

## Death in the Water: Queer Drowned Creatures in L.M. Montgomery, Madeleine L'Engle, and Susan Cooper

Underwater realms often exist in children's fantasy as liminal and timeless spaces for sacrifice, cleansing, and experiential growth. Despite these fruitful possibilities, the threat of water remains for people, particularly girls, who don't quite fit the heteronormative model of procreative growth: the perverse; the bestial; and the unwanted. In fact, water's impermanence and instability allows relationships and behaviors to cross boundaries as in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily Climbs* (1925), where the potential for queerness arises at the seaside when best friends Emily and Ilse go "bathing by moonlight on the sands without a stitch on." Thus, girls who encounter their death by water are found everywhere throughout children's fiction from the unrequited lover in fairy tales like Andersen's "The Little Sea-Maid" (1835) to the tomboy, Leslie, in Katherine Patterson's realistic novel, *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977). The four texts that I propose to examine closely in this paper are L.M. Montgomery's short story, "The Waking of Helen," (1901) in which a lower-class girl falls in love with an engaged artist through reading Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine" together over the course of a summer. Following his subsequent departure, Helen drowns herself in a local spot called the Kelpy's Cave, associating her death with her undesirability, difference, and fey peculiarity. Susan Cooper's *Greenwitch* (1974) and *Silver on the Tree* (1977) also deal with gendered and queerly romantic relationships between the drowned/drowning in Cornwall and Wales: the strange, plaintive bond between Jane and the Greenwitch and the Welsh Drowned Hundred, an artistic and artisanal Lost Land, always-already drowned, within which the bard Taliesin stays with his king for love. Finally, I will discuss Madeleine L'Engle's *Many Waters* (1986), in which twins Sandy and Dennys Murry travel to the biblical time of Noah. Presented as ordinary next to their siblings who experience better known adventures like *A Wrinkle in Time*, Sandy and Dennys are forced to come to terms with the fate of characters even more significantly marginalized than they are, knowing as they do, that Noah's daughters—promiscuous, virtuous, monstrous as they variously are—will not be shielded by the ark in the oncoming floods.