

Giving Life, Taking Life, Forever Changing One's Life: Revelatory Functions of Water in Recent Queer YA

In Patrick Ness's 2013 novel *More Than This*, closeted teen protagonist Seth is dead by page 3. He drowns off the coast of Washington state--yet he wakes up, in what he initially assumes is Hell, on the front walk of his childhood home in England. *Release* (2017), Ness's most recent novel, entwines the stories of Adam, the local preacher's closeted teen son, and the ghost of his classmate Katie, who has drowned after being strangled by her boyfriend. In both novels, water fulfills a violent, fatal function: yet both drowned characters also receive some semblance of a second chance at life after death.

Metaphorical rebirth echoes throughout these texts: Adam's major confrontation with his father regarding his sexual orientation unfolds as they prepare the church Jacuzzi for an upcoming baptism. Meanwhile, Kristin Cashore's *Jane, Unlimited* (2017) follows five potential outcomes of a single decision eighteen-year-old orphan Jane finds herself making shortly after arriving at the mysterious island estate of Tu Reviens.

Surrounded by water, unsure of whom--if anyone--to trust as tensions rise and priceless artwork is stolen, Jane may seem trapped. Yet the watery boundaries of the island force her to turn inward, where she discovers her feelings for another girl on the island.

I plan to utilize these novels, and several other recently published texts for young adults, to examine how water--as boundary, as escape, as death, as cleansing, as revelatory--facilitates the exploration of queer experience and identity formation in these texts. Drowning is not the end of the story for Seth, rather, it offers him an opportunity to reconsider the life he wanted to end. The water that keeps Jane on Tu Reviens does not stop her from living out the multiple potential outcomes of her choice; yet in each outcome, she falls in love with Ivy.