s. How is it relevant to now?**

Pandemics
Black Lives Matter
Inequity
Hong Kong - still feeling the effects of colonialism
Questioning of religions

Quick fire

- What did you enjoy?
- What did you hate?
- What could have been improved?
- Who was your favourite character and why?
- Did it stay with you once you had finished reading it?
- Which copy has the best front cover?
- Would you pick it up unprompted based on either the title or the front cover?
- Does it remind you of any other books?
- What one word would you use to sum up the book?
- Would you recommend it to your friends (or enemies)?

The Neverending Story - Michael Ende

Genre: fantasy/adventure/(an extra long) fable - a short, simple story, usually with animals as characters, designed to teach a moral truth - the pleasures and pitfalls of escapism.

The moral - fantasy is good, just as long as we always know the difference between it and reality.

Fiction lives because people believe in it. We stop believing and it dies. Fiction allows us to escape our lives when they are at the worst. We can be whoever we want to be in our fictitious lands, but if we abuse the God-like power of creating fiction, we bring lies into the real world, and forget what life is really about.

The more Bastian invests in Fantastica, the more he forgets his real life.

Ende suggests that fantasy enriches your own life and others (writing), just as long as it's not the quiet secretive kind, i.e. lies, which can be damaging and soul-destroying. And that it can only be good fantasy if the 'author' is able to move freely between one world and the other, knowing what is real and what isn't. If you can do that, fantasy will help your common-sense and reasoning no end.

Any thoughts?

Context:

Published 1979.

The novel came about when many fantasy role-play games were becoming popular. Ende had lived in Germany through the second world war, and struggled with the politics in a split (East/West) Germany.

Person: 3rd

Tense: Past

Perspective/view point: from Bastian's and Atreyu's

Multiple narrative: Two stories going on at the same time

- Bastian's in the real world
- Atreyu's in Fantasia

Then the two worlds collide and we end up with just the one narrative.

Themes:

Imagination
Truth/knowledge/wisdom/learning
Magic
Heroes and false heroes
Corruption
Friendship
Lies
Love and belonging

What is the plot?

The main story running through the book that contains the principle themes.

- A miserable Bastian escapes some bullies by hiding in a book shop.
- Steals 'The Neverending Story' from the shop, and hides in the school attic to read it.
- The book he reads is set in Fantastic which is being destroyed by the Nothing.
- The Childlike Empress is dying and Atreyu is sent out on a quest to find the cure.
- Atreyu is given Auryn, a powerful medallion, to help protect him.
- Atreyu finds out that the only thing that can save the Empress is if a human child gives her a new name.
- Atreyu goes to the borders of Fantastic and all he finds is Gmork, the wolf and servant of the Manipulators, and the Nothing.
- Saved by Falkor, the luck dragon, Atreyu goes back to the Empress thinking he has failed.
- The Empress says he hasn't because he has brought a human boy along the journey with him, and now all the boy has to do is say her new name.
- Bastian thinks it may be him, but can't fully believe it, so won't say her name.
- The Empress goes to the Old Man of Wandering Mountain, where he too has a copy of The Neverending Story, which she demands he reads aloud.
- The story starts exactly as the book we have just read starts, with Bastian and the bookshop.
- Realising the story will just keep repeating itself, Bastian finally re-names the Empress 'Moon Child'.
- Bastian enters Fantastic and the Empress gives him Auryn to help rebuild everything after the Nothing. On the back it says 'do what you wish'.
- Whatever Bastian wishes comes true, but each wish costs him a bit of his memory.
- He eventually becomes greedy and cruel with power. Atreyu tries to hold him back, but pays the price with a battle wound.
- Bastian finally wants to go home, and with Atreyu's help finds his way to the water of life and home.
- Bastian has now learnt to be happy with himself as he was.

Bastian found out who he was through The Neverending Story. How important is fiction to us in our everyday lives?

We learn to understand what we think and feel about things through fiction.

What is the significance of the Childlike Empress and what is the significance of her name?

She is the creative impulse or spirit behind every story. She ultimately has the power, but can do nothing with it herself, she has to give it to the characters in order for something to be created.

Unless people keep believing in her and re-naming her, she dies, just like fiction in books - you have to believe in the characters, otherwise you stop reading, you give up on the story.

What is the significance of the Nothing?

Consumes Fantastica because no one has given the Childlike Empress the creative energy she needs to keep Fantastica alive.

Without imagination or fiction (books), there is nothing. A big, empty nothing.

☞ Who is the main antagonist of the book?

The Manipulators: the power behind the nothing and Gmork's master.

Their aim is to destroy Fantastica, so that fantasy becomes lies, with which the human race can be manipulated and controlled.

Gmork is the physical embodiment of the force that drives the Nothing.

☞ What is the relationship between Bastian and Atreyu?

Atreyu is the typical hero in the first half of the book, Bastian is the necessary side-kick.

In the second half of the book the tables turn, but then we see Bastian as a false hero and Atreyu becomes Bastian's conscience, guide and helper.

They are like two sides of the same person.

☞ What is the significance of Falkor?

Falkor the luck dragon is there for both Bastian and Atreyu. Essentially, everything needs a little bit of luck to work.

☞ What is the significance of the water of life?

"I am the Water of Life,
Out of myself I grow.
The more you drink of me,
The fuller I flow." (p495)

The more you live life, the more you get out of it. Don't hide in fantasy at the expense of the real world.

☞ Auryn's inscription in German is "do what you want" (Tu Was Du Willst), the English translation is "do what you wish" or "find your true will". The film version made it "do what you dream!" Do you have any idea why the Michael Ende might have a problem with it?

In a typescript from Ende's estate (published in 2007 for the exhibition "Michael Ende: Magical Worlds") Ende (translated from German) writes:

"Do what you dream!" This inscription is really the opposite of what the message of my book means. Petersen believes that my English may not be enough to realise that this is the appropriate translation of "Tu, was du willst!". He only forgets – although I told him – that the sentence originally came from English, namely by the writer Aleister Crowley (died 1947), and there it says: "Do what thou wilt" (solemn church English). The "do what you dream!" is Petersen's interpretation, and it's the wrong one. It is precisely this error Bastian is subject to and why he cannot find his way back from Fantastica. He also thinks at first that it's about doing what he wishes, longs for, wants to do. The lion Grogman gets angry when Bastian tells him this interpretation. To find one's "true will" does not at all mean doing what one wants. This formula "Do what you want!" goes back via Rabelais to Saint Augustine. In Fantastica you can't do your "true will" either, you can only find it there. That's why it leads you back to the human world."
(<https://theneverendingstory.fandom.com/wiki/AURYN>)

☞ Do you prefer Fantastica before or after Bastian gets to it?

Quick fire

- What did you enjoy?
- What did you hate?
- What could have been improved?
- Who was your favourite character and why?
- Did it stay with you once you had finished reading it?
- Which copy has the best front cover?
- Would you pick it up unprompted based on either the title or the front cover?
- Does it remind you of any other books?
- If you watched the film (I, II or III), how did it differ from the book?
- Which did you prefer, the film or the book?
- What one word would you use to sum up the book?
- Would you recommend it to your friends (or enemies)?

Some similarities between the books

- Name's matter.

NS: Moon Child, goes to great lengths to get her name picked for her. She needs to be defined by others in order to exist.

N: Ermentrude, needs to define herself in order to develop.

In both cases the name is necessary if their story is to continue.

- Riches corrupts

Wealth and gold ultimately lead to an abuse of power, absence of responsibility and more greed.

NS: Bastian.

N: If men had been there before, the gold would not be.

- The importance of belief

NS: Gmork P174 Chp9

'When it comes to controlling human beings there is no better instrument than lies. Because, you see, humans live by beliefs. And beliefs can be manipulated. The power to manipulate beliefs is the only thing that counts. That's why I sided with the powerful and serve them — because I wanted to share their power.'

N: Mau Chp 9. P248

"I don't think he believes in his gods, but he believes in belief."

- The journey of self-discovery is more important than where the story ends / learning to be themselves

NS: Bastian is learning to be the best he can be and to love himself "If he had been free to choose, he would have chosen to be no one else." (P497)

N: Mau and Daphne were learning to be themselves rather a product of their grandparents.

- They all came from a place that told them they weren't good enough as they were

NS: Atreyu - not a hero, Bastian - too fat.

N: Daphne - need to be a lady, Mau - need to be a man.

- Jumping between places and stories

NS: Bastian's real world is in italics.

N: It just changed paragraph, setting and people. The reader was expected to keep up.

- Colour representing two opposites

NS: Dark/black and silver/white snakes, the nothing (dark/absence of light - Atreyu: looking at the Nothing "as if one were blind" chp9 p172) and the "crystal-clear water" of life (P497).

N: Gold (corruption, greed and earthly ornamentation (and to a lesser extent, power) - door, teeth, crown & mace) and silver (purity and spirituality - silver fish, purified beer).

- Two main protagonists that balance each other.

NS: Atreyu are two sides of the same person.

N: Mau and Daphne are two sides: of finding truth; science (daphne) vs religion (Mau); what it is to grow up - defining a lady and a man.

- Loosing a mother and the impact this has on the relationship with the father

NS: Bastian - father in a deep depression which affects their relationship negatively.

N: Daphne - father sad, but their relationship remains good.

- Taking responsibility

NS: Bastian for stealing the book - wants to apologise to Mr Coreander himself, Atreyu for finishing the stories and taking on the quest.

N: Mau for the one-on-one battle with the leader of the raiders and being chief of the Nation, Daphne for going back to look after her father.

- Joy at finding the father again

- Only being able to return as part of another journey

NS: Bastian has to re-name Moon Child.

N: Daphne returns as a dead body.

- Physicality and ability/brains and physical impracticality

Atreyu and Mau are the perfect form of heroic (teenage) beauty.

Bastian and Daphne are not particularly adept at the physical world (fat/silly clothing and umbrellas), but learn as they go along, so are quite ready for anything by the end.

- Both stories are about washing away the old and rebuilding

NS: Fantastica lost by the Nothing, rebuilt by Bastian.

N: The Nation lost by a tsunami, rebuilt by lots of refugees from all over.

- They both have a moral

Some differences between the books

- Although both make believe worlds, both very different worlds

NS: Based on 1860s world. A world reliant on science.

N: A magical, other-world. A world reliant on magic.

- focus

NS: What it is to be a hero (the individual) / imaginative thinking.

N: What it is to be a nation (the whole) / questioning thinking.

- Gender appeal

NS: No importance in the male/female roles but very few females and the female characters have very stereotyped characteristics - maternal, a witch or quiet, beautiful and somewhat ineffectual. A woman can do anything in the story, but they don't do much more than the house work

N: Females have equal importance to story, with no stereotyped characteristics but specific practical roles: women make beer, live in women's area.

Women do do everything in the story, but still have to do the housework too.

Quick fire

- Which world would you rather inhabit?
- Which carries the stronger message for you?
- What's more important, questioning or imagining?
- Have the books made you think about anything differently?
- Are you better/worse/the same as a person for having read the books?

Further resources:

<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/nation-pratchett>

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/sci-fi-fantasy/the-neverending-story-and-the-legacy-of-war/>

Activity:

Look up your names in a baby naming book and share with everyone the meaning of your names. Do you like your name? Who named you? If you could change your name, would you rather have a different one?

Think about the importance of names:

- What do they say about you?
- What characteristics/qualities/traits do you associate with certain names?
- Would you rather have another name?
- Does everyone you know go by their first birth name?
- When/why do people change their names (including surnames)?
- What does this tell us about people, their relationships with others and society in general?

Think about the power and implications of naming something:

- Ownership
- Defining something/someone else
- Status
- Irresponsible naming - including racism, sexism etc.

Think about naming characters:

- Can introduce you to a character even though you don't know anything about them.
- Can work as a nice juxtaposition if they are nothing like their name.
- Their title denotes their position in society, job status or personal relationships.
- Would better names work for the characters in our books?
- Who is your favourite literary character? Does their name suits them?

Activity:

Look at a passer-by or a near by animal that you don't know. Give them a name. What is their back story? Why are they here? Are they happy? Who are they interacting with? What will they go on to do?