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An Introduction to *Good Omens*, Producerly Texts, and to this Book

Vera Cuntz-Leng

When the second season of the Amazon Prime series *Good Omens* (2019–) aired in the summer of 2023, the tragic parting of the beloved main characters Aziraphale and Crowley was a “jaw-dropping” (Griffin 2024) experience for the audience. Preventing the apocalypse from happening in season 1—a rather faithful adaptation of the original novel written by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman in 1990—this angel and demon had become the focal point of the narration, supported by the exceptional performance by Michael Sheen and David Tennant, respectively. During the so-called ‘final fifteen’—the last fifteen minutes of the second season’s sixth episode, “Every Day,” the demon Crowley declares his love for Aziraphale, who in turn invites Crowley to join him in Heaven, whereas Crowley disappointedly refuses the offer and gives the angel one desperate kiss. The two part ways with Aziraphale leaving Earth behind. The final fifteen sparked many discussions, speculations, and fannish creativity (cf. Cuntz-Leng 2025). It really hit a nerve. Ineffable in its extent, if you will. And as this profound turn of events transformed *Good Omens* from a sound comedy with sociocritical relevance and homoerotic undertones into an even more challenging, more profound narrative that may be perceived as a game-changer in the construction of non-normative gender displays and in the telling of queer love stories in the media (cf. Asher-Perrin 2023; Gittelman 2023), it ignited the spark for this book project as well. Although insightful academic research has been done on the first season of the series in particular (cf. King 2021; Carroll 2023; Giannini/Taylor 2023; Wight 2023; Kennedy 2024; Shah 2024; Stobbart 2024; Venzmer 2024; Xanthoudakis/Donabedian 2024; Cuntz-Leng 2025)—but not as

much on the novel (cf. Meyer 2009; Walker 2012; Clemons 2017; Scott 2018)—it is less than one might expect. Watching the second season and witnessing its enormous reception online made it obvious to me that the second season had to go hand in hand with an extrapolation of previous academic considerations regarding *Good Omens*. This was all new and exciting—and this had to be addressed.

The end of season 2 may be perceived as an emotional challenge in a good way—people came together to talk about *Good Omens*, they wrote large amounts of fan fiction aiming at ‘fixing’ the final fifteen, a queer-friendly community of fans built online that was strongly invested with the story and its stars. However, this changed dramatically in the summer of 2024 when Tortoise Media published a series of podcasts (cf. Caruana Galizia/Gunning/Johnson 2024). Several women came forward with accounts of unwanted or coerced sexual behavior by co-author and showrunner Gaiman—some alleging violent or non-consensual acts, others describing intimidatory dynamics and disturbing power imbalances. A *Vulture/New York Magazine* investigation in January 2025 added more testimonies (cf. Shapiro 2025)—with a total of eight women publicly speaking out against Gaiman. The authors of this book would like to express their profound dismay and offer their sincere and unreserved solidarity with the victims. Of course, these revelations came with vast consequences to Gaiman’s private life, his reputation as an author and public figure, for the *Good Omens* fan community and admirers of Gaiman as a celebrity, and for the continuing *Good Omens* production and other projects with Gaiman involved (e.g., the production of *Dead Boy Detectives* [2024] got cancelled by Netflix after one season despite its success, Dark Horse Comics will no longer publish Gaiman’s works, Disney paused the production of an adaptation of *The Graveyard Book*). Contrary to the initial plans, *Good Omens* will not continue with a third season of six episodes, but a concluding 90-minute film is currently in post-production (cf. Griffin 2024). And even this would not have happened if Gaiman had not resigned from the production and if the late Terry Pratchett’s daughter Rhianna and his long-time personal assistant Rob Wilkins had not been so committed to the project.

Although feeling betrayed and confused, the queer-friendly community of fans who love and celebrate the story itself still exists, in spite of Gaiman. “It’s been a roller-coaster of emotions for *Good Omens* fans since that heartbreaking season two finale” (Eddy 2025). And to assert that these developments did not also influence this book project would be a downright lie. The authors of this anthology went through the same strong feelings as any fan of *Good Omens*—confusion, anger, disappointment, even denial and disbelief. It must be acknowledged that some essays of this book make reference to Gaiman in one way or another—after all, we are not here to ‘cancel’ Gaiman. Worshipped and idolized by the fan community, Gaiman was one of those authors who fans (and academics) actively sought frequent contact with and affirmation from via social media regarding their theories on *Good Omens*. Ashumi Shah goes so far as to call him the prophetic extradiegetic ‘revealer’ (cf. Shah 2024, 187–189) concerning *Good Omens*. The audience’s loss of this (God-like) auteur figure—Gaiman has refrained abruptly from all social media activity since the summer of 2024—has been a challenge for the fan community but may also be seen as an opportunity to free the *Good Omens* story from an overpowering author persona. Therefore, in the end, this is a book about *Good Omens* and not about Gaiman. After all, the *Author* (with a capital A) has been declared dead long ago by Roland Barthes, has he not?

“[A] text consists of multiple writings, proceeding from several cultures and entering into dialogue, into parody, into contestation; but there is a site where this multiplicity is collected, and this site is not the author, as has hitherto been claimed, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any of them being lost, all the citations out of which a writing is made; the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination [...]. Classical criticism has never been concerned with the reader; for that criticism, there is no other man in literature than the one who writes. We are no longer so willing to be the dupes of such antiphrases, by which a society proudly recriminates in favor of precisely what it discards, ignores, muffies, or destroys; we know that in order to

restore writing to its future, we must reverse the myth: the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author.” (Barthes 1986, 54f.)

In this Barthesian spirit, *Good Omens* may not be perceived as the work of a singular authorial genius but as a complex rhizomatic work of art—a “multi-dimensional space” (Barthes 1986, 53)—that generates its meaning through various different voices and readings: the writers of the novel and the TV show, actors, cinematographers, and other cast members, various other texts/intertextual relations, critical reception by journalists, academics, and—of course—the viewers and fans.

Good Omens is a timeless material that speaks to today’s viewers just as much as it did to readers in the early 1990s, which may show us that narratives have the ability to transcend their creators and that the communities they inspire are often far more significant than the original work alone. As a result, the contributors to this book will articulate their readings of *Good Omens* not from the stand-point of the author (or from the perspective of an ‘ideal reader’ or ‘intended reading’) but they will try to argue from the perspective of the text and its possible readings and orientations (the ‘implicit reader’ [cf. Iser 1994]). In doing so, they aim at “*distancing*” (Barthes 1986, 51) *Good Omens* from Gaiman’s author persona in order to understand and value it as a pop-cultural artefact in its own right—a work of art that belongs to its readers rather than its author(s). In doing so, conflicted relations with Gaiman shall not tamper with the validation and analysis of *Good Omens*, which makes all the more sense when we underline *Good Omens*’ qualities as a producerly text.

In his book *Television Culture*, John Fiske draws on Barthes’ (1975) distinction between ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ texts and Umberto Eco’s (1979) understanding of texts as ‘open’ and ‘closed,’ respectively (cf. Fiske 1987, 94f.). Readerly texts tend to attract a larger audience because they offer a straightforward interpretation; in contrast, writerly texts are more challenging, as they avoid providing a clear conclusion or coherent narrative. Yet, Fiske argues convincingly that some texts are both readerly and writerly—something that he sees realized especially