

The Discursive Deep: Navigating the Storied Seas of Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events

Textual puzzles and oblique coincidences confound not only the characters but also the readers of Daniel Handler's/Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, which features a preponderance of narrative riddles and an abundance of intertextual allusions. In locations like Doldrum Drive (Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*) to Briny Beach (Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter"), the Baudelaires encounter numerous authorial, fictional, and frequently nautical doppelgängers. Prospero and Stephano from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* are incarnated as a ship and villainous disguise, respectively, while Herman Melville and *Moby Dick* lend potential signifieds to the Ahab Memorial Hospital, Hurricane Herman, a facilitator named Ishmael, and the submarine *Queequeg*. Indeed, when the Baudelaire orphans are shipwrecked on an island in *The End*, they soon discover the location is home to various literary "castaways . . . from one storm or another." As in *The Tempest*, those shipwrecked have brought with them "all the stories [that] are connected in one way or another," like ripples in an ocean of story. Accordingly, bound into *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny ultimately contend here not only with Miranda and Ariel, but also with Robinson and Friday, Calypso and Omeros, among others—all of whom now share not only the island but in "the same unfortunate event." The final installment is a book quite literally bound by books, awash in a sea of texts. However, the surfeit of intertextual references in the series prohibits any book within it from being bound in a singular Matlock 2 direction. Rather, intertextuality opens the narrative to plethoric possibility and the perpetual deferral of stable signifieds. Like water through fingers, Snicket's series consistently resists containment and consolatory cyclicity (even as it re-inscribes it) by revealing the conviction in stasis to be a delusory ab/solution. Seriality in *Unfortunate Events* ineluctably slides *The Slippery Slope* (book ten) along endlessly infinite *Penultimate Perils* (book twelve) in eternal falling action that nonetheless refutes narrative closure. Ultimately, through its revelation of structural leaks and seams, the readers outside the series are encouraged to dive into story, writing themselves as imaginative and active explorers of its double-entendric depths.