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“To Build a Bridge: Myth and Legend to Reframe Mental Health in Young Adult Readers”

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“To Build a Bridge: Myth and Legend to Reframe Mental Health in Young Adult Readers”

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Abstract

Carl Jung’s (1947) ‘collective unconscious’ and Joseph Campbell’s (1963) ‘mythographic discoveries’ examined the role of myth in our everyday lives. Additionally, Dr. Viktor Frankl (1984) identified that the ability to make meaning out of suffering can assist a person, including young adults, with mental health concerns. In this discussion paper it is argued that myth-based fantasy stories that describe the legendary ‘hero’s quest’ can play an important role in helping a young person to comprehend mental health suffering. Through the literary trope of Young Adult (YA) fantasy fiction, mythical fantasy stories can aid in understanding during a process of inner reflection and cognitive reframing. As part of an emerging methodology entitled Story Image Therapy (SIT)®, narratives such as the katabatic tale of the hero’s sojourn journey (to the ‘underworld’ and return) provide a viable method for a young person to make meaning out of mental health distress. The proposed method can also be used to deliver mental health information and strategies in a way that is fun, ever-expanding and open to individual, cultural and other interpretations. Evidence to support the YA fiction method includes archetypal literary criticism and bibliotherapy models, as well as the youth’s ‘literary voices’ revealed through the popular mythical YA fantasy fictions: Tolkien’s (1954-1955) *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Lewis’ (1950-1956) *Narnia Chronicles*, Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) and Pullman’s (1995-2000) *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

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Introduction

Early last century the Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist Carl Jung proposed that symbols revealed through dreams and mythology-based stories (hereafter called mythical fantasy stories) were residues of ancestral memory ([Campbell, 2008](#); [De Coster, 2010](#)). Jung believed that these symbols were preserved in the ‘collective unconscious’ (Jung, 1960; 1989). A form of universal knowingness, Jung viewed the collective unconscious as something that all of humanity shared – regardless of a person’s age, culture, or the era in which they live. The therapeutic work associated with such mythical insights is called Jungian psychotherapy or analytical psychology ([Khodarahimi, 2009](#)). And according to Jung, “the form of the world into which [a young person] is born is already inborn in him, as a virtual image” (Jung, 1953, p. 188). Furthermore, Jung proposed that these universal predispositions that stem from our ancestral past and the realm of the collective unconscious includes our complexes ([Davydov & Skorbatyuk, 2005](#)). Such complexes: the individual’s constellation of feelings, ideas, perceptions and memories, may be revealed in the form of archetypes ([Taghizadeh, 2015](#); Jung, 1947, 1989). Within this discussion paper archetypes may be defined as a pattern of human development (Lu, 2012; Brunel, 2015), including the developing young person’s mental health, based on ancient image patterns (symbols) and stories ([Pietikainen, 1998](#)).

Keywords: Youth Mental Health, Young Adult Fiction, Mythology, Bibliotherapy, Archetypal Literary Criticism, Positive Psychology

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An advocate of Jungian philosophy was American mythologist Joseph Campbell. In Campbell's (2008) seminal work, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, he revealed that ancient mythology underlies almost every aspect of modern day. Moreover, Campbell explained that such ancient/modern connections are regularly achieved through a particular mythological structure – a sequence entitled the hero myth or monomyth (Campbell & Moyers, 1988; Vogler, 2007). Campbell's explanation of the stages revealed in this single myth were described as a 'hero's journey'. Campbell claimed that this journey was continuously retold throughout history in a variety of genres – such as today's mythical 'hero quest' stories presented in the Young Adult (YA) fantasy fiction genre (Heilman, 2003; Bloom, 2006).

At its most basic, fantasy fiction may be defined as any literature that contains elements that are according to C.S. Lewis impossible (Duriez, 2013) and do not (or cannot) exist in reality (Fitzgerald, 2008). The fictional stories may however commence with everyday life and reframe real-life personal struggles, such as enduring mental health problems, revealed through actions of the plot or characters. Other stipulations of the genre include that fantasy is heavily grounded in the roots of folklore and mythology, and that it contains universal archetypes (Ramaswamy, 2014). As J.R.R. Tolkien (1996) describes in his famous essay, *On Fairy-Stories*, fantasy is “the making or glimpsing of other worlds” (p. 64). Fantasy is also usually considered to be a genre of quest stories in which there is a journey being undertaken by the characters. There is generally a conflict between good versus evil and questions are raised about the use and consequences of magic. What'smore, “most fantasy stories involve heroes, and many of these heroes ... started from an ordinary or underdog status and have become more” (Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 4). As such, many heroic quest stories contain real-life themes and elements, mythical journeys, archetypes and 'other worlds' reframed through a magical fantasy story.

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Fantasy as a literary genre affords great flexibility and scope for writers to explore their innermost thoughts and ideas – and to potentially deliver information such as mental health information and interventions. As fantasy depends upon the imagination and creativity of the writer (Vijayan & Haider, 2016), it is this flexibility (both the writers’ and the readers’) that enables the genre to be used in a way that is personally meaningful and significant. Generally designed for a target audience twelve to eighteen years (Aronson, 2001), Young Adult mythic fictions that incorporate the hero’s journey (Vogler, 2007) may be extended from ten to twenty-five years (Cart, 2008). Storytelling and the symbolic representation [of the hero status in YA fantasy fiction] is universal. According to Jung and Campbell it binds humanity together (Callahan & Corbit, 2015). Thus, the fantasy trope has the potential to be efficacious for youth worldwide.

Jung and Campbell’s mythic connections can assist a young adult to become more aware of themselves, including their mental health, through an evolution Jung called the Individuation Process (Jung, 1947). The young person’s sense of ‘Self’ (with the ‘Self’ being the central archetype), is revealed through traditional stories from around the world (Caldecott, 1996; Wilkinson, 2009; Koenig, 1997). Campbell, Jung as well as an Austrian psychiatrist who survived the holocaust, Dr Viktor Frankl (1984) in *Man’s Search for Meaning* – all alluded to the same phenomenon. That is, an individual creates their own personal story, as part of a collective humanity story, in order to find particular meaning and purpose. Entitled ‘the will to meaning’ (Devoe, 2012, p. 2), this desire to derive personal meaning out of suffering may hold true for a young person struggling with a particular mental health problem as they endeavour to understand and then overcome their mental health difficulties. The ‘will to meaning’ using the trope of myth and legend can be articulated in Jung’s psychotherapy, Campbell’s storytelling paradigm and Frankl’s logotherapy depictions ([Holmes, 2014](#)).

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Based on Jung, Campbell and Frankl's insights a new model of delivering mental health information and positive psychological interventions/strategies to the youth is proposed. This creative, interesting and potentially promising mental health delivery vehicle involves the young person actively or passively reframing their own mental health through the YA fantasy fiction literary trope. According to the proposed model, youth mental health reframing may be achieved in either of two ways – vicariously or instructively. In the first vicarious method, the Young Adult author (fantasy fiction writer) subtly incorporates mental health messages and insights into a mythical fantasy fiction text. Writing thus becomes the integral part of the research when a story is crafted ([Frank, 2004](#)). With training, the author learns to carefully create the plotline to include particular psychological principles and mythical insights in a manner that is not too didactic so that it simply becomes a moral tale or is too instructive and sermonising (Bloom, 2006).

Using the first model as an example, the story's protagonist could embark on a journey and struggle with mental health issues and obstacles along their quest. Through an observation of the characters' own mental health suffering, and ways in which they make meaning out of the suffering, the YA Fantasy fiction reader may begin to vicariously learn about their own 'hero's journey'. That is, meaning-making may be achieved by the YA fiction reader as they unconsciously start to view themselves as the hero of their own quest by relating to the personal struggles endured by the protagonist. In this way, the young adult reader passively and spontaneously reframes their own mental health. Without the assistance of others, reframing becomes a necessary part of the readers' own journey as they begin to understand the mythical story and its relevance to their own lives ([Jung, 1921, 1948](#); [Campbell, 2008](#)).

In the second method, the YA Fantasy fiction text may be used more didactically: as a therapeutic approach grounded in mythological mores and legendary stories, modern and ancient

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images and symbols (otherwise known as Story Image Therapy). This Story Image Therapy (SIT)® model (Gordillo, 2015) may assist a young person to learn more about their own mental health in preference to, or in conjunction with, other Jungian approaches. Such approaches include Jungian play therapy, colouring mandalas and several other methods advocated for adolescents with mental health concerns ([Green, Drewes & Kominski, 2013](#); Green, 2014). The YA fantasy fiction methodology delivered through SIT and in conjunction with other psychotherapeutic methods may provide an enhanced level of understanding through personal reflection and cognitive reframing ([Beck, 1997](#)). The text is used as a mental health delivery vehicle with which to deliver psychoeducation regarding mental health issues, such as to provide Positive Psychological Interventions (PPI's) and other therapies (Vella-Brockrick, 2011; [Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010](#)). In this way, the text is formally created and then analysed.

As a practical therapeutic tool, SIT necessitates the use of the YA fantasy fiction text as a form of bibliotherapy. That is, stories are read external to therapy ([Gregory & Vessey, 2004](#)). Additionally, they may be analysed using an applied archetypal literary criticism methodology in therapy ([Dobson, 2005](#)). (More information regarding both bibliotherapy and applied archetypal literary criticism models is explained later in the article). Such proposed methods, it is argued, may be learned with the aid of a mental health professional trained in narrative therapeutic methods (Heath, 2000; APS, 2010) – such as Jungian psychotherapy – thereby allowing a young person's unconscious thoughts to become conscious (Kunst, 2014). Becoming consciously aware of one's own thoughts by cognitively reframing through the literary trope of YA Fantasy fiction may help a youth to find particular meaning and purpose in relation to mental health concerns. Caution must be exercised, however, when viewing myths as something concrete or an absolute truth [1] (Rudd, 2002).

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The actual efficacy of this proposed method would, of course, need to be thoroughly researched, practiced and tested in future analytic studies. The fact that archetypes in the hero's sojourn journey and return, often termed the katabasis ([Freccero, 1988](#)), are already imaginatively portrayed in popular YA fiction lends weight to the potential validity of this method. What's more, YA mythical fantasy texts are presently readily embraced by the youth. Some of the most popular books in history [in terms of book sales] include Tolkien's (1954) *The Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis' (1950) *Narnia Chronicles*, J.K. Rowling's (1997) *Harry Potter* series and (to a lesser extent) Pullman's (1995) *His Dark Materials*. All are YA fantasy fiction grounded in mythical archetypes used to describe the hero's journey, and all commence with everyday life ([Wrigley, 2005](#); [Bloom, 2006](#); [Watson, 2009](#)).

Mental health information delivered in this fictional and vicarious mode may also prove useful in helping to improve youth mental health and engagement with mental health services ([Ingoldsby, 2010](#); [Paterson & Panessa, 2008a](#)). As identified by McGorry, Parker & Purcell (2006) in response to the growing concern regarding potentially serious psychiatric disorders in Australian youth – a new and more engaging model is required – one that builds upon, but is qualitatively different from, existing child and adolescent treatment methods. The proposed myth psychology model is one such method which will now be discussed in greater detail, commencing with 'About the Myth', followed by 'The Popularity of Myth', 'The Katabatic Tale', 'Bibliotherapy Grounded in Mythology' and 'Archetypal Literary Criticism'.

About the Myth

Myths, rudimentary narratives from times long past, typically authenticate a culture's social norms. They are suitable for a young multicultural audience as mythological stories explain the nature of the world, life and living. Usually delivered in a supernatural or boldly imaginative style and genre ([Baldick, 2001](#)) and according to the region from which they

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originate, myths remain the living inspiration of modern day activities. Ancient fictions of the world originally delivered through oral narratives and storytelling ([Campbell, 2008](#); Campbell & Moyers, 1988; [Ronning, 2009](#)) they were later disseminated in art, literature and film (Vogler, 2007). From one generation to the next, and from one culture to another, these legendary stories make up an invaluable inheritance and one that each culture continues to share (Koenig, 1997; Waterfield & Waterfield, 2011).

Mythical storytelling paradigms in YA fiction include text written in the fantasy genre for young adults, based on 1. archetypal characters: such as the reluctant hero, the mentor, the shapeshifter (Vogler, 2007); 2. stories: including the great flood, the underworld and the final apocalypse ([Campbell, 2008](#)); or 3. themes: for example the quest and the conflict (Shadraconis, 2013). Mythical creatures and their shadowy nemesis are consistent with the archetypes of the human mind – and the collective unconscious (Jung, 1989). The ancient stories may be likened to a roadmap (a map of meaning-making) to help with difficult life situations revealed through the archetypes (Dunn, 2002).

The real interest of myths, according to Hamilton (2011) however, is that they take us back to a time when the world was new and people had a connection with the earth, the trees, the seas, the flowers and hills, “unlike anything we ourselves can feel” (p. 13). It is this loss of connection with the past according to Jung that is the reason for the rise of the “discontents of civilisation” (Jung, 1963, p. 236). YA fiction grounded in mythology may well be an effective trope with which we can restore the connection. For example, a story’s protagonist might consider that they feel ‘disconnected’ from friends and family as they endure their heroic quest. The character could ponder why this sense of disconnection exists – thus reinforcing the value of connection to the YA fiction reader. In keeping with Kern’s (2003) premise, youth relate to the fantasy fiction of *Harry Potter* because they actually want, and can learn from, the moral

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messages in the text. It is proposed here therefore that the young reader can identify with, and thus vicariously learn from, the character's desire to form connections with others in a fantasy fiction story such as *Harry Potter*.

Ancient mythological tales from around the world tell of gods, epics of heroic deeds and great cosmic events (Koenig, 1997). In the world's many cultures myths can explain to a young audience some of the most fundamental of life's issues. These include cultural explanations of the creation of the universe and humanity (creation myths), the nature of god/s and spirits, what happens when we die and what will happen when the world comes to an end (origin and apocalyptic myths respectively). Explanations of war and peace, love and jealousy, good and evil – the Promethean archetype of human existence (Kerenyi, 1997). Mythical stories reveal the dichotomous nature of humanity through this incredibly powerful storytelling mode, and all can help to make meaning out of suffering. Not only do myths explain such critical life lessons but they do so in a way that engenders intriguing plots, vivid characters and memorable scenes (Wilkinson, 2009). These fantastical storytelling elements can 'grab' the attention of our adolescent readers.

Myths can reach our deepest emotions. And mythical stories have lost none of their emotional power over time (Green, 2013). It is a power that our youth are discovering with increasing regularity as YA fiction comes to play a vital role in the distribution of myth in the postmodern era (Riverlea, 2012). Moreover, every generation has its own set of maladaptive behaviours (Devoe, 2012) and myth may assist individuals to understand, and subsequently improve, such behaviours (Fornaro, [Clementi & Fornaro, 2009](#)). Improvement in behaviour could occur through a medium our youth already embrace (Heilman, 2003; Lennard, 2007). The enormous popularity of modern day myth and legend stories reveals the youth's voracious appetite for mythic tales.

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The Popularity of Myth

The popularity of mythological katabatic stories provides testament to the argument that young readers connect, and identify with, the masculine and feminine protagonists who endure a heroic journey (Costello, 2009). And although ancient mythological hero characters tend to be mostly male (Lyons, 2014), many modern day mythology-based stories also include the strong female or female heroic characteristics, for example Hermione in the *Harry Potter* series. Though not the protagonist in the story, or as physically aggressive as the male characters, Fristedt (2005) defends Hermione's equality to the male characters as Hermione uses her keen logic and sensibility to show her intellectual strength and ability. Similarly, Susan and Lucy in *The Narnia Chronicles* (Lewis, 1950) and Lyra Belaqua in *His Dark Materials* (Pullman, 1995) have equally shared strong female heroic status. Full of motifs and themes cleverly interwoven into the text, young male and female readers can equally enjoy, and learn from, such heroic figures (Klaus, 2014).

YA fantasy fiction's parameters are ever expanding (Fitzgerald, 2008; Seymour & Beckton, 2015). Additionally, research shows that narrative construction of meaning-making (in relation to identity formation) is made up of meaning-filled experiences as well as self-defining fun experiences that induce pleasure and enjoyment in adolescents (McLean, 2005). In ever-expanding ways, YA fiction provides meaning-filled experiences in the form of heroic character's actions and deeds that can help the youth define themselves in order to form their identity. And it achieves this task in a way that induces pleasure and enjoyment. Moreover, the aggrandizement of the hero, the old stories brought up to date and reflecting 21st century life, can also makes mythical reading fun! "Myths [and legends] are powerful things" (Green, 2013, p. vii) and their longevity provides testament to their power (Brown, 2012).

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For audiences from grades 6 and 12 (ages 12 to 18 approximately), the fantasy literary genre based on mythology and legendary heroes is a popular and rapidly-growing one (Cart, 2008). In fact, YA fiction has become such a global phenomenon that the New York Times was forced to assign a children's best-seller list, distinct from an adult one, because the adult list was being increasingly dominated by Young Adult fiction texts. A brief look at any best-seller list (such as the New York Times or the Australian), reveals that such texts aimed at young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years presently account for many of today's top-selling books. Book sales is serious marketable recognition for our youth's desire for YA fiction – particularly fantasy fiction (Pearce, Muller & Hawkes, 2013).

There are critics, however, who wish to discredit the concept of myth (Itu, 2008; Strenski, 1989). These critics consider mythology a falsehood (or claim it has the potential to be misinterpreted) based on the ambiguity of language or the use of fantastical elements such as anthropomorphic (talking) animals (Schremp, 2012). Such metaphorical ambiguity, it is argued, reinforces that ancient symbolic stories can be interpreted in numerous ways – according to the individual needs of a particular youth, in a particular culture, at a particular time. And this is what gives myth its greatest power as a reframing tool. Due to the ambiguous nature of mythologies and the apparent 'vagueness' in the stories such as gross exaggerations of character, mythological creatures based on fantasy rather than fact, larger-than-life legendary heroes; the elements of the story can be used in a variety of ways. For example, Positive Psychological Interventions (PPI's) including learned optimism (Seligman, 2006; [Seligman et al 2005](#)), in which the young person learns the skills to become more optimistic, can be delivered to the youth in personally significant and meaningful ways. By observing the main character using PPI's, for example, interventions could be instructive and influential without detracting from the storyline.

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The Katabatic Tale

Crucial to any construction of myth is the concept of the katabasis. The katabasis is drawn from ancient Greek mythology and literally means ‘the descent’. More generally, the katabasis is a journey to and return from a ‘hell’ or other challenging world (Frost & Laing, 2012). In modern psychology the katabasis may be used to describe the depression or anxiety that many young men and women experience. And mythological stories can help them make sense of their depression or anxiety. For example, the katabasis theoretical framework underlies the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (Waterfield & Waterfield, 2011).

The Greek tale of love and temptation, sadness and disappointment could be rewritten into a modern day context and included in a YA fictional text to illustrate mental health problems (such as feeling anxious about losing a loved one and how to cope with profound grief and loss/depression). Alternatively, the mythological story of Orpheus’ hero’s journey could also provide an example of enduring love to the youth, or the nature of resilience and ‘mental toughness’. In keeping with the theme of ‘youth voice’, young readers can choose, consciously or unconsciously, which themes are relevant to them. They can, for example, select themes that could potentially help with identity formation and meaning-making as they increase their own mental health awareness.

In the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Orpheus is an extremely gifted minstrel (musician and singer) who fell in love with a wood spirit nymph called Eurydice. When pursued by the god Apollo, Eurydice ran away, stepped on a poisonous snake and died. Orpheus then embarked on a katabatic journey to find his beloved until he found a cave that belonged to the god of the underworld, Hades. Orpheus managed to convince Hades, through Orpheus’ musical talents, to let Eurydice go – on the condition that Orpheus would not look at Eurydice. Unable to stop himself, however, Orpheus glanced at Eurydice and she was eternally lost to him

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(Fredriksmeyer, 2007). In the myth, Orpheus was forever heartbroken until his tragic death under terrible circumstances.

Mythological sagas such as Orpheus' katabatic tale (and numerous other symbolic 'descent to hell and back' fictions from around the world), are structured through archetypal figures in modern YA fiction. Metaphorical katabatic tales such as these could prove to be a vital delivery vehicle in the endeavour to combat the rising incidence of youth mental health problems in Australia and elsewhere (McGorry, 2006; ABS, 2009; Cohen & Janikicki-Deverts, 2012; [Olfson, Druss & Marcus, 2015](#); [Twenge, 2015](#)). As youth internalise the story, mental health reframing may be achieved by helping youth to understand how everyday problems (such as the modern day mental health problems of stress, anxiety and depression) can be related to Orpheus' tale. Whatsmore, they will remember it.

Eloquently summated in Ihimaera's sentiment: "Stories rarely leave you alone, they sit like backseat drivers in the recesses of your mind, nagging to come back into the driving seat" (Perris, 2015, p. 86). Mythological stories that explore the activities of Gods and heroes can serve as models of behavioural and mental health if the young reader learns to see themselves as the hero in their own quest – thus reframing their own mental and behavioural health. Such legendary quest stories can sit in the recess of a young person's mind for an extended period – and so too [it is argued] can the mythical, archetypal messages. Evidence of the ancient stories containing important messages include Aesop's fables, which are still popular and personally relevant today (Clayton, 2008) and can be used in bibliotherapy.

Bibliotherapy Grounded in Mythology

Bibliotherapy, the use of books to help with personal problems, first appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in 1916 (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2007). Sometimes referred to as biblioguidance, bibliocounselling or something similar, bibliotherapy involves the use of books

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and other media to assist with normal development, as well as clinically significant problems.

The books can be used as an educational tool or a delivery information system independent of the therapeutic process ([Gregory, 2004](#)), or they can be used in therapy. Recent years have witnessed an expansion in the effective use of books and self-help literature in therapy (National Health and Medical Research Council), with no serious adverse effects reported (Usher, 2013). Moreover, bibliotherapy models often emphasize the relationship between the disposition of a reader and the cognitive and affective experience offered through literature in order to assist the reader ([Jack & Ronan, 2008](#); [Gregory & Vessey, 2004](#)).

Short stories based on ancient mythology and adapted to a modern context may be given to the youth as part of a bibliotherapy method – as an adjunct to psychological treatment to be read in or outside of the psychotherapy sessions. Alternatively the stories may be listened to via a technological medium such as an audiobook for youth who may not feel as comfortable with the written genre. Consistent with the values and philosophy of counselling psychology (Murdoch, Duan & Nilsson, 2012), the written materials may be used to educate the student about the disorder, to help them identify and eliminate ineffective patterns of thinking/behaviour as well as increase their acceptance of proposed treatment ([Fitzgerald, 2008](#)). Reading and analysing fiction text has already been employed by literary critics (Persson, 2006). Results indicate that the text can be interpreted in numerous ways using archetypal literary criticism methods but that further investigation, particularly in relation to the use of fictional texts in bibliotherapy, requires further investigation.

Archetypal Literary Criticism

Archetypal literary theory arguably commenced with Carl Jung, and was later expanded upon by Northrop Frye ([Dobson, 2005](#)). Though Frye does not credit a Jungian archetypal analysis to his work, Jung for the most part, clearly addressed the topic of using literature to

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identify archetypal patterns in *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*. Jung's work contains two essays (first published 1922 and 1930) and Jung's literary prowess regarding archetypal analysis includes one discussion of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. As early as 1912 in *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Jung analysed Longfellow's *Hiawatha* (op cit, 2005). Jung's critical views are insightful as humans have long been captivated by mythology and theorized about the lessons embedded in their tales (Schrempp, 2012).

In practical terms, the application of analytical literary criticism to YA fictional text may include the young student or young adult client viewing the fictional characters as a psychological case-study in which they may/may not liken themselves to aspects of the story. Examining the text from a variety of perspectives can assist the young person to not only interpret the meaning, but then relate it to their own mental health issues with the aid of a psychoanalyst or mental health professional trained in archetypal psychology (Hillman, 1996) or other forms of archetypal literary criticism methods. The young person may identify themselves as the hero in their own story, and/or other individuals in their lives as the 'shadowy nemesis,' 'trickster' or some other archetype. The mythic stories and their structure can also describe heroic adventures in which the young adult hero seeks help when their coping mechanisms are insufficient or fail altogether (Dunn, 2002). What's more, the YA fictional texts may also be viewed from a range of perspectives including folklore, psychology, sociology, and popular culture – as alluded to in Whited's (2002) *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 'literary voices of our youth' have spoken. C. S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling [and to a lesser extent Phillip Pullman] are among the most popular Young Adult fiction writers of all time (New York Times, 2016). All use plot lines that contain mythological/legendary stories and images, the katabatic tale of death and love, good vs evil,

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and their stories commence with everyday life. These fantasy writers are the masters at bridging the ancient and the modern in the fictional space. In a similar vein modern YA fantasy fiction writers can also write mythical texts, but then expand their works to subtly include mental health information and strategies so that they not only entertain their audience, but they can also potentially assist them as well. (Indeed, the author of this article has used ancient and modern stories and images for several years in her work as a clinical psychologist specialising in children and youth – and with excellent results – prompting her to develop this as a form of therapy).

Ancient stories are a way of deriving understanding from suffering, through the journey of overcoming it (Eliade, 1998). Youth can live a life of self-reflection as an in-depth psychological self-discovery (Lu, 2012) and this forms the basis of the ancient/modern connection. In the past, as in the modern day, myth and legend stories paint a portrait of a young person's archetype of 'Self'. That is to say, the stories help with meaning-making and identity formation as the young person reflects, reframes and learns more about their own mental health needs and mental health issues more generally. Moreover, youth like problem solving and enjoy reading about problems they may be facing in the present or will be facing in the future. According to [Bright and Bright \(2013\)](#), youth want to see how others have solved their problems – presumably so they can learn how to solve their own.

Viktor Frankl and Carl Gustav Jung have indicated that common maladaptive behaviours and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, aggression and addiction can be the result of a meaninglessness existence ([Devoe, 2012](#)). Campbell has shown us the way to improve meaningfulness for the YA fiction reader through a mythical story. By reframing a mental health journey as our own heroic journey through the YA fantasy fiction trope, a young adult's resolution of their journey is to have achieved Jung's proclaimed 'Self Individuation'.

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[1] There is an important caveat in terms of my discussion of universalism mythical mores. In my use of myths and legends I have endeavoured to avoid cultural reductionism (that all cultures are the same) or claims of universal applicability. A second important clarification is my distinction between myth and religion or cult. Sermonising or using mythological artefacts as an applied faith is avoided. Reference to the collective unconscious is made as a generic term to describe humanity as a cooperative group.

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