

The After Life and Death in YA Fantasy by Virginia Toole

Abstract: *The after life, death and grief are not easy realities to understand and accept. Although, Fantasy literature may be a helpful outlet for young adults to explore these emotions and beliefs.*

Life can be adventurous and spontaneous. On the other hand, violence, death and illness threaten us every day. This duality is undeniably present in fantasy stories and universes as well. Characters battle against the evil forces at play and are often successful. Although, some stories explore the other side of these triumphs and investigate what happens afterlife comes to an end. Likewise, readers experience grief through these characters' struggles as they lose partners, friends and allies as they progress on their journeys.

Young adults may be exploring these tumultuous realities of life and developing their personal beliefs about what happens beyond life. Literature can be one resource for young adults developing their understanding of death and grief (Radley, 1999). Fantasy stories can be an outlet for exploring themes that can be difficult to grapple with and provide young adults with the opportunity to understand and work through these emotions in a fantastical environment (Brown, 2014). Working through these concepts in a fictional environment may provide questioning teens with the opportunity to look at death from a different perspective, perhaps understanding death as another adventure or journey (Brown, 2014).

For example, the Harry Potter series often blends the reality of life and death to understand death as a natural progression and not necessarily a journey to be feared and reviled. Harry, Ron and Hermione receive help from the spirits of those that they have lost through the series, suggesting that the afterlife is not as far as we perceive. Included is a list of YA Fantasy Books that explore the afterlife that may be helpful, or at least comforting, as young adults explore their philosophies of the afterlife. (Brown, 2014)

Everlife

This book takes place in a world where everyone must choose where they want to live after they die, their Everlife to be exact. Ten is captured for not obeying to sign up to go to Myriad, where her parents want to go. Her other choice is Trokia or, if unsigned by the time she dies, Many Ends. In this story, death is considered another journey or aspect of existence. Showalter, G. (2016). *Everlife*. Harlequin Teen.

An Ember in the Ashes

In this fantasy universe, defiance to the kingdom is met with violence and death. The book does not deal directly with the afterlife death is a rather significant aspect of the story bringing grief to the forefront of the reader's mind. Although, love and bonds provable and provide comfort to those that have lost their loved ones.

Tahir, S. (2018). *An ember in the ashes*. Razorbill.

Everlost

Nick and Allie die in a car accident and are transported to Everlost, the magical and dark netherworld between life and death. They work together to try to escape Everlost and the mysterious forces that try to keep them there. Although, eventually, they must accept death and its reality.

Shusterman, N. (2020). *Everlost*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

References

- Brown, M. (2014). "Death's Other Kingdoms": Death and the Afterlife in Some Recent Fantasies for Young Adults. *Mousaion*, 32(4), 141-153.
- Radley, G. (1999). Coping with Death in Young Adult Literature. *The ALAN Review*, 27(1).