

# Harry Potter's Moral Universe: Reading Harry Potter as a Morality Tale

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## **Introduction**

This thesis examines diversity, bravery, friendship, love, truth and death in J.K. Rowling's seven-volume Harry Potter series and it claims that these are the most prominent moral topics in the texts. It argues that didactic communication of morality is the primary concern of the series. Further, it demonstrates how the books are influenced by the fantasy authors, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis' take on morality and by the didactically shaped area of children's literature. Finally, it shows how the narratives maneuver between political correctness, traditional British aristocratic values and religious ideas.

This introductory chapter first introduces Rowling and her authorship, followed by a few comments on the autobiographical elements in the texts. Furthermore, it briefly discusses the public reception and the correlation between the enormous popularity and morals as well as my own interest in the topic. It outlines the method used in the study and it explains its relationship to literary theory and Harry Potter criticism. Moreover it allocates the seven books within fantasy and children's literature. Lastly it explains and discusses the organization of the material.

Born in the Bristol area in 1965 Rowling is 15 years older than her fictional son, Harry Potter, born in 1980. Harry's experiences of growing up as an orphan among inconsiderate relatives, being a famous wizard, not excelling academically, and being a male preclude any obvious similarities between Rowling and her fictional hero. Perhaps the only resemblance is that both have journeyed from poverty and anonymity to fame and success. Watching filmmaker James Runcie interview Rowling, however, we become aware that she has drawn on personal experiences in her writing, even though the protagonist does not resemble the author herself. In Runcie's documentary she reveals that the prominence of death in the novels is prompted by her own mother's passing away and that the happiness sucking Dementors describe her experience with depression. During the interview she also admits that

she believes in both God and an afterlife. When asked by Runcie if she believes in God, she says: “Yes. I do – I do struggle with it. I couldn’t pretend that I’m not doubt ridden about a lot of things and that would be one of them. But I would say yes” (Runcie). When Runcie asks: “Do you think there’s life beyond this of some kind?” Rowling quickly replies: “Yes, I think I do” (Runcie). Rowling is obviously not the text, yet we observe that her personal views and experiences affirm the morality found in the Harry Potter universe.

However, for an author in our universe, whose seven volume work has been translated into sixty-seven different languages and whose last book, *The Deathly Hallows*, sold twenty-one million copies within the first twenty-four hours of its release, success is an understatement. The fan circus and media craze surrounding Rowling is nothing short of other-worldly in the realm of children’s literature, fantasy literature and even the broader arena of novels. This phenomenal popularity and large audience has produced a number of critical voices: literary critics judging the novels as artistically weak and other critics praising their ingenuity and quality, worried Christians viewing them as occult and excited Christians, seeing them as wonderful tales of love, sacrifice and salvation, feminists arguing that the books are hopelessly chauvinistic and other feminists embracing them for their strong portrayal of female characters. These polarized critical voices have little in common. However, they share one thing, a strong opinion of the Harry Potter books. Thus the question arises: why such strong opinions of a series of novels? Two possible reasons immediately come to mind. First, the enormous popularity propels people to investigate its popularity, examine the content and determine if the popularity is well deserved. In other words, people feel compelled to search for rationalizations to explain the bombshell success. Second, the fact that the novels targeted children and youth, make people, seemingly by instinct, concerned about the content of the books. To varying degrees, the unspoken consensus seems to be that children are more susceptible to influence by literature than adults (or that the

influence extended to children has more important societal consequences). Thus, examining the Harry Potter books, to determine whether the series advocate good or bad values, and whether they encourage good and proper tastes in literature, seems the right thing to do.

My own interest in the books has similar rationalizations. I am intrigued by Rowling's success and the populous readership. Considering the popularity of the novels, they must, by default, on some level, reflect something that the audience likes. It seems impossible that they should only contain literary elements, attitudes and values that are repulsive and disgusting to the readers. The popularity, in combination with a fascination with the many strong reactions the books have provoked, and a love of the, to me, enjoyable entertainment the Harry Potter books provide, sparked my interest in the moral universe of Harry Potter.

No story is morally neutral, just like no story is void of ideology. In his essay, "Ideology and the Children's book" Peter Hollindale presents a list of statements about children's literature and its relationship to ideology, adults and influence:

Children are influenced by what they read.

Adults are influenced by what they read.

A novel written for children may be a good novel even if children in general do enjoy it.

Every story is potentially influential for all its readers.

A novel may be influential in ways that its author did not anticipate or intend.

All novels embody a set of values, whether intentionally or not.

A book may be well written yet embody values that in a particular society are widely deplored.

A book may be badly written yet embody values that in a particular society are widely approved.

A book may be undesirable for children because of the values it embodies.

The same book may mean different things to different children. (Hunt 20)

Hollindale clarifies and rightly claims that these statements seem to be truisms. Furthermore he says: "It would surprise me if any serious commentator on children's reading were to quarrel seriously with any of them" (20). Hollindale's claims seem sensible. However, they are not significant because they bring new and deep insights to the table. Quite the contrary,

they are material because they bring awareness to the self evident premises often undergirding the motivation for examining children's literature, and literature in general.

The notion that both children and adults are influenced by what they read has definitely inspired my interest in the moral universe of Harry Potter. The project of this thesis, though, is not to map out or draw conclusions about how, why or in what direction children and adults are influenced by Rowling's Harry Potter series. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the moral universe of Harry Potter, in order to obtain a better understanding of the values the books embody.

The method used to investigate the moral universe of Harry Potter centers around close reading. However, I do realize that no critical work, just like no novel, is ideologically neutral. This thesis does not draw on one particular literary theory. My understanding of the seven texts does not grow out of either the most text focused theories, such as deconstruction or structuralism, nor the most culturally focused theories, such as marxist or feminist theories. Rather I see my ideological ground somewhere in between, where text and context meet, where interpretation has solid anchorage in textual evidence, and where the bigger picture of context is not discarded. As an extension, I view it as impossible to rid oneself completely of the notion of authorial intention, yet, I hold that textual evidence must take precedence, when and if, biographical elements are considered.

At their core all intellectual endeavors in the humanities are at some level engaging ideas of morals, because they examine and discuss how human life is conducted. Cultural criticism, in particular seems blatantly interested in morals. Feminist criticism is about exposing patriarchal hierarchy, and we infer – so that the praxis will cease. Marxist criticism explores questions of class, and we assume – to reduce differences between rich and poor. The later queer criticism, grown out of feminist criticism, delves into questions of homosexuality, and we gather – to fight discrimination. The nineteen nineties also produced

ethical criticism, which directly addresses questions of morality. Commenting on an increasing interest in morals in literary criticism, philosopher of ethics and spokeswoman of ethical criticism, Martha Nussbaum, writes: “our talk about literature will return, increasingly, to a concern with the practical – the ethical and social questions that give literature its high importance in our lives” (168). Acclaimed Marxist critic and theorist, Terry Eagleton seems to be of the same opinion, that a discussion of morals is inevitable. His *After Theory*, published in 2003, unabashedly speaks about and draws conclusions about morals. When I have, despite contemporary interest in morals and ethical questions in criticism, deliberately chosen not to engage with these studies, it is primarily because the Harry Potter books lend themselves to moral discussion through close reading. Following the text closely I have chosen to enter the moral conversation with the readership at large. This reading is a moral reflection among millions and the analysis is a practical hands-on discussion of morals in the context of fantasy and children’s literature.

Fantasy literature is inherently concerned with morals because it concretizes, personifies and substantiates abstract ideas such as love and evil. Similarly, in Children’s literature morals are traditionally a practical concern because morality is viewed in the context of molding citizens. It is mandatory to emphasize that though this is a moral reading of the Harry Potter books it is not an exercise in moral philosophy. My study is heavily reliant on close textual analysis and does not directly engage philosophy and literary theorists. Additionally it makes continual reference to the codes of fantasy and children’s literature. Comparing Rowling with Tolkien and Lewis has been especially useful. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* represents both children and fantasy literature. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* is the singularly most important work in fantasy literature. The borders between adult and children’s literature are however, not always easily defined. Though intentionally written for children and teenagers the Harry Potter books are widely read by adults. And

though Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was not intended for children it grew out of a story written for children, namely *The Hobbit*.

As would be expected the thesis is also informed by Harry Potter criticism. Four essay collections have been helpful, *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays* edited by Giselle Lisa Anatol, *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* (first and second editions) edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman, *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter* edited by Lana A. Whited and *Harry Potter's World Wide Influence* edited by Diana Patterson. These collections, I will be as bold to say, represent the very small field of serious Harry Potter scholarship. It should also be mentioned that only two of these, Heilman and Patterson have been published after *The Deathly Hallows* was released. Though these essays cover a broad range of aspects it is obvious that they do not represent such depth and variety as one will find in established areas of literary study. The limited scholarship available to engage with has forced my analysis into close interaction with the seven primary texts. It is my hope, however, that it will contribute to the expansion of the field. To grossly understate, Harry Potter studies are not like Shakespeare or Woolf studies. In fact, both fantasy and children's literature are marginalized fields. Very few universities have scholars dedicated to these disciplines. In those universities that do offer serious opportunity for study and research of children's literature this is often connected to the education programs rather than the literature programs, which, for instance, is the case with Cambridge University, the academic home of children's literature scholar Maria Nikolajeva. This said, it should be noted that the Harry Potter phenomenon has generated an enormous amount of unscholarly writing of varying quality. In this thesis I have taken the liberty to quote one such source: *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts* edited by David Baggett and Shawn E. Klein. I have done so, because it addresses an important question about Slytherin and diversity.



Though this is a text-oriented study and does not discuss morality in a philosophical context it cannot be escaped that morality is a philosophically loaded term that is hard to define. This thesis does for instance not emphasize the elusive distinctions between morals, morality and ethics. The three following paragraphs describe, loosely, how I define and use it in the thesis and how it relates to the core ideas of morality in Harry Potter's universe.

According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* morality can be used in two different ways:

1. Descriptively to refer to a code of conduct put forward by a society or,
  - a. some other group, such as a religion, or
  - b. accepted by an individual for her own behavior or
2. Normatively to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons. (1)

When referring to Harry Potter's moral universe, I use the concept moral in its descriptive sense. When references are made to morality it will imply a code of conduct put forward by either the wizard or muggle society or the individual characters in the Harry Potter series. Doing this allows me to examine and map out the morals presented in the books, rather than comparing and contrasting the morals to a normative code that would be put forward by all rational persons when the primary concern is the prevention of harm.

That said, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, clarifies that moralities can differ widely in terms of the motivation and foundation that groups or individuals claim as the source of their morality. Three categories are usefully pointed out. First, purity and sanctity: the need for certain rituals to be performed, the commands of God or divinities are seen as morally supreme. Second, traditions and customs: accepting authority and loyalty to the group is the primary moral concern. Third, minimizing suffering: excluding the harms that can be done to all people (based on a universal aspect of human nature or of all rational beings). Most societies contain all of the three above mentioned moralities and thus they present potential conflict. When faced with a difficult dilemma the question becomes intimate: what

should be the presiding morality guiding my conduct (sanctity, tradition or minimal suffering)? (Standford 4)

The Harry Potter universe is not void of this tension, nor is its main character Harry, untouched by it. The presiding morality in the Potter universe is that Voldemort (evil) must be destroyed whatever the cost. The prerogative that Voldemort must be limited is never disputed in the books. This is a sanctified principle in the novels. Early on in the narrative Harry chooses sides, a decision he stands by to the very end. Considering the conventions of the fantasy genre this is not surprising. The genre predicts and anticipates that the hero will remain committed to the cause. The genre also anticipates, however, acceptance of, and loyalty to an authority. Harry is expected to remain loyal to Dumbledore, as Frodo to Gandalf. However, as the story about Harry and his friends plays itself out, we see these two modes of morality in conflict. When Dumbledore insists, commands and strongly advises that Harry practice occlumency, Harry refuses, not because he no longer wants to fight Voldemort, but because he doesn't believe (or understand) that doing so can advance his chances against Voldemort. Similarly, Harry abandons loyalty to Hogwarts and the teachers by lying to them and not confiding in them, presumably because it hinders his more important task, eliminating Voldemort. That is not to say that Harry is blind to the suffering around him. Harry's staple spell, the *expelliarmus*, is a good point in case. On numerous occasions it would have been perfectly sensible for Harry to use the *Avada Kedavra* (killing curse) to safeguard the progress of his cause, yet he repeatedly chooses to disarm rather than kill. So, by using the *expelliarmus* he challenges the, seemingly, most important value of his universe: destroy Voldemort, cost what it may. Simultaneously, we notice as readers that this will not damage his cause, because we know that good will prevail and evil be defeated as the genre predicts.

The framework for the Harry Potter stories is defined by the conventions, and through interaction with the conventions, of children's literature and fantasy literature. From the world

of children's literature we recognize in Harry the orphan who has to discover the world for her or himself and deal with grown-up problems, and as Harry matures, the coming of age theme clearly emerges. We also spot what Maria Nikolajeva terms the basic circular pattern in children's literature: "That is, the plot follows the trajectory home-departure from home-adventure-return home" (Nikolajeva 79). All the Harry Potter books follow the school calendar and the adventures begin as Harry leaves his home, Privet Drive, every fall and end every spring as he returns home for the summer holidays. As we know, however, Hogwarts, and not Privet Drive, is what Harry sees as his true home. Despite this he is forced to return to his aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon time and time again, because of the deep magical protection that lies in living with one's biological relatives.

The departure from home – adventure – return home pattern in the Harry Potter novels is part and parcel of the boarding school setting and the formula hinged to it. Using the boarding school as the arena for the story automatically lends the author several ideas that are appealing to children. First of all, the boarding school provides freedom from parental interference, (in a way the boarding school makes all children orphans) and what child does not occasionally dream of freedom from daily and constant parental guidance? Second, even though the boarding school is void of parental monitoring, it is still a safe and protected world, which offers the excitement of being away from home at the same time as it offers the comfort of not being left alone. Third, the boarding school setting facilitates a strong sense of belonging, community and friendship, because it offers a common enemy: school rules and teachers, while peers (and even sometimes teachers or staff) become the new support group replacing, parents, siblings and relatives. Fourth, mysteries and intrigues have a tendency to grow proportionally with the lack of constant nosing and interference of adults. Rowling, of course, is not the only one to have made use of the boarding school in her stories, Thomas Huges' *Tom Brown's School Days*, from 1857, is repeatedly brought up as an example when

the intertextual aspects of the Harry Potter books are mentioned. In the world of Norwegian children's literature the *Stompa* series, Nils-Reinhardt Christensen's rough paraphrase of Anthony Buckeridge's *Jennings* books, has been popular for an extended period of time. Like the Harry Potter books the *Stompa* series revolves around dormitory life, and the conflicts and comical situations that emerge, as the main characters try, as best as they can, to work around the school rules and solve "mysteries."

The Harry Potter novels show serial sophistication through the gradual intensification of the conflict between good and evil, and through Harry's coming of age development. Despite this they share a few characteristics with popular series such as *The Nancy Drew Mysteries* and the *Hardy Boys*. Both *The Nancy Drew Mysteries* and the *Hardy Boys* series are constructed around mysteries that children or teenagers solve without the help of parents, in a manner similar to the protagonists of the Harry Potter series. Like the Harry Potter novels, they represent easy and suspenseful reading. However, they are not serial in the same way, because although the Harry Potter novels are similar to *The Nancy Drew Mysteries* and *The Hardy Boys* in the sense that they are formulaic, and therefore predictable, the Harry Potter series is not a never-ending serial like the other two. On the contrary, the series consists of a symbolic seven volumes, like Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Like *The Chronicles of Narnia* the Harry Potter books end in an apocalyptic fashion, in line with the fantasy genre, with a last and final battle where the representatives of evil are defeated and destroyed. The fantasy genre brings a depth and sophistication (not to say that all sophistication and depth in the novels can be attributed to fantasy) to the novels, as will be explored in more detail later, which other popular series of the Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew kind lack.

Fantasy as a genre is a relatively new phenomenon. The first critic to cause international attention with his work on fantasy was Tzvetan Todorov with his *Introduction à*

*la fantastique* in 1970 (Svensen 342). Todorov subscribes to a very narrow definition of fantasy, dictated by the implied reader's response to the text (in addition usually also the response of one or more fictional characters). Based on the highly variable response of the implied reader, likely to fluctuate between experiencing stories as rationally explicable or supernatural, this is by its nature a very unstable definition. Thus, as Svensen explains, Todorov's "fantasy" very easily spills over into the categories of "le merveilleux" (the fairytale) or the "l'étrange" (the strange and extraordinary). As a result, fantasy is what escapes the fairytale and the strange. In other words, not only is it highly unpredictable, which texts will qualify as fantasy, but it is also likely that very few actually do qualify. At the other end of the spectrum we find definitions of fantasy that include all literature that contains elements inexplicable to everyday rationality. Such a definition includes everything from the Bible to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with fairy tales, sci-fi and Harry Potter in between.

More directly relatable to the Harry Potter books is the distinction most scholars make between "high" and "low" fantasy. In this schema the low fantasy stories are those that play out in our recognizable everyday reality, a world in which everything is explicable by the laws of nature. Accordingly, when fantastic elements are introduced, they become truly inexplicable, as opposed to supernatural and extraordinary events taking place in a secondary world, accountable to different laws of nature. Thus, Svensen sensibly explains, that to most who write and embrace the idea of low fantasy, low fantasy is the true and "real" fantasy because it contains the contradiction, explicable and inexplicable, within the fictional universe (Svensen 347). We must conclude, then that the Harry Potter books, built around the existence of a secondary world, arguably a world within the world, do not fit the criteria for "low" fantasy.

Characteristic for “high” fantasy, Svensen elaborates, is first that the action takes place in a secondary world and not in our familiar everyday reality. This secondary reality is characterized by a consistent world order that is explicable through supernatural, divine, or magical powers. The style of high fantasy, she underscores, is often elevated and the characters are often noble, with the exception of the main character, who is of average skill and talent. Strong polarization between good and evil, and a relationship to myths, are other important characteristics of fantasy that Svensen highlights (Svensen 345-346).

The Harry Potter series meets most of these criteria. The main part of the action takes place in the secondary world, the wizard world, which can be reached through magical portals in London, platform nine and three quarters at Kings Cross station and the Leaky Cauldron pub on Charing Cross Road to name a few. Despite this we get the clear impression that the wizard world and wizard dwellings exist inside everyday England, even though they are protected by spells so muggles (ordinary people) cannot detect them. In this sense Rowling differs from Lewis because she both uses and disregards portals at the same time. Whereas a portal in Lewis is a gateway to an alien world, it is in Rowling a door, only necessary because wizards continually work to hide themselves from the muggles. Muggles and wizards do, however, interact. Harry has been brought up by his muggle relatives and Hermione’s parents are muggle dentists. We are made aware that muggles and wizards fall in love, and in *The Half-Blood Prince* we learn that the Minister for Magic occasionally gives advice to the Prime Minister. Additionally, we gather, through Arthur Weasley, that the wizard’s cover up system is not faultless, causing muggles to have occasional experiences with magic. This set-up is both similar and different from that in Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*. In *The Chronicles of Narnia* the worlds are completely detached, they are even separated by time, as the four Pevensie children painfully experience when they return to Narnia in *Prince Caspian*. So, apart from the children that are magically transported to Narnia, there is no interaction

between the inhabitants of the two worlds (with the exception of the incident in *The Magicians Nephew*, where the white Witch is accidentally brought back to London).

Tolkien's Middle Earth universe represents yet another type of secondary world. In *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy the secondary world is the only world, and there is no passage or travelling from our everyday reality to the reality of the hobbits, elves, humans and orcs.

Needless to say, the polarization between good and evil (one of fantasy's trademarks, according to Svensen) is present in the Harry Potter narratives, the ongoing intensification in the conflict between good and evil is one of the basic premises of the narratives. That said, if what is meant by polarization is that the evil becomes more evil and good more pronouncedly good, that is perhaps not the case. The evil Lord Voldemort is evil right from the beginning, and the good characters are his fierce enemies right from the start. People are forced to choose sides as the battle increases in intensity, thus imposing a divide within the wizard community.

We recognize the concept of polarization in *The Lord of the Rings*, also in this story ordinary people as well as Kings are forced to choose sides as the battle intensifies. As shown, there are many parallels to be found between the Harry Potter universe and Middle Earth and not without reason. To state the obvious, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has cult status in the world of fantasy literature, not unlike George Lucas' *Star Wars* films within the realm of science fiction movies. The enormous and growing contemporary popularity of fantasy can probably be explained as a Tolkien ripple effect. Tymn, Zahorski and Boyer write: "Since the appearance in paperback of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in 1965, there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest in fantasy literature....Publishers are now printing new works with increasing frequency, reissuing many of those long out of print, and introducing handsome reprint and facsimile editions of fantasy classics" (Tymn, Zahorski and Boyer 29). Though this was written in 1979, a short trip to any bookshop or library can confirm the trend; liberally filled shelves dedicated to fantasy are now the norm in all libraries and bookshops of

a respectable size. Notwithstanding, Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, subsequently released in 2001, 2002 and 2003, have probably done more than anything (along with Harry Potter) to make fantasy popular this past decade. Tolkien's work towers tall in the genre and avoidance would be impossible. It therefore seemed a natural choice to use Tolkien as my main point of reference, helped along by Lewis and his *Chronicles of Narnia*, in this thesis when discussing the relationship of Rowling's Harry Potter series to the genre and community of fantasy literature.

Thinking about the Harry Potter series in the context of the high fantasy community of novels and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy in particular, there are a few terms and descriptions that immediately come to mind. To list them: Quest, journey, mentor, friendship, old fashioned, mythology and epic.

The quest is the key, Frodo must destroy the ring and Harry must destroy Voldemort. Harry does not know from the beginning of the series that his task is to sacrifice his own life to axe all seven pieces of Voldemort's soul and body. However, the desire to eliminate Voldemort, his parents' murderer and chief neo-Nazi, is there all along. In the seventh volume, *The Deathly Hallows*, this specific quest, to get rid of Voldemort and destroy the - Horcruxes, is the narrative driving force and the axis of the plot. The quest is solved as Harry willingly walks into the woods to allow himself, as the last Horcrux, to be annihilated.

The journey, as part of the quest, is important in *The Deathly Hallows*. Harry leaves Hogwarts with Ron and Hermione and embarks on a camping trip to search for the Horcruxes. This is similar to Frodo and Sam's journey to Mordor, although in comparison to Frodo and Sam's outdoor travels crossing mountain passes and difficult terrain, Harry's camping can hardly be classified as roughing it. More importantly, however, they both leave the safety of home and kin to save the world. Harry leaves Hogwarts, Frodo leaves the shire.



The mentor is present in Dumbledore, who like Gandalf, plays a monumental role in the narrative, not only as counselor and teacher to the hero, but also as knowledgeable and wise warrior in the struggle between good and evil.

Friendship is also crucially important, Frodo could not have climbed Mount Doom without his ever faithful Sam, and Harry would not have found the Horcruxes without Hermione's expertise.

As in pre-modern Middle Earth the old-fashioned colors the wizard world in the Potter universe. Technological advances like telephones, cars, computers, airplanes, air missiles and atomic bombs are nonexistent. Unlike in Tolkien's universe, however, we are humored by technology's magical equivalents. What do you need telephones and web cameras for when you can have your face show up in your friends' fireplace whenever you like? What do you need airplanes for when you have broomsticks and teleportation? What do you need football, rugby, cricket and basketball for when you have Quidditch?

Mythology and legends are integral parts of both the Harry Potter series and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In *The Lord of the Rings*, we encounter elves, trolls, dead people from the underworld and much more. In the Harry Potter books, we have the house-elves, merpeople, giants, trolls, dragons etc. Some of the magical mechanisms and laws have their basis in mythology and legends. Consider the following: Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes, which comes to the rescue on numerous occasions, alchemy in *The Philosopher's Stone* and self-sacrifice in *The Deathly Hallows* alluding to Christ.

The scope of the Harry Potter novels is of an epic dimension. Voldemort represents a threat to the whole world, wizard and muggle communities alike. Likewise, Harry's journey, quest and sacrifice has universal consequences, in short, Harry saves the world. In Tolkien's Middle Earth the fate of the world is determined by Frodo's success in destroying the ring. In

Rowling's universe the fate of the universe is determined by Harry's success in destroying all the Horcruxes.

The epic considers the long lines of history, the hero who determines the course of history and the small actions of everyman that turn the tide of history. When epic and fantasy are merged together nothing seems more important than victory over history's snares and traps. However, as exemplified by Frodo and Harry alike, the journey to victory is full of obstacles and difficulties. For Harry and his readers the goal is unquestionable: Voldemort must be destroyed. That is a given, what is not given is how he gets there. By what means does Harry achieve his goal, what do his methods and strategies reveal about his values and the morals of his world?

This thesis focuses on the areas of moral qualities and issues that surfaced as dominating upon a close reading of the narrative: diversity, bravery, friendship, love, truth and death. Organizing the material was difficult because the themes interact and overlap. After careful consideration I chose to group them into four chapters: Diversity, Bravery and Friendship and Love and Truth.

The Diversity chapter addresses the ideas of equality and tolerance opposed to racism, Nazism, aristocracy, class differentiation and slavery. Rowling's moral voice is loud on these topics. Nazism is bad, aristocracy is bad, slavery is bad, and racism is bad – yet, these messages are undercut and complicated by the text. Diversity seemed a reasonable label because Rowling addresses so many different aspects of equality vs. inequality, tolerance vs. intolerance that are not easily covered by one word.

Next I chose to group bravery and friendship together, it seemed a good combination because the two themes are linked by being directly tied to the actions of the characters and the forward movement of the plot. There is no duality or internal conflict imbedded in bravery and friendship as Rowling has presented them. Though one may, for instance wonder whether

slavery is presented as good or bad, the goodness of bravery and friendship is never questioned.

Love and truth were joined together because both provoke metaphysical and abstract reflection. Death, a subject that invites metaphysical and existential reflection, is an important sub topic in this chapter. Death is a big topic in the novels on its own. However, morally it is very closely linked to the idea of love through sacrifice, and the concept of truth as the ultimate expression of truth, for this reason I chose to tackle it together with the other two topics. In a sense love and truth are the umbrella concepts of morality in Harry Potter story. There is obviously no diversity without love and truth, there can be no friendship without love and truth and likewise no bravery.

All the five moral concepts are closely intertwined. The chapter grouping is not ideal, but, seen together the discussions form a map of Harry Potter's moral universe. Not a complete and decisive map, but hopefully a sketch of the moral landscape where mountain tops, valleys and rivers are clearly discernable.

## Diversity

In an increasingly multicultural world, with people constantly trekking the globe in search of fulfilling lives, diversity is a key word. In post colonial and post holocaust Europe and North-America, diversity is a positively loaded and politically correct term. We want our governments, corporation boards, schools and communities to be happily diverse. Nothing seems better than a success story of males, females, Muslims, Christians, heteroes, gays, blacks and whites happily working together. Respect and tolerance across the divides of culture, religion, gender and sexual orientation are part of the moral foundation of most liberal states. To moralize in the interest of diversity and equality is the norm. To moralize, without the prerogative of equality and tolerance across the above mentioned divides, is to the majority immoral.

The diversity of our multicultural world is reflected in the Harry Potter books. The Hogwarts students come from all parts of the UK and represent many of the ethnicities found in real world Britain. Seamus, Harry and Ron's dormitory roommate, is Irish. The Patil twins have Indian background. Angelina is black, and by inference is of Caribbean or African descent. Cho, Harry's first girlfriend, has Asian roots. The student body is also diverse in terms of intelligence and personalities, the students do not seem to have been carefully sorted by an admissions committee. The diverse composition of the circle of friends surrounding Harry shows that Rowling embraces the diversity of her contemporary world. All seems good and politically correct. Harry's friends and supporters represent all races and as the story develops he even learns to appreciate the friendship of the unpopular Neville and Luna. The diversity of the Hogwarts student body is uncontroversial and we hardly notice. There is no need to lift an eyebrow; ethnicity and skin color are correctly separated from character traits (the eccentric Luna and slow Neville safely represent the white majority).

This chapter argues that the Harry Potter books correctly embrace diversity in a way that maintains the status quo. It explores three concepts in the Potter universe, related to diversity, which stand out as morally interesting: the divides muggle vs. wizard and pureblood vs. mudblood, the four houses of Hogwarts /and the problem with Slytherin), and finally the keeping of house-elves.

The narrative of the books is structured around the idea that there are two types of people in the world, wizards (people with magical powers) and muggles (“ordinary” people). The most dominant muggles in the narratives are of course, the Dursleys, Harry’s aunt Petunia, uncle Vernon and cousin, Dudley. They are, to understate, not portrayed favorably. Vernon and Petunia’s fear in life is not to fit in. Their ambition is to keep up with the Jones’s. Dudley, their only child, is spoiled rotten. He manipulates his parents, ignores schoolwork, is a social bully and has stuffed himself into obesity. The Dursleys are bad representatives of their kind. Make no mistake; Rowling is aiming a kick to the middle class. She unabashedly makes fun of people who are propelled forward in life by the desire for status among the affluent. Doing so Rowling creates a schisma between muggles and wizards. Seen through its exponents, the Dursleys, mugglekind becomes not only embarrassingly stupid, but also immoral as we see them elevate status to a life goal.

The wizard family we get to know the best in the series, the Weasleys, stand out as morally upright. Unlike the Dursleys they are not concerned about fitting in or being “normal” and they do not go to great lengths to distance themselves from “abnormal” people. The Weasley home is warm and welcoming. In sharp contrast to Vernon Dursley, Arthur Weasley is not status-oriented. In fact, he is happy to keep one of the most looked down upon positions at the Ministry of Magic. Arthur’s expertise is muggle artifacts and relations. While Vernon has done all in his power to conceal his relation with wizard nephew Harry, Arthur has raised

his family to be proud “blood-traitors,” people who accept and respect wizards with Muggle parentage.

Based on the comparison Dursleys vs. Weasleys one could easily conclude that muggles are morally underdeveloped and wizards are the bearers of sound morals, in Rowling’s defense, it is not quite as one sided as that. Not even the Weasleys, pictured as a model core family, propagating values of tolerance and respect, escape Rowling’s choice literary tool: hyperbole. Like the Dursleys the Weasleys are caricatured. Finding a family equal to the Weasleys in eccentricity is nearly impossible. Their home is messy and efficiency is a foreign concept. Like the Dursley home, if not quite as glaringly, the Weasley home stands out as comical. Despite their equality in comedy the Weasley home still stands out as superior to the Dursley home in attitude to diversity.

The Half-Blood Prince, the sixth novel in the series, begins with an even more direct juxtaposition of the muggle and wizard worlds. We meet the muggle Prime Minister in his office, despairing over the state of the country: his opponent in the upcoming election, a mysterious bridge collapse and the generally grim mood of the times. Something is not right in the muggle world and the Prime Minister senses it, “And unfortunately, this was perfectly true. The Prime Minister felt it himself; people really did seem more miserable than usual. Even the weather was dismal; all this chilly mist in the middle of July ... it wasn’t right, it wasn’t normal...” (8). It is at this time Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, enters the scene, bringing more grim news for the muggle Prime Minister, telling him what is really going on behind the scenes. The muggle Prime Minister is not portrayed as extraordinarily unintelligent and stupid. However, when compared to Cornelius Fudge his ignorance becomes painfully obvious. When Fudge leaves there lingers no doubt that the muggle Prime Minister is the junior partner in the liaison. No longer able to hold back his despair he yells: “But for heaven’s sake – you’re wizards! You can do magic! Surely you can sort out – well –

*anything!*” (24). The Prime Minister, as the Harry Potter friend knows, is wrong. Magic is not the solution to all the world’s problems. What matters in the Harry Potter universe is your character, your inner strength and your ability to make moral decisions. When we contrast the Dursleys and the Weasleys, wizardkind is presented as the morally superior race. When we contrast the muggle Prime Minister and the Minister of Magic, wizardkind appear as the knowledgeable race. But wizard society is far from perfect. Not all wizards are like the Weasley family; racist pureblood ideology is very much alive in the wizard world. The chief of these purebloods is Lord Voldemort himself. Among his followers, the death eaters, little is more important than having a pure family record. The parallels to WWII are plain. Terms like Aryan and eugenics quickly come to mind. Hitler’s imagined Third Reich was exclusively for Caucasian inhabitants, preferably of so called Nordic stock. Jews, gypsies, blacks, gays and the handicapped, both mentally and physically, were all considered unfit to live. In Hitler’s world diversity was unwanted, in Voldemort’s world even more so, only wizards born of wizard parents are considered acceptable for life. Muggles are hardly worthy of attention, and are killed at random for pleasure and wizards born to either one or two muggle parents naturally deserve torture, harassment and eventually death. Hitler was part Jew and Voldemort, the son of a muggle, Tom Riddle, is not pureblood. Abandoned by his mother at an orphanage as a baby, family is unimportant to Voldemort who has steadily grown more selfish and evil. Power and control are what Voldemort seeks.

For Voldemort’s followers family is important. Only a pure family record can secure status and safety in the group. Two families are particularly prominent, the Black’s and the Malfoy’s, both affluent families with large estates. It is Draco Malfoy, the Malfoy heir, Hogwarts student, and Harry’s arch rival we get to know the best. Draco proud of his family’s affluence, shows arrogance and attitude from day one at Hogwarts. When Draco, meets Ron for the first time he patronizingly lets him know that he already knows who he is: “Think my

name is funny do you? No need to ask who you are. My father told me all the Weasley's have red hair, freckles and more children than they can afford'" (*Philosopher's Stone* 120). Later, in *The Chamber of Secrets*, Draco brags about the broomsticks his father has bought for the Slytherin Quidditch players. Lucius Malfoy, Draco's father, is not squeamish about his aristocracy and wealth either, he uses both for all it's worth to influence the Ministry of Magic. When there was a plot to remove Dumbledore from Hogwarts in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Lucius was instrumental.

The Blacks we get to know mainly through Harry's godfather (and blood traitor) Sirius. Unlike the rest of his family, while still alive, Sirius does not subscribe to the pureblood ideology, but the pureblood legacy is kept alive through his cousins Bellatrix Lestrange and Narcissa Malfoy. The portrait of Sirius' mother hanging in the London home of the Black family also serves as a reminder, when "impure" guests enter Mrs. Black screams at the top of her lungs:"'Mudbloods and filth dishonouring my house'" (*Deathly Hallows* 168). Hardly a polite word of welcome! It smacks of the Rowling trademark, comedy and hyperbole. But more important in this context, it builds a bridge between aristocracy and evil.

Apart from Sirius none of the members of the Order of the Phoenix can claim aristocracy or wealth. The exception is Harry. Harry has inherited a considerable sum from his parents. We never learn how much or how the Potter's accumulated their wealth, but seen in the context it is unimportant, what is important is that Harry is rich compared to Ron. Traveling on the Hogwarts Express Harry can feast on the goods offered by the candy vendor, Ron has to do with homemade sandwiches. Come the Yule ball in *The Goblet of Fire*, Harry can sport a new dress robe; Ron has to make do with a hand-me-down. Luckily Harry doesn't let his privilege ruin him, not even when he becomes inheritor to Sirius, and of Grimmauld Place, is he negatively influenced. Grimmauld place is put to the disposal of The Order and Harry keeps fighting Voldemort. Likewise the thriving Weasley twins escape moral



corruption on their journey from rags to riches. Their joke shop success does not stop them fighting Voldemort nail and teeth. The Weasley twins and Rowling have something in common: they represent the “newly- rich.” Harry’s wealth is inherited, but his experience coincides with Fred, George and Rowling’s in that their wealth came as a huge surprise after an upbringing in modest circumstances. As readers we see the trend: riches in the hands of a stuck- up and power-hungry aristocrat is bad. Riches in the hands of an underdog are good. Rowling’s idea is correctly egalitarian; aristocracy should not be a shortcut to money managing. In fact the plebeians, still uncorrupted by riches, are better at it. In Rowling’s world it is the strugglers, the underprivileged and the financially unfortunate that are the bearers of society’s morals. Aristocrats do not belong in Rowling’s diverse utopia; they have not earned the right to be there. On the contrary, the wizard world equates aristocracy and wealth with neo-nazism and racism, with Harry’s benevolent godfather and friend, Sirius, is the exception.

The four-house structure of Hogwarts, contrarily, is neither egalitarian nor politically correct. House placement at Hogwarts is done according to inner qualities rather than tradition, academic interests or applications. At Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry each student is given a boarding school home based on their moral qualities. According to what we learn of its history Hogwarts had four founders, Godric Gryffindor, Salazar Slytherin, Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff, which the four houses of Hogwarts are named after. All new students are placed in a house according to how his or her personality and character traits match the qualities of the four founders. The sorting hat sings for the first time in *The Philosopher’s Stone*:

Oh you may not think I’m pretty, But don’t judge on what you see, I’ll eat myself if you can find A smarter hat than me. You can keep you bowlers black, Your top hats sleek and tall, For I’m the Hogwarts Sorting Hat And I can cap them all. There’s nothing hidden in your head The Sorting Hat can’t see, So try me on and I will tell you Where you ought to be. You might belong in Gryffindor, Where dwell the brave at heart, Their daring, nerve and chivalry Set Gryffindors apart; You might belong in Hufflepuff, Where they are just and loyal, Those

patient Hufflepuffs are true And unafraid of toil; Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw, If you've a ready mind, Where those of wit and learning, Will always find their kind; Or perhaps in Slytherin You'll make your real friends, Those cunning folk use any means To achieve their ends. So put me on! Don't be afraid! And don't get in a flap! You're in safe hands (though I have none) For I'm a Thinking Cap!' (*Philosopher's Stone* 129-130)

The message is straightforward: there is nothing hidden in a head that the sorting hat can't see. Thus the sorting hat takes on the god-like attribute of omniscience as it tries the heart and mind of each new. Its authority and popularity are reaffirmed every autumn at the annual arrival of a new generation of Hogwarts students. The sense that the sorting hat knows a person's true character prevails and people believe in its judgment. Take Neville or Luna for instance (or Ron for that matter) neither of them stand out, at least not in the very first books, as particularly brave. Yet, they are placed in Gryffindor. The conclusion is readily available; the sorting hat must know who Neville and Luna truly are. Though we later in the series see Neville, Luna and Ron act bravely in a number of sticky situations there is no textual evidence to support that they are more brave than loyal and we wonder, why Gryffindor and not Hufflepuff? Likewise, why is Hermione in Gryffindor and not among those of wit and learning, the Ravenclaws? To the reader's bewilderment the stories yield no answers. The sorting process seems arbitrary and without logical grounding. Seen from a children's literature perspective its appeal lies in the narrative excitement it creates by constructing competing groups among the students. Viewed in the context of fantasy literature the sorting hat substantiates the abstract, namely moral qualities. Observed from a muggle perspective the sorting hat is intriguing because it incorrectly does the tabooed: it publicly judges people's characters.

Even though the sorting hat distributes the students into four houses, only two are of serious interest to the reader: Slytherin and Gryffindor. Chantel Lavoie observes:

The four houses of Hogwarts may be equal in theory; however, two are "more equal" than the others. The most important school founders were obviously the males, who dominate in memory and tradition – Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin. The real

fight between good magic and dark magic is between these two enduring entities and their houses.” (36)

Lavoie rightly remarks that Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff are marginalized in the stories. The hero, Harry, and villain, Voldemort, respectively represent Gryffindor and Slytherin.

Throughout the series Cedric Diggory is the only non Gryffindor and Slytherin character that plays a significant role in the story and his time in the limelight is extremely short.

In terms of narrative the rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin is a vehicle for excitement in the novels. The constant fighting and rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin is the children’s version of the war between the blood traitors and the neo-Nazis. Placing the enemy’s representatives inside the secluded Hogwarts castle brings the cosmic conflict between good and evil to the world of the children. At Hogwarts the children of the Death Eaters fight the children of the members of the Order of the Phoenix. For Harry, (and to a certain extent his companions), the rivalry is more than child’s play. Already from Harry’s first encounter with Voldemort in *The Philosopher’s Stone* the conflict is serious business to him. The eleven year old Harry might not comprehend the full severity of Voldemort’s evil, but he has already developed a strong desire to eliminate him. In Harry’s eyes, Voldemort is the devil and Slytherin his stronghold of supporters. In the narrative structure Voldemort is the villain and Slytherin the conspiracy that provides Harry with the obstacles that turn him into a hero.

In Harry’s head Snape and Voldemort have the same label: enemy. Snape revels in Dumbledore’s trust and is exceptionally accomplished at potions, but for Harry he is ever the suspected servant of Voldemort. His affiliation with Slytherin and the Death Eaters is all the proof Harry is willing to consider. As the narrative progresses and Harry learns more about the history of the Death Eaters and his parents, Snape grows more and more evil in Harry’s mind.

As Harry grows older and the story moves forward the rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin becomes more serious for all the Hogwarts students. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Slytherin students are given exclusive privileges and appointed agents by Dumbledore's replacer, Dolores Umbridge. The rivalry intensifies in *The Half-Blood Prince* as Dumbledore is killed, seemingly in cold blood by professor Snape and it culminates when Harry and Voldemort duel for the last time at Hogwarts in *The Deathly Hallows*. As professor McGonagall pronounces at the beginning of this battle: "The time has come for Slytherin House to decide upon its loyalties" (484). At this peak point of the saga there is no distinction between the rivalry among the children at Hogwarts and the warring among the adults. All are part of the cosmic battle and all have to choose sides, not even the non human creatures are exempt. The situation is similar to the last battle in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Gathered to fight at the walls of Gondor all creatures, humans, hobbits, elves, dwarfs, orcs, elephants and even the dead from the underworld have to choose sides. It is apocalypse and Armageddon combined, the cosmic moment of determination in Middle Earth history in *The Return of the King* and wizard history in *The Deathly Hallows*. At this apocalyptic peak point in the Potter narrative hierarchical distinctions disappear, what matters is whether you support Voldemort, neo-Nazism and racism or Harry, equality and tolerance. The extremity of the apocalypse catalyzes unity and creatures from all walks of life gather to fight for the same cause: save the world. At this decisive point of the story there is a clear distinction between good and evil.

Whereas the Gryffindors are brave and honorable and accepting of all people (except perhaps the Slytherins) including, mudbloods and half-bloods and half giants (Hagrid), the Slytherins are not. To the Slytherins only pureblood wizards are the acceptable kind of human beings. Draco Malfoy is the bearer of the Nazi message at Hogwarts. Together with his cronies Crabbe and Goyle he is the Death Eaters' representative at the school of Witchcraft

and Wizardry. The trio let no opportunities pass by to mock and harass Hermione about her muggle parentage. When the term is introduced to the readers for the first time, in *The*

*Chamber of Secrets*, Draco brags:

'I'm the new Slytherin Seeker, Weasley,' said Malfoy, smugly. 'Everyone's just been admiring the brooms my father's bought our team.' Ron gaped, open-mouthed, at the seven superb broomsticks in front of him. 'Good, aren't they?' said Malfoy smoothly. 'But perhaps the Gryffindor team will be able to raise some gold and get new brooms, too. You could raffle those Cleansweep Fives, I expect a museum would bid for them.' The Slytherin team howled with laughter. 'At least no one on the Gryffindor team had to buy their way in,' said Hermione sharply. 'They got in on pure talent.' The smug look on Malfoy's face flickered. 'No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood,' he spat. (*Chamber of Secrets* 123)

The incident is representative of the encounters we see between Malfoy and Harry in the series. The pattern is familiar: Malfoy brags about his father, status or wealth and places a derogatory remark targeted at Ron or Hermione, attacking the Weasley family's lack of funds and Hermione's muggle parentage. In this case Malfoy is provoked to use the extremely offensive term Mudblood when Hermione comments on the Slytherins' need to compensate for lacking talent. Hermione's comment hits close to home, Draco's reaction proves its sting. He sports the perfect Slytherin attitude according to the sorting hat's description. Draco affirms that Slytherins will go to any lengths to achieve their goals, in this instance, buy a Quidditch advantage, brand new flying brooms. Harry and Hermione are oblivious of the term Mudblood. Harry realizes instinctively given the context that it is a bad word, but he does not know what it means; neither does Hermione who has also been raised by muggles (*Chamber of Secrets* 123). In short the incorrect and repulsive neo-nazi ideology is completely foreign to the hero and leading female star of the series, conveniently establishing them as attractive representatives of innocence, purity and the politically correct. From this point on (*Chamber of Secrets*) Slytherin equates racist and neo-Nazi in the novels.

For Harry coming from the dark cupboard in Privet Drive Hogwarts is paradise.

The large Hogwarts castle, with its secret passageways, moving staircases, towers and

dungeons, invites exploration and adventure. Learning how to perform magic appears wonderfully liberating and the companionship of house and classmates represents fun and security. But like the threat that looms over the Shire, and the White Witch that infests the Kingdom of Narnia, Slytherin is the serpent in the Hogwarts world. The difference is that in Narnia and the Shire the threats to peace and happiness are intruders, whereas at Hogwarts it is represented by a legitimate and integrated part of the school. The existence of Slytherin is not disturbing because it disturbs the harmony in paradise; it is disturbing because it is part of paradise. In *The Lord of the Rings* we are taught that Shire society is originally good and in *The Chronicles of Narnia* we learn that evil entered society post-creation. But, Hogwarts, Harry's haven away from poverty, neglect and misunderstanding, was on the contrary founded, in part, by the immoral Salazar Slytherin. In doing this Rowling brings evil down from its elevated fairy-tale position to the mundane level. Good and evil in the Harry Potter universe exist side by side. In this sense, Voldemort is not a devil or antichrist, like Saruman and the White Witch, he is simply a man overcome by evil, a man that has let the evil in him run free. Letting Slytherin exist side by side with the other houses undermines the notion that the world is divided into good and evil.

The question of why Slytherin is allowed a fully fledged membership in the Hogwarts school fellowship is haunting. Rowling does not describe a world that starts out as perfect, like Tolkien or Lewis. Her explanation of good and evil's coexistence is more muddled. But the polarized idea of good and evil is also vital to her story. Voldemort has no good redeeming qualities, he is a devil and he must be defeated. Nazism is absolutely wrong and diversity must be embraced. Amidst these moral absolutes the presence of Slytherin House, and its villainous members, in the revered society of Hogwarts confounds.

Steven W. Patterson defends the existence of Slytherin at Hogwarts, he reminds us that ambition is the Slytherin virtue, as demonstrated by the Sorting Hat's proclamation:

“Those cunning folk use any means to achieve their ends.” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 130).

However, Patterson admits that the ambition is stretched into the immoral by most Slytherins, but he holds firm that Slytherin belongs at Hogwarts “in a moral sense” (131). Concluding his argument he says: “If we pay careful attention to the moral characters of the Slytherins, we may learn a valuable lesson: a modicum of ambition is morally healthy, but when allowed to rule us, it can turn us into monsters like the Malfoys or Voldemort” (131). Patterson’s conclusion affirms blurred distinctions between good and evil. Yet it does not account for the duality in Rowling’s universe, for as we all well know finding virtuous traits in Slytherins is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Professor Snape is the only exception to the rule and interestingly, Snape’s chief virtue is described as bravery, the Gryffindor virtue, by both Harry and Dumbledore. When contemplating Snape’s character Dumbledore suggests that Snape has been placed in the wrong house. Slytherin’s existence at Hogwarts is morally incoherent with the ideology of the characters representing good in the story. Harry and Dumbledore’s assessment of Snape’s bravery affirms the misfit. There is a discrepancy between the ideology celebrating diversity the good characters subscribe to and the school structure they uphold at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Harry’s sacrificial act of willingly walking into his own death demonstrates human agency and individual decision making of the highest order. In the moral universe of Harry Potter the ability to make independent decisions is crucial. Free will is part of the paradigm. For as Dumbledore assures Harry, “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are far more than our abilities” (*Chamber of Secrets* 358). But, independent decision making does not come easy to all the magical beings in the Potter universe. The house-elves stand out as subdued and dependent in the societal hierarchy. When Dobby shows up in Harry’s bedroom in Privet Drive, in *The Chamber of Secrets*, and we are introduced to the house-elves for the first time it is a miserable creature we see. “The little creature on the bed had large, bat-like

ears and bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls” (*Chamber of Secrets* 18). Not only is Dobby bad looking, but he is also excessively insecure, when politely asked to sit down by Harry he starts to cry violently: “To his horror, the elf burst into tears – very noisy tears. ‘S-sit down!’ he wailed. ‘Never ... *never ever* ...’ Harry thought he heard the voices downstairs falter. ‘I’m sorry,’ he whispered, ‘I didn’t mean to offend you or anything.’ ‘Offend Dobby!’ choked the elf. ‘Dobby has never been asked to sit down by a wizard – like an equal-’” (*Chamber of Secrets* 19). It hardly gets better. When Harry suggests to Dobby that he can’t have met many decent wizards in his lifetime Dobby starts banging his head against the wall. Dobby explains to Harry: “‘Dobby had to punish himself, sir,’ said the elf, who had gone slightly cross-eyed. ‘Dobby almost spoke ill of his family, sir...’” (*Chamber of Secrets* 20). Harry has met an abused creature. When treated with kindness he reacts with shock, when expressing independent opinion he punishes himself. Dobby interprets Harry’s civility as kindness and Harry earns an invaluable friend and as readers we are pleased to see that our hero treats a vulnerable creature without pretentious airs.

In *The Goblet of Fire* the morality of the situation increases in complexity. The relationship between Wizards and house-elves is no longer represented by the sympathetic hero and his abused friend. Hermione has of course learned of Dobby through Harry, but when she realizes that the house-elves are unpaid servants at Hogwarts the enslavement of the house elves becomes a theme. “‘There are house-elves *here*?’ she said, staring, horror-struck, at Nearly Headless Nick. ‘Here at Hogwarts?’ ‘Certainly,’ said Nearly Headless Nick, looking surprised at her reaction. ‘The largest number in any dwelling in Britain, I believe. Over a hundred’” (161). Disgusted Hermione reacts: “‘Slave labour,’ said Hermione, breathing hard through her nose. ‘That’s what made this dinner. *Slave labour*’” (162). Hermione responds with aversion and action. Freeing the house-elves becomes the number one issue on her



political agenda and in Hermione the readers gain an activist flagging the welcome banner of the politically correct: egalitarianism.

Harry reacts differently, and although more sympathetic to Hermione's activism than Ron, he does not fully support it. Harry's relation to the house-elves is his personal relationship with Dobby. Harry is sympathetic to Dobby, and in return Dobby extends his services to Harry. On the surface their relationship is like that of a hero and his worshipper. But when Dobby dies, sacrificing himself to save Harry and his friends in *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry's care for the house-elf is revealed as true and untainted by selfish motives. Immersed in grief Harry insists on digging Dobby's grave himself: "I want to do it properly," were the first words which Harry was fully conscious of speaking. 'Not by magic. Have you got a spade?' ... He dug with a kind of fury, relishing the manual work, glorying in the non-magic of it, for every drop of his sweat and every blister felt like a gift to the elf who had saved their lives" (387). Faced with the cruelty of death magically preparing a hole in the ground is hopelessly impotent to muggle raised Harry. Despairing Harry chooses to get his hands dirty. The symbolism is hard to miss. In the context of the narrative Harry's gesture emerges as a humble act of solidarity, solidifying his image as moral hero.

Displaying Harry intensely grieving Dobby, chisels in an important point: Harry is not only the hero and good guy. He is the protector of the weak and defender of diversity. Construing the emotional scene of Harry crying over Dobby's body, like he did over Dumbledore, effectively erases all potential doubt about Harry's moral backbone with regards to the house-elves and slavery. Rowling describes how Harry recalls Dumbledore's funeral at Dobby's freshly dug grave:

Harry placed the elf into the grave, arranged his tiny limbs so that he might have been resting, then climbed out and gazed for the last time upon the little body. He forced himself not to break down as he remembered Dumbledore's funeral, and the rows and rows of golden chairs, and the Minister for Magic in the front row, the recitation of Dumbledore's funeral... He felt that Dobby deserved just as grand a funeral, and yet here the elf lay between bushes in a roughly dug hole" (*Deathly Hallows* 388).

The message is inoffensive. The revelation of Harry's thoughts shouts at the reader: Dumbledore and Dobby are equals. Coming from the hero of the story the didactic message is given a narrative thrust difficult to ignore. Harry's conduct assures the audience that status and brains alone do not determine greatness: in the moral universe of Harry Potter egalitarian acts of solidarity are infinitely more important.

Leaving the grieving Harry at Dobby's graveside the picture increases in complexity. Because as Hermione is constantly reminding Harry and Ron: the house-elves are slaves. At Hogwarts they prepare the food and do the dormitory housekeeping without pay and their clothes are more resemblant of rags than items of dress. Dobby, as we learn in *The Chamber of Secrets* originally belonged to the Malfoys and outside of Hogwarts most well off and aristocratic families keep house-elves. Aware that the story is set in our own time we wonder why the praxis has crept into the narrative. Why, one wonders, is the wizard world more backwards than its muggle counterpart when it comes to slavery and hierarchical systems? The hierarchically structured wizard world and the slavery and servitude of the house-elves smack of colonial Britain and the archaic atmosphere of the boarding school makes it appear conventional. Intolerance of diversity is part of the wizard world, present not only in the Nazi ideology of the Death Eaters but also in the preservation of old hierarchical structures, manifest in the slave class, the house-elves. But Rowling's world is dual. Muggle raised underdog and hero, Harry, represents the updated moral universe of Britain. Harry makes personal friends with house-elves, half-giants (Hagrid) and centaurs. Showing no regard for race or class Harry embraces the nondiscriminatory diverse world. Muggle born Hermione goes even further she does not only practice an inclusive attitude herself, but she enthusiastically campaigns to change people's attitudes and abolish slavery. Rowling has appointed Hermione to bear the message of diversity and inclusion to the old-fashioned wizard world.

In the essay, “Hermione and the House-Elves: The Literary and Historical Contexts of J.K. Rowling’s Antislavery Campaign,” Brycchan Carey highlights Harry and Hermione’s different reactions to the discovery of the House-Elves and their situation: “Unlike Harry, whose response to the problem was largely personal, Hermione sees the problem as a public one, requiring political engagement to reach public solutions” (105). Harry is content to see his elf friend Dobby happy. Hermione is never content. Hermione wants the political impact of freeing all house-elves. Further on Carey remarks that the Potter books are “among the most politically engaged novels to have been written for children in recent years” (105). I would argue, instead, Rowling’s books are the most morally engaged children’s literature to have been written in years. It is possible that the Potter books are more politically engaged than other contemporary children’s novels. Granted, Hermione is radical going against the status quo of the wizard world. But Hermione is not radical in terms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century correct morality norm. In the wizard world she is the conscience assuring the reader Rowling’s ideology is main stream. Though S.P.E.W. (Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (*Goblet of Fire* 198)) and political activism are important parts of Hermione’s identity, S.P.E.W. is not important when fighting Voldemort. All seven books teach us that quick witted action and steadfast moral purpose is what defeats evil. Harry outsmarts evil and the Ministry of Magic is repeatedly outmaneuvered by evil. The Ministry of Magic performs politics and bureaucracy, Harry acts. In the moral universe of Harry Potter actions speak louder than politics.

While Carey argues that Rowling tries to make youth politically active with the Harry Potter books, the critics, Elizabeth E. Heilman and Anne E. Gregory are worried the books do not unquestionably support diversity, they write:

In the Harry Potter books, Rowling has created an ideological world presenting privileged insiders and outcast outsiders across a wide range of signifiers. These include gender issues, social class, peer group affiliations, race, culture, and nationality. As such, the Harry Potter books legitimize numerous forms of social

inequality and their related cultural norms, rituals and traditions. Yet, there are tensions and critiques within the text as well. Hermione worries about the rights of house elves and Harry defends Ron when he is teased for his low social class standing. (242)

Heilman and Gregory's argument is twofold. There are two assertions. First, the ideology in the Harry Potter world legitimizes social inequality. Second, voices within the text criticize social inequality. The first part of their claim is problematic. True, the Harry Potter books depict social inequality; Ron's family has no money, Draco's family swims in money. Squibs are looked down upon and gifted witches and wizards are praised. But claiming that the books legitimize social inequality is dubious. Both Harry and Hermione, the most important male and female characters of the series, fight inequality and discrimination. Heilman and Gregory's analysis is sharper when they, also, announce, "the presence of a moderate amount of social critique does not make the Harry Potter texts progressive" (242). Instead the Harry Potter books comfortably maintain the correct status quo. They fit in the crowd didactic children's literature. Even if they are not radical the didactic voice is loud. In the Potter universe we learn that the underdog wins (Harry). That poverty is no hindrance for upward mobility (Ron). That intelligence can save the day (Hermione) and that eccentricity is compatible with success (Luna and Neville).

In a globalized world acceptance of diversity is a necessity. In the western world it is a crucial part of the presiding politically correct package. Rowling's books include two concepts that do not fit in this package, Slytherin and the house-elves. The existence of Slytherin in the Wizard world illustrates an interesting difference between Rowling's world and the worlds of Tolkien and Lewis. Tolkien and Lewis draw on Christian tradition and present worlds that both begin and end with perfection and complete eradication of evil. Instead Rowling lets Slytherin, with its dubious values, be part of both the beginning and the recreation of wizard society. Hogwarts, the hub of the wizard world, was founded in part by Salazar Slytherin and when peace is restored, Voldemort defeated, Slytherin House is still

represented at the school of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Both the Slytherin House and house-elves concepts are founded on English and western traditions of the boarding school and slavery. The boarding school still exists, slavery is abolished. But both prevail in the archaic fantasy milieu of the Wizard world. The boarding school paradigm allows Nazi ideology a legitimate place at Hogwarts. The fantasy paradigm facilitates the existence of hierarchy among intelligent creatures.

Despite these two contradictions, the moral universe of Rowling's series stands out as uncontroversial and socially acceptable. Harry fights Slytherin and Hermione fights slavery. Indifferent Ron becomes a house-elf liberator, clumsy Neville becomes a hero and eccentric Luna a treasured friend. Most importantly the devil, villain and antagonist Voldemort is killed and the epic battle between good and evil is settled. In Rowling's universe the moral backbone of a few heroes compensates for the corruptions of an imperfect world.

## **Bravery and Friendship**

The lightning scar is the mark of a hero, and Harry's courageous decision to submit to be sacrificed by Voldemort is the ultimate symbol of bravery. The trio: Harry, Ron and Hermione, is an archetype of friendship. Harry's bravery and the tightly knit friendship triangle represent crucial moral qualities in the plot and narrative structure of the Harry Potter series. Without bravery there would be no exhilarating danger and victory over evil, without bravery there would be no hero. Without friendship there would be no cooperation and effective mystery solving and without friendship, Harry would not have been able to complete his mission as the chosen one.

The lone trio is not unique in the world of literature. Their triangular friendship mirrors that of French adventure novelist Alexandre Dumas' three musketeers: Athos, Porthos and Aramis. Companionship is important in fantasy literature. In Tolkien's fantasy world we meet two inseparable pairs: Frodo and Sam and Merry and Pippin. Frodo could not have completed his mission without Sam, and Merry and Pippin are perpetual partners in crime. In Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* we see the same pattern: children from our world are never sent on a mission to Narnia alone. Once in Narnia cooperation is essential for success, and heroic actions arise as a result of collaboration.

Like Frodo, Harry goes through a metamorphosis from underdog to hero. In the beginning Frodo is merely an insignificant hobbit with large feet, but when his task is completed he is the hero that all the creatures of Middle Earth respectfully bow before. It is innocence and a heart uncorrupted by the desires for fame, power and money that singles Frodo out to carry the Ring, and it is these characteristics that enable him to complete the task. In comparison, Harry is, at first, a friendless, nearsighted orphaned child, but when his task is completed his name is forever chiseled into the hero gallery of the wizard world. As with Frodo, it is ultimately Harry's innocence that enables him to succeed. It is Harry's

uncorrupted heart that enables him to give his life as a sacrifice and to bury his rightly won power symbol (and power source), the Elder Wand. Victory, for both Harry and Frodo, demands bravery. Facing Black Riders and Dementors, and willingly walking into Mount Doom and the Forbidden Forest, are not for the faint hearted. But, while Frodo's bravery materializes as part of his strenuous odyssey to Mount Doom, Harry's bravery displays climaxes time and again in direct encounters with Voldemort. Herein lies the difference between the two heroes: Frodo is the brave courier and Harry is the brave warrior.

That bravery is highly valued in Harry's immediate wizard milieu, is communicated as soon as he arrives at Hogwarts and learns about the four houses and their characteristics. Gryffindor, which to Harry's relief becomes his house, has a golden lion for its emblem and the color is a bold red. The Gryffindor dormitories are located in the tower. In contrast the Slytherin emblem is a serpent and the Slytherin dormitories are in the dungeons. The medieval symbolism is hard to miss: the brave Gryffindors reside as close to heaven as possible, the cunning Slytherins live underground as close to hell as possible. These are merely outward characteristics, yet they are used in the narrative to exalt Gryffindor, highlighting the contrasts between Slytherin and Gryffindor.

It is upon his first arrival at Hogwarts, in *The Philosopher's Stone*, that Harry hears the Gryffindor qualities verbalized for the first time when, the sorting hat sings: "You might belong in Gryffindor, where dwell the brave at heart, Their daring, nerve and chivalry Set Gryffindors apart" (130). Harry is more than happy to join the ranks of the brave, daring and chivalric and he is not long into his Hogwarts career before he turns this daring nerve and chivalry into the action of saving Hermione from the mountain troll that has been let into the school building. The same daring nerve, accompanied by Harry's unfailing tendency to act quickly, spurs Harry into action during his first broom flying practice ever. When Madam Hooch leaves to escort Harry's classmate and fellow Gryffindor, Neville Longbottom, to the

hospital wing, Harry and Slytherin student, Draco Malfoy pick a fight over the remembrall Neville has dropped on the grass. “‘Give it here,’ Harry called, ‘or I’ll knock you off that broom!’ ‘Oh yeah?’ said Malfoy, trying to sneer, but looking worried. Harry knew, somehow, what to do. He leant forward and grasped the broom tightly in both hands and it shot towards Malfoy like a javelin” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 163). Harry does not hesitate to act, despite Madame Hooch’s clear instructions to stay grounded while she is gone. Instead he daringly sets after Malfoy in order to protect the belongings and honor of fellow Gryffindor, Neville from Draco’s ridicule. Professor McGonagall’s (the head of Gryffindor) reaction affirms not only her partiality to her own house, but it also highlights the superiority of bravery, the Gryffindor value. For as Harry out-flies Draco and catches the remembrall in midair McGonagall happens to watch from a window and she does not hesitate to act. However, she does not, as Harry expects this stern teacher to do, scold and deliver punishment; instead she sees to it that Harry gets a spot on the Quidditch team despite his young age. Because of his extraordinary talent at handling the broomstick, McGonagall deliberately chooses to overlook Harry’s disobedience to madam Hooch’s instructions. “‘I want to hear you’re training hard, Potter, or I may change my mind about punishing you.’ Then she suddenly smiled. ‘Your father would have been proud,’ she said. ‘He was an excellent Quidditch player himself’” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 166). Harry, of course, is delighted to become part of the Quidditch team and he receives no punishment for his irregular flight. Harry’s disobedient, but brave act is rewarded and Gryffindor gains a new Quidditch player.

Bravery, along with his exceptional flying abilities and eye for Quidditch, is Harry’s most important asset. Unlike Hermione he is not brilliant in academia and unlike Ron he does not have a large and wonderfully supportive family. All of the books except *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and *The Half-Blood Prince* climax as Harry is caught in a direct encounter with Voldemort. In *The Philosopher’s Stone* bravery enables Harry to continue alone behind the



trapdoor and face the unknown that turns out to be Voldemort in professor Quirell's body. In *The Chamber of Secrets* he encounters Voldemort in the chamber in the form of Voldemort's Horcrux, his bewitching diary. In *The Goblet of Fire* bravery helps Harry to not chicken out when forced to watch Voldemort rise and transform into a human shape, and subsequently to duel with him. Later in *The Order of the Phoenix* Harry's daring nerve enables him to throw every fiber of his body into the fight with the Death Eaters at the Ministry of Magic. Finally, at the last encounter, it is pure bravery that empowers Harry to calmly walk into the woods to face death at Voldemort's hand.

Bravery, on Harry's part, does not entail direct encounters with Voldemort in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and *The Half-Blood Prince*, but that does not mean these books are void of bravery. *The Half-Blood Prince*, for instance, contains bravery of the most intense sort. But, instead of manifesting itself in combat and a face to face duel with Voldemort bravery in Rowling's sixth book emerges as Harry's loyalty to Dumbledore and emotional strength is severely tested. While hunting for Horcruxes, Dumbledore demands and insists that Harry assist him in drinking and emptying the contents of the basin in the cave, even though it causes him unspeakable pain. True to his word, though it causes him tremendous pain, Harry is able to carry it through. Interestingly, this act of bravery, on Harry's part, is quite similar to Snape's bravery which peaks as he kills Dumbledore on his own orders. Snape like Harry has the stamina to follow Dumbledore's orders despite its highly uncomfortable nature. Dumbledore commends the bravery of both. Dumbledore's first words to Harry when they meet in the Kings Cross chapter of *The Deathly Hallows* is: "Harry' ... 'You wonderful boy. You brave, brave man. Let us walk'" (*Deathly Hallows* 566). Harry could not have received a more affirmative speech. The praise, coming from the chief protector of good and highly esteemed headmaster of Hogwarts establishes Harry, not only as the finest of brave Gryffindors, but also as a moral hero and measuring stick. Dumbledore's admiration for

Snape has a similar effect. After Snape's death in *The Deathly Hallows*, and as Harry "watches," in the pensieve, the memory Snape has left him, we learn what happened between Snape and Dumbledore when they discussed Igor Karkaroff during the Triwizard Tournament in *The Goblet of Fire*:

'Karkaroff's Mark is becoming darker too. He is panicking, he fears retribution; you know how much help he gave the Ministry after the Dark Lord fell.' ... 'Karkaroff intends to flee if the Mark burns.' 'Does he?' said Dumbledore softly, ... 'And are you tempted to join him?' 'No,' said Snape, ... 'I am not such a coward' 'No.' agreed Dumbledore. 'You are a braver man by far than Igor Karkaroff. You know, I sometimes think we sort too soon....' (545)

Dumbledore applauds Snape's bravery and interestingly he does it by insinuating that Snape would have made a fine Gryffindor. Once again the connection between bravery and the house of Gryffindor is strengthened. Correspondingly, it is no surprise that Dumbledore himself was a Gryffindor. He even grew up in Godric's Hollow, the homestead of Godric Gryffindor, the founder of the house of Gryffindor. Nothing could be more natural in the narrative context than that the greatest headmaster in Hogwarts' history belongs to the house of the brave.

Like Dumbledore Harry affirms Snape's bravery. This becomes evident at the very end of *The Deathly Hallows*, in the "Nineteen Years Later" chapter, as we get to know that Harry has named his youngest son after both Dumbledore and Snape. Scared that he will be sorted into the house of Slytherin because of his siblings and uncle Ron's teasing, Albus, Harry's youngest child and Hogwarts debutant, lingers at platform 9 ¾:

'What if I 'm in Slytherin?' The whisper was for his father alone, and Harry knew that only the moment of departure could have forced Albus to reveal how great and sincere that fear was. Harry crouched down so that Albus's face was slightly above his own. Alone of Harry's three children, Albus had inherited Lily's eyes. 'Albus Severus,' Harry said quietly, so that nobody but Ginny could hear, and she was tactful enough to pretend to be waving to Rose, who was now on the train, 'you were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew.'" (607)

This is the message: being in Slytherin is not the end of the world because it does not exclude bravery. For, as is Harry's case in point, Severus Snape was a very brave man. Again, and this

time at the very end of the saga, bravery is brought forward as a virtuous quality, and this time not exclusively a Gryffindor quality, but also as a characteristic defining the noblest of Slytherins.

Brave Harry is not, nevertheless, a perfect student, he does not excel academically like Hermione and he does not observe the school rules faithfully. This, however, Dumbledore teaches Harry, is secondary to bravery in a world where evil is tightening its grip. At the end of *The Chamber of Secrets*, after Harry has rescued Ginny and destroyed Voldemort's Horcrux diary, Dumbledore has a talk with Harry and Ron:

'I seem to remember telling you both that I would have to expel you if you broke any more school rules,' said Dumbledore. Ron opened his mouth in horror. 'Which goes to show that the best of us must sometimes eat our words,' Dumbledore went on, smiling. 'You will both receive Special Awards for Services to the School and – let me see – yes, I think two hundred points apiece for Gryffindor.' (355)

Here Dumbledore reveals his priorities: bravery first, school rules next. Rule breaking is not preferable, but fighting Voldemort is immeasurably more important.

Like Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*, Dumbledore is godlike and infinitely wise. Dumbledore takes it upon himself to see to it that Harry is gradually educated about evil, Voldemort and the prophecy. Dumbledore teaches Harry to be brave and Dumbledore encourages Harry to solve mysteries on his own (more often than not mysteries that are not mysteries to Dumbledore). Dumbledore sends Harry James' invisibility cloak knowing perfectly well that he will use it to sneak around the castle at night and Dumbledore never makes an effort to stop the irregularities of Harry, Ron and Hermione's detective work. Dumbledore, however, is not mentoring Harry at random, he has a plan and this is made clear in *The Deathly Hallows* as Snape and Dumbledore discuss Harry's future:

'So the boy...the boy must die?' asked Snape, quite calmly. 'And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential.' Another long silence. Then Snape said, 'I thought ... all these years...that we were protecting him for her. For Lily.' We have protected him because it has been essential to teach him, to raise him, to let him try his strength,' said Dumbledore, his eyes still tight shut. (551)

Dumbledore has known all along that if evil is to be eliminated Harry must die a sacrificial death. Dumbledore's goal all along has been to prepare Harry for this ultimate act of bravery. This it appears he is tending in two ways. First, to let Harry solve mysteries and "try his strength" on his own, second, through private lessons and the pensieve in *The Half-Blood Prince*, to expose him to stories of the past, explaining the current existence of evil and Voldemort's place in the world. It is peculiar, however, that Dumbledore is not initiating more honest dialogue with Harry, as it appears that it might have spared Harry of his violent outburst in *The Order of the Phoenix* and saved all the energy spent on suspecting Snape. But then again, as the reader is well aware, the Harry Potter novels are not narratives of personal reflection, inner dialogue and soliloquizing. They are novels of mystery and action, in part propelled by Dumbledore's irresponsible neglect of Harry's psychological needs as a growing teenager. Action, nevertheless, is a vital part of the narrative structure and so is bravery by extension. For when Harry acts in the service of good it is nearly always under threat and pressure.

Chivalry as the gentlemanly public school and Arthurian extension of bravery is an important component of Harry's Gryffindor identity. As mentioned earlier, in *The Philosopher's Stone* Harry in a chivalric manner rescues Hermione from the mountain troll, similarly, in *The Chamber of Secrets*, he does not hesitate to go after Ginny in the chamber; in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* he chooses to let Peter Pettigrew live, in *The Goblet of Fire* during the Triwizard tournament he rescues Fleur Delacour's sister even though it is not part of his task and in the last task, he helps Cedric and generously shares the victory with him. In the same book he evacuates hundreds of "mudbloods" from the Ministry of Magic even though it compromises his own agenda. In *The Deathly Hallows*, he also chooses to evacuate the children of Death Eaters from Hogwarts before the last battle, despite Aberforth's advice to keep them as hostages and the same day he also helps Draco escape death thrice. Chivalry

adds another dimension to Harry's daring nerve and bravery. It affirms him as a hero in the romantic sense and it ascertains his attractive appeal. What reader does not have a weakness for the hero that protects the weak and risks his life for his friends? Chivalry adds an attractive positive, flavor to Harry's bravery. Chivalry cements the preeminence of bravery among the moral qualities in Harry's life.

Bravery is the most visible moral quality in Harry's adventurous and action filled life, but friendship comes in as a close second. The stories are told from Harry's point of view; though written in the third person, everything is filtered through Harry's perspective. So, naturally Harry's closest friends play leading roles in the narrative. This is not an uncommon feature, friendship as a relationship is markedly vital in children's literature. Perhaps the most common convention in the world of children's literature is the orphan motif. The child heroes in children's literature are independent agents, just like adult heroes in adult fiction. Excitement is construed as the child has to cope with life independent of parental supervision. In this vacuum friendship arises as the most important relation in the child's world. For example, the parents of Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking are absent, but she has two best friends: Tommy and Annika. Huckleberry Finn has a drunkard for a father, but slave fugitive Jim is his ever faithful friend. Mary, in Francis Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, is orphaned, but becomes best friends with her cousin Colin and the maidservant's brother Dickon. Louis Sachar's Stanley Yelnats is sent away from home to Camp Green Lake for bad boys, but he earns a best buddy, Zero. Lyra, in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*, doesn't have parents that care about her, but she has best friend and buddy, Roger Parslow. This knock about list of characters of children's fiction represents different, genres, centuries, thematic foci and writing styles, but it highlights one thing, the ever recurring emphasis on peer relationships and friendship in children's fiction and it places Harry Potter and friends not only in good company, but also safely within the tradition of children's literature.

Friendship, nevertheless, in the Harry Potter novels, though most notable, is not exclusively left to Harry's friendship with peers, Ron and Hermione. Friendship exists in a variety of relations and Harry's group of friends is diverse in age, sizes and talents. Hagrid, the outcast half-giant, Hogwarts gamekeeper is a good friend of Harry's, but also of Ron and Hermione. Dobby, the house-elf is a good friend of Harry's. Sirius, Harry's godfather, was the best friend of Harry's father, James, but is also Harry's friend. Neville, Luna and Ginny whom Harry does not actively seek out to befriend, become treasured friends. As Harry grows older and wiser, Dumbledore also turns out to be more than a trusted mentor and when he dies Harry grieves a treasured friend. However, it is Ron and Hermione that are Harry's best friends. The threesome is nearly inseparable; they are cronies, partners in crime, support group and family away from home. In the series they stand out as a model circle of friends.

That friends are important to Harry is undisputed. In her essay: "Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority" Farah Mendlesohn explains that it is Harry's friends that make him a hero, "Repeatedly in the Potter books, it is not Potter who displays ingenuity, intelligence, or bravery but his companions: redoubtable and brilliant Hermione; the kind, reckless and incredibly strong Hagrid; the faithful and dogged Ron" (164). Mendlesohn concludes that the "structure of companionship in the Potter books has two effects," first, "these companions function as courtiers: their talents are, by extension, their prince's talents, and their deeds reflect his glory," second, "the role of the companions, combined with the hereditary nature of Potter's own intrinsic qualities, creates a peculiarly passive hero to whom things happen" (165). Mendlesohn's argument reduces Harry's friends to servants and Harry to a marionette in constant need of assistance. Harry's friends, Ron and Hermione especially, however, are more than assistants; I will argue that they are friends as described by *The Oxford Dictionary of English*: "One joined to another in mutual benevolence and intimacy' (J). Not ordinarily applied to lovers or relatives." Harry doesn't only receive

support and services from his friends he also gives aid and encouragement. The moral quality of friendship in the Potter universe can successfully be traced back to the fairy tale helper, but it contains much more.

The next paragraphs of this chapter lays out textual evidence demonstrating how friendship is established in the Potter world and how it involves mutual loyalty and honesty as well as moral support. When Harry, Ron and Hermione meet for the first time on the Hogwarts Express in *The Philosopher's Stone* they have one thing in common: they are new to Hogwarts and they are not well integrated, neither cool nor popular. Harry is completely green to all of wizardry and scarred from a deprived childhood. He openly admits his ignorance and insecurity to Ron on the train: "...I've got loads to learn... I bet,' he added, voicing for the first time something that had been worrying him a lot lately, 'I bet I'm the worst in the class'" (112). Ron is the last of six brothers to go to Hogwarts and anxious about it, like Harry's, his insecurity shines through: "...Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it's no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five brothers. I've got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand and Percy's old rat'" (111). Hermione is not an orphan, nor is she part of a large family, she is a muggle born bookworm and know-it-all. She does not enter Ron and Harry's train compartment unnoticed: "'Has anyone seen a toad? Neville's lost one,' she said. She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth. 'We've already told him we haven't seen it,' said Ron, but the girl wasn't listening, she was looking at the wand in his hand. 'Oh, are you doing magic? Let's see it, then.' She sat down. Ron looked taken aback. 'Er – all right'" (116). Harry's underdog status is well established, but his chosen friends, Ron and Hermione, are no better.

Harry and Ron become friends right away, but it takes some time before the inseparable duo becomes an inseparable trio. It is the troll episode halfway through *The*

*Philosopher's Stone* that forever verify them as a threesome. Well aware of this Harry and Ron decide that they have to warn her. Subsequently, Harry and Ron rescue Hermione from the troll and Hermione earns the boys' respect by covering for them when they are questioned by professor McGonagall. Hermione is instantly transformed into a friend: "But from that moment on, Hermione Granger became their friend. There are some things you can't share without ending up liking each other, and knocking out a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them" (195). The basis of Harry, Ron and Hermione's friendship is shared experience. Common experience is a given in friendship building, but in the fantastical Potter universe, revolving around action adventures, it is conspicuous. The Harry Potter books are about Harry, Ron and Hermione facing danger, fear, sorrow and fun together and it is about three friends practicing loyalty while solving mysteries.

Mutual loyalty in Harry, Ron and Hermione's relationship runs like a red thread through the plots of all seven books. At the end of *The Philosopher's Stone*, Ron and Hermione demonstrate that they are willing to die for the cause and for Harry. When playing giant wizard chess Ron willingly sacrifices himself, not knowing if he will survive or not, so that Harry can continue pursuing the stone. In *The Chamber of Secrets* they work together to solve the mystery of the Basilisk. Hermione does research and makes the poly juice potion and Harry and Ron do the fighting in the chamber. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban* Harry and Hermione willingly follow Ron into the Shrieking Shack to rescue him, from what they believe to be a vicious dog, namely Sirius Black. In *The Goblet of Fire* Harry and Ron have a big fight, because Ron thinks Harry figured out a way to trick himself into the Triwizard Tournament. Hermione, however, to Harry's consolation remains loyal: "To his immense relief, Hermione accepted his story without question" (254). But, Ron and Harry clear up the misunderstanding and loyalty is restored. For Christmas break in *The Order of the Phoenix*, Hermione chooses loyalty to the cause and to her friends. Instead of joining her family for a



ski vacation she spends the holidays with Ron and Harry at the Order headquarters, Grimmauld Place. In the same book Harry and Ron, not wanting to disappoint Hermione, refuse to tell her that most of the house-elves do not want to be set free and at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix* Ron and Hermione loyally go with Harry to the Department of Mysteries. Likewise at the very end of *The Half-Blood Prince*, when Harry decides that he must go looking for Horcruxes, instead of spending the coming school year at Hogwarts, Ron and Hermione insist on joining: ““We’re with you whatever happens”” (607). Finally, in *The Deathly Hallows* we observe that Harry is overwhelmed with gratitude when Ron and Hermione affirm that they are coming with him: “He wanted to tell them what that meant to him, but he simply could not find words important enough” (87). The continually reappearing pattern of mutual loyalty in the plots of the books is formulaic and predictable. All seven stories end with acts of loyalty. Yet it is not a static concept. Ron and Hermione continually choose to be loyal, and sometimes disloyal, to Harry and vice versa. In comparison the reader is never invited to question Sam’s loyalty to Frodo. Sam is simply the loyal companion. It is in introducing the element of choice and uncertainty that Rowling rises above the expectancies of the fantasy genre, revealing a steadfast moral vision. By juxtaposing friendships among the Slytherins and Voldemort’s followers with those of Harry, Ron and Hermione and members of the Order of the Phoenix, Rowling reveals the moral necessity of egalitarian choice and uncertainty for true loyalty to exist.

The Slytherin counterpart to the trio of Harry, Ron and Hermione is Draco Malfoy and his friends, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle. The dynamics of the Slytherin threesome rests on Draco’s undisputed leadership. Draco is the clever one, Draco is the one to make decisions and Crabbe and Goyle are the sheep that follow. For Crabbe and Goyle, allegiance to Draco is the ticket to acceptance and status. For Draco, Crabbe and Goyle are servants increasing his power and influence at Hogwarts. Fear is the glue that binds them together. In

contrast, the Harry, Ron Hermione group, though Harry can be argued to be their leader, displays group dynamics void of fear. Honesty, for better and worse, is the guiding principle of their collaboration.

Because they do not fear each other, Harry, Ron and Hermione disagree, argue and fight. Small disagreements and differing viewpoints are frequent throughout the whole series. But two fights between Ron and Harry stand out as crucial pieces of evidence verifying the honesty, and equality of their friendship. The first fight occurs in *The Goblet of Fire* when Harry is innocently chosen, despite his inappropriate age, to be Triwizard champion for Hogwarts, Ron gets angry with Harry because he believes Harry has been lying to him, and not told him that he was going to put his name in the goblet:

'Oh, right,' said Ron. 'I thought you might've told me if it was the Cloak ... because it would've covered both of us, wouldn't it? But you found another way, did you?' 'Listen,' said Harry, 'I didn't put my name in that Goblet. Someone else must've done it.' ... 'It's OK, you know, you can tell me the truth,' he said. 'If you don't want everyone else to know, fine, but I don't know you're bothering to lie, you didn't get into trouble for it, did you? That friend of the Fat Lady's, that Violet, she's already told us all, Dumbledore's letting you enter. A thousand Galleons prize money, eh? And you don't have end-of-year tests either....' (251-252)

Ron demands the truth from Harry and he gets angry when he believes he is being kept in the dark. The interaction between Ron and Harry illustrates two important concepts: first, friends tell each other the truth. Second, friends are free to exit the friendship. A closer look at the reconciliation scene that takes place between Harry and Ron reveals another concept, friendship is based on mutuality: "Ron opened his mouth uncertainly. Harry knew Ron was about to apologise and, suddenly, he found he didn't need to hear it. 'It's Ok,' he said, before Ron could get the words out. 'Forget it.' 'No,' said Ron, 'I shouldn't've –' 'Forget it,' Harry said. Ron grinned nervously at him, and Harry grinned back" (313). Finally on good terms again, Harry and Ron's happiness is mutual.

The second fight between Ron and Harry occurs in *The Deathly Hallows*. Ron and Harry are as we know, best friends, but they are also rivals, for as Hermione explains to Harry

in *The Goblet of Fire*: Ron's cause for frustration is obviously jealousy. Being the youngest brother of five and the best friend of the most famous person in the wizard world has made him sick of always ending up in the shadow. Ron, however, is not afraid of expressing his frustrations with Harry and his own role. Ron does not let his own position reduce his person to the hero's servant. This is thoroughly underlined in *The Deathly Hallows*:

'So why are you still here?' Harry asked Ron. 'Search me,' said Ron. 'Go home then,' said Harry. 'Yeah, maybe I will!' shouted Ron, and he took several steps towards Harry, who did not back away. 'Didn't you hear what they said about my sister? But you don't give a rat's fart, do you, it's only the Forbidden Forest, Harry *I've-Faced-Worse Potter* doesn't care what happens to her in here, well, I do, all right, giant spiders and mental stuff –' ... 'Oh, you're sure, are you? Right then, well, I won't bother myself about them. It's all right for you two, isn't it, with your parents safely out of the way –' 'My parents are *dead!*' Harry bellowed. 'And mine could be going the same way!' yelled Ron. 'Then GO!' roared Harry. (253-254)

Ron and Harry argue at a high temperature, accusations are flying fast. Harry blames Ron for disloyalty (why are you still here?) and Ron blames Harry for only caring about himself, and never the Weasley family. Despite this, Harry and Ron do not make threats at each other.

When he understands that Ron has lost faith in the cause, Harry is no longer interested in working and cooperating with him. Ron's departure cements the friendship as mutual and egalitarian. When he has left, both Harry and Ron feel miserable, and when he returns they both rejoice. The return is just as important as the departure, for morally the story of Ron is not the story of Judas, it is the story of the Prodigal son. Like Edmund in Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Ron leaves in rebellion, like a traitor, but returns a hero. The rebellion proves a relationship based on respect for free choice and respect for the individual. The return, however, is an unveiled moral lesson teaching the reader that loyalty is always more desirable.

Respect for the individual and freedom to rebel places Harry, Ron and Hermione in sharp contrast to Draco and his friends. The same proves true when contrasting Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix members with Voldemort and the Death Eaters. The Death

Eaters follow their leader out of pure fear. Having fallen out of grace with Voldemort the Malfoys are miserable cripples of anxiety. We observe Voldemort demanding Lucius Malfoy's wand: "Lucius Malfoy looked up. His skin appeared yellowish and waxy in the firelight and his eyes were sunken and shadowed. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse. 'My Lord?' 'Your wand, Lucius. I require your wand.' 'I...'" (*Deathly Hallows* 14). Reluctantly, but without resistance, the reduced Lucius obeys Voldemort. In comparison Dumbledore's crew feels free to question his decisions. The order members discuss and argue about how to fight Voldemort with Snape and Sirius' perpetual disagreement as a good example. But, though Dumbledore is no dictator, Rowling is particular to emphasize that he is no god either. The revelations about Dumbledore's past successfully take him down from any pedestal. Dumbledore is the Gandalf of the Potter universe, yet he is not. Dumbledore is infinitely wise, yet he is incredibly stupid. As a leader Dumbledore is a representative of the politically correct. For though his gifts and talents exceeds the average his moral steadfastness does not. In this sense he is truly one of the people. Dumbledore is an egalitarian leader. Dumbledore is not perfect, but his example teaches that moral mobility is what counts. Dumbledore is successfully stripped of eminence and divinity, but he is not dismissed for he has triumphantly journeyed from Nazi and irresponsible brother to humble headmaster sacrificing his life for the cause.

While Dumbledore has been climbing heavenwards on the morality curve in his lifetime, Voldemort has been sliding to hell. There is nothing egalitarian about Voldemort. Voldemort is a dictator and the Death Eaters are his servants. Upward mobility, cost what it may, is what counts in their society. Compared to the corruption of Voldemort and his Death Eaters, Draco, Crabbe and Goyle's evil seems bleak. But, the essential mechanisms are the same: Voldemort and Draco are dictators and their friends are servants. Friendship among the bad is locked in a subverting pattern of tyranny, fear and power hunger. In juxtaposition

Harry, Ron and Hermione's friendship is authentically dynamic. It is based on honesty, but it is not perfect. Two points in case: Ron and Harry never truly support Hermione in her fight for elf rights and in *The Deathly Hallows* Ron deserts Harry and Hermione. But we are made aware: friendship built on honesty without fear is the only friendship that will stand the test of time. At the end of *The Deathly Hallows* Voldemort is dead, his followers are scattered and the trio: Draco, Crabbe and Goyle is forever dissolved.

Giving and receiving moral support and encouragement is a vital part of Harry, Ron and Hermione's friendship and unlike the static fairy tale helper Harry, the hero, participates in both giving and receiving. There is no lack of accidents during the three friends' years at Hogwarts and they all take their turns in the hospital wing. In *The Chamber of Secrets* Hermione is hospitalized twice, first for cat-hair growth in her face and second for petrification. While hospitalized Harry and Ron visit her, which becomes the norm; the three visit each other, whenever one of them is sick and confined to bed. When Christmas comes they give each other gifts. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Ron and Hermione go to Hogsmeade, and Harry is stuck at the school, they think of their "imprisoned" friend and make sure to bring him lots of sweets. In *The Goblet of Fire* Hermione helps Harry prepare for his first Triwizard tournament task and she gives him a word of encouragement when he has to leave: "'Good luck, Harry,' Hermione whispered. 'You'll be fine!'" (304). Later when about to enter the third task Harry is encouraged by Ron, Hermione and a crew of friends cheering for him at the stadium: "Harry could just make out Mrs Weasley, Bill, Ron and Hermione applauding Fleur politely, halfway up the stands. He waved up at them, and they waved back beaming at him" (*Goblet of Fire* 539). In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry and Hermione do the same for Ron. When Ron is chosen to play in the last Quidditch match of the season, they go to cheer for him: "They found seats in the topmost row of the stand. It was a fine, clear day; Ron could not wish for better, and Harry found himself hoping against hope

that Ron would not give the Slytherins cause for more rousing choruses of ‘Weasley is our King’” (602). Harry and Hermione do not stay at the Quidditch stadium because Hagrid is desperate for their help with his giant half brother, Grawp. However, they are very careful about not spilling the bad news about Grawp to Ron right away; they do not want to spoil his long wanted intoxicated victory celebration: “Ron’s euphoria at helping Gryffindor scrape the Quidditch cup was such that he couldn’t settle to anything next day. . . .neither was keen to be the one to bring Ron back to reality in quite such a brutal fashion” (620). Sensitive to Ron’s happiness over his successful Quidditch win Harry and Hermione supportively do what they can to participate in his joy and to break the spell as gently as possible. Friends, we learn from the threesome, support each other through success and failure, happiness and sorrow.

That Ron and Hermione’s support is important to Harry is not surprising, and at the beginning of *The Half-Blood Prince* it is made unmistakably clear that he is truly grateful:

A warmth was spreading through him that had nothing to do with the sunlight, a tight obstruction in his chest seemed to be dissolving. He knew that Ron and Hermione were more shocked than they were letting on, but the mere fact that they were still there on either side of him, speaking bracing words of comfort, not shrinking from him as though he were contaminated or dangerous, was worth more than he could ever tell them. (97)

Ron and Hermione’s emotional support is unwavering and they seem to give it willingly and without restraint. Harry’s sincere gratefulness indicates that the feeling is mutual. Later in the same book Harry and Hermione do all they can to encourage Ron, who is nervous to the point of breaking before the first Quidditch match of the season. Yet, later in *The Half-Blood Prince* Harry shows sensitivity to Hermione’s disappointment when Ron runs off to make out with Lavender Brown, he follows her to her hiding place and tries to comfort her:

‘Hermione?’ He found her in the first unlocked classroom he tried. She was sitting on the teacher’s desk, alone except for a small ring of twittering yellow birds circling her head, which she had clearly just conjured out of midair. Harry could not help admiring her spellwork at a time like this. ‘Oh, hello, Harry’ she said in a brittle voice. ‘I was just practicing.’ ‘Yeah...they’re – er – really good...’ said Harry. He had no idea what to say to her. (282)

Harry does not know how to help Hermione feel better, but he makes an effort to find her and show his support. Similarly, Hermione is there for Harry when they visit his parents' graves in *The Deathly Hallows* and when he starts crying, she offers moral support:

Hermione had taken his hand again and was gripping it tightly. He could not look at her, but returned the pressure, now taking deep, sharp gulps of the night air, trying to steady himself, trying to regain control. He should have brought something to give them, and he had not thought of it, and every plant in the graveyard was leafless and frozen. But Hermione raised her wand, moved it in a circle through the air and wreath of Christmas roses blossomed before them. Harry caught it and laid it on his parents' grave. (269)

A bit later, in *The Deathly Hallows* it is Hermione who is in need of support and Harry that delivers: "Her face streaked with tears, she crouched down beside him, two cups of tea trembling in her hands and something bulky under her arm. 'Thanks,' he said, taking one of the cups. 'Do you mind if I talk to you?' 'No,' he said, because he did not want to hurt her feelings" (287). Here, Harry chooses to go against his immediate impulse of wanting to be left alone and instead he decides to listen to Hermione. Friendship in Harry's world includes thinking about the needs of others before your own.

At the end of *The Philosopher's Stone* when Harry compliments Hermione on her excellent spellwork, Hermione replies: "'Books! And cleverness! There are more important things – friendship and bravery...'" (308). In sum bravery is the compass needle in Harry's world of morality. It is the inner force that enables him to overcome fear and fight the mountain troll, endure Professor Umbridge's torture and finally to face Voldemort in the forest. To have bravery in Harry's world is to have moral backbone.

Friendship in the moral universe of Harry Potter represents relations built on the liberty to fearlessly disagree and rebel. Friendship is the most extreme form of loyalty, to be willing to die for ones friends; it is to protect each other in dangerous situations and to actively take part in your friends' lives by sharing both joys and sorrows. But most important, it is a moral imperative, for only united in friendship can Voldemort and evil be defeated. As Dumbledore reminds his students: "...we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we

are divided. ‘Lord Voldemort’s gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust...’” (*Goblet of Fire* 626).



## Love and Truth

Fantasy literature translates the metaphysical into the physical and symbolic. Good meets evil on the battlefield. Love is the power that enables Harry to sacrifice his own life for his friends, not the study of ethics and well reasoned conclusions. Truth is the power that releases Harry into adulthood and completes his coming of age journey.

The fantasy world's formula for self-sacrificial love is informed by Christianity and mirrored in the life of Harry Potter. The biblical narrative tells of a God whose quest to save the world is completed by willingly submitting to death on a cross - a common metaphor in fantasy literature. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Lewis applies the archetype directly as Aslan, the Christ figure, is ruthlessly slain on a stone table. Tolkien exploits the Golgotha theme in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy: Gandalf the Grey dies in selfless battle for good, but returns divine and transformed as Gandalf the white. Frodo's quest is completed as he willingly enters hell on earth, Mount Doom, to destroy the ring. Harry Potter secures victory over Voldemort through submitting himself to be killed as a ransom – triumphantly returning from a state of death.

Dumbledore is essential when discussing love in the moral universe of Harry Potter. If we apply the paradigm of Christianity to the Potter universe, Voldemort becomes the devil and Dumbledore God's representative. The devil represents evil and God represents love. Dumbledore defines and explains love's extraordinary powers to Harry. Harry willingly accepts his explanations. It is through Dumbledore we learn how the sacrifice of Lily, Harry's mother, exemplifies motherly love that is perfect and redeeming. Dumbledore is the keeper of Severus Snape's deepest secret, his ever faithful love of Lily, and Dumbledore willingly dies for the cause, modeling self-sacrificial and unselfish love for Harry.

Dumbledore is Harry's mentor, but also chief interpreter of the world in the series. Dumbledore gets the last word, the final analysis, the summation and conclusion of the turn of

events. Dumbledore has knowledge that he only shares incrementally with Harry, and he has a plan of how to defeat Voldemort. Like Harry, the readers leave every book, with Dumbledore's encouragement, praise and interpretation of the world. However, as the story unfolds the reader, like Harry, increasingly realizes that Dumbledore's interpretations are not infallible and several questions about love and morals in the Potter universe remain.

Is love an inherited power that equips you to be a good person? Or is love something you deliberately choose to have? Why did Lily's love succeed at saving Harry and why did Merope's love fail? Was Merope's love impure or does love only have saving powers when directly and symbolically self-sacrificially dying for it?

At the end of *The Half Blood Prince* Dumbledore for the last time imprints on Harry the importance of love. After Harry has realized that the Horcruxes are pieces of Voldemort's soul that must be destroyed, the following interaction occurs: "But I haven't got uncommon skill and power," said Harry, before he could stop himself. "Yes you have," said Dumbledore firmly. "You have a power that Voldemort has never had. You can –" "I know!" said Harry impatiently. "I can love!" (476). Harry's ability to love is what distinguishes him from Voldemort. But how has he acquired the ability? Dumbledore clarifies: "...If Voldemort had never murdered your father, would he have imparted in you a furious desire for revenge? Of course not! If he had not forced your mother to die for you, would he have given you a magical protection he could not penetrate? Of course not, Harry!..." (477). Dumbledore infers that Harry's ability to love can be traced back to his mother's sacrifice. Love is not something Harry has acquired or chosen to obtain himself. He is predestined for love.

The symbolism works well within the Fantasy genre: by portraying love as Lily's concrete sacrifice the translation from metaphysical to physical and symbolic is completed. Interestingly Dumbledore is simultaneously able to reassure Harry that he is not predestined to fulfill the prophecy: "Got to?" said Dumbledore. "Of course you've got to! But not because

of the prophecy! Because you, yourself, will never rest until you've tried!..."” replying Harry admits:

‘I’d want him finished,’ said Harry quietly. ‘And I’d want to do it.’ ‘Of course you would!’ cried Dumbledore. ‘You see, the prophecy does not mean you have to do anything! But the prophecy caused Lord Voldemort to mark you as his equal in other words, you are free to choose your way, quite free to turn your back on the prophecy! But Voldemort continues to set store by the prophecy. He will continue to hunt you...which makes it certain, really, that – ‘That one of us is going to end up killing the other,’ said Harry. ‘Yes.’” (*Half-Blood Prince* 478-479)

Dumbledore is careful to underline for Harry that he is an agent of free will. It is Harry’s and Voldemort’s choices that will prove the prophecy true, not destiny or deep magic.

Dumbledore’s world view proves double edged and so is the depiction of love in the Potter universe. Love inherited from Lily’s sacrifice proves to be Harry’s salvation and his predestined love is what enables him to victoriously fight Voldemort. But as Dumbledore explains to Harry for the first time in *The Chamber of Secrets*: “‘Exactly,’ said Dumbledore, beaming once more. ‘Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities’” (358) decisions determine if we end up siding with the good or the bad. Phrased differently, you can choose the ability to love or you can refuse. Love is two things, an empowering gift bestowed upon you by someone else and second, your own decision to love somebody else.

In reading the Harry Potter books a comparison of Harry and Voldemort easily presents itself. Questions invite to be asked: first, why did Harry turn out a hero and Voldemort a devil? Second, why is the moral value of sacrificing your life for your child in front of an attacking enemy higher than giving up your life for your offspring in childbirth? Third, why did not Merope transfer some powerful love to her son? Harry, we learn, is privileged with a resourceful mother. In contrast, Voldemort is given a mother starved for love. While Lily was loved by her parents, husband and peers. Voldemort’s mother, Merope, had an abusing father and unrequited love. James Potter had to compete for Lily’s love; Merope seduced her husband into marriage by magic. The depiction of Merope’s life is

thoroughly miserable. While Lily died heroically saving his son's life, Merope died destitute, giving birth to her son. Mrs Cole at the London orphanage explains to Dumbledore: "New Year's Eve and bitter cold, snowing, you know. Nasty night. And this girl, not much older than I was myself at the time, came staggering up the front steps. Well, she wasn't the first. We took her in and she had the baby within the hour. And she was dead within another hour" (*Half-Blood Prince* 249). Though she led an afflicted life, Merope did have love, though not returned she loved her son's father, Tom Riddle. Yet we learn, Merope's unrequited love was not enough to save her son, just as dying in childbirth could not bestow a special power on Voldemort in the way Lily's sacrificial death bequeathed protection on Harry.

Harry is surprised to hear Merope's miserable story and his subsequent conversation with Dumbledore indicates that choice is the deciding factor in the moral universe of wizards and muggles, not yet aware of Merope's manner of death Harry asks Dumbledore:

'She wouldn't even stay alive for her son?' Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. 'Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?' 'No,' said Harry quickly, 'but she had a choice, didn't she, not like my mother –' 'Your mother had a choice, too,' said Dumbledore gently. 'Yes, Merope Riddle chose death in spite of a son who needed her, but do not judge her too harshly, Harry. She was greatly weakened by long suffering and she never had your mother's courage....'" (*Half-Blood Prince* 246)

Given the extremity of both Lily and Merope's deaths one could successfully argue they had no choice. Their circumstances are so dire that claiming something else appears judgmental. But that is exactly what Dumbledore does. Dumbledore affirms for Harry that both women had a choice and that circumstances cannot incapacitate the free will of the human agent. In short, Merope had a miserable life because she made bad choice. The textual evidence tips in favour of a moral universe built on free will. The didactic message is correct, you are responsible for your actions and just as important, the underdog can succeed, given he or she makes the right choices.

Despite the continued emphasis on choice the idea of predestined love lingers with Lily. Dumbledore tirelessly highlights Lily's sacrifice. Lily's life is exclusively described as

thoroughly good. As Harry comes of age he is introduced his father's unattractive character traits, but Lily is never pictured in a negative light. Lily was loved by all, even Severus Snape, who pledged her allegiance till death. In short, Lily is transformed into a Madonna and the love she represents becomes a divine and mysterious power that transcends the laws of magic. In the moral universe of Harry Potter, Lily is a symbol of love. Lily's act of sacrificial love is a fixed point in the progressive narrative. Her pure act of love represents the mysterious and the religious. The power her sacrifice has transferred to Harry has religious qualities. It conveniently aids Harry in doing well. Yet, Rowling reminds her readers through Dumbledore, the effects of Lily's sacrifice are not predestined.

Merope was a victim of unrequited love and so is Professor Snape. But while she tragically exits the narrative Snape departs a hero. The difference: Snape sacrificed his life for the love of his life. Already in *The Philosopher's Stone* Rowling teases her readers and we wonder, is Snape good or bad? *The Deathly Hallows* yields the answer. Snape has been loyal to the cause and to Dumbledore all along. The reason: his undying love for childhood and youth sweetheart, Madonna, Lily Potter. Fearing that Voldemort is going to kill Lily, Snape approaches Dumbledore:

'You know what I mean! He thinks it means her son, he is going to hunt her down – kill them all –' 'If she means so much to you,' said Dumbledore, 'surely Lord Voldemort will spare her? Could you not ask for mercy for the mother, in exchange for the son?' 'I have – I have asked him –' 'You disgust me,' said Dumbledore, and Harry had never heard so much contempt in his voice. Snape seemed to shrink a little. 'You do not care, then, about the deaths of her husband and child? They can die, as long as you have what you want?' Snape said nothing, but merely looked up at Dumbledore. 'Hide them all, then,' he croaked. 'Keep her – them – safe. Please.' 'And what will you give me in return, Severus?' 'In – return?' Snape gaped at Dumbledore, and Harry expected him to protest, but after a long moment he said, 'Anything.' (543-544)

Snape meets Dumbledore's demand, Snape willingly sacrifices his own life to protect Lily's son and Snape proves that he truly loved Lily Potter. We learn that Snape's love for Lily is the anchor that ties him to the good side. For Snape the love Lily has inspired in him becomes the difference between brave hero and unlikeable villain. Snape's devotion is remarkable, having

known him as Harry's hated teacher and figurehead of villainous Slytherin, love for Lily as the sole explanation of Snape's loyalty appears idiosyncratic. Snape is not an attractive character, Snape does not inspire love in other people and Snape is not a loving person. Snape's love for Lily is not of a mundane character: his devotion to Lily is religious. Love for Snape is a concrete power that enables him to religiously choose self sacrifice and heroism.

Dumbledore is spokesman of the symbolic, translated and sacrificial love. Dumbledore speaks of the importance of Lily's sacrifice, Dumbledore prepares Harry to sacrifice, Dumbledore plans his own sacrificial death and Dumbledore never doubts Snape's willingness to sacrifice. But Dumbledore struggles with love on the mundane level. In Dumbledore's world the elevated sacrificial love and the mundane loves conflict. Explaining himself to Harry in *The Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore says: "I cared about you too much," said Dumbledore simply. "I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives that might be lost if the plan failed. In other words, I acted exactly as Voldemort expects we fools who love to act" (739). Dumbledore's plan represents the elevated sacrificial love and his "caring too much" his mundane, but real feelings of love towards Harry.

Interestingly Dumbledore does not recognize the Dursleys care for their son Dudley as love, rebuking them for not taking proper care of both Harry and Dudley he says: "You did not do as I asked. You have never treated Harry as a son. He has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands. The best that can be said is that he has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy sitting between you" (*Half-Blood Prince* 57). Dumbledore correctly thinks more of his parental care for Harry than the Dursleys care for Dudley. In the moral universe of Harry Potter, the Dursleys represent the immoral spectre of the muggle world: greed. Petunia and Vernon's love for Dudley is corrupted by materialism and is therefore not genuine. Regardless of inconsistencies in his

view of love Dumbledore is the chief ambassador of good in the Harry Potter universe and Dumbledore is the interpreter of love.

Love in the Harry Potter universe demands free will, but simultaneously it is semi-religious facilitating for belief in providence and predestination. Love's ultimate expression is the Christian archetypal self-sacrifice. In this mythology Lily is the Madonna figure, Dumbledore the God figure and Harry the Christ figure. Love in Rowling's Potter universe operates on two levels: the religious and the mundane. The religious self-sacrificial love has redeeming powers that can secure you an esteemed reputation among the good. However, it cannot reverse the consequences of unloving, but mundane actions. Dumbledore affirms this when he humbly asks Harry for forgiveness when meeting him after his death *The Deathly Hallows*. Love in the Potter world is important on the cosmic level and the personal and it is the singularly most important concept of all. Dumbledore's last words of advice to Harry are about love, instructing Harry for the last time he says, "Pity the living, and above all, those who live without love..." (*Deathly Hallows* 578). In Harry's world a life worth living is a life filled with love.

"Finally the truth" (554). These three words at the beginning of Chapter Thirty-Four in *The Deathly Hallows* mark the end of Harry's childhood. It marks the end of Harry, Ron and Hermione's mystery solving and it marks the end of Dumbledore's planning and secret keeping. The previous chapter (Thirty-Three), demystifies the two most intriguing riddles of the series: Snape's loyalties and Harry's role in the prophecy and Dumbledore's plan to destroy Voldemort. We learn that Snape has been faithful to Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix all along and that Harry must die so Voldemort can be eliminated and Harry discovers that the truth he has long for all along predicts his sacrificial death.

The rest of this chapter is an analysis of the role of truth in the moral universe of Harry Potter. It discusses the questions: Is truth the last stop in Harry's coming of age journey,

death? Is truth the existence of the cosmic battle between good and evil? Is truth that Voldemort has returned? Is truth, the opposite of what Rita Skeeter does, reporting experiences accurately? Is truth to never lie?

Already at the end of the *The Philosopher's Stone* we observe that searching for truth is important to Harry. He asks Dumbledore to answer his questions: “‘Sir, there are some other things I’d like to know, if you can tell me... things I want to know the truth about...’” (321). It is common knowledge that children are avid searchers of truth. Children’s capacity to repeat the ever current why is their way of making sense of the world and the teenager’s drive to inquisitorially question parents and the establishment is their way of transferring into the adult world. Both ways of seeking out answers are essential in the Potter series. Viewing the series as a bildungsroman, the uncovering of truth is paramount. Harry is constantly searching for answers, but answers are revealed incrementally as he grows older.

Death, the full discovery of Voldemort’s evil and the revelation of James and Dumbledore’s imperfections stand out as milestones in Harry’s coming of age journey. Death is an overarching theme in the series. The quest for immortality represented by the Philosopher’s Stone is the central motif of the first book. The Stone, we are informed, is the capstone of the ancient study of alchemy, not only can the stone transform any metal into pure gold, but it can also be used to produce the Elixir of Life, a liquid that immortalizes its drinker (*Philosopher’s Stone* 238). The motif reappears in the last book as we learn more of the quest for immortality and are introduced to the three Deathly Hallows: The Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone and the Cloak of Invisibility. Likewise we learn that legend predicts that the owner of all three Hallows will become the immortal master of death (*Deathly Hallows* 333). Evil Lord Voldemort is the most ardent searcher of immortality, the stone and the Hallows, but he fails, despite his relentless efforts and willingness to split up his soul and store the pieces in Horcruxes. After Harry has successfully stopped Voldemort from getting



his hands on the Philosopher's Stone, Dumbledore explains the protection mechanism he designed for the stone: "...You see, only one who wanted to *find* the stone – find it, but not use it – would be able to get it, otherwise they'd just see themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life..." (*Philosopher's Stone* 323). Purity and innocent motives enabled Harry to retrieve the Philosopher's Stone. Similarly, Harry did not seek the Resurrection Stone, Invisibility Cloak and Elder Wand for personal gain and therefore became their rightful owner, explaining the difference between himself and Harry, Dumbledore says: "But the cloak, I took out of vain curiosity, and so it could never have worked for me as it works for you, its true owner. The stone I would have used in an attempt to drag back those who are at peace, rather than to enable my self-sacrifice, as you did. You are the worthy possessor of the Hallows'" (*Deathly Hallows* 577). The laws of magic and the forces of good prefer the pure and innocent wizard. Dumbledore's confession is in praise of innocence. The narrative also seems to favor the innocent for as Harry encounters Voldemort for the very last time it turns out that the chief Death Eater has conveniently made a mistake leaving Harry, effortlessly, the true master of the Elder Wand and in consequence the master of death. When Harry at the end of saga both dies and becomes master of death the dichotomy of truth is complete. For Harry truth is horrible when he understands that he must die to eliminate Voldemort and wonderful when he realizes that he has become master of death. In the end Dumbledore's wisdom proves true, truth is both "a beautiful and terrible thing" (*Philosopher's Stone* 321).

The mystery of the Philosopher's Stone foreshadows the mystery of the Deathly Hallows. Harry's uncorrupted conduct in *The Deathly Hallows* reflects his purity in *The Philosopher's Stone*. But death is more to Harry than fantastical objects. Death is a truth that invades more and more space in his life as he approaches adulthood. During his three first years at Hogwarts Harry experiences no direct encounters with death. But in *The Goblet Fire*, Harry witnesses his peer and friend Cedric dramatically murdered by Voldemort. In *The*

*Order of the Phoenix* Harry watches his godfather Sirius Black being killed by Bellatrix Lestrange. In *The Half-Blood Prince* Harry beholds Snape performing the avada kedavra curse on Dumbledore. In *The Deathly Hallows* Harry observes the murder of Snape and his good friends Lupin, Tonks and Fred. Death is a recurring and prominent theme in the Potter series.

Compared to most children's literature death is uncommonly prevalent in the Harry Potter series. Harry is not only an orphan to begin with; his transformation from child to adult includes grieving the loss of a friend, a parent substitute and a mentor/father figure. All these deaths build up to Harry's own "death." Cedric's death represents the loss of peer support, Sirius' death the loss of parental guidance and Dumbledore's death the loss of wise counsel. Each loss is increasingly hard for Harry to live with and when Dumbledore dies Harry is forced to make independent decisions like an adult. After Dumbledore's death Harry reflects: "He could not let anybody else stand between him and Voldemort; he must abandon for ever the illusion he ought to have lost at age one: that the shelter of a parent's arms meant that nothing could hurt him" (*Half-Blood Prince* 601). Death has made Harry unwillingly independent and death has opened Harry's eyes to the truth of pain.

Though Harry learns that death is accompanied by terrible pain, grief and unwanted independence, he is also taught that death should not be feared. Already in *The Philosopher's Stone* Dumbledore instructs his students: "to the well organised mind, death is but the next great adventure" (324). The lesson is hard to misinterpret: evil and bad people fear death, good people do not. Dumbledore's elusive comment, however, is exemplary and muddled. Dumbledore does not reveal what he means by "next great adventure," in short, he does not reveal whether he thinks there is an afterlife or not. Harry's curiosity and longing for answers brings us closer to an answer. In *The Order of the Phoenix* Harry expresses (elusive) belief in afterlife. Tortured by Voldemort Harry thinks: "Let the pain stop, thought Harry ... let him

kill us ... end it, Dumbledore ... death is nothing compared to this ... And I'll see Sirius again ...” (720). Reading this passage it appears that death for Harry entails reunion with Sirius implying post death existence. Harry's conversation with the Gryffindor ghost, Nearly Headless Nick, also affirms the notion of an afterlife:

'He will not come back,' repeated Nick. 'He will have....gone on.' 'What d'you mean, "gone on"?' said Harry quickly. 'Gone on where? Listen – what happens when you die, anyway? Where do you go? Why doesn't everyone come back? Why isn't this place full of ghosts? Why -?' 'I cannot answer,' said Nick. 'You're dead, aren't you?' said Harry exasperatedly. 'Who can answer better than you?' 'I was afraid of death,' said Nick softly. 'I chose to remain behind. I sometimes wonder whether I oughtn't to have ... well, that is neither here nor there ... in fact, I am neither here nor there ...' He gave a small chuckle. 'I know nothing of the secrets of death, Harry, for I chose my feeble imitation of life instead....'” (*Order of the Phoenix* 759)

Unpacking Nearly Headless Nick's explanations we are left with a handful of confusing facts about death. Sirius is dead and will not come back to life and we conclude: dead people are dead. Sirius has “gone on” and we assume: perhaps, to an afterlife. Nick is dead: yet he is alive enough to think and speak to Harry. Nick is neither here nor there and we learn: there is a form of existence which is neither death nor life. Nick was too scared to choose the “going away” death: it is possible to choose the manner of one's afterlife. Nick's explanation is contradictory, to say the least, it may seem that we are faced with a dichotomy of death that is divided into the religious and the mundane. Later in the series in *The Half-Blood Prince* Rufus Scrimgeour (Cornelius Fudge's Minister of Magic successor) reaffirms, when speaking to Harry, that dead people cannot return to life: “My dear boy ... even Dumbledore cannot return from the - ‘I am not saying that he can...’” (604). We recognize the idea as a truth of everyday life – dead people are irrevocably dead. Harry and Hermione's visit to Godric's Hollow, however, retains religious overtones. Visiting James and Lily Potter's grave in Godric's Hollow, Harry reads the tombstone and Hermione explains: “”The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”...’ A horrible thought came to him, and with it a kind of panic. ‘Isn't that a Death Eater idea? Why is that there? ‘It doesn't mean defeating death in the way the Death Eaters mean it, Harry,’ said Hermione, her voice gentle. ‘It means ... you know

living beyond death. Living after death” (269). Hermione’s interpretation does not console Harry’s grief, but the script on the tombstone establishes afterlife as a religious idea in the narrative. This notion is reaffirmed by the most important passages about death in the Potter story, in the King’s Cross chapter of *The Deathly Hallows*. Harry and Dumbledore converse: “‘But you’re dead,’ said Harry. ‘Oh, yes’ said Dumbledore matter-of-factly.’ ‘Then ... I’m dead too?’ ‘Ah,’ said Dumbledore, smiling still more broadly. ‘That is the question, isn’t it? On the whole, dear boy, I think not’” (567). A few pages later it becomes clear that Harry can choose to go back to “life” or not: “‘I think,’ said Dumbledore, ‘that if you choose to return, there is a chance that he may be finished for good. I cannot promise it. But I know this, Harry, that you have less to fear from returning here than he does’” (578). The religious overtones are hard to ignore. Dumbledore is dead, yet, here at King’s Cross he is speaking to Harry. A number of ideas emerge from Dumbledore and Harry’s conversation. First, we are forced to presume: there is an afterlife. Second, Harry can choose to go back or remain: we think of Frodo who chose after his mission was fulfilled to sail to the afterlife. Third, Voldemort has more to fear from returning to death than Harry and we reason: death can be dangerous or painful for bad people. Living after death is beyond the fantastical paradigm of the wizard world, life after death in the good and unselfish sense can’t be obtained by magical potions, spells or even through manipulation of the laws of magical “nature.” However, though outside the magical paradigm the religious/supernatural idea of an afterlife is not outside the fantasy genre. Both Lewis and Tolkien, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, allude to heaven and life beyond death.

Despite the religious overtones in the Kings Cross chapter, death in the Potter universe is ever elusive and the dichotomy, religious vs. mundane perpetually present. At the end of the King’s Cross chapter, Harry, confused by his own and Dumbledore’s death/life status asks: “‘Tell me one last thing,’ said Harry. ‘Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my

head?’ Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry’s ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure. ‘Of course it is happening in your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?’” (*Deathly Hallows* 579). Like a trained politician Dumbledore avoids answering Harry’s question directly. Instead he explains that truth and reality is more than historical records, it is experience. Dumbledore’s answer is politically correct and it opens up for a multitude of interpretations of death in the Harry Potter series. It caters to the Christian understanding of heaven and hell. It facilitates for alternative spiritual perceptions embracing communication with the dead and ghost existence and it aids the unbelieving in viewing visions of afterlife as fabrications of the mind. Quintessentially death in the moral universe of Harry Potter is correctly post-modern and elusive.

Grieving is an important ingredient in the Potter universe and of Harry’s coming of age journey. Harry’s loss of his parents, Lily and James Potter, is expressly highlighted in the story. When Harry as an eleven year old is told the truth about how his parents died he develops a passionate hunger for more knowledge about their lives. In light of this desire we understand why, in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, the Mirror of Erised becomes irresistible to Harry. The Mirror, we learn, shows the beholder the deepest longings of his or her heart. So, when orphaned Harry takes a look he sees his parents. Dumbledore catches Harry sucking in the presence of his parents in front of the mirror, and explains to him: “...this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible” (231). The mirror is a physical translation of a psychological phenomenon: lusting after the unrealistic. Herein lies the moral message, all-consuming desires are unhealthy, because they are not truth. Truth we are led to conclude resides at the heart of morality. It is therefore

interesting to observe that the mirror resembles the Resurrection Stone that Harry uses in *The Deathly Hallows* to make call forth his parents, Sirius and Lupin:

And again, Harry understood without having to think. It did not matter about bringing them back, for he was about to join them. He was not really fetching them: they were fetching him. . . . He knew it had happened, because he heard slight movements around him that suggested frail bodies shifting their footing on the earthy, twig-strewn ground that marked the outer edge of the Forest. He opened his eyes and looked around. They were neither ghost nor truly flesh, he could see that. They resembled most closely the Riddle that had escaped from the diary, so long ago, and he had been memory made nearly solid. (560)

In this instance, however, Dumbledore commends Harry for how he used the stone unselfishly. Talking to Harry at King's Cross Dumbledore says about himself: "...The stone I would have used in an attempt to drag back those who are at peace, rather than to enable my self-sacrifice, as you did..." (*Deathly Hallows* 577). Like the Mirror of Erised the Resurrection stone can procure a visible manifestation of one's psychological longing to be reunited with loved ones who are dead. Unlike with the Mirror, however, Dumbledore condones and praises Harry's use of the stone; it even appears that it has been part of his plan that Harry should use it. An inconsistency in Dumbledore's views emerges. Calling forth "shadows" of the dead is deceitful and counterproductive, but not always. It is smart when done in unselfish service for the greater good. In Dumbledore's world objective truth is both important and unimportant. In Dumbledore's world the felt or sensed experience is in some instances just as worthy as the objective truth of the experience.

Harry's longing for his parents is a motif in all the seven Harry Potter novels and learning the truth about your parents is a noteworthy component of the growing up experience. Every little piece of information about James and Lily is eagerly sucked up and treasured by Harry. In Harry's mind James was a hero and Lily a saint. When Harry learns the truth about his father's arrogance and lousy behavior towards Snape in *The Order of the Phoenix* disappointment is an understatement: "He felt as though the memory of it was eating him from the inside. He had been so sure his parents were wonderful people that he had never

had the slightest difficulty in disbelieving the aspersions Snape cast on his father's character" (575). Harry's proud vision of his late father is crushed to crumbs. Learning about Dumbledore's past proves painful as well. Finally getting to know the truth about Dumbledore's affiliation with Nazi Grindelwald and his selfish disregard for his ill sister is a hard blow for Harry: "But he shook his head. Some inner certainty had crashed down inside him; it was exactly as he had felt after Ron left. He had trusted Dumbledore, believed him the embodiment of goodness and wisdom. All was ashes: how much more could he lose? Ron, Dumbledore, the phoenix wand..." (*Deathly Hallows* 293). Once again it is affirmed: truth destroys pedestals, truth is the liberating gateway to adulthood and independence, but truth is also painful.

Ideally journalism is meant to uncover truth. Generally people desire the media to present truth, and the public is generally inclined to believe the media. Simultaneously it is commonly acknowledged that the media can twist, tweak and reinvent reality. This tension is brilliantly exposed by Rowling through *The Daily Prophet* and its star reporter Rita Skeeter. Rita Skeeter is the reincarnation of the sensation hungry reporter. She is literal slyness in flesh, bugging is not only one of her methods; at the end of *The Goblet of Fire* we learn that she is a beetle Animagus. Rowling's characterization of Skeeter does not favor journalism invading privacy. The passage describing Skeeter's interview with Harry after he is made school champion in *The Goblet of Fire* hyperbolically depicts how ruthlessly and immorally journalists may twist the truth to make front page stories. Skeeter's favorite tool the Quick-Quotes Quill, edits the truth in real time, here she asks Harry about his parents, and the quill interprets:

'Can you remember your parents at all?' said Rita Skeeter, talking over him. 'No,' said Harry. 'How do you think they'd feel if they knew you were competing in the Triwizard Tournament? Proud? Worried? Angry?' Harry was feeling really annoyed now. How on earth was he to know how his parents would feel if they were alive? He could feel Rita Skeeter watching him very intently. Frowning, he avoided her gaze and looked down at the words the quill had just written.

*Tears fill those startlingly green eyes as our conversation turns to the parents he can barely remember.*

‘I have NOT got tears in my eyes!’ said Harry loudly. (268-269)

The didactic communication could not be more straightforward. Cynically manipulating an (inexperienced in this case) interview object is wrong. Twisting the truth is wrong. The instructive message is similarly illuminated, do not trust reporters, reporters are bad people that beguile the truth.

Manipulating the truth is a serious thing in the Potter universe. Through Harry and Hermione’s experience with Skeeter in *The Goblet of Fire* we learn that the consequences are painful. So, when Hermione exercises justice and imprisons Skeeter in a glass jar we rejoice. Likewise we are pleased to see Hermione outsmart Rita Skeeter and exploit her services to her own benefit in *The Order of the Phoenix*. Hermione has understood how the media works and how the *Daily Prophet* serves as propaganda organ for the Ministry of Magic, Hermione demands that Skeeter report the true story: “‘You *want* me to report what he says about He Who Must Not Be Named?’ Rita asked Hermione in a hushed voice. ‘Yes, I do,’ said Hermione. ‘The true story. All the facts. Exactly as Harry reports them...’” (500). Threatening Rita with reporting her unregistered Animagus ability to the authorities, Hermione gets her way and Rita writes the piece. To the reader’s satisfaction Skeeter gets to taste her own medicine. Exposing the truth about Voldemort’s return is cardinal, treating villainous journalists with integrity is immaterial and independently exercising justice on behalf of truth is okay when it is well deserved. Summarized: in the moral universe of Harry Potter the sensation hungry reporter is the devil’s pen and represents the corrupted government.

Harry and Dumbledore are frustrated that the Ministry of Magic, the government, won’t acknowledge Voldemort’s return. Even after Voldemort has attacked Harry and fought Dumbledore, in person, at the Department of Mysteries, Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, is unwilling to recognize his return, Dumbledore confronts him:



Cornelius, I am ready to fight your men – and win, again!’ said Dumbledore in a thunderous voice. ‘But a few minutes ago you saw proof, with your own eyes, that I have been telling you the truth for a year. Lord Voldemort has returned, you have been chasing the wrong man for twelve months, and it is time you listened to some sense!’  
(*Order of the Phoenix* 721)

Broadcasting the truth of Voldemort’s return is of primary importance to Dumbledore. Only through acknowledging the truth of evil’s existence can the wizard community, and the world, survive.

The dynamics of truth in the Potter universe is complex. As a series revolving around mystery truth is by default important – truth is the answer and the solution. Seen as a Bildungsroman (or as a coming of age journey) truth is the stepping stone to adulthood and viewed as fantasy fiction truth is the battle between good and evil. Death, however, appears to be the ultimate truth. The greatest mystery to be discovered in the saga is that Harry must die in order to save the world, likewise the deaths of his parents, mentors and friends is what closes the coming of age chapter of Harry’s life and leaves him to decide for himself whether or not he should willingly walk to his own death. Finally, death in the context of the battle between good and evil is the fight against death. For as demonstrated by Voldemort, only the most horribly evil person could split up his soul into Horcruxes – and doing it requires the death of an innocent victim, a murder in cold blood!

## Conclusion

“Behind the witchcraft and the wizardry lies an intensely moral fable about good and evil, love and hatred, life and death” these are the words of James Runcie at the very beginning of his documentary film: *J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life*. I believe Runcie is on to something. This thesis has demonstrated: in the moral universe of Harry Potter diversity is dealt with in a politically correct way; bravery is a core value, friendship is essential for greatness, love is the salving power and truth exists (and its ultimate expression is death). In this concluding chapter I will try to tie up the loose ends of each chapter, or topic.

The moral qualities of the Potter world comprise a complex matrix. Bravery and friendship is at the center surrounded by a web of conflicting ideas. Analyzing the concept of love reveals competition between predestination and free choice. Looking at the ultimate truth, death, unveils both a strong insistency that an indefinable afterlife exists and that it does not. Examining diversity reveals two opposing explanations for the house-elves’ downtrodden and enslaved situation, nature and nurture. They loyally serve their masters because that’s the way they are and what they want (nature), and they serve because that’s what they are taught through generations of oppression (nurture).

The first topic dealt with in this thesis, diversity, is ridden with an inner moral tension. Diversity is both embraced, through Harry’s heroic fighting against the neo-Nazis and Hermione’s fight for House-elf liberty, and shunned through the inclusion of Nazi Slytherin at Hogwarts. Similarly, diversity is embraced through Harry and his friends’ acceptance of muggles and shunned through the unflattering portrayal of the middle class muggle family – the Dursley’s. Summed up, there is a tension between traditional exclusive aristocratic values and modern politically correct values.

Hierarchy among creatures, however, is not exclusive to Rowling’s work, we find it in Tolkien and Lewis’ fantastical universes as well. In Tolkien’s universe the elves are the most

exalted beings, followed by humans, dwarfs and lastly hobbits. In *The Lord of the Rings* this hierarchy is deconstructed as Frodo, the hobbit, successfully destroys the ring and transforms into a hero. Symbolically this happens at the end of the trilogy after Frodo and Sam have been rescued from Mount Doom and are met with song: “Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise!...” and a humble Aragorn, King of Gondor: “he bowed his knee before them; and taking them by the hand, Frodo upon his right and Sam upon his left, he led them to the throne” (*The Return of the King* 276.277). Tolkien effectively reverses the hierarchical order; the lowly hobbit is exalted and placed on the King’s throne. It is a literary moment that erases aristocracy and uplifts individual merit, bravery and resilience. Lewis’ subversion of hierarchy is similar to Tolkien’s. Lewis turns children into the great Kings and Queens of his fantasy kingdom, Narnia, and through his tale of Reepicheep, the warrior mouse, he didactically, in Aesopian style, instructs the readers, that low status does not exclude bravery and the ability to achieve great things. The lesson is obvious, what matters most in life is not tied to titles, aristocracy or hierarchical position. These carnivalesque elements turning the hierarchy topsy turvey are vital in Rowling’s saga. Harry is the child hero, and underdog victors are queuing up in *The Deathly Hallows* hall of fame: Neville (learning difficulties), Luna (eccentric weirdo), Ron (clumsy baby brother) and Hermione (muggle born). I would argue, however, that Rowling has more than traditional fairy tale subversion of hierarchy in her world; Rowling’s universe differs from that of Tolkien and Lewis because it openly depicts slavery, Nazism and holocaust.

The enslavement of the house-elves, the story of Grindelwald, pureblood ideology, Voldemort’s dictatorial rule and the Muggle-Born Registration Commission forever engrave diversity as a theme in the saga. For successful-middle class-Hermione, the enslavement of the house-elves and neo-Nazi Voldemort’s pureblood ideology stand out as outdated and horrendous. As readers that can identify with Hermione’s muggle perspective, we are able to

distance ourselves from these horrors of the wizard world. However, on further thought one realizes that slavery, in the form of human trafficking, and pureblood ideology in the shape of racism, and even neo-Nazism, are highly relevant issues in the real world. These directly relatable issues establish Rowling as a spokeswoman of morals; she takes it a step further than a moral fable – even if just elusively, the books do suggest that there are things in our world that are morally wrong.

The idea of absolute wrong in the Harry Potter universe rests on the western vision of Holocaust. In their essay, “Holocaust History Amongst The Hallows--Understanding Evil in Harry Potter,” Aida Patient and Kori Street explain that Hitler, the Nazis and the Holocaust “have become the quintessential evil or archetypal metaphor for evil” (201). They conclude that Rowling uses “historically-referenced frameworks as a way to convey evil” (226). The argument is sensible, both Grindelwald, defeated in the historic year of 1945, with his racist motto: for the greater good and muggle hater, Voldemort, allude to Hitler. The Ministry of Magic - ever so slow in recognizing the danger of Voldemort’s return, leads the thoughts to the naïve European non-interference politics in the nineteen thirties, and the list could go on. The method is effective. In the European consciousness it is a universally acknowledged truth that Holocaust was a crime. Hitler’s attack on diversity is the embodiment of evil in the western part of the world. Placing her devil (Voldemort) within this framework, Rowling achieves two things, one, she does not have to define evil, it is already done for her (evil equals Hitler), two, she establishes that to act morally is to fight Voldemort, regardless of the cost. The Holocaust paradigm leaves no room for discussion; the reader does not have to wonder, what is the bad side, what is the good? He or she knows instinctively that Hitler-Voldemort is bad. In short, evil in the Harry Potter universe is represented by the memory of the most monumental anti diversity figure in history, Adolf Hitler. Evil in the Harry Potter

universe is the opposite of cultivating a diverse society, evil is to ruthlessly kill and weed, creating a conformity culture where the power hungry dictator can rule.

Though grounded in history, the Holocaust vision is very much present in the world of fantasy literature. Also here the intertextual links between Rowling, Tolkien and Lewis are easily discerned. It is hard to think of a literary work that has been read as a World War II narrative to a larger degree than Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Given the historical and biographical context of its authorship it is no wonder. The trilogy is a war story, it was written during World War II and Tolkien himself had soldier experience from the trenches of the Great War. Antagonist, Saruman, easily lends himself as a Hitler figure and his imperial project is reminiscent of the Nazi's Third Reich Empire.

Though not a war story to the same degree as *The Lord of the Rings*, World War II is the backdrop for Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* begins as the four Pevensie children are sent away to the country side because of the London air raids. Ironically, once safely situated outside the city they are magically transported to Narnia, where they fight their own World War against the oppressors and enemies of the Narnians – those who cannot stand the diverse Narnian population of talking animals, centaurs, fauns and trees. Evil in Narnia, like evil in Rowling's wizard world, is to fight for exclusivity, conformity and World Empire.

Unlike diversity the topics of bravery and friendship do not pose any immediate moral tensions in the narrative. Bravery and friendship are simply there as fixed points at the apex of moral qualities. There is no proper hero in fantasy without bravery and there is no children's novel without friendship to fill the relational vacuum of the orphan. The saga revolves around the themes of bravery and friendship. Main character, Harry, commits the bravest act of all, he saves the world; and the most prominent sub characters, Ron and Hermione, together with Harry, represent the archetype of friendship and loyalty.

Bravery in Harry's world, however, sticks deeper than slaying the dragon and saving the damsel in distress. Combat and chivalry are manifestations of conquered fear, that is obvious, but Rowling takes it a step further by suggesting that conquering psychological fears and withstanding psychological pressure and temptation is just as much an act of bravery as winning a duel. Harry's ultimate test is more psychological than physical. Indeed, the prospect of meeting Lord Voldemort is fearsome, however, it is the knowledge of knowing that he must die, that he is going to die, the death angst, so to speak that is Harry's chief fear as he enters the forest for the last time in *The Deathly Hallows*. It echoes the idea we find in the gospels: it was hard for Jesus to be nailed to the cross, but the psychological stress of the Gethsemane experience was even more arduous. In essence, overcoming the psychological pressure and making the difficult decision is more stressful, and thus, braver than the actual act of fighting or dying. This is not only demonstrated by Harry, Snape's life, lived in the psychologically strained position of double agent, as well as Dumbledore's potion drinking experience, while Horcrux hunting in the cave in *The Half-Blood Prince*, are good points in case. In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* bravery is also more than combat and fighting. Frodo's quest as the ring bearer is all about enduring physical challenges, but more than that it is about overcoming mental obstacles. The ring is a tremendous source of power and it requires strength of character to withstand the temptation to use it for personal gain. Not only is it difficult to refrain from exploiting the powers of the ring, but carrying the ring is a burden in itself as it wearies the bearer by inflicting negativity and bad thoughts. Discussing bravery in the Harry Potter books Eliana Ionoaia, puts it this way: "We may thus conclude that Harry's bravery is far from being fearlessness, and that it most intimately resembles an unwavering mastery of his fear, and unwillingness to bow down before what he considers morally reprehensible" (68). In sum, bravery in both Middle earth and Rowling's wizard world is to

overcome one's physical and psychological fears and the temptation to succumb to greed and comfort when sacrifice is called for.

Friendship is imperative in both fantasy and children's literature. The fantasy hero needs a helper friend, like Frodo needs Sam. In children's literature the orphaned child needs friends to fill the parent gap, like Pippi Longstocking needs Tommy and Annika. Friendship in Harry's world is both these and more. Harry needs helpers to succeed with his quest, and lacking parents and family, friends have to meet his social and relational needs. Friendship in Rowling's universe, however, exceeds these two; this is demonstrated by the threesome, Harry, Ron and Hermione. They are equals that fight, disagree and get jealous in addition to supporting each other. By deliberately highlighting Ron's jealousy when Harry is made Triwizard champion, Harry's anger with both Ron and Hermione in *The Order of the Phoenix*, and Hermione's tremendous frustration with Harry and Ron's attitude towards S.P.E.W, Rowling turns the archetype group of friends into something more than a symbol of loyalty, the story of Harry, Ron and Hermione becomes a tale of morality. Thus rather than just being invited to admire their demonstration of loyalty; we are invited to learn from their mistakes.

The topics of love and truth inhibit contradictions to a larger degree than friendship and bravery. Love is a metaphysical, abstract and inexplicable power and love is the mere concrete result of choices and actions. Love is both predestined and chosen. Harry has love because of his mother's sacrifice and Harry has love because he chooses to act lovingly. Love is the redemptive difference between the bad people who are "lost" and good people who live. Redemption only requires a little bit of love; Snape is counted among the good, because of his love for Lily, and the Malfoys survive because of their love for their son, Draco. Dumbledore explains to Harry that love and selfishness have coexisted in his own life: "I loved them, I loved my parents, I loved my brother and my sister, but I was selfish, Harry, more selfish than

you, who are a remarkably selfless person, could possibly imagine” (*Deathly Hallows* 573).

In short, evil, of the kind that requires eradication, is the substance that is left when love, in all its different forms, is plucked away. Evil in the Potter universe equals the absence of love. Love in turn is what makes it worthwhile to live. Pity those who live without love! Is Dumbledore’s message to Harry at King’s Cross in *The Deathly Hallows* when Harry has to decide, whether or not to resume life to duel with Voldemort for the last time. By returning, Dumbledore indicates, Harry can perhaps make sure that less people live without love, he says: “By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart” (578). Harry has intimate knowledge of what Dumbledore is talking about. Harry has grown up without parents because they were cruelly murdered and torn away. Likewise, Voldemort, who has the most obviously maimed soul of all, as he has literally hacked it to pieces, also grew up as an orphan, because his father had no love for him or his mother.

Despite this, the story of Harry Potter is a story of hope and the redemptive powers of love. Because of his parents, and his mother’s love in particular, Voldemort is incapable of killing Harry and when Harry annihilates Voldemort it is by the most powerful demonstration of love that exists in life and literature, self sacrifice. Similarly it is Lily and Harry’s acts of self sacrifice that enable the restoration of family. By the power of Lily and Harry’s love the story comes full cycle. The epilogue chapter, “Nineteen Years Later,” in *The Deathly Hallows* gives us a glimpse of two happy families: Harry and Ginny, with their children James, Lily and Albus Severus and Ron and Hermione, with their children Hugo and Rose. The saga begins with a description of the destruction of the protagonist’s family and it ends with a description of its restoration. Harry is once more part of a happy family, and the legacy of James and Lily Potter, Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape, who died fighting for love, are secured through his children. In the Harry Potter world, love is crucial both on the macrocosmic and the microcosmic scale, love is the force that upholds the universe and love



is the force that keeps families and friends, together. Love is security and comfort, both privately and publicly.

Truth in Harry Potter's moral universe operates on three levels: the mundane, the psychological and the metaphysical/supernatural. On the mundane everyday level the theme of truth surfaces as Harry despairs over Rita Skeeter's journalistic manipulation and as Harry and friends, lie to the teachers to avoid trouble and adult interference. On the psychological level truth emerges as Harry is infuriated because father figure Dumbledore has withheld information about his "destiny." Truth on the metaphysical level is the discovery of good, evil and death. Summarized and simply formulated, truth is honesty. Honesty, however, means different things in different situations. In the case of Harry and his friends lying to the teachers to avoid interference with their mystery solving, the moral is: it is permissible to lie in the service of good. Dealing with Rita Skeeter the moral is: manipulating the truth to obtain publication and fame is nauseating. Presented with the spineless and bureaucracy ridden Ministry of Magic the moral is: evil exists, fight it! In the face of death the moral is: be good so you don't have to fear it. But, when it comes to Harry's anger with Dumbledore the moral is more dubious. Was Dumbledore right to present the truth for Harry incrementally, or not? For as we learn, Dumbledore expresses regret that he doubted Harry's character and ability to handle the truth at a young age, at the same time it is clear that this was part of his master plan all along. The story is told through Harry's perspective and when Harry is angry at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix* and at the beginning of *The Deathly Hallows*, because Dumbledore has kept him in the dark, we sympathize with him. More importantly, Harry comes to terms with Dumbledore's choice, in fact at the very end he doesn't care, the only thing he cares about is destroying Voldemort. Thus, Harry's justified questioning of Dumbledore's character is reduced to teenage rebellion and Dumbledore's authority as father figure, mentor and adult

is restored. We can conclude that the moral is: adults have a prerogative right to manage truth as they find suitable when dealing with children.

Morality is important in the Harry Potter saga both as a work of children's literature and as fantasy literature. As children's literature it is didactically correct portraying the restoration of the authority of the adult and as fantasy literature it appropriately deals with the large and serious questions of love, death and truth in concrete ways. Attempting to answer the seemingly ever recurring question when discussing Harry Potter: why have the books become so popular? Children's literature scholar Maria Nikolajeva, in concluding her essay, "Harry Potter – A Return to the Romantic Hero," argues that Rowling's books have met the need for children's fiction displaying characters that are neither, completely one dimensional and formulaic, nor entirely ambivalent and postmodern. She says: "The fortunate blend of the romantic and the ironic, the straightforward and the reasonably intricate, the heroic and the everyday in Harry Potter appeared as a response to these contradictory needs, and, sarcastic voices notwithstanding, seems to have reconciled the incompatible desires" (140). In light of this thesis' discussion of morality, Nikolajeva's summary appears reasonable. The Harry Potter saga includes straightforward moral messages, yet they are not repulsively categorical or offensive. Read as a morality tale Rowling's seven texts have their place between the extremes of the didactic stories such as Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*, and Lewis Carroll's nonsensical *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. Seen from this perspective the Harry Potter books arise as the perfect merge between moral fable and nonsense story – a morality tale for the twenty-first century.

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