

2019

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Recommended Citation

Thomas, Cody (2019) "Macabre Upbringings: A Look into Identity in Mort by Terry Pratchett and The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman," *Toyon Literary Magazine*: Vol. 65 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/toyon/vol65/iss1/20>

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Macabre Upbringings: A Look into Identity in *Mort* by Terry Pratchett and *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman

Cody Thomas

The concept of an individual's identity and the stages of growth through which one passes are core foundations that scholars have used to approach children's and adolescent's literature for decades. One's name is often their connection with the world in which they reside, and if their name comes into question, their link to reality can become blurred or faded. The questions addressed in works that deal with identity and names resonate with readers of all ages—in part due to the fact that many adults, themselves, are trying to solidify their own fundamental selves and carve out an identity from the masses. It stands to reason, then, that what are often cast off as children's books and therefore not worth a read might indeed be worth reading as an adult. These questions of identity and what is "normal" are directly taken on in Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2008) and Terry Pratchett's *Mort* (1987). The macabre upbringings, as shown in fantasy and quasi-fantasy settings, allow the characters to come out with a more grounded identity and a greater willingness to face the future. It is easier for children and adults alike to relate and grow from a story featuring characters who have overcome fantastical obstacles as opposed to ones rooted in reality because the reader stays engaged and learns to understand their own fears and worries through the metaphors and analogies.

Throughout their distinct journeys, the boys grow and learn in their new environments, having been taken from their normal world and thrust into strange surroundings. Because of these changes in their situations, both Bod

and Mort grow into fuller and better developed characters with which children can better relate. Bod has his own life put into perspective by the lives of a thousand-years-worth of souls, ranging from a Roman on the frontier to a few late 19th century city-dwellers; he ultimately must go forth and live his own life in the modern day, but he will carry with him the lessons and experiences they shared with him. Mort is forced to confront his own mortality, and, after literally fusing with the anthropomorphic personification of Death, finds his morality. They leave their strange circumstances surprisingly more “normal” than one might expect: Bod pursuing a normal life with a wallet full of cash and a passport at his disposal, and Mort marrying and being left with the task of making sure history unfolds the way in which it was originally bound.



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