



Master of Death: Love and Spirituality in the Harry Potter Series

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Master of Death:
Love and Spirituality in the *Harry Potter* Series

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Abstract

J. K. Rowling creates a world in which there is no religion and no god, but in which there is still a great sense of morality and love. In her seven-book *Harry Potter* series, Rowling shows that life is not about avoiding death, but rather about following the journey and living fully through love. Rowling presents the reader with a world in which life and death occupy a liminal space. Throughout the series, she shows the reader how the lines between life and death are blurred, and how human souls are the connection and gateway to the afterlife. This is a unique view in young adult literature, and a compelling one in today's society. Rowling presents the reader with a clear idea about what happens to the soul after death: morally good souls have a chance to go on to another space after death, while souls mutilated by evil simply cease to be. This is a compelling thought, especially in the twenty-first century as many people are moving away from organized religion, but still want to believe in a sense of life after death. Rowling is not limited to a traditional Christian framework, and is therefore able to investigate her own ideas of morality and the afterlife in a unique way. Ultimately, she reveals the world of the dead is connected to the world of the living in a wonderful way: death is not something to be feared, but rather we should fear a life lived without love.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, children's literature consisted of cautionary tales and stories of exemplary behavior, both of which had the intention of teaching children to be good and to obey their parents. During that time, death and violence were prevalent in the stories, but mostly used as grisly punishments to scare children. Children's literature in the twentieth century pushed death and violence into the margins, and these themes were, for the most part, avoided (Maria Tatar OUTH 7-8). The *Harry Potter* books, by J. K. Rowling, mark a return to discussing death and violence openly, but in a different way than the earlier literature.

The *Harry Potter* book series by J. K. Rowling has been immensely popular since the first *Harry Potter* novel, *The Philosopher's Stone*, came out in 1997, and has only gained popularity over the years. The first movie based on the books came out in 2001, only four years after the first book. The books are about a boy named Harry Potter, who attends a wizarding school, learns magic, and has a mortal enemy named Voldemort. Harry and his friends are all flawed characters, growing up in a magical world in which they use spells, charms, and potions, as well as a world in which they have evil and lethal enemies. The international phenomenon of the *Harry Potter* books has provided food for thought about adolescent literature and what makes it interesting to children and teenagers.

The *Harry Potter* series includes many elements that children can relate to. The trio of Harry, Ron, and Hermione is easy to identify with, especially pitted against the rival group of Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle. What child does not want to believe in a paracosm where magic exists, and where children find out they are actually witches and wizards, and are able to take a scarlet steam engine to school in a castle? In addition, Rowling gives Harry and his friends complete agency: they are able to actually change the world. Throughout his school days, when Harry has a mystery to solve, the teachers and authorities do not always help or believe him. But he is able, with his friends, to solve those mysteries, and ultimately the children are the ones who succeed at thwarting Voldemort. Harry, a boy, is able to fight the forces of evil, and with Hermione's brilliance and Ron's loyalty, is able to set the world to rights.

Children today are being brought up to think more independently, to have freedom to believe in what they choose, and the world is becoming a place where young adults need to answer hard questions about morality, death, and the soul, often without religion or God. The *Harry Potter* series openly discusses death, the soul, and morality, but does not use religion to do so. It is neither a cautionary tale telling children to listen to their parents, nor is it a story that avoids dark or difficult subjects. Children have always been intrigued by the hard facts of life, and these harsh realities of disease, mortality, and violence were used in early children's literature to serve the purpose of organized religion. In the 20th century, there is an effort to operate without a religious or behavioral agenda, though there are undoubtedly other agendas at work. Many stories, like *Harry Potter*, help today's children navigate their own moral compass.

In *His Dark Materials*, another series for young adults, Philip Pullman also discusses death, the soul, and religion. Little Lyra Belacqua is brave and strong, has a special skill in reading a truth-telling instrument, and goes to the end of world to keep a promise she made to a friend. She is able to see right from wrong in a universe where organized religion is evil and corrupt. In the series, “God” is not the Creator: he is the first angel, and he lied to all the angels who came after him. Every human being has a soul, and in Lyra’s world, these souls are physically manifested as a “daemon.” But the daemons are not affected by one’s morality, nor do they have any effect on where one goes after they die. As opposed to Rowling’s series about love and spirituality without religion, Pullman’s series illustrates the evils of Christianity and organized religion, and the importance of fighting against those constructs. But both have a main character that is to be emulated: fallible, flawed, and yet through difficult times, remains strong and morally pure.

John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* is a popular 21st century novel, and a very different one from the fantastical stories of Harry and Lyra. Green’s hyperrealism is in stark contrast to the paracosms created by Rowling and Pullman. *The Fault in Our Stars* centers on teenagers with cancer, exploring and navigating the reality of a disability, as opposed to characters with magical abilities. Although Green also discusses death and dying, in *Harry Potter* the young adults are given agency, instead of incapacity. Realism is popular in young adult fiction today, and it could be argued that exploring real-life issues in teenage literature is much more important than escaping into a made-up world. However, Rowling’s imaginary world makes it possible for her to talk about the soul and the afterlife in a completely unique way which would not be possible in a story that takes

place in the real world. In addition, it would be untrue to think that, just because Harry resides in a world where magic exists, that he is not facing many of the same issues that children face in our own society. Harry must deal with the death of his parents, a hard childhood, the stress of school, conflicts between friends, and the confusion and frustration that comes with being a teenager. True, most teenagers are not also pitted against the most powerful dark wizard of all time, but Rowling includes lessons within the fantasy that can be transposed to real-world situations.

Rowling presents the reader with a world in which life and death occupy a liminal space. Throughout the series, she shows the reader how the lines between life and death are blurred, and how human souls are the connection and gateway to the afterlife. Although discussing morality and the soul is not a new concept in children's literature, Rowling presents us with a unique view, and a compelling one in today's society. Children and young adults have always had to grapple with the dark subject of death, and as we grow away from organized religion, it is important for many to feel that we are still connected to our departed loved ones, and that we have the comfort of knowing that we will live on after death. As Harry's (and Voldemort's) journey shows, ancestors are integral to our own experience: we need to understand where we came from so that we know where we are headed.

There have been many different reactions to the series by people and communities, the most heated reaction coming from the Christian community. Interestingly, however, they are not all on the same page about how to react to Harry Potter and his story of finding out that he is a wizard and attending the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, as well as how he gets into all sorts of adventures, battles

and magical mayhem. Some Christians are trying to promote the story of Harry Potter as a Christian story, while others believe that the story is evil and corruptive and should be banned from schools and libraries. But regardless of what direction some Christians are trying to force Harry Potter into, Rowling's series of magical books has its own spiritual framework. It may have some similarities to structures in Christianity, but is absolutely its own entity. Rowling presents the reader with a clear idea about what happens to the soul after death: morally good souls have a chance to go on to another space after death, while souls mutilated by evil simply cease to be. This is a compelling thought, especially in the twenty-first century as many people are moving away from organized religion, but still want to believe in a sense of life after death. Rowling is not limited to a traditional Christian framework, and is therefore able to investigate her own ideas of morality and the afterlife in a unique way. Ultimately, she reveals the world of the dead is connected to the world of the living in a wonderful way: death is not something to be feared, but rather we should fear a life lived without love.

In an interview in 2007, Maria Tatar stated: "It's no accident that many children's books begin with bored children...How do you move from boredom to curiosity – how do you animate the child? My answer is: by using the shock value of beauty and horror, administering jolts and shimmers that flip a switch in the mind" (Craig Lambert 38). She explains that "the [fairy] tales not only have this magical, glittery sparkle, but also a dark, horrific side that stages our deepest anxieties and fears" (Lambert 38). J. K. Rowling uses this same approach in the *Harry Potter* novels by creating a magical world of spells, castles, and adventures, but also including death like a dark ribbon running through the story. Rowling uses magic as a wonderful way to draw in her readers and create an

entertaining store, but she is also showing the importance of language and education, promoting literacy and reading, throughout the series. Harry never could have defeated Voldemort without his Hogwarts education, his knowledge of spells, and Hermione's love of knowledge and books.

As children are growing up, the stories they read become more and more complex. They learn that magic only exists in their imagination, but that does not mean that fairy tales lose their power. While outside of the fairy tale spells, curses, and charms do not have the power to enact physical change, other concepts, such as morality, bravery, and acceptance, still hold true and may be transposed (Tatar WFTM 57). In the end, Harry Potter is exceptional, not because of the spells he casts, but because of who he is as a person, and the choices he has made in his life.

Death was a prevalent theme in stories before the early nineteenth century, and many folktales included torture and execution. Earlier tales were made into stories for children by taking out the adult humor and adding morality and spiritual guidance. Rather than removing the violence and death to make them lighter for children, "they preserved and often intensified it, though usually only when scenes of physical suffering or mental torment could be invested with a higher moral purpose." At the time, children's stories were either cautionary tales to frighten children into obeying their parents, or tales of exemplary behavior that were meant to encourage similar actions (Tatar OWTB 5-8).

In the late nineteenth century, children's literature began a shift in focus. Death and violence were no longer openly discussed and portrayed, and they became subjects that were deemed inappropriate for children's literature. If they were discussed at all, it was in a superficial way. The *Harry Potter* series changes this. Tatar states that Rowling

“writes *for* children but never *down* to them...[she] does not shy away from the great existential mysteries: death and loss, cruelty and compassion, desire and depression” (Lambert 41). She weaves a story full of complex characters, mystery, and humor, but also orphans, torture, destruction, bigotry, and quests for power. Through objects and creatures that occupy a liminal space between life and death, and a unique representation of the human soul and its connection to love and morality, Rowling creates her own spiritual framework throughout the series that resonates with children and adults all over the world.

Chapter II

Creatures and Objects

J. K. Rowling creates a world in *Harry Potter* where the dead are still very connected to the living. She gives the reader ghosts on the one hand, which are an embodiment of the dead, yet on the other hand leads us to an understanding that the dead make themselves most powerfully felt through memory. They live on in our heads and our hearts well after they are gone from this world. Rowling weaves the topic of death and tragedy into her story along with a good dose of comedy. As we are reading, even about dark and difficult subjects, there is often a comedic figure, such as the melodramatic bathroom-dwelling Moaning Myrtle or the “Nearly Headless” Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington, to make the concept of ghosts and dying more accessible. Rowling also incorporates the universal love as chocolate and its mood-enhancing properties into the story. In the magical world, chocolate is a remedy for the fear and depression associated with dementors, which is an amusing idea a lot of readers can appreciate. With wit, humor, and incredible imagination, Rowling shows that it is not just ghosts that haunt the living, but that the dead we love never “truly leave us,” and in memory our loved ones can be so powerful that they become embodied (Rowling POA 6405).

In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling has created many creatures and objects that occupy a liminal space between the living and the dead. One of the most obvious examples of these in-between entities comes in the form of ghosts. Each House at Hogwarts has its own ghost: Nearly Headless Nick, the Bloody Baron, the Grey Lady,

and the Fat Friar. In addition, Moaning Myrtle, a student who died and whose soul never departed, and Professor Binns, who died one day and yet continued teaching, also still haunt the castle. With the regular appearance of these ghosts in daily life, the line between the living and the dead seems porous to the students at Hogwarts. However, it is made clear that not everyone becomes a ghost after they die. Firstly, only a wizard can become a ghost, which means the process must involve magic. In addition, ghosts are only able to inhabit the spaces that they once occupied while living (Rowling HBP 860). This state is not fully understood even by wizards, and is being studied in the Department of Mysteries.

Moaning Myrtle died in the bathroom that she haunts, often referred to as “Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom” because of her frequent presence there (Rowling COS 280). She had a terrible time at Hogwarts, always being bullied and teased, and was killed by a basilisk as she was crying in the bathroom one day. Ever since then, she has remained in the school, mostly in that bathroom, oftentimes still crying and upset. The Grey Lady was Helena Ravenclaw in life, the daughter of Hogwarts co-founder Rowena Ravenclaw. Helena stole a famous magical diadem from her mother and ran away, so Rowena sent a man after her to bring her back. This man loved Helena, but was hot-tempered, and stabbed Helena when she refused to return with him. This man was the Bloody Baron in life, who killed himself after seeing what he had done (Rowling DH 616). Both of them, distraught and meeting a sudden and violent end, did not go on. As ghosts, they still reside within Hogwarts, with regret and sadness. Ghosts are an “imprint of a departed soul left upon the earth,” and are transparent (HBP 6924). Although ghosts

can float through solid objects, they are cold to touch: Harry's hands felt as though they had "been thrust into icy water" when Nick tried to grasp them (DH 613).

Although many of the living ask them, ghosts do not know what it is like to die. After Sirius Black's death in *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry was hopeful that perhaps Sirius would be a ghost, and asked Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost of Gryffindor House, about it. "'He will not come back,'" Nick tells Harry. "'He will have...gone on.'" Nick was afraid of death, and chose to remain behind, but admits that now he is "neither here nor there" and that he chose a "feeble imitation of life" instead of going on to what lay beyond (Rowling OOTP 861). Although it is possible to stay behind and therefore become a ghost, most people do not choose to do so, and Sirius's soul has traveled on. "The ghosts that haunt Hogwarts represent a failed relation between death and life. The deathday celebrations, which mirror and invert the Potter books' birthdays, are overcast with nostalgia for life lost, a state that defines the ghosts generally" (Shira Wolosky 159). The ghosts are in a constant condition of mourning. This is one of the areas in which Rowling's use of comedy helps to cut through the tragic elements of death and regret. Ghosts represent a rather sad state, and yet the character of Nearly Headless Nick is imbued with dark humor: when he was killed by an attempted beheading, Nick's head was not fully chopped from his body. This is a constant embarrassment to him and prevents him from joining the Headless Hunt, in which he so desperately wants to ride.

In the first book, *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Harry encounters the Mirror of Erised. "Erised" is "desire" spelled backwards (as if one was looking in the mirror while reading it), and this mirror shows witches and wizards what it is they most desire. When Harry looks into the mirror, he sees himself with his mother and father: "Harry was looking at

his family, for the first time in his life” (Rowling SS 207). There were his parents, standing right behind him, smiling. Since Harry’s parents died when he was a baby, this is the closest he comes to being with them. The mirror depicts such a life-like picture that it is hard for Harry to tear himself away.

The dead are also ever-present in painted portraits that move and speak, and photographs of people who can wave and laugh. The old headmasters of Hogwarts have the ability after death of continuing to serve the current headmaster by listening from their portraits on the walls and giving counsel. Rowling gives a whole new meaning to the power of art, as the people painted in magical portraits can see, interact with each other and the living, and, if there are multiple portraits of the same person, they can move from frame to frame. While non-magical paintings can show an image or freeze a moment in time, magical portraits can actually have independent thoughts, and can communicate to those witches and wizards still living. “These portraits act as windows between the worlds of death and life” (Wolosky 20). These portraits are, however, different from ghosts in that they are not the imprint of a soul left upon the earth, but rather a multi-dimensional image of a person captured in a magical photograph or portrait. These magical photos and portraits also exist even while a witch or wizard is living, and are not limited to creation after death.

Rowling has also created a spell that resurrects the dead in some form. *Priori Incantatem*, or the Reverse Spell Effect, is a spell that is used to show the previous spells cast by a wand. In *The Goblet of Fire*, when Harry and Voldemort are dueling in the cemetery, the spells issued by their wands “met in midair” and “beads of light” started to appear (Rowling GOF 9861). As Harry focused on forcing a bead of light into

Voldemort's wand, he inadvertently cast the *Priori Incantatem* spell, and "shadowy figures" came out of Voldemort's wand (GOF 9915). At first, it is a "smoky" Cedric Diggory, and then other people whom Voldemort murdered appear, including Harry's parents. These apparitions of the dead are fleeting, but they can talk and encourage Harry, and even after he tears his wand away, they are able to close in on Voldemort to allow Harry time to run to safety (GOF 9944). This spell is a brief invocation of the dead, but is limited to the spells that were previously cast from the opponent's wand.

The most obvious symbol of the thin boundary separating life from death is the mysterious veil suspended in an old archway in the Department of Mysteries at the Ministry of Magic. Since this archway is located in the Department of Mysteries, it is clear that, even to witches and wizards, it is an enigma that is not well understood. It is a literal veil that separates the living from the dead. The archway seems to lead nowhere, and yet both Harry and Luna can hear whispers and murmurs coming from behind the veil. The veil moves as though someone just walked through the archway, even though nobody is there. Both Harry and Luna are convinced that the noises they hear come from people on the other side of the veil (OOTP 773). Strangely, Ron and Hermione cannot hear the voices. We learn more about the veil when Sirius is struck by Bellatrix's curse in *The Order of the Phoenix*: "He fell through the ancient doorway and disappeared behind the veil, which fluttered for a moment as though in a high wind and then fell back into place" (OOTP 805). Harry thinks Sirius will just appear on the other side, but he has passed from the world of the living. It seems that it was not Bellatrix Lestrange's spell that killed him, but rather passing through the archway itself, since he did not die instantly upon the curse hitting him (nor does it seem to be the Avada Kedavra curse,

since Bellatrix was shooting red jets of light at Sirius, not green). However, it was the force of Bellatrix's spell that pushed him through the archway, which ultimately killed him. Not only did Sirius's soul pass from the world of the living to the world of the dead, but his whole physical form passed over, as well, leaving no body behind.

This physical manifestation of a barrier between the two worlds only works in one way: one can pass easily through from the living to the dead, but it is impossible to pass back through again. Harry and Luna cannot just hear voices through the veil, they also have a strong feeling that there are people standing just on the other side. The longer they look at it, the more mesmerized they both are by the swaying veil, and Harry "felt a very strong inclination to climb up on the dais and walk through it" (OOTP 774). It seems to draw people to it and pull them in, which may also explain why Sirius was so close to it while fighting Bellatrix. This concept, especially in Sirius' case, speaks to Freud's "death drive," or the human drive towards death and destruction. Freud says that "human instincts are of two kinds: those that conserve and unify,...and the instincts to destroy and kill" (Sigmund Freud 8). He argues that this is not good and evil, but rather that both instincts are blended together in all of us, and that there are always multiple motives that affect our actions. We are all pushed towards self-preservation and life, as we are also pushed towards death and self-destruction. The magnetic power of the archway in the Department of Mysteries seems to draw the self-destructive instinct out of people, especially those people who have seen death. In the case of Sirius, it could be argued that he is even more powerfully drawn to the archway because of his current depression. Harry believes that Sirius' hatred of and humiliation from being stuck at Grimmauld Place, helpless and alone, contributed to his passionate dueling of the Death Eaters that

night. He “had concluded that Snape’s snide remarks to Sirius about remaining safely hidden while the rest of the Order of the Phoenix were off fighting Voldemort had probably been a powerful factor in Sirius rushing off to the Ministry the night that he had died” (HBP 2479). While the “death drive” seems to be an instinct in all of us, each person’s is blended with our instinct for life in a different way.

Harry and Luna are also two of the few people who can see thestrals, a creature invented by Rowling that looks like a winged horse with a skeletal body, face with reptilian features, and wide, leathery wings. Unlike the pure white of Pegasus, the winged horse in Greek mythology, thestrals are black with white pupil-less eyes and have dragon-like features. There is a superstition that they are unlucky and are a bad omen to people who see them, but Hagrid explains to the students that they are misunderstood (OOTP 446). They can only be seen by those who have seen death, which gives the reader further insight into why Harry and Luna are the only ones who can hear noises behind the veil at the Department of Mysteries (OOTP 196). Thestrals look sinister and are drawn to the scent of blood, but are actually of a sweet and gentle nature. Rowling shows throughout the series that the veil between life and death is thin, and although death may seem scary, when you finally get a good look at it, there is nothing to fear. Tenebrus, the first thestral born in the Forbidden Forest to Hagrid’s herd, is Hagrid’s personal favorite, and the first to come when Hagrid calls (OOTP 447). The name “Tenebrus” may be derived from *tenebrous*, which means dark, gloomy, and obscure, which comes from the Latin *tenebrae* for “darkness.” This name may suit Tenebrus’ appearance, but is at conflict with his sweet and friendly nature. In addition, the thestrals have an innate sense of direction: all Harry had to do to get to the Ministry of Magic was

to mount a thestral, and just tell it his desired destination. After their travel was done, the thestrals calmly foraged for food in a dumpster, invisible to everyone but witches or wizards who had seen death (OOTP 765-767).

During Harry's first four years at Hogwarts, he thought the school carriages pulled themselves. It was shocking to him to come back to school in his fifth year and see these black, skeletal creatures, and especially surprising that Ron and Hermione did not notice any change. He can only see the thestrals because he witnessed the death of Cedric Diggory at the end of his fourth year. This event changed him, and this change is manifested by now being able to see these death-like creatures. Harry was frightened of them at first, but soon finds that they are smart and trainable creatures, and eventually finds them beautiful (Wolosky 18). It is also of note that Harry could not see thestrals until after witnessing the death of Cedric Diggory, as he did witness his mother's death as a small child. It seems that one must not only see death, but also accept and understand it in order to see the thestrals.

Rowling has created one inanimate object that is connected with death: the Resurrection Stone. One of the three Deathly Hallows, the Stone is an object that gives its possessor the power to bring back the dead. "[T]he dead come back in the forms of ghosts, memories, echoes, and souls drawn back by the Resurrection Stone" (Andrea Stojilkov 144). The Resurrection Stone actually returns the dead to life, but the person comes back still "separated...by a veil," and has neither a full nor happy life (DH 408). The Resurrection Stone brings back the loved ones of those who cannot accept death (Wolosky 157). The story of "The Three Brothers" tells that the Stone does not bring back ghosts or memories, but truly brings the dead back to the world of the living. In the

story, the second brother wanted to bring back the woman he had loved and lost. She did come back to him, but was “sad and cold” and it was clear that she did not belong in the world of the living. The second brother kills himself in order to truly be with her (DH 407). This again illustrates that, though the worlds are connected, the dead cannot pass through the veil to truly live again.

At the end of *The Deathly Hallows*, when Harry turns the Resurrection Stone in his hands, his deceased parents and friends appear, and surround him with smiles and encouragement as he walks towards what he believes will be his death. “They were neither ghost nor truly flesh, he could see that...Less substantial than living bodies, but much more than ghosts, they moved toward him, and on each face, there was the same loving smile” (DH 698). Harry wonders to what extent he has brought them back, but Sirius tells him that they are all part of Harry, and “invisible to anyone else” (DH 700). Unlike Ron and Hermione, Harry is not afraid to live amongst the dead; he is drawn to the loved ones he has lost, and is encouraged by their presence. But unlike what the reader imagines in the story of “The Three Brothers,” when Harry actually uses the Resurrection Stone, it is only the memory of his loved ones he has brought back to him. It is not a true manifestation of the dead being brought back to life.

Rowling has also created a concept called a Horcrux, which is a piece of soul contained within an object or being. A witch or wizard only completes this dark spell by committing murder, which rips the soul, enabling him or her to hide the ripped piece inside a new container. The “hor-” in Horcrux could have many different meanings, from “hoar” (implying advanced age, in keeping with Voldemort’s goal of immortality), the Greek prefix ‘hor-’ (having to do with time), and the French ‘hors’ (implying ‘outside,’

consistent with Voldemort's housing bits of his soul outside his body)" (Hilary Justice 9). "Crux" may mean "the crux of the matter," implying that the Horcruxes are what Harry's destiny and adventure is all about (Justice 8). "Crux" also means "cross" in Latin, and "Hor" means "face" in Ancient Egyptian. Whether Rowling intended this or not, it is interesting to note that Harry, who many readers see as a savior, bears the scar on his face of the Horcrux hidden inside him (Justice 9). There is no one fixed meaning to this, which is also clearly what Rowling intended. In addition to the inadvertent Horcrux inside Harry, Voldemort created six other Horcruxes: his snake, Slytherin's locket, Hufflepuff's cup, Ravenclaw's diadem, Tom Riddle's diary, and Gaunt's ring. The piece of soul fights hard to stay "alive," and can be felt by those around it. In the case of Voldemort's Horcruxes, being near them has a negative effect on people, making them irritable and pessimistic. Slytherin's locket is always cold, even against warm skin, and seems to have a tiny metal heartbeat (DH 276). When Tom Riddle's diary is stabbed by a basilisk fang, it emits a terrible scream, and bleeds torrents of ink (COS 322). Voldemort chooses objects of importance and power to keep the pieces of his precious soul safe, and only very potent weapons, such as basilisk venom and Fiendfyre, can destroy a Horcrux.

After Voldemort's curse killed the Horcrux inside Harry in *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry wakes to find himself in a sort of ghostly King's Cross Station. It seems to be a place of "limbo" in which he encounters Dumbledore. Harry no longer needs his glasses in this place, and Dumbledore's hand is no longer withered from his battle with the Horcrux in Tom Riddle's ring. In this state of being, "Harry's eyesight is immaculate and his lightning-shaped scar gone, Dumbledore's once withered hand is healed, but his nose is still crooked and his piercing blue eyes are hidden behind characteristic half-moon

spectacles” (Stojilkov 141). This begs many questions: what is this heavenly King’s Cross Station? Is this really Dumbledore, or Dumbledore in Harry’s memory? Harry asks Dumbledore if this is real, if it has all been happening inside of his head, to which Dumbledore replies: “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?” (DH 721-723).

From here, Harry could have boarded a train from the station to go on, leaving his physical body behind and “soulless” (Stojilkov 138). Instead, he chose to return to the living. In “Beyond Godric’s Hollow,” Jerry and Jonathan Walls state that this King’s Cross Station “evokes the image of Purgatory, the place of postmortem penitence, penal retribution, and spiritual growth in Catholic doctrine” (Walls 250). The Walls’ discuss how Dumbledore seems to repent and atone for his sins, and the small moaning creature is the damaged piece of Voldemort’s soul that is “beyond repair” (Walls 250). While the ethereal King’s Cross Station does have similarities to the Christian Purgatory, Rowling has made key differences. During Harry’s time in the train station, he is processing what has happened, and thinking about his choices. Harry is not repenting, nor is he being judged. This is a time for reflection for Harry, and he alone is responsible for his decision to return to the world of the living. Regardless of whether or not this is happening “in his head,” it is clear that Harry is suspended between life and death, and the choice between them is in his own hands.

Dementors, dark creatures that feed on human happiness and bring despair wherever they go, are also associated with death. When they appear, there is a dramatic and terrible effect:

“Something had happened to the night. The star-strewn indigo sky was suddenly pitch-black and lightless – the stars, the moon, the misty streetlamps at either end

of the alley had vanished. The distant grumble of cars and the whisper of trees had gone. The balmy evening was suddenly, piercingly, biting cold. They were surrounded by total, impenetrable, silent darkness, as though some giant hand had dropped a thick, icy mantle over the entire alleyway, blinding them” (OOTP 16).

Dementors are “[t]owering, hooded figure[s]” with “gray, slimy, scabbed hands” that devour human souls to survive (OOTP 17). “Dementor” comes from the Latin word *demens*, which means insane. It is also an extension of “demon,” which is an evil creature. The dementors bring depression and darkness, even to Muggles, who cannot see them but feel their presence. When they approach Harry, he hears his mother screaming in her last moments, and relives his worst memory. Sadly, he sometimes welcomes this, as it is the only time he is able to hear his mother’s voice. But dementors are what Harry fears the most, as they bring back all of his fear and hopelessness. Since Harry has so many more terrible memories than most people his age, he reacts very strongly to the dementors, and sometimes even loses consciousness. As Professor Lupin shows Harry, Ron, and Hermione, chocolate is a remedy for dispelling the feelings brought on by dementors (POA 1321). This is another one of Rowling’s wonderful tactics of softening tragedy and fear by introducing a feature that the reader may smile about.

Dementors are figures that embody our own internal depression, and are only fought by using the Patronus charm, *Expecto Patronum* (Wolosky 26-27). *Expecto Patronum* means “I expect (or await) a guardian” in Latin, and the word “patronus” meant “protector,” such as a patron. The term “patron” comes from “pater,” which means “father” in Latin, so it includes that connotation, as well. A Patronus in the *Harry Potter* series is a guardian that takes the shape of an animal (generally the animal that the witch or wizard feels the deepest affinity) that is produced by a Patronus Charm. It is a silvery, shining creature that bursts out of a wizard’s wand to ward off the dementor.

Interestingly, some wizards' Patronuses take on the shape of other people's to whom they have a strong connection. For example, "'Snape's Patronus was a doe,' said Harry, 'the same as my mother's, because he loved her for nearly all of his life, from the time when they were children'" (DH 740).

Dumbledore always taught Harry that the dead we love never truly leave us. When Harry is in great danger, he produces a Patronus that embodies his father's Animagus shape: "Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that *particular* Patronus? Prongs rode again last night" (POA 6405). Not only does Dumbledore believe that the dead live on in our memories and hearts, but also that they stay alive as Patronuses. With these Patronuses, Rowling shows the reader that "love as an invincible force" can protect Harry long after his family and/or friends have died (Stojilkov 146).

In addition, Rowling shows how Harry's parents live on through his physical appearance, as is the case in even the non-magical world. Harry looks just like his father, James: "He wore glasses, and his hair was very untidy. It stuck up at the back, just as Harry's did." Harry was often told how much he looked like his father, but he has the eyes of his mother, Lily: "*her eyes are just like mine*, Harry thought" (SS 207). Severus Snape, who loved Lily almost all of his life, asks Harry to look at him after he is mortally wounded, and, "as the green eyes found the black," Snape dies (DH 658). In his last moment, he felt as though he was looking at Lily, and in a way, he was.

Death is a continuation of life: life and death are separate from one another and are opposites in many ways, and yet in other ways, there is no firm boundary between the two (Wolosky 157). In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling shows this in both literal and

figurative ways through her creatures and objects. The veil in the Department of Mysteries shows how delicate and thin the boundary between the dead and the living is, but the greater takeaway from Rowling's text is that the dead may never truly return to life, but that does not mean that they are not still here with us. When Harry uses the Resurrection Stone at the end of *The Deathly Hallows*, and the figures of his deceased loved ones appear, they protect him: "The dementors' chill did not overcome him; he passed through it with his companions, and they acted like Patronuses to him" (DH 700). They were his guardians, shielding him from pain, evil, and death. They were not visible to anyone else, but they were at his side, giving him strength from within. Rowling shows that the worlds of the living and the dead are closely linked, and that, though we may still fear death, there are comforts, consolations, and things far worse than death.

Chapter III

The Soul

Fear of death is a powerful force in children's literature. "Dead" and "alive" are not mutually exclusive states in the *Harry Potter* series, which is a concept that adds another level of intrigue to the story, and gives room for a complex discussion of the soul and the afterlife (Stojilkov 135). The lines between life and death are blurred, as shown through the various creatures and objects in the *Harry Potter* series. These elements in the story also give the reader a framework for understanding how Rowling has created her version of a "soul," and how it relates to the living and an afterlife. The series begins with the death of Harry's parents, and the terrible effect that this has on Harry's life.

In Harry's first year at Hogwarts, when he encounters the Mirror of Erised, he is mesmerized by the reflection he sees: his parents standing behind him, smiling. When Hagrid creates a photo album for Harry at the end of his first year, full of pictures of Harry's parents smiling and waving, Harry was so full of emotion that he could not speak (SS 304). The Mirror and the photos brought his parents back to him in a small way, if only for a moment. The theme of death continues throughout the series, as Cedric Diggory dies, then Sirius Black, and then even Albus Dumbledore. Through all of this tragedy, Harry learns more about accepting death, and about what is important in life. As Dumbledore says, Harry is miraculous not only because he survived a Killing Curse, but because, after all the tragedy in his life, he is still able to love. He is able to rise above all

the fear and heartache, and still be a good person. It is this theme that addresses the nature of morality, and its effect on the soul.

Rowling's idea of the soul is present throughout the books, and is an important aspect of her orthodoxy. Scott Schon's article, "The Soul in Harry Potter," discusses how the soul is "that which makes us most human and makes life most full: our deepest emotions, our ability to love, our moral conscience" (Sehon 9). It is integral to our existence and experience in this life and in the afterlife, and is therefore a compelling concept to readers from all ages and cultures. In the world of *Harry Potter*, the soul is separate from the body, and survives even if the body is destroyed (Sehon 11). On the flip side, Rowling shows that your body can survive without a soul, but only in a vegetative state. Although she builds on a Christian framework, her idea of the soul as a physical and tangible entity that is controlled by one's choices takes the concept a step farther.

In the Christian religion, the soul is separate from the body, and it is the essence of who we are as a person. The soul can go on without the body, but the body cannot survive without the soul. The moral state of the soul is what determines where the soul goes after the death of the body: Heaven, Hell, Limbo (for those souls who have not sinned but have not been baptized), or Purgatory (for those souls who will go on to Heaven, but need purification first). There are many parallels between these concepts in Christianity, and the framework for the soul and spirituality that Rowling has created. The *Harry Potter* series is an epic battle between good and evil, echoing the battle between good and evil in the Bible. Rowling illustrates that there is life after death in Harry's world, and there is also a strong morality in the series, which mirrors Christian values of compassion, kindness, and equality. Sacrificial love is also present in the series,

as Harry's mother dies to save him at the beginning of the story, and Harry sacrifices himself for everyone else at the end. This is a central Christian theme, as Jesus Christ sacrificed himself to save humankind. Though Rowling's construct is fiction, and not a theological concept, it is part of a religious orthodoxy that stems in Christian values of morality, the soul, and an afterlife, but changes it in important ways. God is never mentioned throughout the series, nor is any sort of organized religion or church. The concept of the soul, and of morality being connected to the soul's health, is similar, as is the notion of the soul determining where one goes after death. But instead of a Heaven or a Hell, Rowling has her own ideas about how and where a soul goes, or does not go, after life ends.

In *Harry Potter*, only a soul that is physically in one piece can move on to whatever comes next, which is an important concept for most people who believe in some sort of heaven and desire to ascend there after death (Stojilkov 137). A human soul only remains intact if its owner does not commit evil acts, and only with a whole soul are they able to "go on" to whatever may lie after death. In illustrating this concept, Rowling shows that witches and wizards have control over their soul, and everyone is able to choose their path.

Rowling clearly illustrates that "only souls which are unmarred by evil doing are able to continue their existence in the afterlife, while the ripped and burdened souls die, or exist like Voldemort's, which is a punishment worse than death" (Stojilkov 139). Rowling stresses that there are punishments much worse than death, such as living a life with a soul that is damaged, or living with no soul at all. This idea of the soul being a physical thing that can be ripped apart, or something that a human can live without,

allows the reader to really think about the soul as being its own entity. Not only are your moral choices important in life and crucial to the well-being of your soul, but it is precisely the health or condition of your soul that determines if you continue to exist after you die. Rowling does not discuss the concept of “hell,” but rather, if your soul is damaged by your actions in life, you simply cease to be after death, or find yourself in a perpetual limbo. This furthers her unique ideology that presents the reader with a world in which there is no organized religion, but a strong sense of morality and its connection to the soul and afterlife.

In both *Harry Potter* and Christianity, the body is a shell in which our soul resides, but if our body is destroyed, our soul lives on. However, Rowling has invented the Horcrux, so a Dark witch or wizard can hide a part (or parts) of their soul. While a piece of their soul is stored safely away in a separate container, they cannot die. This is an interesting concept, described by Hermione:

“Look, if I picked up a sword right now, Ron, and ran you through with it, I wouldn’t damage your soul at all.’
‘Which would be a real comfort to me, I’m sure,’ said Ron. Harry laughed.
‘It should be, actually! But my point is that whatever happens to your body, your soul will survive, untouched,’ said Hermione. ‘But it’s the other way round with a Horcrux. The fragment of soul inside it depends on its container, its enchanted body, for survival. It can’t exist without it’” (DH 103-104).

The separated piece of the soul cannot survive without its container, even though a soul can survive without its body. The body and soul are not one entity, and yet they depend on each other (Stojilkov 138).

Creating a Horcrux requires committing a murder. When carrying out this evil act, the soul is ripped, and there is a spell that a Dark witch or wizard can use to encase that torn piece of soul inside an object. The more murders committed, the more potential

Horcruxes can be created, ultimately giving the Dark witch or wizard greater protection against death. Voldemort decided to create six Horcruxes, which would mean that his soul was split into seven pieces. Since seven is a magically powerful number, he believed this would ensure his immortality (HBP 7502).

In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, when Voldemort attempts to kill Harry as a baby, his death curse rebounds back onto him. Since Voldemort had already created and safely stored six Horcruxes, he survives the curse, but enough damage was done to his physical form that he was “mere shadow and vapor” (SS 293). Even after he regained a body, his physical appearance was greatly altered. The more evil acts he committed, the “less human and more snakelike” he looked (Stojilkov 145). A snake is a symbol of rebirth and transformation, as well as of immortality. In addition, the snake is associated with good and evil, and Satan takes a form of a serpent in the Bible as he tempts Eve into sin. On a more visually obvious level, Voldemort's physical form took on the essence of what was happening to his soul as he continued to perform terrible spells. Rowling is showing the reader that evil is ugly, and that you do deep damage to yourself when you commit immoral acts. Voldemort becomes deathly pale, with red eyes, and just slits for a nose, losing his human looks as he loses his humanity. She shows how Voldemort's quest for immortality blinds him to the fact that he has destroyed all hope of actually living forever beyond death. Dumbledore tries to explain this to Voldemort: “[Y]our failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness” (OOTP 813).

However, Rowling shows us that there is way back to the light even after so much dark:

“Isn’t there any way of putting yourself back together?’ Ron asked.
‘Yes,’ said Hermione with a hollow smile, ‘but it would be excruciatingly painful.’
‘Why? How do you do it?’ asked Harry.
‘Remorse,’ said Hermione. ‘You’ve got to really feel what you’ve done’” (DH 101-103).

If there is genuine remorse and regret, the soul can begin to heal and to put itself back together. In doing this, our goodness and humanity can be restored, as can our chances of an afterlife. Instead of being redeemed through prayer, punishment, or any other construct of organized religion, Rowling puts it on the sinner to recognize his/her sins and go through the process of redemption. If a wizard has committed murder, they must feel enough remorse to physically hear the soul, which, as Hermione points out, is incredibly painful and difficult. It is not easy, but it is possible through acknowledgment, reflection, and real regret. Voldemort never even considered regretting his sins, nor the health of his soul, as he commits terrible acts throughout the series.

Strangely, when Voldemort’s killing curse against Harry rebounds, there were other unintended consequences besides almost destroying himself. Unbeknownst to both of them, Voldemort made a seventh Horcrux out of Harry in that moment. Hermione’s research into Horcruxes tells “how unstable you make the rest of your soul by ripping it” (DH 101). Voldemort’s soul, already so ravaged, flung a piece of itself into Harry as the curse hit it, seemingly to seek survival in a container not so damaged. “Destructive acts are destructive to those who perform them. Their very souls are torn apart” (Wolovsky 45). In Voldemort’s case, his soul is torn into eight pieces.

Unfortunately for those around him, Voldemort’s magical prowess remains, even as he is wreaking havoc on others and his own soul (Wolovsky 48). After Voldemort was no longer able to possess Quirell’s body, he was left a weak and revolting thing: tiny and

thin like a crouched child, but hairless and scaly with a snake-like face (GOF 9520). But with the bone of his father, flesh from a servant, and the blood of an enemy all combined together with magic, the tiny damaged body comes out of the bubbling cauldron as a tall and thin man (GOF 9577). The new body that he created for himself enables him to continue his evil plans, though he is both physically and emotionally separated from the majority of his soul. When Harry starts planning his destruction of Voldemort's Horcruxes, he is concerned that Voldemort will catch on to him and will make the search impossible. Harry asks Dumbledore whether Voldemort knows when his Horcruxes are destroyed, and he answers: "I believe not. Voldemort is so immersed in evil and these crucial parts of himself have been detached for so long he does not feel as we do" (HBP 7641). Although Voldemort could survive without his body, and even creates a new one for himself, Rowling shows that Voldemort becomes less and less human the more he is separated from his soul.

As Professor Slughorn tells a teenage Tom Riddle, "[Y]ou must understand that the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against nature" (HBP 7491). This is clearly illustrated in Voldemort's case, but what happens to Severus Snape's soul when he kills Dumbledore? Is it the act of killing that maims the soul, or the intention? Snape has no desire to kill Dumbledore; it is Dumbledore's wish that Snape do this. Rowling shows us in *The Chamber of Secrets* that you do not have to kill with your own hands to commit murder and make a Horcrux: Tom Riddle uses the basilisk to kill Moaning Myrtle, but that does not leave his soul any less affected than if he had done it himself. Therefore, it seems the morality of the act is what

is most important, and Snape's soul would remain intact, even after performing the Killing Curse.

Voldemort seeks to possess everything around him: magical skill, people, powerful objects, and immortality. What he does not realize is that, in constantly seeking to make himself invincible and powerful, he is losing himself. This is why he cannot even feel when parts of his soul are destroyed (Wolovsky 48). One of Voldemort's greatest frustrations was that he could not understand why he could not possess Harry, and why he was not able to kill him. Dumbledore explains to Harry: "I do not think he understands why, Harry, but then, he was in such a hurry to mutilate his own soul he never paused to understand the incomparable power of a soul that is untarnished and whole" (HBP 7697). It is Harry's morality and ability to love that protect Harry's soul from evil possession, and it is these qualities that make his soul immortal.

When Voldemort's Killing Curse rebounded off of Harry, and accidentally made a Horcrux, Voldemort became connected to Harry. When Voldemort feels an intense emotion, Harry feels it, too, and his scar prickles or pains him. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry dreamed that he was Voldemort's snake, sliding towards Mr. Weasley and attacking him. When Harry woke, he knew it was not a dream, and that "[h]e had not merely seen the snake, he had *been* the snake" (OOTP 492). Harry was immensely worried that Voldemort possessed him, and that he would be made to do terrible things, like attacking Mr. Weasley. What he comes to find out is that Voldemort was possessing Nagini, the snake, and he was sharing Voldemort's view. Possession is an interesting concept in the series, showing that Voldemort has no trouble in occupying the body of others, except for Harry. In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Voldemort literally shares the body of

Professor Quirell, and strangely, Voldemort's face is attached to the back of Quirell's head. He can speak, and tells Quirell what to do. In the case of Nagini, the snake moves according to Voldemort's wishes, and he can access all of the snake's senses, but stays separate in body. Due to Voldemort's penchant for possessing people, Dumbledore and others who care about Harry are afraid that Voldemort will try to possess him. Professor Snape starts to teach Harry Occlumency, which is intended to close Harry's mind towards Voldemort, so that he cannot enter. The word "occlumency" comes from the Latin *occlude*, which means "to block" and *mens*, which means "mind." Dumbledore hoped that he could block the mental connection between Harry and Voldemort. Unfortunately, Harry's wonderful nature of showing and feeling emotion makes it very hard for him to be a proficient Occlumens, and Voldemort is able to plant a vision in Harry's mind, tempting him into danger (OOTP 727).

When Voldemort attempts to possess Harry in the Atrium of Ministry of Magic, Harry's scar and body are in excruciating pain. Harry feels as though he is no longer in the hall, and that he is "locked in the coils of a creature with red eyes," which is forcing him to speak Voldemort's words (OOTP 815). It is not until Harry thinks about Sirius with strong loving emotion, and how he will join him again after death, that Voldemort loosens his hold. Dumbledore tells Harry that it was his love for Sirius that saved him: "That power also saved you from possession by Voldemort, because he could not bear to reside in a body so full of the force he detests. In the end, it mattered not that you could not close your mind. It was your heart that saved you" (OOTP 843).

Hermione explains that "a Horcrux is the complete opposite of a human being" (DH 104). A Horcrux is a soul inside a container that relies on the container for

protection. A human being has a soul inside a body, but the soul does not rely on the body for survival. The last Horcrux in the series, and “its ultimate symbolic expression,” is in the ghostly King’s Cross Station (Wolovsky 48). When Harry arrives there, he thinks he is alone, until he sees it:

“He recoiled. He had spotted the thing that was making the noises. It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath” (DH 706).

Harry is afraid of this strange creature, and though he wants to help it, it also disgusts him. This is the ultimate representation of what has happened to Voldemort’s soul: torn into pieces, ripped apart, in pain, neglected, unloved, and repulsive. Harry thought that he “ought to comfort it, but it repulsed him” (DH 706). It was a child, whimpering, which should engender compassion, and though Harry felt some of that, it was not enough to overcome his instinctive reaction to stay far away from it. This tattered piece of a torn and tainted soul sickens and repels Harry, whose soul is morally clean and good. In contrast to the physically damaged form, Harry no longer needs his glasses in this place, and Dumbledore’s cursed hand is now “whole and white and undamaged” (DH 705-706). It seems that the physical appearance of the soul affects the outward appearance in direct correlation to their moral purity.

This ethereal King’s Cross Station holds a physical manifestation of the souls of Harry, Dumbledore, and Voldemort, but though Harry’s soul has left his body, he is not yet dead. Instead, his soul resides in a place where he can make a choice: to return to his living physical form, or to move on to what comes next. In this place, he is able to speak to Dumbledore, and also to see and hear the manifestation of the piece of Voldemort’s soul that was ripped from him when he murdered Harry’s mother, and attached itself to

Harry. Although Harry is able to seek knowledge in this place, and has his choice in front of him, this mutilated shard of Voldemort's soul can do nothing but remain in this in-between place, whimpering in pain.

Dementors also illustrate Rowling's idea that the soul is a physical entity, and that the body can live on without the soul, but that does not mean that you are truly alive. Dementors can perform what is known as the "Dementor's Kiss," where they remove the soul from a body. They pull back their hoods, "clamp their jaws" over their victim's mouth, and literally suck out the soul (POA 3701). After the "Kiss," your soul is gone, and though your body may still be alive, you are no longer yourself. Lupin explains to Harry that this is a fate worse than death:

"You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no...anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just – exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever...lost" (POA 3701).

Dementors have no soul, which is why they are constantly seeking to devour them: "If it can, the dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself...soulless and evil" (POA 2811). This is a particularly nasty way to go, since the victim's soul ceases to exist, and does not seem to be able to make it to the next world. Dementors are actually able to physically extract and destroy any soul, and their loyalty lies with whoever can feed them the most souls.

The Inferi are another example of soulless creatures: they are corpses reanimated by a Dark witch or wizard. "Inferi" means "the dead; underworld" in Latin, and "Inferius" is a form of the Latin word *inferus*, meaning "underneath; below," but with an added connotation of being "lesser than" the living. Severus Snape explains: "[The Inferius] is not alive, it is merely used like a puppet to do the wizard's bidding" (HBP

6896). Voldemort is able to create an army of Inferi with no souls and no free will to do what he wishes. This is especially frightening, since the Inferi do not know what they are doing, and are unable to fight against the evil power controlling them.

An Inferius is the opposite of a ghost, which is an “imprint of a departed soul” (HBP 6899). A ghost no longer has a physical body, though they still retain an ethereal form that looks much like how he or she looked in life. Their memories and emotions are still intact, and they still have their essence of humanity. An Inferius retains the physical appearance that they had in life, since the spell uses the corpse, but has no emotions or memories of any kind. The main physical difference between a living body and an Inferius is that the eyes are misted over, showing no real life inside. The spell used to animate the corpse makes them strong and fast, and impervious to almost any physical harm. As is shown in Voldemort’s cave, Inferi seem to only be afraid of fire, since the spell does not protect against burning (HBP 8659). The word “Inferi” is also connected to the word “infernal,” which is associated with the Christian concept of Hell, as well as to fire and heat, which Rowling shows as the only way to destroy an Inferius.

Rowling’s depiction of the soul is unique in that it can be damaged and healed like a physical thing, and it is also one’s passport to life after death. The connection of our morality to the soul is not a new concept, but thinking of the soul as a physical thing makes Rowling’s ideas different and interesting. “[F]ear of death is probably the ultimate emotion human beings can experience,” and Rowling’s exploration of the soul and the afterlife in a new way captures the interest of children and adults (Stojilkov 136). Her presentation of the simple connection between being a good person and a healthy soul is easy to grasp, which makes it an approachable framework for discussing death and

spirituality. The soul as a physical entity, as well as Voldemort's snakelike appearance, show how morality affects us inside and out, and Rowling makes sure to include the fact that regret and remorse can heal damage done by immoral deeds and potentially save one's soul. Harry is comforted throughout the series when he feels close to his parents and other deceased loved ones, and this in turn comforts the reader. The feeling that the dead we love will always be with us, in whatever form that may be, is universally sought after and is appealing to both children and adults.

Chapter IV

Spirituality and Morality

Voldemort's inability to transcend death stems from his lack of understanding that love is the most powerful magic of all. This is Rowling's important point: there can be a world in which morality and love transcend institutional religion. There is irony in the fact that, in a series of books about magic, love ends up being the strongest force. Love is the underestimated power that protects Harry, makes his life worth living, and ultimately enables him to defeat Voldemort. With all the spells, curses, potions, and charms available, the deepest message has nothing to do with magic. Through Harry's story of love and sacrifice, Rowling constructs a salvation metanarrative while also using tropes and symbols throughout the series that could be seen as Christian. As a result, many critics have tried to adopt the story as a Christian one, and read orthodox values into it. To them, it is no longer a story about the adventures of a boy wizard, but about sin and salvation.

Rowling has created a new mythology that draws on multiple literary and religious sources, with an added layer of lived experience. She shows that life is not about conquering death, but rather about living fully through love. If this is done, death is not a punishment, and one's soul can live on. Not willing to accept or understand the power of love, Voldemort corrupts his soul by killing multiple times, and never feels remorse for any of the evil acts that he committed. He searches for immortality, but in the end he loses his life, as well as any chance of his soul surviving in the afterlife or in the

memory of others. Dumbledore knew this all along, and helped Harry to understand: “Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love” (DH 720).

There have been many different reactions to the series by people and communities, the most heated reaction coming from the Christian community. Interestingly, however, they are not all on the same page about how to react to Harry Potter and his story of finding out that he is a wizard and attending the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, as well as how he gets into all sorts of adventures, battles and magical mayhem. Some Christians try to promote the story of Harry Potter as a Christian story, assimilating Rowling’s message into Christian orthodoxies, while others believe that the story is evil and corruptive and should be banned from schools and libraries.

S.M. Hutchens argues that *Harry Potter* is a Christian story, and encourages all Christians to read it. He believes that God can be found in *Harry Potter*, despite certain conventionally non-Christian aspects, including the fact that Rowling created a lead character that is homosexual. He claims that Dumbledore can be a Christian character, despite the fact that he is gay: “If Dumbledore’s creator thinks of him as a man of homosexual orientation, why does that mean Christians are obliged to ignore his excellences – particularly if he lives, as he is depicted, a chaste and celibate life?” (Hutchens 15). Hutchens is trying to argue against the fact that Christians dismiss Dumbledore for his sexual orientation. However, what he is actually arguing is that we should love Dumbledore *despite* the fact that he is gay, only because Dumbledore is not acting on his homosexuality. If Dumbledore had a partner, or if we knew of

Dumbledore's partners, should that change how we feel about him? Would that then counteract all of his strengths? Clearly Hutchens is arguing that it would counteract his goodness. However, Dumbledore's sexual orientation should have nothing to do with how we feel about him as a man, or as a character, and Hutchens wants Christians to read *Harry Potter* for all the wrong reasons.

Hutchens' argument that *Harry Potter* is a Christian story has many flaws in it. Even if a Christian could acknowledge Dumbledore's greatness, could they compare him to God? Hutchens says: "The keys to the Kingdom were delivered to the most robustly flawed of all Christ's disciples. This is why we should be uncomfortable with the attempt to create perfect heroes. For one thing, it makes for dreadful literature, and for another, oddly enough, characters sanitized to our standards of good never, ever, look like the Lord" (Hutchens 16). Hutchens is hinting that Dumbledore could look like the Lord, which is a statement that would undoubtedly make many Christians uncomfortable. Dumbledore is human, and it is his humanity that creates his character. He had difficulties in his life, and made some mistakes. Through his boyhood friendship with Grindelwald, his quest for knowledge and power, and his sister's death, Dumbledore grew and learned, and became the all-knowing moral figure that Harry knew. But he is still a complicated figure, full of secrets and hidden agendas. In *The Deathly Hallows*, the reader discovers that Dumbledore was actually slowly dying from a curse when Severus Snape killed him. We learn that Dumbledore and Snape had made an agreement that Snape would kill Dumbledore in order to prevent Draco Malfoy from having to do it (DH 548). Hutchens points out that this is an entirely non-Christian pact, but thinks it is still fine to have it in the book: "These children are old enough to understand that murder-

suicide pacts are the sort of things that can be entered by pagans with noble and admirable intentions, but which Christians know to be sinful” (Hutchens 15). He is arguing that even though this is a sin, the Christians know it is a sin, so it is permissible in the book. However, if he is claiming that Dumbledore is a Christian character, how would this sin not be a major deal-breaker?

John Granger, author of *Looking for God in Harry Potter*, also believes that Christians can find God in *Harry Potter*, and attempts to square the series with Christian messaging. “Granger maintains that Rowling is following in the footsteps of authors such as C.S. Lewis in using magical themes to point up archetypal human experiences that relate closely to salvation history as understood by Christians” (Leonie Caldecott 24). However, Granger’s argument is not much more convincing than Hutchens’. He states: “Despite initially having forbidden my children to read the Rowling books, reading them myself has convinced me that the magic in *Harry Potter* is no more likely to encourage real-life witchcraft than time travel in science fiction novels encourages readers to seek passage to previous centuries” (John Granger 4). Without knowing what the books were really about, Granger was against them, but he now believes that they are harmless and even beneficial to read. However, he tries to convince people that one of the reasons they are harmless is that that Harry’s magic is “incantational” and not “invocational,” which he claims makes all the difference for Christians (Granger 4). “Invocational” is associated with calling in dark magic or spirits, while “incantational” magic has a connection to the Christian view through story. However, others would say that incantations can still be dark magic and still count as witchcraft within the *Harry Potter* books.

There are morals in *Harry Potter*, and lessons of morality, but though they sometimes resemble Christian ideas, they branch off in their own way. “The values in the books, [Rowling] observes, are by no means exclusively Christian, and she is wary of appearing to promote one faith over another rather than inviting people to explore and struggle with the hard questions” (Nancy Gibbs 2). The books incorporate theological matters, such as the concept of good versus evil, the importance of the choices one makes, and the possibility of life after death, and are beneficial in teaching adolescents how to cope with difficult situations in life. The *Harry Potter* series is not overtly religious, but rather it provides entertainment combined with teaching tools to handle real-world problems. These books take up questions that adults refuse to discuss because they fear that children are not “old” enough to hear the answers.

Leonie Caldecott, author of the article entitled “A Wizard’s Mission: Christian Themes in Harry Potter,” argues that the *Harry Potter* books, if not overtly Christian, use Christian structures (Caldecott 25). Harry’s mother, Lily, sacrificed herself to save him, and Lily’s love gives Harry protection against Voldemort, which can be seen as a Christian-related theme (Caldecott 25). However, Rowling shows that this protection actually has a physical manifestation. Harry does not understand why, but in *The Sorcerer’s Stone*, when a Voldemort-possessed Quirrell is fighting with Harry, “he could see Quirrell howling in agony. ‘Master, I cannot hold him – my hands – my hands!’ And Quirrell, though pinning Harry to the ground with his knees, let go of his neck and stared, bewildered, at his own palms – Harry could see they looked burned, raw, red, and shiny (SS 295).” Quirrell could not touch Harry’s skin without being physically burned due to the magic of Lily’s protection that is coursing through Harry’s veins. Dumbledore

explains that in forcing Harry's mother to die for Harry, Voldemort gave Harry "a magical protection he could not penetrate" (HBP 7678). Rowling materializes certain powers: maternal love and sacrifice actually give Harry an incredibly strong physical protection against harm. Voldemort does not understand self-sacrifice, nor the power that comes with it, since he is ultimately only self-serving. However, love and sacrifice are not exclusively Christocentric, and Rowling builds on this theme throughout the books in her own way.

Harry's parents' gravestone quotes a line from the Gospel of Matthew: "*The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*" (Caldecott 26). Dumbledore's mother's and sister's gravestone uses a line from First Corinthians: "*For where your treasure is, there your heart be also*" (Caldecott 27). Clearly, as direct quotes from the Bible, there is a Christian connection here. These citations and the orthodoxy are adapted by Rowling, and it is also clear that we should be looking into a deeper meaning than just the one from the Bible, as the Bible is just one of the many sources she uses throughout the series. Rowling uses these lines in particular to convey a certain meaning to the reader, and it is not a mistake that she did not overtly connect those quotes to the Bible in the books. The statement on the Dumbledores' grave can have a general explanation: a reader can easily interpret this as saying that Albus Dumbledore's heart will lie forever with his sister, who is his greatest treasure. This is a natural way to feel, given the circumstances of her death, the guilt and remorse Albus feels, and the love he has for Ariana.

In the case of the Potters' gravestone, Harry does not know where the lines are from, and we as the readers are meant to come to our own conclusions about what it might mean. "After six books with no mention of God or Scripture, in the last book Harry

discovers on his parents' graves a Bible verse that, Rowling says, is the theme for the entire series" (Gibbs 2). "*The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*" can imply two different sides of destroying death, both of which exist throughout the books. Voldemort is looking for ways to become immortal, hiding parts of his soul away as Horcruxes so as to unnaturally avoid death at any cost. But this is not how the Potters would see it. Rather, as Hermione points out, the statement on their grave refers to living beyond death, not in a physical form, but in a spiritual way (DH 269). Although it sounds like it is the embodiment of the Death Eaters' search for immortality, the Potters see it as meaning living after death. They see it as meaning that death no longer *is* the enemy. James and Lily Potter lived good lives, and made moral choices. Though they did not want to leave Harry, they sacrificed their lives for him, and their souls went on into the afterlife. However, given the blurred lines between life and death, Harry was able to still feel a connection to them through the photographs that smiled at him, the stories about them shared by friends, the ghostly figures of them that appeared when he was dueling with Voldemort, and by the means of the Resurrection Stone when he was facing Voldemort for the last time.

Caldecott believes that Harry is ignorant about the quote in order to point out the importance of "the need of young people not to be spoon-fed the truth, but rather to puzzle it out for themselves" (Caldecott 27). This is true, but instead of proving her point (which is that it is an explicit Christian reference), it actually leaves the interpretation open, just as Rowling intended. If the reader is unaware where the line comes from, it could be interpreted in a more general way. When a young couple is murdered in front of their baby by an evil person, their friends and family would be both saddened and

angered. In such cases, it is natural to be angered by death, and to want your friends to still be with you. It is a hope of the remaining friends and family of the Potters that they live on somewhere, and the Potters do live on in their hearts.

The *Harry Potter* books are not opposed to God and Christianity; they just create their own orthodoxy. Rowling uses make-believe to create a new belief system, borrowing bits and pieces from other from Christianity and other religions to merge into a new doctrine. In his article, “The Doubting Harry,” Lev Grossman states, “If you want to know who dies in Harry Potter, the answer is easy: God” (Lev Grossman 1). But Grossman is not saying that the *Harry Potter* books are against Christianity, just that God is not in them. He states that Rowling has created a world for Harry that does not include any religion (Grossman 1). Grossman explains that Harry has love instead of God, and that is where his power comes from (Grossman 1). The importance and spirituality of love is one of the key concepts of the series, and Rowling shows a clear sense of morality from the beginning. Even in *The Sorcerer’s Stone*, the reader is aware of the power of Harry’s good heart. The Mirror of Erised shows each witch or wizard what it is that they truly desire. When Harry finds out about the Sorcerer’s Stone, a magical object that can give immortality and riches, it does not even cross his mind to want the Stone for himself. He thinks: “*What I want more than anything else in the world at the moment*, he thought, *is to find the Stone before Quirrell does* (SS 291).” Only someone who wanted to find the Stone, and not use it, was able to retrieve the Stone from its hiding place. As Harry grows older, and deals with loss, depression, and other realities of life, his morality remains the same: “In spite of all the temptation you have endured, all the suffering, you remain pure of heart, just as pure as you were at the age of eleven, when you stared into a mirror that

reflected your heart's desire, and it showed you only the way to thwart Lord Voldemort, and not immortality or riches'" (HBP 7678). Harry seeks love and friendship, rather than wealth and power. Dumbledore brings this to Harry to show him how rare this is, and how beautiful. In calling attention to this in the books, Rowling is showing the reader what is important, and what is worthy of praise. There are many examples of this throughout the series, such as the fact that Harry's "heart leapt" when he sees his friend Hagrid, but when he finds out he has a small fortune in gold for the first time, he is mostly just shocked (HBP 1711, SS 75).

James Prothero discusses the importance of fantasy literature for teenagers in his article, "Fantasy, Science Fiction, and the Teaching of Values." The problem in adolescent education is not a lack of reality (James Prothero 32). In a world full of responsibility, hard times, pain and confusion, reading fantasy novels can be instructive as well as entertaining. Connecting to the minds of youth is essential in teaching them, and they learn better by feeling rather than thinking. Reading *Harry Potter* can seem pure entertainment on the surface, but is also educating children and teenagers about bigger issues in the real world. "Myth teaches meaning, not by realistic logical exposition but rather by imagination and metaphor, entering the back door of the mind through imagination" (Prothero 33). Symbolic worlds help readers to navigate reality.

Values are difficult to teach from hard facts and solid statements, and are much more easily learned from stories (Prothero 33). The best way to teach morals and values is to interweave them into an imaginative story that is told to children and teenagers, giving "what if's" to enable the reader to explore possibilities. Reading fantasy novels such as *Harry Potter* give children and teenagers the chance to read a story and come to

their own conclusions about values and morals through it, and Rowling gives readers a vocabulary for exploring spiritual matters. By comparing themselves to characters in the novels, or thinking about different events and situations that Harry and others encounter, the readers can begin to think about what they may have done in their position.

In his article, “Harry Potter’s Provocative Moral World: Is There a Place for Good and Evil in Moral Education?”, Perry Glanzer argues that “educators should be challenged by Rowling’s provocative moral world, but they should also think about how to borrow something from it that would embolden the moral education they provide” (Perry Glanzer 525). *Harry Potter* is a series about good and evil, and Harry and his friends inspire the reader’s support and enthusiasm as they fight their battle against Voldemort and his followers. Though Harry does lie and break rules, his moral choices make sense given the context (Glanzer 526). When it is a question of breaking a school rule to destroy evil, the reader understands why Harry made his choice. In fact, the mission Harry is given often requires him to be cunning, lie to authorities (and even to his friends), and keep many secrets. He is forgiven many misdemeanors given his ultimate purpose and his quest to battle evil and defeat the enemy.

Rowling embraces difficult and controversial subjects, which can show the different faces of morality. As characters in *Harry Potter* illustrate, there is both good and evil in every human being. Glanzer argues that you cannot separate vice and virtue, but what we can do is evaluate and identify the virtue and vice in characters within a larger context to be able to understand right from wrong (Glanzer 527). Oftentimes we see that a character’s choices ultimately define him. When Harry puts on the Sorting Hat in *The Sorcerer’s Stone* to find out what House he will be in, the Sorting Hat sees qualities in

him that could place him in either Gryffindor or Slytherin (SS 90). Though Harry does not know it, it is ultimately his own decision which House he ends up in. By wishing and hoping that he is placed in Gryffindor, and appalled at the idea of Slytherin, he makes his choice. Though what both these Houses admire most is within him, Harry would rather choose the side of himself that is brave and good, than the side that is hungry for knowledge and power. Making that conscious choice has already created a change within Harry, pushing the lust for power behind his drive to be a courageous person and loyal friend. What begins with an instinctive choice turns out to have a moral core. The character of Sirius Black also reinforces this idea: though he grew up in a pure-blood and Slytherin household, he chose to reject his family's sentiments and joined Gryffindor House, fighting against Voldemort and becoming a member of the Order of the Phoenix. As the similarities between Harry and Voldemort become clearer throughout the story (both are orphans, had difficult childhoods, speak Parseltongue, etc.), Dumbledore explains to Harry that it is not one's abilities, but rather one's choices, that count (Caldecott 25).

It is good for adolescents to know what may exist in the world so that they know how to handle it when it is encountered. Glanzer points out that "children need to be aware of common evil and allowed to take actions against it" (Glanzer 528). In *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Ron and Hermione find out that all Muggle-born witches and wizards are being asked to register and receive the punishment associated with their status (DH 172). Harry and his friends know this is wrong because they understand that people cannot be discriminated against because of their parentage, and immediately Ron is determined to protect his Muggle-born friend, Hermione (DH 173). There are social

evils and battles to be fought for liberty and justice, and children and teenagers need to be aware of this. Sometimes the best medium for understanding these difficulties is through a fantasy novel. It can give children an opportunity to confront real issues in the less threatening environment of an imaginary world.

A more difficult and controversial topic is the element of the metaphysical battles between good and evil, and as Glanzer points out, “public schools cannot constitutionally take sides in the metaphysical debates on which world religions and philosophers dwell” (Glanzer 528). But there is nothing against letting children read about them and coming to their own conclusions. The *Harry Potter* books give children an opportunity to think about these issues in a fantastical setting which gives them a background for real-life occurrences, and endows children with the power they rarely have in real life. The same is true for issues of growing up, pain, loss and responsibility. “In her books, Rowling is not teaching people how to put spells on corridors and staircases; she’s teaching them that they can deal with unpredictability and change” (Sharon Black 542). Adolescents have to deal with a lot of new and unexpected events while growing up and experiencing more of the world. Some of these are exciting and pleasurable things, and others are difficult to deal with. When reading *Harry Potter* with her young students, Tisha Beaton states that “the eleven-year-olds could identify with Harry Potter’s feelings of isolation and loneliness. They too were experiencing changes as they started their middle school years” (Tisha Beaton 100). These books can be productive tools in helping children realize they are not alone in their confusing and sometimes painful emotions, and they can learn from Harry’s experiences as he deals with loss and adversity, makes new friends, and creates a new world for himself at Hogwarts.

Although Harry's self-sacrifice makes many believe that Harry is a Christ-like figure, Rowling did not intend to make Harry a Christian character. He is an intentionally imperfect human, and is someone the reader can relate to on many levels. For Harry to truly be a Christian character, he would have to be perfected by the end of the books, but Rowling has him remain his usual self, full of goodness and wisdom, but also of human flaws. "The Christian literacy tradition [requires] perfectibility, and...the ability to represent Christ, whether by authorial intention or not" (S.M. Hutchens 15-16). Therefore, Harry cannot be the Christian character some readers want him to be. The reason Harry is such a notable character is not because he represents Christ or a perfect role model, but rather because the readers understand his feelings, his anger and his joy, and identify with him.

Harry's journey is not always easy, and in *The Deathly Hallows*, he is scared and frustrated at the task before him of finding and destroying all of Voldemort's Horcruxes. When he finds out about the Hallows, the three objects that, if possessed, make the possessor Master of Death, he is tempted:

"Three objects, or Hallows, which, if united, will make the possessor master of Death...Master...Conqueror...Vanquisher...The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death...And he saw himself, possessor of the Hallows, facing Voldemort, whose Horcruxes were no match...Neither can live while the other survives...Was this the answer? Hallows versus Horcruxes? Was there a way, after all, to ensure that he was the one who triumphed? If he were the master of the Deathly Hallows, would he be safe?" (DH 429).

The reader can understand why he is enthralled by this idea: Harry has lived under the yoke of the fear of Voldemort since he found out who killed his parents. With so much responsibility on his young shoulders, the Hallows seem like an easy way out. To be Master of Death means that he would be able to destroy Voldemort, and be free of the

fear and the endless, and seemingly fruitless, hunt for the Horcruxes. Harry is convinced that Dumbledore left him the Resurrection Stone in the old Snitch, and he already possessed the Invisibility Cloak, so all he would need would be the Elder Wand to have all three Hallows (DH 429). While Ron and Hermione want to continue searching for the Horcruxes, Harry becomes obsessed with finding the Hallows. It is only when Dobby gives his life for Harry in an act of selfless protection that Harry changes his mind. While digging Dobby's grave by hand, without magic, Harry thinks about his Dobby's sacrifice, as well as his own journey and what is important, and comes to the conclusion that he must follow the path Dumbledore set for him: Horcruxes not Hallows; the quest to destroy evil instead of the quest for power and immortality (DH 481).

Harry is correct about what is inside the Snitch, but has yet to learn Dumbledore's intention. Dumbledore knew that Harry may be tempted on his journey, which is why he enchanted the Snitch to only open when Harry was ready to receive the Stone.

Dumbledore had faith that Harry would reach the morally right conclusion in the end: that he must accept death, and accept that by losing the fight, he could win the battle. In that ultimate moment of self-sacrifice, the Snitch finally opens, to reveal the Resurrection Stone. In this moment, Harry uses it as support, thinking that in a few short moments, he will be joining those he loves beyond the world of the living (DH 700).

It is this choice that highlights the moral framework of Rowling's story. It is in accepting death, and not fighting it, that we truly become Master of Death. Just as in Beedle the Bard's story of "The Three Brothers," the youngest brother successfully hides from Death for many years under the Invisibility Cloak, but in the end, it is time to go,

and “*he greeted Death as an old friend, and went with him gladly, and, equals, they departed this life*” (DH 409).

The power that saved Harry’s life and that protected him throughout his young life was not a spell or potion. It was his mother’s love, running through his veins, shielding him from Voldemort. Rowling shows that every sacrifice, and every good deed, has a ripple effect. Even Harry’s mercy towards Peter Pettigrew in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* ends up saving his and Ron’s lives in *The Deathly Hallows*: Pettigrew’s magical hand heard Harry’s plea and, instead of obeying its owner and killing Harry, the hand kills Pettigrew instead (DH 469). This story, that at first glance seems to be about magic and wizardry, is really about a boy named Harry and the value of being human: we are all fallible, and yet capable of transcendent love. Rowling shows how love and friendship are what is important, and that everyone can be redeemed, not through seeking immortality, but through human connection. Harry did not have an idyllic childhood: just like Voldemort, both of his parents died when he was a baby, and he was left in the care of people who did not understand him nor treat him with love. Even still, and unlike Voldemort, Harry grew to have a family of friends and mentors, and is surrounded by love: Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Neville, Luna, Albus Dumbledore, Rubeus Hagrid, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, the Weasleys, and many more. Harry’s friends and family have a dark side, too, as illustrated clearly in Harry’s complicated relationship with the Dursley’s, and also with Draco Malfoy, but Rowling shows that this is not what defines us: it is what we choose for ourselves in life that define who we are.

Rowling shows that in the prophecy told about Harry and Voldemort, the “power the Dark Lord knows not” that Harry’s possesses, is love. It seems anticlimactic to Harry,

but in the end, he finally understands what it means. It is not just the physical protection from his mother's love that is powerful, but also how love shapes your actions in life, and thus decides the fate of your soul in the afterlife. Harry is extraordinary not because of his magical powers, or because he is famous, but because of his ability to love, even after so much suffering: "'Harry, you can love,' said Dumbledore... 'Which, given everything that has happened to you, is a great and remarkable thing. You are still too young to understand how unusual you are, Harry'" (HBP 7650).

In the end, the message is not about spells, curses, and charms. In *The Half-Blood Prince*, the Muggle Prime Minister yells at Fudge and Scrimgeour: "But for heaven's sake – you're *wizards*! You can do *magic*! Surely you can sort out – well – *anything*!" (B6 HBP). But as is shown throughout the series, the greatest force for good, the best weapon against evil, is not a complicated spell performed with the Elder Wand. Magical prowess does not dictate how fulfilling a life is. Perhaps this explains the domestic idyll at the end of the series: Harry does not become a heroic or legendary figure, but an ordinary human. Although it seems anticlimactic to Harry that love is the powerful weapon that he possesses, how his life ends up is not at all disappointing. All Harry ever wanted was to be part of his own loving family. Rowling shows that "the ideal of happiness is not the celebration of occult power or the human ego, but ordinary family life" (Caldecott 27).

Chapter V

Conclusion

As Harry Potter walks into the forest at the end of *The Deathly Hallows*, he is prepared to die, but once again becomes the boy who lives. It is not Harry's ability to defeat death, but his ability to accept mortality, that makes him the ultimate Master of Death. Harry is the only wizard who was ever able to possess all three of the Deathly Hallows: the Invisibility Cloak, the Elder Wand, and the Resurrection Stone. He is also one of very few wizards who are able to resist the temptation of ultimate power, as he drops the Stone onto the Forest floor, and returns the Wand to Dumbledore's grave.

Rowling's use of death as a major theme may cause some trepidation for parents, but it is exactly these more sinister themes that make the story so important for children to read. It is vital that children learn how to negotiate the world on their own, and this means that they need to be able to grapple with the darkness as well as the light (Lambert 41). These stories show children horrors and sadness, but they also show them "a way out, allowing children to explore great existential mysteries that are far more disturbing when they remain abstract and uncharted rather than take the concrete form of a story" (Tatar EH 85).

Children cannot be shielded from death: it is prevalent throughout our lives in real-life experience, as well as through other media, like television and the Internet. Death and dying are part of the human condition, and children must learn to figure out how to cope with this (Tatar EH 89). As time has gone on, death has remained an important and integral theme in our stories, and that theme does not end with children.

Adults become just as immersed in the *Harry Potter* books, and in the battle between the light and the dark.

The *Harry Potter* series is an international phenomenon that connects with readers on many levels. Forbes magazine lists Rowling as the first person to become a millionaire by writing books, and as the second richest woman in entertainment in the world (Gibbs 1). “Now translated into 65 languages, the books have joined a canon that stretches from Cinderella to Star Wars, giving people a way to discuss culture and commerce, politics and values” (Gibbs 3).

This fame has also opened Rowling up to harsh criticism. Jack Zipes, author of *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*, distrusts the phenomenon and thinks that the success of the *Harry Potter* series says something distressing about our society. He calls the books ordinary, conventional, and predictable, and the writing “nothing exceptional” (Zipes 172-175). Zipes argues that “[p]henomena such as the Harry Potter books are driven by commodity consumption that at the same time sets the parameters of reading and aesthetic taste.” He claims that the experience of reading for children today is dictated by the mass media, and any positive reaction to the books is just a reaction to marketing (Zipes 172).

Capitalism rules Western culture, and though Zipes wrote this critique before The Wizarding World of Harry Potter was built in Orlando, his readers can take a good guess at what he would say about the theme park. Zipes claims that, though popular books like the *Harry Potter* series might encourage reading in young adults and children, it is also homogenizing them (Zipes 188). This may be the downside of success: due to its popularity, the *Harry Potter* series can be overlooked as being unoriginal. It is true that

many children and adults will never read the *Harry Potter* series, but may watch the movies instead, or go to the theme park and buy a box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans. But none of that takes anything away from the reader who waited in line at midnight to get the next book, stayed up all night reading it, and continues to re-read the series, cheering Harry on, and getting caught up all over again in an adventure they will never forget.

Harry Potter is the boy who lives, and who also lives on in his readers' minds. Rowling has created a story in which Harry has a kind of immortality, haunting us in positive ways. Just as Dumbledore says the ones we love never truly leave us, Harry, even as a fictional character, has had such an impact on so many of us, that the love we have for him lives on in our hearts and minds. We can imagine turning the Resurrection Stone in our fingers, and remember the laughter, the heartache, and the messages about life and love in the *Harry Potter* series.

The books are full of lessons in morality, and of how the choices you make create who you are. They bring up questions of good and evil, and the gray area in between. Throughout the series, Harry and his friends fight to preserve what is worth living for in the world, and are willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of wizards, Muggles, and other creatures alike. In *The Deathly Hallows*, after learning what his fate will be, Harry does not try to cheat death. He realizes that his purpose is to save others, and not just his family and friends. Harry sacrifices himself willingly for the good of humanity, and we would like to think we would do the same. These books do not contain a Christian message; they are more complicated and subtle than any one agenda. "Rowling's religious agenda is very clear: she does not have one. [She states:] 'I did not set out to

convert anyone to Christianity. I wasn't trying to do what C.S. Lewis did. It is perfectly possible to live a very moral life without a belief in God” (Gibbs 2). She does not preach for God, but very passionately writes with a cause in mind. In an interview, Rowling asks, ”What did my books preach against throughout? Bigotry, violence, struggles for power, no matter what” (Gibbs 2). Her message is clear, and her readers escape into her fantasy world while learning about injustice, inequality, and what is right. As a preface to the last book, Rowling quotes William Penn: “Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still...This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal” (DH Preface). Without incorporating religion, *Harry Potter* shows the true power and everlasting bond of love.

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