

“Death is Not the End”: Finding Identity in Patrick Ness’s *Release* and *More Than This*

Patrick Ness is known for his ability to accurately capture the emotions of a teenager, especially the emotions of a teenager who feels like he doesn’t fit in. His latest book, *Release*, fits along these same veins, examining a day in the life of a teenager struggling with his sexual identity and fitting in to a family that believes his existence is a sin. Like his other texts, Ness’s text is infused with the supernatural, and his symbolism is supported by elements of nature. Analyzing the way that Ness uses water and the supernatural in *Release* and *More Than This* reveals the chaotic pattern of building adolescent identity and the protagonists’ own journeys toward a place of belonging.

Through the symbol of water as rebirth, both Adam (*Release*) and Seth (*More Than This*) experience altered identities by the end of their respective stories. Adam’s release stems from a confrontation with his father in the baptism pool at their church. Seth’s release stems from drowning, a drowning that opens his eyes to the truth of his life. In both cases, the symbol of water is the jumping off point for each character to find their true families and their true identities. As they are both unwanted by their families, the water gives them the push they need to figure out who they are and where they fit in, giving them an eventual sense of belonging.

This paper will analyze these texts with a cognitive lens, examining the way that Ness uses emotion to drive the construction of identity for both of his protagonists. MacDonald’s theory of adolescent identity construction contributes to the understanding of the way that Ness builds identity in his own text, showing that teens use action and experience to form their own identities in a world where the future is uncertain.