

*The Wardstone Chronicles*, an Asset to Adolescent Development?

by

Sil Lapperre

Dr. Aaron Griffith

Bachelor Thesis

9 February 2020

### Abstract

This study investigated the effects that young adult fantasy series *The Wardstone Chronicles* may have on the development of its adolescent readers. In order to achieve this, theories from the fields of developmental psychology and educational psychology were applied to analyses and close readings of various novels in the series. These analyses and close readings revealed that, if the psychological theories described in the thesis are right, *The Wardstone Chronicles* may help adolescents develop the romantic side of their identity through providing them with catharsis and the vocational side of their identity through teaching them lessons that increase academic performance. This leads to the conservative conclusion that the series may be positive to the development of its adolescent readers, but that further research is needed to draw a definitive conclusion.

Table of Contents

Introduction ..... 3  
Theoretical framework and methodology ..... 5  
*The Wardstone Chronicles* and Myth..... 9  
Tom’s Academic Behaviour..... 15  
Conclusion..... 18  
Works Cited..... 20

*The Wardstone Chronicles*, an Asset to Adolescent Development?

Introduction

Supernatural elements have been an important element of many stories for a long time; the Greeks that lived around two millennia ago were afraid of Zeus's lightning bolt, Collodi wrote about a wooden puppet with a growing nose in 1883, and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1948) features dragons, mages and witches. One of the earliest types of literature with supernatural elements, is myth. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, often considered one of the oldest known works of literature in the world—Stephen Mitchell refers to it as “the oldest story in the world” (1) and Bernarda Bryson calls it “Man's First Story”—is said to be written four millennia ago. Many cultures, like the Greek and the Roman or the Aztec and the Maya, had or have had their own mythologies. Even in contemporary times, myths are still an important part of culture; in the Netherlands, for example, children believe that an old man called Saint Nicholas brings them presents in December if they have behaved well in the year before. The outrage caused among many Dutch people by the suggestion of removing or changing the celebration of Saint Nicholas (see, for instance, Kort), shows exactly how integral myths can be to a society's sense of culture.

Another genre of stories with supernatural or magical aspects and importance to cultures has also existed for a long time: the fairy tale. Many children have grown up with fairy tales like *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Rapunzel* and psychoanalysts such as Bruno Bettelheim have written about the effects that these stories may have on the development of children. But nowadays, fairy tales are not only popular among children; adults also enjoy them, as becomes clear from the fact that many parents like to watch Disney movies with their children.

Contemporary fantasy, the central topic of this thesis, has also emerged as a popular genre with supernatural elements. Novels of popular series such as Michael Grant's *Gone*,

George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* and Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* line the walls of many bookstores, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* has become so popular that people who have not read it are often met with surprise from their peers. It should be noted that myth, fairy tales and contemporary fantasy are not the only genres that include supernatural elements, but they provide a good impression of the role that supernatural stories have played over the years.

At their most basic level, these three story types are built in similar ways. Joseph Campbell called this the "monomyth" (1) and Ronald B. Tobias used the terms "plot of the mind" and "plot of the body" (33) to denote the two categories under which all stories can, according to him, be placed. Regardless of what word one uses to describe these story foundations, it is clear that myths, fairy tales and contemporary fantasy stories are thought to resemble each other in structure.

Much research has been done on the psychological effects of stories, but historically only two of the three aforementioned story types have received specific attention: multiple writers, such as Joseph Campbell (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) and Rollo May (*The Cry for Myth*) have written about the psychological effect of myths, and Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* discusses the psychological power that fairy tales can have on the upbringing of children. Only in 2012 was such a work first published about fantasy stories: William Indick's *Ancient Symbolism in Fantasy Literature*. Indick's book examines the archetypes of fantasy literature and discusses their psychological effects. In the introduction, Indick puts fantasy on the same level as myths and fairy tales, claiming that "[m]ythmakers, fairytale tellers, and fantasists are essentially the same" and that "[t]here is a psychologically curative power of myth that has been sustained in fairytales and fantasy" (2).

This thesis aims to continue on the road that Indick paved, exploring whether contemporary fantasy, because of its similarity to myths and fairy tales, can have positive

effects on the psyches of its readers. It will do so through focus on one particular fantasy series, namely Joseph Delaney's *The Wardstone Chronicles*. As this series is young adult fantasy literature, it is most effective to discuss the effect of the series on adolescents, i.e. youth between the ages of around 12 to 18, specifically. Because the theories and sources used in this thesis assume the psychological effects they describe to be applicable to all adolescents (or humans), the gender, ethnicity, of the adolescents need not be further specified. The question that this thesis will try to answer, then, is: can *The Wardstone Chronicles* positively affect the development of its adolescent readers?

This question will be addressed from two different angles. The first of these angles is a combination of literature and psychology. It is examined whether *The Wardstone Chronicles* is similar to the myths that have been ascribed psychological effects, and as such might have (some of) these effects itself. The second angle is an examination of the current literature in educational psychology that aims to find out whether the academic behaviours portrayed by the protagonist of the series can be positive models for adolescent readers. At the end of the thesis, these two angles will be combined into a general answer to the research question and an explanation of the societal relevance of the findings.

#### Theoretical framework and methodology

In order to learn what *The Wardstone Chronicles* may be able to do for the development of its adolescent readers, it must first be established what adolescent development entails and how it can be stimulated. One of the most influential sources on human development in psychology is Erikson's life-span development theory, which holds that humans go through eight stages of development in their lives, with each stage having its own, central conflict which has to be resolved to advance to the next stage. According to Erikson, the most important conflict of adolescence is that of identity versus identity confusion; adolescents need to be allowed sufficient space to explore different life paths, or

they will become confused about their identity (qtd. in Santrock 74).

It has been argued that Erikson's theory is too rigid, because representing stages of development as periods with clear boundaries and without overlap is not realistic (Neugarten, qtd. in Santrock 75). The notion that finding one's identity is an important developmental task of adolescence, however, is widely regarded as true (e.g. Steinberg & Morris; Christie & Viner). As this thesis is not concerned with providing a perfect framework for human development, but rather with examining adolescent development, Erikson's notion that finding one's identity is a central part of adolescence can be used for this thesis. Adolescent development in the context of this thesis then means: exploring different aspects of identity so that one reaches a stable identity as opposed to becoming confused about who they want to be.

The term identity in the way that Erikson uses it can be described as a sense of self, an image of how one thinks they fit into society (Cherry). This sense of self is broad and has many different sides, including but not limited to a romantic and a vocational side. Adolescents, according to the life-span development theory, need to explore what they are looking for in romantic relationships and what their career path will be. If *The Wardstone Chronicles* is to have a positive impact on adolescent development, it should encourage adolescents in the exploration of these different aspects of their sense of self.

The two different parts of this thesis, called '*The Wardstone Chronicles* and Myth' and 'Tom's Academic Behaviour' correspond to the aforementioned sides of the sense of self. '*The Wardstone Chronicles* and Myth' examines the effects that the overarching plot of all thirteen novels in the series may have on the romantic side of one's identity, while 'Tom's Academic Behaviour' looks at the effects of the vocational side of identity. '*The Wardstone Chronicles* and Myth' starts with an analysis of *The Wardstone Chronicles* in the light of Campbell's nuclear unit of the monomyth, showing to which degree the series is in line with

it. This analysis is followed by an explanation of the way in which *The Wardstone Chronicles*, in the same way as other myth-like stories, may provide readers with catharsis of romantic sadness.

Myth, fairy tale and fantasy are important concepts for this analysis. While they have many similarities, most notably the fact that they contain supernatural elements, they also have differences. It is important to be able to distinguish between the three terms.

Myth is defined as “[a] traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon” (OED, s.v. “Myth,” definition 1a). The clearest distinguishing factor here is that myths provide explanations for phenomena that people otherwise would not have understood. Fairy tales and fantasy stories usually serve a different purpose.

Fairy tales are defined as “[a] tale about fairies; a tale set in fairyland; *esp.* any of various short tales having folkloric elements and featuring fantastical or magical events or characters.” Moreover, it is mentioned that fairy tales are “sometimes [...] viewed as stories for children” (OED, s.v. “Fairy tale,” definition 1). Fairy tales are most clearly distinguishable from myths and fantasy stories by their length and complexity, as shown by the OED definition of the term and by the ideas of Bettelheim, who argued that fairy tales are more suitable for younger children because they are often devoid of unnecessary details and therefore simpler to understand (Introduction).

The definition of ‘fantasy’ in the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms shows the problem with using the general definition of fantasy. “A general term for any kind of fiction that is not primarily devoted to realistic representation of the known world. The category includes several literary genres [...] e.g. [...] fairy tale” (s.v. “Fantasy,” definition 4f). The term is so broad that it would include both myths and fairy tales. It needs to be more narrowly



defined in order to be of use. In this thesis, 'fantasy' and 'fantasy stories' refer to stories that contain imaginary elements, have entertainment as their main goal rather than providing explanations of nature or religion, and have more complex plots than the average fairy tale. Moreover, these stories are contemporary. As opposed to myths and fairy tales, which were mostly written decades or even centuries ago, fantasy in the context of this thesis refers to works that were written recently, often even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

'Tom's Academic Behaviour' examines the effects that the series may have on the vocational side of one's sense of self through leading to improved academic performance. A 2012 report by researchers of the University of Chicago forms the theoretical basis of this part of the thesis. It combines many different studies into the effects of certain academic behaviours and academic performance and explains how these behaviours not only have an impact on performance, but also on each other. These relationships between behaviours are also important, as they show that good academic behaviour can reinforce itself. This means that any positive effects that *The Wardstone Chronicles* may have on adolescents' academic performance can be even more effective.

Stuart Karabenick's research into help seeking also supports this part of the thesis. Help seeking is an academic behaviour that is not mentioned in the University of Chicago report, but that is nonetheless important for the examination of *The Wardstone Chronicles*. Help seeking, in Karabenick's works, is the behaviour of asking questions in class when one thinks they have insufficient knowledge to deal with a certain problem.

This second part of the thesis consists of close readings of passages in which Tom can be seen displaying certain academic behaviours and explaining how these academic behaviours may influence academic performance. While *The Wardstone Chronicles* is treated in its capacity as literature in this thesis, a side effect of its possible positive influences on academic performance is that it can also be considered as a pedagogical tool.

*The Wardstone Chronicles* and Myth

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell posed that there is a “nuclear unit of the monomyth,” a certain story structure that underpins all “mythological adventure[s] of the hero” (28) and follows the stages of the rites of passage:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder [departure]: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won [initiation]: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man [return]. (28)

In the introduction of the book, he explains that “mythology [is] everywhere the same, beneath its varieties of costume” and that its “characteristic efficacy to touch and inspire deep creative centers dwells in the smallest nursery fairy tale” (3). That does not necessarily mean that all mythological stories contain the same power to speak to the human mind. It does, however, mean that stories that are in line with the nuclear unit of the monomyth are more likely to hold at least some psychological power. If *The Wardstone Chronicles* follows the nuclear unit of the monomyth to some degree, it may also be able to have an effect on the psychological state of its readers.

Campbell also noted that “[t]he changes rung on the simple scale of the monomyth defy description” (228), i.e. that it is to be expected that stories, even classic myths, do not exactly follow the monomyth. He also explains that “[m]any tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle” (228). Following these findings, the underlying presumption of this thesis is that even if *The Wardstone Chronicles* follows only certain aspects of the monomyth, rather than the exact structure, the psychological effects associated with these aspects will also apply to it.

Campbell summarises the first stage of the monomyth, the departure, as follows:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend into death (dismemberment, crucifixion). (227)

*The Wardstone Chronicles* follows this description closely. While the first three novels of the series function more as an introduction to Delaney's world and characters, part four, *The Spook's Battle* marks Tom's departure and the real beginning of the overarching storyline. Tom, the main protagonist, is in training to become a Spook, someone who keeps the world safe from evil creatures such as boggarts and witches. Tom and his master, Spook John Gregory, set forth from their common-day house in Chipenden towards a village called Pendle (ch. 4), which functions as the threshold of adventure. Pendle is home to three witch clans that are about to perform a dark ritual with the goal of summoning the Fiend, the physical incarnation of the devil. A young witch called Mab functions as the shadow presence that guards the passage. She is the leader of the Mouldheels, the one witch clan that initially does not want to perform the ritual. When Tom offends her, however, she changes her mind and decides that her clan will join the ritual (ch. 17). This ritual serves as the metaphorical passage to the initiation; the Fiend gets summoned and Tom's world turns into a kingdom of the dark, in which he fights dark powers, alive.

Another aspect that Campbell describes as part of the departure but does not mention in the summary, is that of the supernatural aid, the "protective figure [...] who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (63). Tom also has a supernatural aid: his mother. She grants Tom, who has lived with the Spook rather than at his parental home since he started his training, a room in her house that is magically protected

from all forces that mean harm to the person within it. This metaphorical amulet against dragon forces saves his life as he hides in the room while the Fiend tries to find and kill him (ch. 24).

Campbell summarises the initiation in this way:

Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). (227-28)

*The Wardstone Chronicles* does what Campbell mentions directly following his summary of the stages of the rites of passage: it greatly enlarges upon one typical element of the full cycle, namely the test motif. Parts five, six, seven, eight, and ten of the series are focussed on Tom journeying through many different parts of his world-turned-dark. Along the way, he encounters many threatening forces, such as an evil, lizard-like goddess in *The Spook's Sacrifice*, an army of mages in *The Spook's Destiny*, and a host of malevolent vampires in *The Spook's Blood*. Throughout his journey, he has multiple helpers. Not only non-magical ones such as the Spook and his brother, but also magical ones like his mother and Alice, his love interest. There is no father atonement, apotheosis, or sacred marriage for Tom (he neither metaphorically marries a goddess nor wins over his love interest), however, and there is no theft of boon in the sense that Campbell described either. The boon that Tom

came to gain and finally attains, is the death of the Fiend. He achieves this in *The Spook's Revenge*, as he stabs the devil through the eyes with his two magical daggers (ch. 29). Once the two daggers enter his body, the Fiend has no means of getting away from the Wardstone, to which he is tied. A number of smaller monsters called skelts then come along and tear the Fiend into pieces (ch. 30), guaranteeing that he will never be able to return, despite his immortality.

The initiation is followed by the return, which Campbell summarises as follows:

If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir). (228)

The return in *The Wardstone Chronicles* also follows Campbell's description relatively closely. Immediately after the destruction of the Fiend, the Wardstone, which can travel through time and space, takes Tom to a place different from where the skelts tore the Fiend apart (ch. 30). In this new place, he finds Alice and Lukrasta, the dark mage who—as far as he knows at that moment—has stolen Alice from him as his lover (chs. 30-31). In a sword battle, he beats Lukrasta (ch. 33). Alice then begrudgingly blesses him with her powers, granting him a safe return to his own world, which is now restored from the dark influences of the Fiend (ch. 33). The only difference between Tom's return and the return as explained by Campbell, is that there are no transcendental powers that Tom has to leave behind in the time and place from which he returned.

All in all, *The Wardstone Chronicles* follow Campbell's descriptions of the stages of the rites of passage quite closely. Tom's departure even fits it exactly, while the initiation and return retain many of the relevant elements. This leads to the conclusion that many of the

effects that are ascribed to myths, should also apply to *The Wardstone Chronicles*.

The concept of catharsis, which means ‘cleansing’ and refers to the purifying or purging effects that art forms can have on one’s emotional state (“Catharsis,” definition 1a), is one of these possible effects. Aristotle was the first to use the term in his *Poetics*, explaining that tragedy can, through catharsis, bring relief to the “pity and fear [...] and similar emotions” (section 1449b) of its readers. He argues that humans deal with these emotions through experiencing them in tragedy. His description of tragedy has an important element in common with Campbell’s nuclear unit of the monomyth: it is “a representation of an action that is heroic” (section 1449b). This means that catharsis can be linked to heroic stories (i.e. myths), and thus by extension also *The Wardstone Chronicles*. More articles have been written about the possible cathartical effect of reading since the *Poetics* (see, for example, Koopman), underscoring the idea that *The Wardstone Chronicles* may be able to provide catharsis.

Currently, it is thought that simply experiencing these emotions through art is not enough. In order to be effective at relieving negative emotions, art forms should also incite cognitive processes in their consumers (Bohart; Scheele). People must be able to use the material that causes them to feel emotional to gain a better understanding of their own issues. Catharsis in psychological context usually refers to the process of venting anger (examples are Bushman; Gentile), but as suggested by research by Bohart and Scheele, and Aristotle’s original explanation of catharsis, a combination of emotional expression and cognitive assimilation can also help to relieve feelings of sadness.

Reading about Tom’s relationship with Alice may provide adolescent readers who feel sad with regards to their own romantic relationships with catharsis. The overall development of Tom and Alice’s relationship throughout *The Wardstone Chronicles* follows a pattern that also occurs in real life: Tom meets Alice and is obviously attracted to her (*The Spook’s*

*Apprentice*, ch. 6), they grow steadily closer until Tom first admits to himself that he is in love with her (*The Spook's Destiny*, ch. 10), but in the end, Alice leaves him for Lukrasta and makes it clear that she does not care about him anymore (*The Spook's Revenge*, ch. 30). Alice does return to Tom eventually, but this only happens in another series by Delaney—readers of *The Wardstone Chronicles* will, just like Tom in *The Spook's Revenge*, think that has left him indefinitely. It is likely that at least some of the adolescent readers of *The Wardstone Chronicles* have had similar experiences with romantic relationships.

The development of this relationship has the potential to meet both conditions of catharsis. Firstly, readers, especially those that are also of Tom's age, are likely to feel empathy for Tom. If they are sufficiently drawn into the story, they will almost experience Tom's life as their own. This means that Tom's romantic struggles will lead to emotional expressions. Readers might envision themselves in Tom's shoes and relive their own romantic tragedies. Tom's eventual victory over Lukrasta in particular, which may lead the reader to fantasise about overcoming their romantic competitor, can provide strong emotional relief.

Secondly, the fact that the pattern also occurs in real life, means that readers are likely to recognise it and draw cognitive conclusions about how to act in said romantic situations. They might see that Tom, even after being confronted with the fact that his beloved is now with someone else (*The Spook's Revenge*, ch. 11), continues fighting for the safety of the world. Readers may internalise this lesson and draw the conclusion that life goes on, even though the person they are in love with does not love them back anymore. By drawing that conclusion, they can close off one exploratory path of their romantic identity (namely that of the person who does not want to be with them), and continue to search for their identity on other paths. Without this lesson, they might continue to chase after the person that does not want to be with them, thereby not allowing themselves sufficient room to explore other paths of their romantic identity. As such, *The Wardstone Chronicles* may prevent its adolescent

readers from becoming confused about their romantic identity and thus positively affect their development.

#### Tom's Academic Behaviour

As academic performance is often an important factor in selection processes for jobs or educational degrees, the higher one's academic performance is, the more paths are open to them to explore the vocational side of their identity. This means that if *The Wardstone Chronicles* can help its adolescent readers improve their academic performance, it can also provide them with an easier path towards a stable sense of self.

One of the ways in which *The Wardstone Chronicles* might be able to do this is through showing effective academic behaviours and showing that these behaviours can have desirable effects. Such an implicit method of teaching right behaviours is likely to be more effective than the more explicit method of telling adolescents how to behave and not to behave in academic contexts; as Jack Brehm noted, people respond negatively to influence attempts, even if these attempts are relatively impersonal, like lessons that are taught to entire classrooms of adolescents. A novel that shows that certain academic behaviours have positive effects, in contrast, is a subtler way of teaching. As such, it is less likely to evoke negative reactions.

Moreover, Hermann Hans argues that implicit lessons are better able to reach the target audience. If agency, "the ability to generate self-directed actions that control the individual and the course of events in the environment" (15), is increased, levels of learning are higher. When students learn implicitly how they should behave rather than being told by adults, more specifically teachers, they are less likely to experience the lesson as an attack to their agency and will therefore be more willing to pick it up. If they feel that they came to learn the lesson by themselves rather than from teachers, they will feel an improved sense of agency and the lesson has a higher chance of sticking.



The next question then is: which academic behaviours can *The Wardstone Chronicles* teach its adolescent readers in order to increase their academic performance? In 2012, The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research published a report that outlined the most important noncognitive (i.e. not purely intelligence related) factors for student school performance. They explained what these factors are, how these factors influence school performance, and whether they are malleable (i.e. whether it is possible for these factors in students to change). An important principle that emerges from the report is that all noncognitive factors influence academic performance not only directly, but also indirectly, through each other (11). In other words: if *The Wardstone Chronicles* can influence only even one of those noncognitive factors, it can also lead to increases in the others.

Academic mindsets emerged as one of the malleable factors (31) and may be the factor that is most likely to be influenced by reading *The Wardstone Chronicles*. While the series does not have obvious displays of the effects of learning strategies such as doing homework or attending classes, it does have clear examples of the effects of academic mindsets. In particular, the second mindset mentioned in the report, “[m]y ability and competence grow with my effort” (28), seems to be one that can be influenced by reading *The Wardstone Chronicles*. Tom’s behaviour may be able to instil this mindset in adolescents, as Tom can be seen putting much effort into his training and then reaping the benefits of it. In *The Spook’s Battle*, for example, Tom tries to throw a silver chain around a pole 100 times in a row, starting anew whenever he misses a throw, even if the missed throw is the very last one after he has already succeeded 99 times (ch. 1). This is symptomatic of the effort he puts in to become good at his future job of protecting the world, as accurately throwing silver chains is a spook’s way of defending himself against witches. When Tom manages to defeat Morwena, a dangerous water witch, in *The Spook’s Mistake* by throwing his silver chain around her (ch. 28), readers are reminded of the time he spent training the skill, and are implicitly told that

practice pays off. They can internalise this lesson, believing that, just like it did for Tom, increased effort can also help them perform.

This growth mindset can, according to the report, lead to improvement in other noncognitive factors: “Students who believe they can increase their academic ability by their own effort are more likely to work toward building competence, more likely to be self-motivating and persistent, and more likely to exhibit behaviors associated with higher academic achievement” (28-29).

Another important academic behaviour that *The Wardstone Chronicles* can teach adolescent readers is that of help seeking. Adolescent students will inevitably have moments during classes at which they do not understand the subject material well enough to perform the assigned tasks. At moments like these, many adolescent learners do not dare ask either their more knowledgeable peers or their teachers for help, as they think it implies incapability on their side and they consider it threatening to their self-worth (Karabenick and Dembo 33). It is important that they do ask questions, however, as explanations from more knowledgeable people can help them resume their attempt to master the material.

*The Spook's Battle* also provides an example of Tom showing help seeking behaviour and benefitting from it. When the Spook has just told Tom about specific tactics that witches can employ to manipulate people, Tom thinks the information about witches in general is not yet enough to prepare him for the journey that he and the Spook are about to undertake to Pendle. Tom does not hesitate and asks the Spook if there is anything he should know about the witches of Pendle specifically. The Spook tells Tom about the three witch clans of Pendle, the Malkins, the Deanes, and the Mouldheels. He explains that while the clans all argue with each other, the Deanes and the Malkins have gotten closer over the years. The Mouldheels, however, he says, remained distant, until recently. According to the Spook, someone or something is trying to unite all three clans, including the Mouldheels (ch. 1). Later on, while

Tom is in Pendle, this knowledge turns out to be important. A powerful witch called Wurmalde is indeed trying to unite the clans. Rather than having to waste time to find out what is going on, Tom already knows that the final goal of his enemies is to perform a ritual for which all three clans are needed. This gives him valuable extra time to come up with a plan to defeat them. While he does not succeed in stopping the clans from uniting, his actions do lead to Wurmalde's death (ch. 22)—a victory that meant he had less enemies to worry about in later situations in the series. It is shown that the academic behaviour of help seeking leads to positive consequences. If adolescent readers internalise this lesson, help seeking might turn from something that they are scared of into something they do themselves.

It leaves no doubt that *The Wardstone Chronicles*, through its implicit method of teaching, has the potential to instil effective academic behaviours into its adolescent readers. In doing so, it can lead them to higher academic performance and thus to have more chances to explore the vocational side of their identity. If they have enough freedom for exploration, it will ultimately be easier for them to find their vocational niche in society, and thus a more stable identity.

### Conclusion

By examining how *The Wardstone Chronicles*, with its myth-like structure, can lead to romantic catharsis and by examining the learner mindsets and behaviours that the protagonist of the series displays, this thesis has attempted to find out whether *The Wardstone Chronicles* might be a valuable tool in helping adolescents with their development of identity. While a definitive answer to this question is not possible, a conservative answer can nonetheless be given: if *The Wardstone Chronicles* evokes emotions in its adolescent readers and helps them to learn about their own romantic experiences, and if adolescents indeed internalise implicit lessons about academic behaviours, the series can definitely be an asset to adolescent development. Reading about Tom's unsuccessful relationship with Alice as he advances on

his journey can provide adolescent readers with important ideas that help them develop their own romantic identity, while Tom's appropriate learner behaviour can inspire classroom mindsets and behaviours that stimulate school performance, providing adolescents more options to explore the vocational side of their personal identity.

The use of psychological theories and indirect conclusions drawn from combining multiple scientific works, rather than performing a new study that directly examines the relationship between *The Wardstone Chronicles* and adolescents' identity development, means that providing a definitive answer to the research question is not possible. The tentative answer that is given, however, provides interesting directions for future research. If *The Wardstone Chronicles* can help adolescents find their identity, then maybe other works of contemporary young adult fantasy have the qualities to do so as well. If future studies examine the relationship between works of contemporary young adult fantasy and indicators of identity development in adolescents, a new tool for improving adolescent development might be discovered. This can be achieved with directed studies, for example by measuring adolescents' subjective sense of well-being or school performance before and after reading *The Wardstone Chronicles*. Through an unusual combination of psychology on the topic of literature and scientific research into school performance, this thesis has provided a first step in that possibly interesting avenue.

## Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. William Hamilton Fyfe. Harvard UP, 1932. Web. *Perseus Digital Library*. 9 Feb. 2020.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage-Random, 2010. *Ebook file*.
- Bohart, Arthur C. "Toward a Cognitive Theory of Catharsis." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 17.2 (1980): 192-201. *Google Scholar*. Web. 8 Feb. 2020.
- Brehm, Jack W. "Psychological Reactance: Theory and Applications." *Advances in Consumer Research*, 16 (1989): 72-75. *Google Scholar*. Web. 27 Jan. 2020.
- Bryson, Bernarda. *Gilgamesh: Man's First Story*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967. Print.
- Bushman, Brad J. "Does Venting Anger Feed or Extinguish the Flame? Catharsis, Rumination, Distraction, Anger and Aggressive Responding." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28.6 (2002): 724-731. *Google Scholar*. Web. 9 Feb. 2020.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004. *Ebook file*.
- "Catharsis." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2020.
- Cherry, Kendra. "Identity vs. Role Confusion in Psychosocial Stage 5." *Very Well Mind*. Dot dash, 7 Dec. 2019. Web. 11 Jan. 2020.
- Christie, Deborah, and Russell Viner. "Adolescent Development." *British Medical Journal* 330.7486 (2005): 301-04. *Google Scholar*. Web. 13 Jan. 2020.
- Delaney, Joseph. *The Spook's Apprentice*. London: Random House, 2004. *Ebook file*.
- . *The Spook's Battle*. London: Random House, 2007. *Ebook file*.
- . *The Spook's Mistake*. London: Random House, 2008. *Ebook file*.
- . *The Spook's Sacrifice*. London: Random House, 2008. *Ebook file*.

---. *The Spook's Destiny*. London: Random House, 2011. Ebook file.

---. *The Spook's Blood*. London: Random House, 2012. Ebook file.

---. *The Spook's Revenge*. London: Random House, 2013. Ebook file.

Farrington, Camille A., et al. "Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance: A Critical Literature Review." Chicago: University of Chicago CCSR, 2012. *Google Scholar*. Web. 9 Jan. 2020.

Gentile, Douglas A. "Catharsis and Media Violence: A Conceptual Analysis." *Societies*, 3 (2013): 491-510. *Google Scholar*. Web. 9 Feb. 2020.

Hermann, Hans. "Science of Adolescent Learning: How Identity and Empowerment Influence Student Learning." *Alliance for Excellent Education*. Alliance for Excellent Education, August 2019. Web. 28 Dec. 2019.

Indick, William. *Ancient Symbolism in Fantasy Literature: A Psychological Study*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2012. *Google ebook file*.

Karabenick, Stuart A., and Myron H. Dembo. "Understanding and Facilitating Self-Regulated Help Seeking." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 126 (2011): 33-43. *Google Scholar*. Web. 25 Jan. 2020.

Koopman, E. M. "The Attraction of Tragic Narrative." *Scientific Study of Literature* 3.2 (2013): 178-208. *Google Scholar*. Web. 9 Feb. 2020.

Kort, Rien. "Pro-Zwartepiet-Demonstratie bij Sinterklaasintocht Emmen." *Dagblad van het Noorden*. DVHN, 8 Nov. 2019. Web. 27 Jan. 2020.

Mitchell, Stephen. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. Ebook file.

The Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford UP, Dec. 2019. Web. 13 Jan. 2020.

The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. Oxford UP, 2008. Web. 13 Jan. 2020.

Santrock, John. *Educational Psychology*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2018. Print.

- Scheele, Brigitte. "Back from the Grave: Reinstating the Catharsis Concept in The Psychology of Reception." *The Psychology and Sociology of Literature: In Honor of Elrud Ibsch*. Ed. Dick Schram and Gerard J. Steen. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001. 201-24. Print.
- Steinberg, Laurence, and Amanda Sheffield Morris. "Adolescent Development." *Annual Review of Psychology* 52 (2001): 83-110. *Google Scholar*. Web. 6 Jan. 2020.
- Tobias, Ronald B. *20 Master Plots (And How to Build Them)*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest, 1993. *Google*. Web. 20 Dec. 2019.