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Honors College

27 January 2021

Gods, Kings, and Teenagers: Y.A Fantasy Literature as Narrative Therapy

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Honors College  
University of West Georgia

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
Honors College Distinction

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by

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December 2, 2022

In an article from *Psychology Today*, psychologist Gregg Henriques claims that in the past 15-20 years, there has been a dramatic increase in mental health treatment for college-age adults. Rates jumped from 19% in 2007 to 34% in 2017. For lifetime diagnosis, rates again soared from 22% in 2007 to 34% in 2017. In 1980, one out of every ten students needed mental health care. A third of all college students in America receive mental health care (Henriques, *Psychology Today*). Emotional fragility and distress among young adults have increased in the past two decades. The exact cause remains debated, but a potential coping mechanism exists in YA fantasy literature. This thesis will demonstrate a plausible connection between YA fantasy literature and narrative therapy.

To accomplish this, current forms of art therapy will be defined and examined to investigate the protagonist's mental health and relationships in one primary young adult fantasy text and demonstrate that young adult fantasy literature significantly improves mental well-being and is thus worthy of consideration as narrative therapy. The primary text (*A Court of Silver Flames*) was selected because the main protagonist, Nesta Archeron, grapples with multiple mental health issues and can overcome them with assistance from significant relationships in her life. My research indicates a defined link between young adult fantasy literature consumption and the alleviation of anxiety and depression. This is accomplished by interaction with a transpositional narrative therapy in which the struggles of reality are re-interpreted in the environment of a new, fictional world. The critical distance maintained by this approach allows readers to process trauma as the characters they interact with, and the struggles and triumphs of the main protagonists can model the recovery process. This paper will report the findings, explain the link, and suggest young adult fantasy literature as a form of narrative therapy, potentially alleviating mental health symptoms.

To be considered young adult fantasy, the book must cater to an audience of 12-18-year-olds. In addition, the main characters are generally young adults grappling with typical themes such as romance and biological or intellectual maturing. This kind of work is important, as the main characters often model the coming-of-age struggles endured by most adolescents, making them a relatable point of contact for one of life's most emotionally conflicting stages. Many young adults need extra help navigating this challenging part of life, and fantasy literature might contain a new way of addressing their heightened emotional stress. This extra help comes in the form of narrative therapy.

The APA defines narrative exposure therapy (NET) as “a treatment for trauma disorders, particularly in individuals suffering from complex and multiple trauma. It has been most frequently used in community settings and with individuals who experienced trauma due to political, cultural, or social forces.” It is characterized by the recognition that people tell themselves stories about their lives and that these stories influence how they perceive themselves. For example, if someone defines themselves solely by their traumatic experiences, they will consistently feel traumatized. A patient goes through NET under the supervision of a therapist, intending to establish a chronological narrative of the patient’s life, trauma and all. In the process of creating the narrative, “the patient fills in details of fragmentary memories and develops a coherent autobiographical story. In so doing, the memory of a traumatic episode is refined and understood” (apa.org).

This process of narrativizing the patient’s life can be seen in fantasy literature, where young adults may process their trauma by watching their favorite main characters grapple with physical and mental adversity. In doing so, the reader engages in a kind of narrative therapy, able to explore and process trauma by uncovering buried truths through the distanced lens of an

imaginary character in a fictional world. By transposing real trauma into a fictional world, readers are encouraged to grapple with their own as they follow the narrative structure of the characters. The characters and their struggles are real, but the environment they interact in is fictional, providing the reader with a critical distance to reflect on their own lives.

Richard Kearney, a philosopher, writes about the power of narrative in his book, *On Stories*. He holds that stories not only entertain us but deliver meaning to our lives and identities. Kearney argues that a story recounts “your present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations” (Kearney ?). When we are asked to describe ourselves, we tell a story about who we are currently, what we are doing, and where we want to be. We represent ourselves as unfinished stories; therefore, narrative, or telling one’s story in relation to others, should be seen as a fundamental principle of human existence. Storytelling goes back as far as the ancient Greeks with Aristotle and his poetic mythos, which focused on narration as a cathartic process where every story was open-ended. It becomes a kind of storytelling that “forever fails to *cure* trauma but never fails to *try* to heal it” (Kearney, “Narrative Imagination and Catharsis”). This is accomplished by converting pity into compassion and fear into serenity. A properly narrated story will allow the reader to relate to the story’s pain through compassion but also maintain a healthy distance from the pain through serenity. This prevents the pain expressed in the story from fusing with the reader’s own trauma.

Kearney draws on this ancient knowledge to support his claim that narrative is central to human experience. He claims that “the art of storytelling-defined as the dramatic imitating and plotting of human action- is what gives us a shareable world” (Kearney 28). Narrative is how we relate to each other, and is therefore fundamental to human expression. Through this primal relatability, the coping mechanisms of narrative and fantasy literature begin to emerge. Fictional

narratives can provide a necessary level of cognitive dissociation from reality, where deep truths exposed by characters can be explored and interpreted by readers. Stories can retrieve psychic trauma in a way most formal disciplines cannot. Kearny claims, “People suffering from psychiatric or psychological disorders are more likely to get better when they believe their stories are being heard in addition to being ‘treated’ in a purely clinical or biochemical way” (39). The experience of being known or understood is rooted in an ancient desire for acceptance amongst our peers. Many fantasy novels (such as the ones I listed for study above) demonstrate how being understood can help a person endure some of the worst pain imaginable.

Another author who engages with fantasy literature as a form of therapy is the famed J.R.R. Tolkien, who most would consider the founder of modern fantasy literature. He wrote during WWI and WWII, a time known for causing some of the greatest psychological distress in human history. It was a period of great unrest and disillusionment with the world, as many Europeans encountered horrific brutality and loss of life on an unimaginable scale. During these mentally insecure times, Tolkien insisted that fantasy literature was a healing balm. In his essay *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien claimed that fantasy literature helped people cope with difficult situations through recovery, escape, and the happy ending.

The recovery, or regaining a clear view, was important to Tolkien. He argued that fantasy literature allows us to reorient ourselves during difficult circumstances. Because creative fantasy is “mainly trying to do something else [create a new story],” it “may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away” (Tolkien 19). Young adult fantasy literature gives youth the space to recover through distraction. Immersing someone in a different world while they are enduring something difficult is essential to what fantasy works provide. The separation of another world with different concerns allows the reader to reorient and “breathe” in a way that is impossible

when our reality is poignantly pressing.

Another important aspect of fantasy literature is the escape. In defense of this, Tolkien created the famous Escaping Prisoner Analogy, where he claims, “Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about topics other than jailers and prison walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it” (Tolkien 20). If someone feels trapped in a situation, why should they be forced to only think about what is troubling them? In fact, if we are willing to admit it, most people get through difficult situations by doing other things to distract them from the issue as they work through it. Reading young adult fantasy provides a healthy way to escape for a moment to find our resolve to press through adversity. Tolkien and other proponents of fantasy literature are often criticized for encouraging a kind of literary escapism in which people are encouraged to disassociate from their lives entirely. However, this is a misinterpretation of their intent. Escaping reality through a fantasy work is meant to provide a *temporary refuge* from present difficulty. It is not meant to excuse the participant from *all responsibility* for their life, only to give them a brief moment of rest to strengthen them in their journey. This is not a willful delusion, just a deliberate break to reorient.

The final and most important aspect of fantasy literature is the happy ending. Tolkien argues that this differentiates fantasy literature from any other kind of literature. “It is the mark of a good fairy story...that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give...when the turn comes, a catch of breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art” (Tolkien 23). In other words, the happy ending, the “sudden joyous turn” despite all odds, is the essential marker of a fairy story (Tolkien 22). It is important to note here that the existence of a happy ending does not deny the reality of grief in

our lives. What it does deny is a universal and final defeat from adversity. No matter how difficult it gets or what is sacrificed, the main character emerges victorious. This message of hope is designed to encourage the reader through whatever difficulty they are enduring in reality, as no matter how dark it gets, there will always be a way to move forward. This idea is central to narrative therapy, where the focus is to help the patient identify a narrative that goes beyond whatever trauma they have endured, preventing them from being solely identified by it. Fantasy literature is designed to do this through its critical distance from the reader and its encouragement to move forward as the reader watches characters grapple with serious obstacles and come out better on the other side.

A fellow author and contemporary of Tolkien, C.S. Lewis also extensively studied the impact of stories on life, drawing inspiration for his work from ancient Norse and Greek myths. In his critical work, *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, he examines why fantasy stories are such a potent form of communication and should not be devalued because of their target audience. In his essay “On Stories,” Lewis argues that the pleasure given by “children’s stories” has been overlooked and misunderstood. On page 13, he claims that the function of art is to “present what the narrow and desperately practical perspectives of real life exclude.” The goal of art, and therefore literature, is to expose deep truths that are often ignored or numbed under the bustle of reality. The unrealistic nature of fantasy does not hide the harshness of life. In fact, “the happiness which it presents to us is in fact so full of the simplest and most attainable things—food, sleep, exercise, friendship, the face of nature, even (in a sense) religion” (Lewis 19). As for what it does to the reader psychologically, Lewis claims that “the whole story, paradoxically enough, strengthens our relish for real life. This excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual” (Lewis 19). As a reader interacts with a fantasy work, the

unrealistic nature of the world, characters, and setting give the reader the strength to continue coping with reality. In fantasy, the character drives the plot. Immersive world-building is important to give the reader a critical distance from the difficulties the story will unpack. However, how the characters interact with the world and each other will ultimately determine the reader's response. The characters serve as an ethical lay line for the reader. Through their actions and reactions, the reader may learn how to cope with difficulty and trauma in their daily lives. Stories can guide us toward a better picture of reality. Through fantasy literature, we can "catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive" (Lewis 28). Young adult fantasy literature can help capture these moments, turning daily experiences into something beautiful, real, and permanent by transposing them into another world.

In his second essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said," Lewis argues that the fairy story might be one of the best ways to convey truth. Casting the truths of reality into an imaginary world could make stories appear in real potency. In such a manner, one could "thus steal past those watchful dragons [of reason and rationality]" (Lewis 70). Stories can present truth in a way that slips past our guard simply because it is a story. If the reader is convinced that the events are fictional, their guard is lowered, making them receptive to whatever message the story was designed to convey. In addition, he argues that "The inhibitions which I hoped my stories would overcome in a child's mind may exist in a grown-up's mind too, and may perhaps be overcome by the same means" (Lewis 72). Reserving fantasy literature specifically for children does everyone a disservice. Truth should be relevant no matter the age of the reader. Fantasy literature is uniquely capable of delivering truth in the following ways. Fantasy literature can generalize while also remaining concrete. It can present abstract concepts, experiences, or entire classes of experiences in an easily digestible format. Most importantly,



fantasy can give readers experiences they have never had, enriching their lives as a result.

An example text will be provided to demonstrate this: *A Court of Silver Flames*, by Sara J. Maas. will outline the basic plotline and the mental hurdles given to the main character Nesta Archeron. While most of J. Maas' work critically engages with mental health in some way, *A Court of Silver Flames* is the best portrayal of mental health struggles for study purposes. The main protagonist, Nesta Archeron, struggles with several mental issues, including recurring PTSD, depression, low self-esteem, and crippling guilt. One of the many reasons for this is the brutal death of her father at the hands of the enemy king in the previous book. Nesta did not have a great relationship with him due to his neglect during a phase of poverty. As a result, she feels terribly guilty that he died loving her while she hated him for his shortcomings. Throughout the book, Nesta practices many of the pro-mental health ideas supported by Lewis, Tolkien, and Kearney. In particular, Nesta relies on a strong network of family friends and a significant other to lift her out of her current slump.

Her journey with mental health is mapped out via a selection of important quotes from different periods of her mental health journey. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that Nesta began her journey broken and disillusioned and emerged not unscathed but healing with hope for the future. In providing hope for the future, fantasy literature gives the reader a simulated blueprint to follow. By following this blueprint, the reader who struggles with similar mental health issues can vicariously experience, and therefore learn from, Nesta's triumphs and tribulations. From the beginning, it is clear that friendship is important to overcoming mental obstacles.

The journey begins on page 505, where Nesta has decided that she is fundamentally worthless and does not have the strength to change who she is, though she sees the pain she causes her loved ones. Cassian responds,

“These tears mean you care. I am going to tell you that it is not too late, not for any of it. And I can’t tell you when, or how, but it will get better. What you feel, this guilt and pain and self-loathing—you will get through it. But only if you are willing to fight. Only if you are willing to face it and embrace it, and walk through it, to emerge on the other side of it. And maybe you will still feel that tinge of pain, but there is another side, a better side” (J. Maas).

Here, Cassian is modeling a supportive friend, encouraging Nesta to face her fears and come out on the other side as a better person. This mirrors Tolkien’s claim that fantasy retroactively helps readers work through trauma as they learn coping behaviors from characters grappling with similar issues. A reader could subconsciously absorb this, as Lewis claims, is bound to happen when encountering fairy stories and learn how to cope with mental health purely by watching the main character model it. Encased in this fictional story is a powerful message for struggling young adults. Difficulties can be overcome with persistence as long as you have strong support.

Later in her journey, Nesta is comforted by Amren, a close friend whose relationship soured as Nesta became more mentally unhealthy. Nesta can repair their friendship as time passes, earning a compliment and some advice from Amren. “That’s the key, isn’t it? To know the darkness will always remain, but how you choose to face it, handle it...that’s the important part. To not let it consume. To focus upon the good, the things that fill you with wonder” (J. Maas 633). This dialogue represents a pivotal moment in Nesta’s journey. After several months

of fighting for her sanity, she finally emerged from the darkness. She is not unscathed, but she is ready to live as a healthy person once more. Once more, Nesta's character models healthy ways to overcome mental struggles in a way that is easily absorbed and emulated by the reader. As Tolkien stated earlier, it is an essential aspect of fantasy literature that people are drawn away from everyday life to face their fears in a safe way. The reader becomes part of the fictional space while maintaining a presence in the physical world, creating a mirroring effect in which the character's and readers' experiences are shared.

The importance of friendship is essential in Nesta's recovery. From the beginning, the book focuses on an enemies-to-lovers arc between herself and Cassian. In an underlying aspect, the book invites readers to watch Nesta build strong friendships with three other women who were victims of wartime trauma. As the story progresses, Nesta, and in turn, the reader, realize how essential companionship is to be lifted out of dark times. Nesta claims that "As long as she had Cassian at her side, her friends with her, she could do it. Face it. They wouldn't let her fall back into that pit. Cassian would never let her fall again" (J. Maas 645). One of the key steps to overcoming depression and other mental health issues is forming a strong social support system.

By the end of the novel, Nesta recognizes that "we need [hurtful things] in order to appreciate the good. Some days might be more difficult than others, but... I want to experience all of it, live through all of it. With them" (J. Maas 734). Fantasy literature effectively communicates deep truth while maintaining a critical distance from the issues clouding the reader's life. In reading YA fantasy such as *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, readers not only escape from difficult life circumstances, they can gain real advice in times of need. Characters like Nesta, who model good behavior, should be emulated. Readers can learn real human responses to

mental health issues through the transpositional process. Nesta successfully demonstrates how to grapple with and overcome mental health struggles through her character journey.

In support of this, social psychologist Karen Dill-Shackleford provides extensive commentary on how reading fantasy literature shapes social life. The article attempts to answer the question, “Why do fictional narratives matter?” The short answer is that people gain insight into what makes life meaningful by engaging with fictional characters and worlds through narrative. There is an extensive psychological inquiry into why meaningful fiction might be good at evoking memories in a safe way. According to Dill-Shackleford, “The basis of believable fiction is reality because it is written by real people to evoke real social thoughts, feelings, and behaviors” (3). In this line of thought, they argue that the key tenets of fictional narratives allow readers to engage with sensitive memories, learn social behaviors, grapple with difficult emotions, and even simulate social connection or belonging. The key to this engagement is the character, who lends a story its relatability through their connections to other characters and the world around them. This fictional social network is often based on reality, as real authors have created them. As a result, these fictional networks mirror real social networks by inviting the reader to engage in social behavior while fulfilling needs and gratifications.

These needs and gratifications are what readers experience by participating in Nesta’s journey as a parasocial relationship. That is, a one-sided relationship initiated by the reader that simulates a real-life social relationship with the character. Within this space, the character’s and readers’ experiences are shared, creating a simulated form of connection that might be as persuasive as a real social relationship. This is highly persuasive; in fact, “Many adults’ favorite story worlds are...worlds where they can experience trials and sorrows, but also triumphs and joy” (Dill-Shackelford et al. 636). By occupying a character’s world but still being part of our

own, readers can safely engage with critical information to inspire them through adversity (just as Tolkien claimed earlier). Through Nesta's experiences, the reader could learn to understand life better in ways that inform social thinking, feeling, and decision-making. In this case, a better understanding of how to grapple with trauma and the subsequent mental issues it brings. Immersion into a story allows the reader to think, feel, and act in simulated social contexts that are very similar to reality. This increases their ability to socially engage and express empathy, enabling readers to engage more successfully with real-life interactions and individuals.

In addition to improving social skills, fantasy literature provides an important function for mental health: empathy. Fictional characters like Nesta can simulate belonging. By reading about Nesta's friendships and their growth over the novel, the reader simulates their friendships with the characters in response, generating belonging. It creates a group identity that satiates the social need for companionship. Companionship is an important part of recovering from trauma. The simulated companionship provided by Nesta and her relatable struggles will help the struggling reader seek out companionship in their life. As discovered by Dill-Shackelford, "Reading passages from fictional stories caused individuals to psychologically affiliate with the social groups presented in the narratives (640). Reading YA fantasy literature builds empathy and should be considered a viable form of narrative therapy.

Lastly, Dill-Shackelford argued that readers could receive benefits with coping and memory from reading fictional narratives, claiming that "meaningful fiction may be especially good at evoking memories" (Dill-Shackelford et al. 640). These memories evoked while reading create a deeply personal experience, allowing readers to utilize fictional narratives to battle difficult emotions. Nesta's struggles with trauma and PTSD as a result of war and the death of her father may evoke memories in a person suffering similarly, allowing them to reinterpret these

harmful memories with the assistance of narrative. This processing method is called dual empathy, in which the reader contains “simultaneous empathy for the character and empathy for the self” (Dill-Shackleford et al. 641). By processing these memories through the character and autobiographically at the same time, the reader can resolve trauma.

Engaging with fictional narratives and characters allows people to grapple with confusing emotions, ideas, and beliefs in a safe context, as the grappling is one layer removed from the real world. In *A Court of Silver Flames*, Nesta Acheron grapples with several mental health issues that are reported in young adults, such as depression, trauma, and PTSD. YA fantasy literature is the most widely read genre on the planet, and the meaning it brings to people’s lives should no longer be taken for granted. It is the perfect candidate for narrative therapy, which utilizes a therapist guiding a patient's narrative as they confront harmful past memories. YA Fantasy already accomplishes this through dual empathy, and it could only be enhanced under the guidance of a licensed therapist.

Dual empathy is represented by Kearney, Tolkien, and Lewis as one of the unique aspects of fantasy literature that makes it so effective at relating truth. Through Kearney, the ancient roots of the story as fundamental to the human identity were explored. Narrative was defined as central to human existence. Human beings are defined by the stories they narrate for themselves and others. From there, he argues that fictional narratives drive meaning, creating a safe space for readers to grapple with fundamental truth. Tolkien argued that fantasy literature set itself apart from all other genres through escape and the happy ending. Escape provides the reader with a necessary break from reality while allowing them to begin grappling with the truth they need to move forward. The happy ending gives readers a reason to keep on going. Through the essential power of the happy ending, readers are inspired to fight on through their physical and mental

struggles by vicariously experiencing fictional characters as they do the same. From Lewis, the essential capacity of fantasy literature is to relate the truth. This is accomplished through the off-world setting that communicates truth without raising suspicion. This stealthy exposition of truth is what makes fairy stories uniquely equipped to convey deep truths to readers. Narrative therapy undertakes a similar process when the patient is asked to reinterpret their traumatic narrative with the help of a trained therapist. Fantasy literature serves as a potential vehicle for narrative therapy in that it already accomplishes most of what narrative therapy looks to do. Through the fictional narrative, readers are inspired to engage with their lives in a safe yet critical manner.

A character like Nesta who models a positive recovery from trauma could easily be used by the reader to help them overcome their own. Thus YA fantasy literature acts as a kind of narrative therapy already without being officially welcomed. The rising trend of mental health issues in young adults suggests that the current approach is not working, at least for the next generation. Traditional methods of therapy are no longer serving as they once did, and it is no accident that fantasy literature is so widely watched and read. Young people are searching for meaning, and the norms and morals they pick up in entertainment are filling the void. If there is a way to combine fantasy literature with a legitimate narrative therapy approach, young people may be engaged in a relevant and helpful way. The key is to find something relatable to connect beyond standard teen angst but to also find something that has real therapeutic meaning beyond simply the cathartic. YA Fantasy literature is massively relevant and has now proven to be therapeutically significant. The bones for future psychological studies are here. Clearly, YA fantasy literature qualifies as a form of narrative therapy and should be considered for future studies to treat the rising mental health crisis in young adults.

### Works Cited

“Art Therapy: Definition, Uses, and How It Works.” *Medical News Today*, MediLexicon International, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/art-therapy#in-children>.

This article explains the various forms of art therapy, including painting, sculpting, sketching, and poetry. The report also explains the essential criteria of art therapy and what it must do to be considered therapeutic. Included are a list of mental health conditions art therapy effectively



treats, including depression. This source provides foundational material from which links between art therapy and reading Y.A. fantasy can be connected.

Dill-Shackleford, Karen E., et al. "Connecting the Dots between Fantasy and Reality: The Social Psychology of Our Engagement with Fictional Narrative and Its Functional Value." *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2 Nov. 2016,  
[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/spc3.12274?saml\\_referrer](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/spc3.12274?saml_referrer).

This article from the Wiley Online Library investigates the role of narrative and its impact on humanity. Narrative is considered invaluable in creating and maintaining human social experiences, including making sense of the world. As a result, Dill-Shackleford and Karen E. argue that reading fiction increases empathy and social skills by uniting multiple perspectives seen as "other" before the story's beginning. They conclude that a process called dual empathy allows readers to process themselves and feel through characters simultaneously. This is beneficial to society because reading fiction helps readers process personal and social experiences.

Esther Jones. "Science Fiction Builds Mental Resiliency in Young Readers." *The Conversation*, 11 Mar. 2021,  
<https://theconversation.com/science-fiction-builds-mental-resiliency-in-young-readers-135513>.

In this article, Jones argues that science fiction and fantasy increase mental resiliency in young people. Reading multiple characters and experiences from different fictional worlds helps kids make sense of the world. These books depict young people grappling with serious political, social, and emotional issues. This helps kids cope with the harsh realities of the world around

them. Jones closes with an appeal to let kids read more science fiction and fantasy, as it helps them cope with reality more effectively.

Farrelly-Hanson, Mimi. *Spirituality and Art Therapy*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001.

This book contains a collection of art therapies and their techniques to assist clients. In particular, I focus on the information compiled in chapter 10 on inner necessity and how it drives people to create meaning. In this chapter, Farrelly-Hanson argues that inner necessity compels people to be creatively authentic, pursuing reality beneath the surface of everyday life. The chapter also makes relevant practical points on relaxation and choosing the correct space in which to conduct art therapy. Inner necessity puts a more technical term towards the intuitive drive to create meaning discussed by Kearney, Lewis, and Tolkien.

Kearney, Richard. *On Stories*. Routledge, 2009.

His book, *On Stories*, discusses the indispensable nature of the literary narrative in our lives.

Stories not only entertain us but deliver meaning to our lives and identities.

Kearney believed that “the unnarrated life is not worth living” (Kearney 309). By this, he meant that narrative is so essential to our lives that we could not exist without it. Narratives have defined nations from the beginning. Kearney references the myths surrounding the creation of Rome and the narrative of “other” employed by the United States to establish unity against perceived threats. Most importantly, he argues that narrative texts always refer back to the author and forward to the reader. It is a platform of conversation where the author’s opinions are expressed, but the conclusion is left to the reader.

Lewis, C.S. *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*. Harper Collins Publishers, 1982

This collection of academic essays, compiled by Owen Barfield, showcases Lewis' insight into fantasy literature and how it is fairly and unfairly criticized. In particular, the essays "Sometime Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said" and "On Stories" were used to gather information on the transpositional power offered by fantasy stories. I consider Lewis a foundational source on the subject.

Tolkien, J.R.R., et al. *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*. Harper-Collins, 2014.

In this famous essay, Tolkien argued that fairy stories allow us to recenter ourselves in a harsh and cruel world. Not everything needs to be about darkness and violence, and escapist fantasy helps us recover a clear picture of the goodness of life as fiction grapples with fundamental truths. Tolkien believed this was one of the primary roles of a fantasy story. Fantasy literature allows us to escape the ugliness of modern life; it can be used to flee things such as poverty, sorrow, and death. A happy ending gives us a glimpse of joy beyond our world; no matter how crazy it gets in the book, we know it will all come out ok on the other side. The joy expressed here is a glimpse beyond reality to truth itself, which satisfies our question of "is it true?"

