

“All Was Well”: The Problematic Representations of Evil in the *Harry Potter* Series

Marthe Dahlin



A Thesis Presented to
The Department of Literature, Area Studies and
European Languages
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Spring 2014

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ENG4790

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2014

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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Tina Skouen, for excellent advice and guidance through the treacherous process that is thesis writing; for noticing and helping me form the arguments I made, but sometimes overlooked; and for inspiring and supporting me through the ups and downs of writing.

A huge thanks to my fellow students Béatrice Thorstensen and Hanne Johansen for reading, rereading and correcting what my eyes were too tired to see.

To Ingunn Aronsen, who took time out of her busy schedule to read and make invaluable comments from across the world.

To my extended family and friends, for standing by me during my period of hibernation, even though they never quite understood my fascination.

And lastly, to my brilliant parents, for letting me occupy their kitchen table for weeks at an end, eating all their food, and especially to my mum for keeping my spirits up, whipping up delicious delicacies, and reminding me to take breaks, drink tea and step outside every now and then.

Always.

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Abbreviations

<i>PS</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i> (1997)
<i>CoS</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i> (1998)
<i>PoA</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i> (1999)
<i>GoF</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i> (2000)
<i>OotP</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i> (2003)
<i>HBP</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i> (2005)
<i>DH</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</i> (2007)

Introduction

The battle between good and evil is a common and traditional pattern often found in children's fantasy. The villain threatens to take over the world and destroy what is good, and the hero defeats this evil and saves the world. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, and several examples that complicate and contradict it, but it remains the most classic pattern, as seen for example in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (1950-1956) and *The Hobbit* (1937). The *Harry Potter* novels (published between 1997 - 2007) follow this well known plot line. When Lord Voldemort returns and attempts to resume his reign of terror, Harry Potter defeats him - and from the very start the reader expects good to be victorious. This assumption is based on the fact that this series was written for children, and in children's literature the hero usually prevails. While Harry's defeat of Voldemort seems certain, the *survival* of Harry himself is a matter of suspense, as there is also a tradition of the protagonist sacrificing him/herself (or being sacrificed by the author, like the Pevensie children). In this thesis; I wish to look at the character of Harry, and his relationship with - and eventual defeat of - evil, especially the personification of evil in the series: Voldemort. By doing so, I want to prove that the character of Harry goes from being a round, dynamic character, to becoming a flat, lifeless one, which is something that has not been recognised by previous critics. It is an important issue because it signifies a "backward" character development in the series, and a potential loss of meaning - and moral education - tied to the protagonist. In other words, I want to prove that *the triumph of good over evil in the Harry Potter series is problematic, because it leads to a loss of both meaning and potential educational power by deflating the character of Harry, and making him less believable to the reader.*

Previous critics, such as Greg Garrett (2010), Kathleen McEvoy (2011) and Jennifer Sattaur (2006), have tended to focus on the main character, Harry, emphasising his moral behaviour but also his flaws. In this thesis, I would like to add to the existing discussion about the character of Harry by investigating and highlighting his struggles with evil, both within and outside himself, but also by looking at the possible repercussions of the revelation that Harry was a Horcrux. My approach is thus partly speculative: I want to argue that the author - by choosing to remove all traces of Voldemort (representing pure evil) in Harry, thereby also removing the dark and evil aspects of Harry's character - has deprived her audience of what could have been a valuable moral lesson, namely that even good people can make mistakes and commit "evil" deeds. Admittedly, there are other characters in the books that can convey this message, but as Harry is the protagonist, and the focalised character, he is the one that readers are likely to identify with the most, and whose motivations and actions we become most familiar with.

The *Harry Potter* series consists of seven books, covering the seven years Harry is supposed to attend Hogwarts. He faces Voldemort repeatedly over these seven years, and time and time again he defeats or avoids him. Throughout the novels, increasingly disconcerting revelations are made about the character of Harry and a connection he has with Voldemort. This culminates in the final novel where it is revealed that Harry carries a piece of Voldemort's soul within him, making him a Horcrux. This part of Voldemort's soul is an element of what has made Harry special, and what has given him unique powers of resilience whenever faced with his mortal enemy. As we shall see, it has also given him access to Voldemort's mind and made him share strong feelings and reactions with Voldemort. This connection is not fully explained until the final novel, and until this revelation the character of Harry remains a dynamic one, battling forces of good and evil *within* himself, as well as without. Due to this connection, the reader is left unsure whether Harry is really the hero he is supposed to be. When this internal battle is revealed to be a result of Harry carrying a part of Voldemort's soul within himself, I would argue that it removes a large part of the fascinating aspect of the character of Harry. He is no longer fighting an inner battle between good and evil, but conquers evil and is, in the end - "purified" - rid of the evil that was never his to begin with, and he is left the reaffirmed, traditional good hero. At the same time, the possible educational aspects can be said to decrease as this internal battle between good and bad, that many readers can relate to, is drastically reduced.

While all of the books may serve as a backdrop for my discussion of Harry's character and his connection to Voldemort, it is possible to narrow down the scope to certain crucial incidents occurring in two of the books *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*¹ (2005) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). In *HBP*, Harry and Dumbledore explore Voldemort's past and his connections to Harry, which gives many clues to both the character of Voldemort and Harry. *DH* continues in the revelatory style of the previous book, but without the guidance of Dumbledore Harry is forced to make discoveries both concerning himself and his deceased mentor. As the final instalment, *DH* also contains the ultimate climax of the series, where answers are given, riddles explained, and the final revelation of Harry as the seventh Horcrux is made. *DH* is the book where the reader finally learns the true nature of certain characters, and can make up a final opinion of them.

Harry, the hero of the story, is a dynamic, realistic, and troubled character, and, as will be discussed in the section addressing his character (2.1), he is a complex role model for the young audience. The reader is challenged in a positive way by the introduction of doubt concerning whether or not Harry is good, as it forces the reader to re-evaluate his character repeatedly throughout the series. He displays good moral judgement, but at the same time makes mistakes, and he is rather problematic in his likeness to the darkest character in the

¹ The complete title and year of publication will be given at first mention only.

series; Lord Voldemort. In this thesis, I wish to explore these similarities between Harry and Voldemort, in addition to other aspects of Harry's character that can be perceived as “dark” or “evil” - aspects which have not yet received due attention in the existing criticism. I wish to do this by performing a close reading of the two final novels, especially, and by analysing examples from these novels. Prior to Part I and II, however, I will offer an overview of, and introductions to some of the fields of theory that are relevant to this thesis. The main areas concern narrative and character theory, children's literature and theory of evil.

Narrative Theory and Primary Literature

The main theoretical terms that will be applied in this thesis concern the author and characterisation. A short introductory presentation of the role of the author will be offered here, while the different approaches to characterisation will be presented alongside the two main characters analysed in Part I and II of this thesis, namely the analysis of Voldemort and Harry Potter. Terms, tools and techniques concerning the characterisation of these two figures will be explained and applied continuously in the analysis of their characters.

The real, historical author is the actual, physical writer of the book (J. K. Rowling), while the implied author is a construct that the reader can discern in the text when reading it. According to Jakob Lothe, in *Narrative in Fiction and Film* (2000), the historical author is primarily “a writer, [...] the producer of the text of narrative fiction that forms the starting-point of the narrative analysis” (18). This historical author “stands in principle outside the literary universe he or she creates by means of language” (18). In other words, once the author has finished the text, she stands outside her creation. However, Lothe continues, it does not mean that there is not any connection between author and text; but it means that this relationship is indirect and influenced by other factors, such as language and literary techniques (18).

The implied author is a construct, or an idea, of the author that is created through the reading of the text (Lothe 19). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan writes in her book *Narrative Fiction* (2002) that the implied author; “is the governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work” (88). Maria Nikolajeva supports this in *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (2002), by saying that “the implied author is responsible for the ideology of the text - that is, the views and opinions expressed in it explicitly or implicitly” (4). While the relationship between implied author and author has not been thoroughly analysed, Rimmon-Kenan points out that the implied author of a text needs not reflect the actual ideas, meanings and beliefs of the real author, and an author could - and frequently does - present different emotions and beliefs in different works (88). In that case, the implied author in the *Harry Potter* novels might not represent the same moral ideas,

beliefs or emotions as J.K. Rowling herself.

J. K. Rowling, the author, differs from the implied author presented in the text, and therefore, according to Lothe, stands outside her literary universe. Still, she has been known to “interfere” in her readers' interpretations, even after the publication of the final novel. In the article, “Neither Can Live while the Other Survives!': *Harry Potter* and the Extratextual (After)life of J. K. Rowling” (2012), Pamela Ingleton discusses the phenomenon of “Pottermore”² as an example of Rowling’s continued interference in the *Harry Potter* universe. Ingleton describes Pottermore as the “latest example of Rowling’s insistent need to constantly assert and *reassert* (authorial) control over her text(s) and carefully monitor and indeed police her brand and literary universe” (175). In a sense, Rowling is refusing to let go of her creation, and is regularly adding new information to her universe in order to reaffirm her hold on it. It is almost as if Rowling is attempting to eliminate the theoretical distinction between the real and implied author. Ingleton exemplifies this, by mentioning the many interviews and television appearances that Rowling participated in after the publication of the final novel, and how this enabled Rowling to maintain her influence and authority (176). “Like her über-villain Lord Voldemort, Rowling’s biggest fear appears to be death - in this case, the death of the author. One might say that, in the face of Barthesian assaults on conventional notions of authorship [...] Rowling refuses to die” (176). Rowling’s famous “outing” of Dumbledore at Carnegie Hall in 2007 - where she outright stated that “Dumbledore is gay” - is, according to Ingleton, one of the most prominent examples of Rowling’s extratextual additions (178). Rowling is an author who continues to assert control over *her* world, and by so doing closes the text and prevents any attempts at interpretation from other sources (178).

The question remains, whether Rowling’s comments - which can be argued to represent authorial intent - concerning the *Harry Potter* universe should be taken into account when discussing the possible meanings and interpretations of the series. The most problematic aspect of Rowling’s interference is the “primacy of *Rowling’s* interpretation over the infinite, individual interpretations of any and all *Harry Potter* readers, and the implicit denial of alternative interpretations” (Ingleton 186). I have chosen to include these extratextual comments whenever I find they can serve to problematise or add to my discussion. Yet, precisely because of Rowling's authorial comments, it is important that one is able to separate what the real author has said from what one can see in the text. As we shall see, the ideology of the real and implied author are not necessarily the same.

² “Pottermore” is an online, interactive companion to the novels, where Rowling herself offers additions and contributions to the story. Pottermore.com

Narration, Plot, Characterisation

The narrative voice in the series has been discussed by several critics, and like Lykke H. A. Guanio-Uluru in her PhD. dissertation, “Best-selling Ethics: A Literary Analysis of Ethical Aspects of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* Series.” (2012), I find John Granger’s description of the “third person, limited omniscient view” appropriate (Granger, as cited by Guanio-Uluru 218). The reader follows Harry and sees the world from his point of view throughout the entire series, with a few exceptions.³ This “narratological voice”, makes Rowling’s use of narrative misdirection possible, as Guanio-Uluru points out, which is an important tool in her storytelling repertoire, where the “revelation plot” and surprise endings are implemented repeatedly (218). Jack Zipes, in his book *Sticks and Stones* (2002), describes the plot in each book as following a formula – similar to a fairy-tale - where Harry always starts the story at the evil family (the Dursley’s), and at the end of each novel is the reaffirmed hero (176-177). Although Zipes’s book was published before the publication of all the novels, I would argue that his summary of the structure applies to the later novels as well. This revelation plot is a common characteristic for melodramatic work, and Marc Bousquet argues, in his “Harry Potter, the War Against Evil, and the Melodramatization of Public Culture” (2009), that the *Harry Potter* series belongs to this tradition. Bousquet writes that the revelation plot circles on “Potter misunderstood, Potter recognized” (189). Harry is repeatedly revealed to be good after friends, schoolmates and public misjudge him, at times even he himself questions his goodness, as seen for instance in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998). As we shall see, these alterings and unexpected developments occurs within almost every major character throughout the series.

The most striking feature of melodrama - in relation to the *Harry Potter* novels - is Bousquet’s summarisation that “[a]s a victim, the hero’s character generally doesn’t develop, but is always, simply, 'good'. Consequently much of the dramatic action has to do with being misunderstood or victimised. The character doesn’t change, but his circumstances change or his true identity is revealed” (179). In many ways, it can be argued to be the case of Harry’s character as well, because he remains good, while his surroundings alter. Bousquet supports this reading of the character when he explains that, essentially, melodrama has as its core feature a moment of enlightenment: “At the end of the mayhem, the hero’s reward is an acknowledgement that he was right all along, however paranoid, irrational, and antisocial he seemed throughout the plot” (Bousquet 181). This summarisation bears many similarities to the character of Harry, as he is periodically broody, antisocial and repeatedly misunderstood by the public throughout the entire series, but does the readers ever doubt his goodness? And does Harry change? Does he develop further than in a strictly physical sense and in practical

³ At the beginning of *PS*, *GoF*, *HBP* and *DH* the first chapters follow other characters or scenes remote from Harry.

knowledge over the seven years the readers follow him? This is something that will be investigated further in the analysis of his character.

Characters in literature are usually, for the sake of simplicity, separated into two categories: “flat” and “round” characters. However, there are numerous nuances between these two counterpoints: “The various characters abstracted from a given text are seldom grasped as having the same degree of ‘fullness’” (Rimmon-Kenan 40). Distinguishing between “flat” and “round” characters is relatively straightforward; where flat characters are often humorous caricatures, that are easily recognised and do not develop through the plot, round characters are traditionally more complex and do develop as the story evolves (40). These categories have been criticised for being too simple because they exclude several possibilities, such as the potential depth and life that can be found in some flat characters, in addition to the obliteration of the nuances of characters in, and between, these two categories (40).

To return to the issue of plot, one may also ask to what extent the *Harry Potter* novels conform with the tradition of the realist *Bildungsroman*. These are typically narratives of “character growth - of overcoming internal obstacles and changes of attitude by the hero” (Bousquet 182). This is also a narrative that can be compared to the *Harry Potter* series, since Harry is on a continued journey to understand Voldemort and how to destroy him. As Bousquet writes: “Melodramatic heroes are misunderstood by authority; realist heroes misunderstands themselves or others” (183). Bousquet admits that in the later novels the characters of the *Harry Potter* series seem to develop, and Harry becomes “more of a bourgeois-realist hero, with *Bildungsroman*-style challenges that establish the growth and evolution of his character” (186). He also writes that the melodramatic structure remains throughout the series. In my opinion, there seems to be examples of both literary traditions in the series. On the one hand, Harry does seem to be repeatedly misunderstood and then cleared without developing much as a person (he is often right from the very start, and the disbelief and doubt can be found in the characters around him), but on the other hand, he can be argued to go through a moral growth and development as he moves closer to defeating Voldemort while at the same time coming to terms with his own fate - and the sacrifices he must make. Does Harry evolve as a character from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) where he chooses to, selflessly, save the stone and not use it, to *DH* where he chooses to, selflessly, give his life for the people he loves? This question, and more, will be dealt with in the second half of this thesis where Harry’s character, and the evil within him will be analysed. First, a brief presentation of the problem of representing evil in children's books.

Is This Children's Literature?

A key question in the previous criticism has been whether or not the *Harry Potter* series may

be considered children's fantasy since it grows progressively darker towards the latter half of the heptalogy. As Maria Nikolajeva has argued in her article "The Development of Children's Fantasy" (2012), this kind of question has typically been raised - not only with the *Harry Potter* novels - but with many examples of children's fantasy. The majority of the "best" examples of children's fantasy were at some point questioned as books for children, and Nikolajeva refers to the new phenomenon of cross-over fantasy and the work of Philip Pullman and J. K. Rowling in particular as examples of this tendency ("Development" 60-61). According to David Rudd's section on "Crossover Literature" in *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (2010), "cross-over literature" became a widely known term at the beginning of the twenty-first century, used to describe books that appealed to both adult and child readers (158). Some of these cross-over books are easily recognised by the fact that they are published in dual editions, with different covers for adult and child readers (the *Harry Potter* series is an example of this). Rudd points out that the majority of cross-over literature are children's books that have become popular with adults, not the other way around (158). J. K. Rowling, in addition to Mark Haddon and Philip Pullman, is considered one of the greatest influences for this trend in Britain (158). Nikolajeva comments, in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (2010), on the "adult appeal" of the *Harry Potter* novels as originating in the different layers in the books, hence adult readers appreciate layers such as: "adult issues, the richness of allusions, elaborate linguistic games, or social satire" (13). Maria Nikolajeva brings forward one of the most commonly asked questions in the field of children's literature: does children's fantasy belong to the area of education or art (8)? In other words, should we study and consider it as written for educational purposes or as a work of literature? This question is often referred to as the "literary-didactic split", and like Nikolajeva herself, I will operate with the idea that all literature is both (8).

In discussing the problematic representations of evil, I will assume that the *Harry Potter* series is primarily part of children's and teenage fantasy, and that its implied readers are therefore children and teenagers.⁴ It is important to clarify the readership because it will be essential for my discussion of the possible educational and moral lessons that the main characters can pass on to the readers. However, the classification of the *Harry Potter* novels as children's fantasy can be disputed as the final books in the series, in particular, deal with increasingly dark themes and situations. While it is possible to argue that these themes are more suited for young adult readers than children, it can be said that the potential guidance and moral development these themes can offer the young readers far outweigh their controversy. In addition, the majority of the young readers of the *Harry Potter* novels grow older while reading the books, and the dark themes found in the series reflect the maturing of

⁴ While numerous adults have also read the *Harry Potter* novels, they were initially written for children and teenagers, and so any possible moral or educational points that are made are arguably aimed at these implied readers.

its readers.

Bruno Bettelheim, in his *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), writes of children's fantasy and how prior to the age of five children can generally not understand the difference between fantasy and reality (64). After the age of five, which is also - according to Bettelheim - "when fairy tales become truly meaningful", children will no longer confuse it with reality, and will therefore be able to distinguish and understand its content and meaning (64). While the implied readers of the *Harry Potter* series are on average older than five years old, it is important to note their age will allow them to distinguish the fantasy in the series from reality. Nikolajeva points out that "[y]oung readers usually have stronger empathy with literary characters, mainly because they perceive them as 'real'" (*Rhetoric* 7). Hence, more mature readers can detach themselves from the story being told, and enjoy stories with protagonists they do not identify with, while younger readers usually lack this ability and attach themselves to the story in a different way – but at the same time they are able to separate reality from fiction. Another approach is represented by Courtney B. Strimel, in her article "The Politics of Terror: Rereading *Harry Potter*" (2004), where she argues that the combination of magic and horrible events in the *Harry Potter* series creates a distancing function for young readers which can be beneficial. By distancing themselves from the conflict through fantasy fiction, the readers are able to process and deal with fear and evil, and incorporate these coping mechanisms into their everyday life (40).

Christopher J. Patrick and Sarah K. Patrick has written an article called "Exploring the Dark Side – *Harry Potter* and the Psychology of Evil" (2006), in it they point out that even though the *Harry Potter* series is considered children's literature, this does not necessarily prevent it from dealing with very dark themes of evil and death (222). While these themes are indeed "featured prominently" in the heptalogy, this is not exclusive to the *Harry Potter* series as many other classical children's stories and fairy tales deal with frightening and intense topics and have dark, evil villains as well. For example, there are many similarities between the *Harry Potter* novels and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Hobbit*. All have a "presence of supreme evil and the need to defeat it" which "adds a compelling, universal element to the story that makes it appealing to adolescents and adults as well as younger children" (Patrick and Patrick 222). In other words, this series' universal themes make it suitable for a variety of readers.

Catherine Butler, in her article "Modern Children's Fantasy" (2012), discusses the evolving trends within children's fantasy from the 1960s until the present, and the *Harry Potter* series is one of her most prominent examples. She defines the series as a part of "modern children's fantasy" and says that Rowling has done her fair share to reshape its nature (232):

It is now less common to find fantasies that are delimited in the sense that the end of the book and the resolution of the plot coincide with a return to a non-fantastic 'normality'. Perhaps under the influence of realist young adult fiction, children's fantasies now usually ensure that encounters with the fantastic precipitate significant emotional growth, if not life-defining change, in their protagonists. (Butler 225)

Butler refers to the *Harry Potter* series as one of the predecessors in this development. It can be argued that Harry is not the same person at the end of the seventh book as he was at the beginning of the first, but that he has matured and developed and in this sense the series as a whole can be seen as a *Bildungsroman*, as was mentioned in the previous section. The *Harry Potter* series is a complex children's fantasy where the characters evolve, serious topics are dealt with, and valuable lessons learned by both the character and the reader, some of which will be presented in the following section.

The Problem of Evil: Overview of the Existing Criticism

The presence of evil in the *Harry Potter* series is undeniable, something that has been frequently and persistently emphasised by Christian and non-Christian critics alike⁵. Elizabeth Heilman, in the introduction to *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* (2009), writes that some "Christian censors around the world see the books as diabolic stories encouraging occult practices, magic and witchcraft" (3). In this thesis, the representations of evil in the series will not be approached from a Christian point of view, but instead as a general theme often found in literature. The presence of evil in the characters, especially Voldemort and Harry, will be discussed further in Part I and II, respectively. In Part I there is also a section further defining and explaining the different definitions and theories concerning evil; a Christian approach will be presented, alongside Patrick and Patrick's discussion of evil in the *Harry Potter* series, and Jennifer L. Geddes's treatment of evil in her "Banal Evil and Useless Knowledge: Hannah Arendt and Charlotte Delbo on Evil after the Holocaust" (2003).

Evil is an incredibly difficult term to define. It is a word that covers an array of feelings, actions and opinions, and it is often easier to attempt a definition by looking at some of the subcategories that are usually associated with it; such as anger, hate and aggression. When discussing the representations of evil in the *Harry Potter* series, I shall argue that evil is first and foremost defined as a result of, or motivation for, actively and consciously causing serious (physical) harm - and as the most serious offence: taking someone else's life. Murder is the most serious and evil crime, and we see this most clearly in the character of Voldemort

⁵ Christian critics argue the presence of evil in the series, and their focus tend to be on the evil it encourages in its audience. Some accuse the series of encouraging paganism and Devil worshipping. However, there are also Christian critics such as John Granger, Richard Abanes and Peter Ciaccio, who encourage Christians to read the series, because they find an abundance of Christian themes, values and symbols in it.

who causes great terror and destruction by killing innocent people without hesitation. However, there are milder incidents than murder that are still defined as evil, and Harry Potter, the hero of this series, grows increasingly ambiguous in relation to such lesser versions of evil, for instance in his careless use of spells, and his likeness to Voldemort. The connection between Voldemort and Harry Potter (which is not fully explained until the final instalment of the series, as a clever construct of the revelation plot), can cause the readers to doubt Harry's moral and question whether he is actually the representative of such unwavering goodness as the hero of a children's fantasy is expected to be.

The claim of this thesis is that the doubt and need for reflection which the revelation plot evokes in the reader are beneficial, because as the dynamic and evolving characters of the series make moral (or unmoral) choices and act in morally ambiguous ways they challenge the reader to reconsider and re-evaluate their initial impression of the characters. This need for reflection allows the reader to deduce that good people can make bad choices, and evil people can do good deeds. It helps create nuanced characters, rather than the traditional black and white, good and bad archetypes that are typical elements frequently found in children's literature. Patrick and Patrick describe the presence of evil in the *Harry Potter* series by writing that "we [the readers] are fascinated by the question of evil because all of us, as human beings, are capable of evil actions as well as good ones" (222). This quote reflects another reason why the characters in the series are relevant to analyse: in many ways they are similar to the readers, facing emotions and struggles similar to ones experienced by the readers themselves in real life, hence making it possible for the readers to identify with the fictional characters and their hardships.

While some have argued that the content of the *Harry Potter* series is too dark and serious for children to deal with, Strimel argues that "fantasy is often used as an escape from the real world" and that the genre can create a "safe realm to tackle anxiety-producing issues" (37). She also mentions Robert Needlman as an advocate for fantasy "as a means of escape to facilitate learning"; through this genre a safe environment can be created where children can learn, especially if they are dealing with issues like terror, which is frequent in this series (Needlman as qtd. by Strimel 37). In this sense, the *Harry Potter* series can have the potential for teaching children valuable lessons in relation to ethics, in addition to offering guidance on how to cope with difficult topics. This focus is also the theme of Guanio-Uluru's dissertation, where she analyses the fundamental ethical aspects found in the *Harry Potter* series and *The Lord of the Rings*. My thesis, however, attempts to highlight the problematic conclusion of the series that in many ways lessen this ethical potential, namely the "purification" of Harry's character as a result of his sacrifice and removal of Voldemort's soul from his own. I believe the reader's identification with Harry's internal struggle probably decreases when Harry's

anger and frustration are explained as a result of him being the seventh Horcrux. By doing so, the author has removed the most problematic, evil, angry and tortured side of Harry, which is precisely the side that has made him a noteworthy, dynamic, multi-dimensional and engaging character.

Organisation of This Thesis

This thesis is separated into two parts. Part I deals primarily with the “evil” characters in the *Harry Potter* series, while Part II deals with representations of evil within the “good” characters. Part II presents and analyses Voldemort and the Malfoys, but it also gives a further treatment of characterisation and theories of evil. It begins with a subsection called “Character Analysis”, where the characterisation of characters in children's literature, and some of the considerations that needs to be made are presented. Part II continues with a subsection on “Evil in the *Harry Potter* Series”, which is further separated into two sections: one “Theory of Evil”, and one where these theories are applied to the *Harry Potter* series. Following these two subchapters is a thorough examination of the character of “Voldemort”. Everything from his beginnings, to his childhood, time at Hogwarts and adult life is considered, and culminates with “Voldemort's Demise: Why Evil Never Wins”, which contains a discussion of Voldemort's most prominent flaws. After this, “Evil Methods” suggests some of the most important methods found in the series, followed by “The Malfoys”, where this family is introduced as an example of a lesser form of evil found in the series.

In Part II of this thesis, a presentation of the good characters is offered. It begins with an extensive consideration of the character of “Harry Potter”, where the primary focus is kept on representations of evil found in his character, primarily in the form of his connection to Voldemort, his anger, and his choices. This section is concluded with a discussion of his character as a whole. Following “Harry Potter” is a presentation of “Severus Snape” and his ambiguous character, before a final segment on “Albus Dumbledore” and his moral.

The thesis is rounded off with “Concluding Thoughts: What Can We Learn From Harry Potter?”, where the main arguments of the thesis are summarised, and my concluding thoughts are given.

1 - Part I

1.1 Character Analysis

Both Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Maria Nikolajeva have emphasised that there has been little research done and theory written on characters in literature, and they both attempt to compensate by writing about it. Rimmon-Kenan investigates the notion of “the death of character”, and Nikolajeva attempts to contribute to a theory on character in children’s fiction which is a field that has been paid even less attention (Rimmon-Kenan 29, Nikolajeva *Rhetoric* vii). Because characters, and analysis' of specific characters, their traits, history and the implications of such factors are of great importance to this thesis, I will briefly go through the most important points in character theory. In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (2009) Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle emphasise the importance and power of characters, by writing that:

Characters are the life of literature: they are the objects of our curiosity and fascination, affection and dislike, admiration and condemnation. Indeed, so intense is our relationship with literary characters that they often cease to be simply ‘objects’. Through the power of identification, through sympathy and antipathy, they can become part of how we conceive ourselves, a part of who we are.
(Bennett and Royle 63)

This attitude to literary characters is something that has developed over time, as in ancient literary theory – such as Aristotle's - characters were considered secondary to the plot (Rimmon-Kenan 34). In this thesis, Bennett and Royle’s attitude to characters, namely their importance and power of identification, will be the chosen approach.

The first distinction to be made in relation to characters should be the difference between a mimetic and a semiotic approach, and a clarification of which approach will be used here. The central question in the discussion of literary characters is whether characters should be perceived (and therefore analysed) as comparable to real, living people, or as purely “textual constructions”. This question forms the distinction between mimetic and semiotic characters, which are the two opposites. While the mimetic view of characters - or fiction at large - says that fiction is a direct reflection of reality, the semiotic or thematic approach presupposes that characters are made of “words alone” and therefore have no reference in the real world (Nikolajeva *Rhetoric* 8). Rimmon-Kenan attempts to clarify the difference between these two extremes by focusing the difference on either “people or words” (31). A semiotic approach assumes that characters are “closed textual constructions” and that the readers “extract the essential traits of the characters exclusively from their sayings and doings in the text” (Nikolajeva *Rhetoric* 10). In other words, if the readers hear nothing about a background they can assume it never existed.

There are dangers and drawbacks to both theories, but also advantages. A mimetic approach enables the critic to “speculate about the characters’ unconscious motivations and even constructs for them a past and future beyond what is specified in the text” (Rimmon-Kenan 32). It is easy, and common, to “read a literary character using schemata from child psychology and even clinical psychiatry, thus treating characters as medical ‘cases’ ” (*Rhetoric* 9). The danger of this approach is that while it may be interesting and, to a degree, enlightening, it rarely is more than speculation, because literary characters do not have to follow the mental patterns or behaviour of real human beings (*Rhetoric* 9).

The question remains: which approach is relevant for this thesis, the mimetic or the semiotic? Since this thesis will focus on the possible interpretations by the readers, of characters and character traits found in the *Harry Potter* series, I would argue that the mimetic approach offers the best opportunities for analysis. Nikolajeva writes that there is generally a strong tendency towards mimetic approaches within children’s literature criticism (*Rhetoric* 10). Because only with a mimetic approach is it possible to talk about characters as “plausible” or “implausible” (10), which is relevant as to whether they can serve as believable sources of guidance. Furthermore, the distinction between a mimetic and semiotic approach is especially “relevant in children’s literature research, since children, as unsophisticated readers, have an even stronger tendency than adult readers to interpret characters as real, living people and judge them accordingly” (Nikolajeva *Rhetoric* x).

There are some considerations to be made in relation to this series being primarily children’s fiction, and one of them relates to the complexity of the characters. Nikolajeva writes that while some might assume that characters in children's fiction are less complex, this is not necessarily the case (*Rhetoric* x). Still, as she points out, the characters must always be comprehensible for young readers. This is true of the *Harry Potter* series, where the majority of characters are complex and evolve substantially from the first novel to the last, but where it must be presumed that most of these characters are understood by the reader, who herself probably ages and evolves during the reading process⁶. Nikolajeva continues by pointing out that in children’s literature, more than in mainstream literature, characters serve as “ideological (or rather educational) vehicles” influencing and challenging the reader’s perspective and opinions (*Rhetoric* x). In this sense, the characters, and the lessons and messages they send, are of great importance as they are in the position of possibly altering and forming their readers.

The majority of traditional children’s literature has been plot oriented, because, as Nikolajeva points out; “[i]t is commonly believed that young readers are more interested in plot than in characters, as compared to adult readers” (*Rhetoric* 12). This has resulted in a

⁶ Seven novels take a while to get through, and many readers, including myself, have grown in the course of Rowling's publications.

large number of flat and static characters. However, a shift that took place in children's literature after the 1960s, and an increased interest in characters emerged, towards more "psychological, character-oriented children's novels" (13). The *Harry Potter* novels contain both a strong focus on the development of characters (Harry, in particular), in addition to being plot driven, which is evident in the battle against Voldemort and the continued build up towards the final confrontation between Harry and Voldemort. However, some, like Ernelle Fife, in her article "Reading J. K. Rowling Magically: Creating C. S. Lewis's 'Good Reader'" (2005), argues that the series is entirely character driven, because "the protagonists' choices are always ultimately more significant than what happens to them" (149). This makes it even more important to analyse the characters, their actions and motivations, as well as their moral.

Bennett and Royle write that "[t]o read about a character is to imagine and create a character in reading: it is to create a person" (69). In this sense, the reader plays an important part in the creation of the character, as stated in reader-response theory. A reader-response theory "presupposes that the reader constructs the character, alongside all other elements of the text" (Nikolajeva *Rhetoric* 16). The most well-known critics who have prescribed to the reader-response theory are Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Umberto Eco, but they are far from the only ones, and Nikolajeva mentions Baruch Hochman's claim that "the impact on the reader is the most essential function of the character" (*Rhetoric* 16). Nikolajeva argues that readers connect the information they are given about the characters in part to their real life experiences, and partly to their previous readings, and in this way, each reader's previous experiences influence the way they interpret a character (16). She, continues; "I would [...] venture to state that young readers feel stronger empathy with literary characters and that children's writers appeal to the readers' feelings in a more immediate way" (16). Furthermore, in children's literature, there will undoubtedly be some readers who retrieve and construct characters in different ways. There is an important distinction between the primary audience, children, and the secondary audience, adult mediators, as Nikolajeva emphasises: "A children's text does not necessarily have adults as its implied co-reader (although in practice it is almost impossible to avoid); therefore, the demands we as adults put on characters in terms of unity, consistency, or complexity are not relevant for the primary implied reader" (17). In other words, the expectations of a child reader differ from those of an adult. As Michael Benton points out in his "Reader-Response Criticism" (1996), children's responses when reading are different than adults', for instance in the different emphasis they put on plot, characters and the quality of writing (79). In addition to the difference between child and adult readers, there is also a distinction within the group of child readers; between those readers who are sophisticated, competent, and informed, and others who are unsophisticated, incompetent, uninformed readers, where the latter group might miss clues given in the text or

not find them important and as a result miss out on important points(17). The various readers reconstruct the characters from the text in different ways by putting together the various indications that are spread throughout the text (Rimmon-Kenan 36).

Nikolajeva writes, that in children's fiction, guidance offered by the author to fill in these textual gaps is typically stronger than in mainstream fiction (16). She continues by pointing out that a children's author will probably present the character traits, behaviour and motivation in a more pronounced way, because the "author's construction of the implied reader is more conscious and deliberate" (16). The implied reader in children's literature, then, is clearer than in other forms of literature, and the author uses this knowledge to her advantage, by adapting her writing accordingly. In this section I have presented the difference between a mimetic and a semiotic approach, and argued why the mimetic will be applied in this thesis, furthermore, I have explained that we will primarily see the *Harry Potter* series as being character, not plot, driven, and that characters in children's literature are different from the characters in mainstream literature – but not necessarily less complex. In the next section, a definition of evil will be offered, in addition to several theories of, and approaches to, evil.

1.2 Evil in the *Harry Potter* Series

In *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (1984), H. P. Owen writes that there are several ways of considering evil, both in terms of its "nature, explanation and remedy" (120). He distinguishes "moral evil" from "non-moral evil" (such as natural disasters), where the definition of moral evil is the one that concerns this thesis. Owen defines moral evil as consisting "in transgression of the moral law", and continues by writing that an act is "morally evil only if it is a voluntary infringement of a moral law that is known to the agent" (120). In the article "Narrating Evil: Great Faults and 'Splendidly Wicked People'" (2001), Roger Shattuck offers four distinctions between different forms of evil; natural, moral, radical and metaphysical evil (50). His definition of moral evil is similar to Owen's, but his radical evil adds something to the idea of evil concerning this thesis. Shattuck defines radical evil as applying to "immoral behavior so pervasive in a person or a society that moral scruples and constraints have been utterly abandoned" (50). As shall be discussed later, this form of evil might be applied to one character in the series; Voldemort. In the *Harry Potter* series, Hermione Granger comments that "Evil' is a strong word" (*HBP* 595). This is supported in Professor Horace Slughorn's description to a young Voldemort: "[a]n act of evil - the supreme act of evil. By committing murder. Killing rips the soul apart" (*HBP* 465). Murder permeates the world of Harry Potter: Harry's parents are murdered, so are Sirius Black, Dumbledore and countless other innocent people – as well as an unknown number of Death Eaters. Harry grows up a victim of the supreme act of evil, and it shapes and forms his

character into the hero he becomes. However, Slughorn's emphasis on the "supreme act of evil", leads us to believe there are minor acts of evil as well. I interpret these as lesser breaches of moral laws, and violent emotions and acts, such as the cardinal sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony. The scale by which I will measure the level of evil I find in the series will consist of the one supreme evil, and lesser versions of evil, which will enable discussions of a variety of evils.

When writing about evil in general, according to Jennifer Geddes, the approach is usually either theoretical or empirical. In other words, as Geddes writes in the introduction to *Evil After Postmodernism* (2001), the writer usually attempts to either "explain how and why evil things happen in the world, thereby taking up the subject of evil at a conceptual and theoretical level; or they seek to describe and analyze particular events or situations deemed evil" ("Introduction" 3). In this thesis, a combination of a theoretical and empirical approach will be attempted as a theory of evil is examined, before specific examples from the series will be presented and analysed - always keeping in mind that these are imagined scenarios, but can be seen as a reflection of our contemporary society.

When writing about the theme or nature of evil, references and parallels to Christianity are numerous, since it forms the basis of many values and norms for Christians and non-Christians alike. Many of these basic Christian morals have been adopted by non-Christian thinkers, and Owen points out that, in the same way, Christian views of evil are in many ways similar to the views adopted by non-Christians (120). Some, like Patrick and Patrick, draw direct parallels between the presence of evil in the Bible and in the *Harry Potter* series, primarily between Lucifer, and Lord Voldemort. For instance, Lucifer's fall from being an angel of God to being cast out because he opposed God, to then fulfilling his own desires of self-glorification and power, is sometimes compared to Voldemort's fall. Voldemort was a clever student with great potential at Hogwarts, but he crossed over to the dark side searching for power and immortality (Patrick and Patrick 223). There are a number of similarities between them; both Lucifer and Voldemort attempt to draw other people to their side; the snake is a symbol of them both: Voldemort has Nagini and is a Parselmouth, and Lucifer transformed into a snake in the garden of Eden to seduce Adam and Eve into eating from the Tree of Knowledge (Patrick and Patrick 223). Patrick and Patrick continue by pointing to the similarities of plot that can be found in the *Harry Potter* novels and the New Testament, especially referring to the Devil tempting Jesus with promises of power and wealth. The parallel to this scene can be found in the *Harry Potter* novels where Voldemort both threatens and attempts to tempt Harry into joining his side with promises of wealth and immortality (223). This image of gaining power and wealth through an alliance with the devil can also be found in many other stories, for instance in Goethe's *Faust* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*

(223). It is a well known and frequently used theme in stories from all over the world, and the forces of evil have been represented in the form of “legendary monsters of various kinds” throughout the ages, some more popular than others, such as “witches, werewolves, vampires, zombies, goblins, and ghouls” (Patrick and Patrick 224).

1.2.1 Theory of Evil

Geddes points out that evil is a multivalent term and that scholarly studies of evil are often a mixture of both theoretical and empirical research and discussion (“Banal Evil” 109). In her article, “Banal Evil and Useless Knowledge: Hannah Arendt and Charlotte Delbo on Evil after the Holocaust” (2003), Geddes explains some of the common misconceptions when people think of evil, by referring to the writings of Hannah Arendt and Charlotte Delbo. There are several ongoing discussions as to how best to approach the study of evil. Should the perpetrators be the object of study? The victims? The intentions or the effects? Geddes argues that these divisions are artificial, and that they exclude elements which could lead to gaps in our understanding of evil (105). For instance, even though there might not be evil intentions behind an action, the effect might be evil, and so the perpetrator is “morally responsible for the suffering inflicted by evil” (105). According to Geddes, making sure we neither mythologize evil, nor impose meaning on the suffering that is the result of evil, is important (105). She writes that “[p]eople speak of evil geniuses or demonic monsters, as if there is an extraordinary quality to those who do evil”, and when we allow evil to take on this mythical quality we let the evildoer be removed to a category outside of human beings (105). When thinking of people who do evil as monsters, we make them as different and distant from ourselves as we possible can, yet most of the people who commit acts of extreme cruelty and evil are ordinary human beings (106).

This emphasis on the humanisation of evil posits an interesting contrast to the “supreme evil” we find in the *Harry Potter* series, which is primarily focused on Voldemort. Throughout most of the novels Voldemort is represented as this mythologised creature of pure evil. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), when Voldemort regains his “human” form, he is described as having a combination of human and animalistic features: “[w]hiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes, and a nose as flat as a snake’s, with slits for nostrils... [...] His hands were like large, pale spiders; his long white fingers caressed his own chest, his arms his face; the red eyes, whose pupils were like slits, like a cat’s” (*GoF* 558, 559). In the first meeting with the character of Voldemort in *PS*, he is living inside Quirrell, his face protruding from the back of Quirrell's skull (*PS* 212). It is not until *HBP*, when Harry and the readers are introduced to some aspects of Voldemort’s past such as his childhood, that they encounter a Voldemort who physically resembles a human being.

The renowned American philosopher Richard J. Bernstein has written an article called

"Reflections on Radical Evil: Arendt and Kant" (2002), where he also supports the idea that "[m]onstrous deeds do not require monstrous motives" (21). Yet, in the case of Voldemort it seems like this might not be the case, which will be discussed in the subsection concerning him. In her article, Geddes writes of Delbo's work,⁷ and how it "challenges us to consider the limitations in our ability to understand evil, to acknowledge the gap between the knowledge we as scholars have of evil and the knowledge one has of evil when one has suffered because of it" ("Banal Evil" 110). The evil that is dealt with in this thesis, however, is imaginary evil, it is fantasy fiction, which is important to emphasise for fear of making assumptions about the parallels between fantasy and reality. One could argue that evil is less represented in children's fantasy because in many ways reality is too brutal. Nevertheless, for the implied readers of the *Harry Potter* series - the children and teenagers - the evil presented can function as an introduction to the evil in human beings and it can, as we shall see, be a good starting point for moral reflection and discussion.

1.2.2 Applying Theories of Evil to the *Harry Potter* Series

The fight between good and evil that is present in the *Harry Potter* series is a traditional one that can be found repeatedly throughout history in myths, legends and fairytales. According to Patrick and Patrick this conflict can be regarded "as an archetypal theme – something fundamental to our experience of being human" (231). This fundamental, overarching theme is reflected in the character of Harry, who shows the potential to commit evil deeds and must at times fight it. "It is this struggle between good and evil within Harry (as well as between Harry and Voldemort) that is so inherently fascinating to readers – because it reflects an ongoing struggle that each of us experiences within ourselves" (227). It can be inferred from this quote that the readers are drawn to stories like the one told in the *Harry Potter* series because they recognise the battle between good and evil from within themselves. Harry's connection to Voldemort could be seen as emphasising the dark aspects found in each individual by externalising the conflict, removing part of the struggle that takes place within a person, and making it visible and polarised between Harry and Voldemort. In this sense, Voldemort represents the darkness Harry battles inside. Each human being has a "dark side" that they must balance as part of their psychological development (Patrick and Patrick 231). Patrick and Patrick argue that it is the presence of this dark side that leads us to be "fascinated with depictions of evil in the media and occurrences of evil in real life" (231).

The particular focus of this thesis is the representations of evil in the *Harry Potter* series, and specifically how it is illustrated through the characters of Voldemort and Harry. There is a dynamic relationship between the good and the evil characters, but also between good and

⁷ Charlotte Delbo, an Auschwitz survivor, writes of the "useless knowledge" one acquires through extreme suffering - knowledge that is neither necessary nor constructive to the sufferer (Geddes "Banal Evil" 111).

evil impulses within the good characters. This development is a result of the increasingly dark nature of the novels, which leads to a corresponding development in the characters. Jennifer Sattaur writes, in her article “Harry Potter: A World of Fear” (2006), that “Rowling’s rewriting of her own characters is a clever manipulation of complex versus simple reading” as the characters grow increasingly ambiguous (4). In addition to a development of the characters, the evil in the series evolves and darkens, and grows increasingly comparable to the world of the reader. As Sattaur points out by claiming that “[a] death-eater could be anyone; a terrorist could be your own next-door neighbour” (6). These similarities are arguably a narrative tool applied to enhance the feeling of fear and terror by linking them to something the reader is familiar with.

Patrick and Patrick explain and define two theories they deem important in relation to the evil in the Potter novels: Freud and his Id, Superego and Ego, and Jung's archetypes (226-227). They argue that Freud's theories are valid because of his idea of Id “comprising the basic primitive, instinctual, and unconscious survival urges of the individual – in particular, urges toward sexuality and aggression” (226). As widely recognised, Freud saw these urges as present in all humans, as they form the basis of our survival, and the Ego and Superego are moderators of these basic instincts. Therefore, from Freud's perspective, “the mind of each individual in society contains a primitive, potentially evil 'monster' ” (226). In relation to the *Harry Potter* novels, “the Id can be seen as the potential that individuals [...] have to go over to the Dark side – i.e., the potential for selfishness, power-seeking, and self-aggrandizement” (226). Patrick and Patrick write that Harry has the same potential to “move to the Dark side”, and that this is something he must fight at times, which is a struggle the readers recognise because it is a struggle they themselves experience (227). However, I disagree with this claim, as in my opinion, Harry is never in any real danger of joining the Dark side. This discussion will be continued in Part II.

Patrick and Patrick write that “Jung's theory is valuable in thinking about why themes such as the struggle of good versus evil appear universal to human experience and arise repeatedly in various myths, legends and stories throughout history.” (227). They mention the “collective unconscious”, and the “dialectic relationship among elements of the collective unconscious”, i.e. archetypes, as two of Jung’s most important ideas (227). Each basic archetype includes an opposing archetype, for instance, the Hero and the Shadow. The dynamic struggle between these archetypes is known as a “dialectic”, and this dialectic struggle is present in all individuals (227). According to Jung there needs to be a balance between the archetypes, because if one is dominant it is unhealthy for the individual. This theory can help explain the readers' fascination with the *Harry Potter* novels, or indeed any novel that depicts the struggle between good and evil, as it is a struggle that we unconsciously

recognise from our own efforts towards becoming balanced individuals.

Most people – while capable, according to the theories discussed above – do not commit serious evil acts in their lives. However, Patrick and Patrick mention one kind of person for whom “power and self-gratification are of sole importance”; the psychopath (230). “A psychopath is an individual who lacks the capacity to feel guilt or concern for others (empathy) and who is incapable of love” (230). This description is, more or less, a perfect summary of the character of Voldemort, who can neither feel, nor understand, love, and for that reason constantly underestimates its power. Patrick and Patrick continue their description of a psychopath by writing that they “appear confident, sociable, and charming on the surface, but underneath this they are deceptive, exploitative, and uncaring” (230). Again, this description is a true match of the younger Voldemort whom Harry sees glimpses of through the memories of Slughorn in *HBP* and through Tom Riddle's diary in *CoS*. In these memories we are shown the charming and manipulative boy he once was. However, the Voldemort Harry knows and meets is nothing like the charming exterior presented to Slughorn. The next section of this thesis will expand on this description of Voldemort, and further analyse his character in an attempt to define the representations of evil in the *Harry Potter* series.

1.3 Voldemort

Voldemort is the villain in the *Harry Potter* series, and the one character that is unquestionably evil. Courtney B. Strimel highlights this by writing that “[a]lthough there is a tone of death, hate, lack of respect, and sheer evil [in the series], Voldemort is the single character that embodies those qualities. In his desire to reign over the magical world, he gains a complete disregard for life” (43). The character of Voldemort is important to comprehend in order to gain a full understanding of the role evil plays in the *Harry Potter* series, but also to understand the evil present in Harry's character. The discussion concerning Voldemort and evil, and the discoveries made, reveal, to a great extent, the ideas of the implied author concerning good and evil, hence, the moral that this author, in my reading, wishes to communicate to the implied readers. This perceived message will be discussed to a greater extent in Part II, but first, a look at the character of Voldemort, and possible motivations for his evil.

1.3.1 Voldemort's Beginnings: Was He Evil From Birth?

Voldemort's evil can be traced back to his family, parents, and his parents' loveless conception of him. Merope Gaunt, Voldemort's mother, along with her father and brother “were the last of the Gaunts, a very ancient wizarding family noted for a vein of instability and violence that flourished through the generations due to their habit of marrying their own cousins” (*HBP*

200, 201). We learn that the Gaunts are in possession of both the Peverell ring - suggesting that they are descendants of the second Peverell brother (The Tale of the Three Brothers, and the Deathly Hallows) - and Salazar Slytherin's locket - suggesting he is their ancestor (*HBP* 196). These are two very influential connections which make Voldemort a descendant of very powerful men, still, Merope is presented as a pitiful creature through the memories Harry is shown in the Pensieve: "Her hair was lank and dull and she had a plain, pale, rather heavy face. Her eyes, like her brother's, stared in opposite directions. [...] Harry thought he had never seen a more defeated-looking person" (*HBP* 194).

Voldemort's father, the handsome muggle, Tom Riddle, is rich and charming, and oblivious to Merope's affections for him. Dumbledore believes Merope slipped Tom Riddle some love potion, and that this is how they came to elope together. However, when she stopped giving him the potion, Riddle left her - while she was pregnant with Voldemort. This story describes Voldemort's background; his conception was a combination of obsessive love from his unstable mother and a father influenced by love potion. By the time Voldemort was born, his mother was alone, grieving and seeming to have given up on life; she barely had time to name her son before she died. Kathleen McEvoy writes in "Heroism at the Margins" (2011) that "Rowling complicates our understanding of his evil. Voldemort's backstory, while not excusing his actions, gives motivation for his evil" (215). Certainly, learning about where Voldemort came from and grew up influences the way the reader sees him. Had it not been for the gruesome deeds the reader knows he will grow up to commit one could almost pity him. McEvoy comments, "[i]n Tom Riddle, Rowling paints the picture of an unwanted, neglected child who grew up to lash out at the world that rejected him" (215). However, I am not sure I would agree that Voldemort is lashing out, it seems more like he enjoys doing evil, and he displays psychopathic tendencies as he grows up, hiding behind a manipulating and charming facade. Patrick and Patrick write that the factors that lead some people to commit horrible crimes like murder, or serial murders, are unknown, but that "[m]ost knowledgeable experts believe that inborn (constitutional) factors play some role in causing this type of extreme violence" (231). They continue by writing that many experts would argue that "random environmental factors [...] also play a role in leading such individuals over to the 'dark side'" (231). It seems likely that Voldemort's character is a result of a combination of magic (a loveless, manipulated conception) and a bad childhood (abandoned and alone). In "Love Potion No. 9 3/4" (2010), Gregory Bassham writes that it is not unlikely that Voldemort's beginnings influences his character, and that it would not be surprising "that a character who from his earliest years harbored such a fondness for cruelty and domination would have a mother willing to coerce the will of her mate and a father who would so callously neglect his child after the enchantment lifted" (Bassham 73). Granted, neither of Voldemort's parents

appear to offer a beneficial foundation for a child, but can the parentage alone be the cause of Voldemort's evil? As we shall see, Voldemort seems to have exhibited disturbing, sadistic signs from infancy and all the way through his childhood.

1.3.2 Voldemort The Child: Thoroughly Evil

Voldemort as a child is just as frightening as his beginnings. When Dumbledore goes to visit him at the orphanage in which he resided to tell him he is a wizard, and that he will start at Hogwarts, Voldemort is eleven years old. Mrs Cole, the matron, tells Dumbledore that “He’s a funny boy. [...] He was a funny baby, too. He hardly ever cried, you know. And then, when he got a little older, he was... odd” (*HBP* 250). She explains that he scares the other children, and that he has been surrounded by strange incidents to which he denies any connection to, like a rabbit hung from the ceiling, and children going off alone with him and returning obviously disturbed (*HBP* 251). These stories show the reader that Voldemort was different from other children from the very beginning. Possibly, he was affected by being born and raised in a Muggle orphanage that did not understand him and his abilities, but it can be argued that Harry’s childhood was very similar - apart from the very first year of his life - and he turned out surprisingly “normal”. The first year of a child’s life is undoubtedly influential, but can it be the basis for such evil? Surely, the conception where Tom Riddle Sr was under the influence of love potion must have been influential as well?

There are many similarities between Voldemort the child and Voldemort the adult: his contempt for his name, which represents his contempt of anything ordinary, as evident in his comment: “There are a lot of Toms” (*HBP* 257). Already when he was a child he had no friends, but preferred to command and control people. These disturbing tendencies are obvious from Dumbledore's first meeting with the eleven-year-old: “I can make bad things happen to people who annoy me. I can make them hurt if I want to” (*HBP* 253). This behaviour is consistent with the adult Voldemort who never had a friend, and as Dumbledore comments: “nor do I believe that he has ever wanted one” (*HBP* 259). Lastly, Voldemort the child, like Voldemort the adult, collected trophies, which were the forerunners of his Horcrux objects.

When Riddle came to Hogwarts he was instantly chosen to Slytherin, the house of his forefather, he learned early on that he was a Parselmouth, and was generally well-liked by all the teachers (*HBP* 337). All in all, an unusually talented, good-looking orphan. It was at school that he started surrounding himself with a gang of followers, and also where he changed his name as he learned the story of his parents. The sixteen-year-old Voldemort sought out his mother’s family, and upon learning the truth of his father from Morfin, his uncle, he murdered his Muggle father and his grandparents. He blamed the murders on Morfin and so “obliterating the last of the unworthy Riddle line and revenging himself upon the father

who never wanted him” (*HBP* 343, 344). Murdering his own family and blaming it on his uncle was Voldemort’s first act of “supreme evil” (that the reader learns of), and it happened at the age of sixteen. If there was ever a sign of his callousness, this incident is it.

1.3.3 Voldemort Grown Up: Evil Never Changes

Greg Garrett writes, in his book *One Fine Potion – The Literary Magic of Harry Potter* (2010) that “[e]very great adventure story needs a great villain – a Professor Moriarty, a Dracula, a Hannibal Lecter, a Darth Vader – and we are fortunate as readers of the Potter novels to have one of the greatest, Voldemort” (72). Voldemort is an extremely mysterious character and most of his adult life is clouded in secrecy. Dumbledore says: “I doubt whether there is a soul alive, apart from himself, who could give us a full account of his life since he left Hogwarts” (*HBP* 402).

As pointed out by Geddes, it is important not to mythologise evil, because evil actions are committed by humans, not monsters. However, to avoid mythologising Voldemort is not an easy task, as both his appearance and his actions reflect a nature far removed from what most people recognise. After his attempted murder of Harry, Voldemort survived without a body, his Horcruxes kept him alive and he lived like a parasite, feeding off of others. Shira Wolosky mentions “possession” as the “ultimate form” that Voldemort’s power takes (141), in her book *The Riddles of Harry Potter – Secret Passages and Interpretive Quests* (2010). She writes that “[t]he most intimate relationship Voldemort can ever achieve is possession; taking over others is his closest connection to them” (142). Voldemort’s presence and appearance in the first two books is solely through his possession of Professor Quirrell and then Ginny, and as he explains in *GoF*, after his “death” “[o]nly one power remained to me. I could possess the bodies of others. [...] my possession of them shortened their lives; none of them lasted long...” (*GoF* 567). Once he returned to a physical body he is described - as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis - as an inhuman figure with warped features. Wolosky argues that as Voldemort’s power increases, he grows “more and more beastlike”, and she continues by saying that in his pursuit of immortality he becomes increasingly deathlike (143). The description of Voldemort is one of the most obviously influential “direct definitions” in the series, as his appearance is so distinct and so influential. His “wide, livid scarlet eyes, and a nose as flat as a snake’s, with slits for nostrils” is a horrendous picture that immediately secures his identification as the villain - if that was not clear enough to begin with (*GoF* 558). Direct definitions are relatively easy to spot as they usually consist of a clear description or comment on the character by the most authoritative voice in the text (Rimmon-Kenan 60). However, it is important to note who comments, as comments offered by various other voices in the text - less trustworthy ones - cannot necessarily be taken as reliable affirmations of the traits or qualities they offer of a person (Rimmon-Kenan 60). In other words, as the reader is

seeing Voldemort through the eyes of Harry, it is important to exercise caution in case the image is clouded by Harry's prejudice.

Greg Garret writes that while Voldemort actively seeks to be supernatural, his fears and ambitions betray him as human (75). "What sets him apart is that his fear of death has warped his soul to the extent that, using his great personal power, he chooses to perform horrible acts" (75). Indeed, Voldemort goes through a transformation that Dumbledore credits with being a result of his soul being "mutilated beyond what we might call usual evil" (*HBP* 469). Still, as Garret maintains, "while Voldemort takes on many supernatural trappings, his very human fear of death still remains the most important reminder that he is merely a powerful – but human – villain" (76). This will become clear from my discussion of Voldemort's flaws - in other words, the flaws and shortcomings of pure evil - in the next section. In a sense, Voldemort's downfall emphasises his human shortcomings.

1.3.4 Voldemort's Demise: Why Evil Never Wins

Rita Singer's article, "Harry Potter and the Battle for the Soul: The Revival of the Psychomachia in Secular Fiction" (2011), deals with the dynamic between good and evil in the series, and she claims that "[t]he nature of the dark forces, that is their inability to feel compassion, inevitably contributes to Voldemort's downfall" (34). Because Voldemort neither feels nor understands empathy or love, he cannot predict the betrayals of his allies when they are motivated by love. Voldemort's downfall is his inability to understand love, and the lengths to which it might drive people. His blindness prevented him from predicting the actions of his allies and victims, and therefore the consequences were something he could not anticipate. He did not predict the power of Lily's sacrifice, the protection it gave Harry, or the inherent power that resides in people fighting for love. Rowling, the author, encourages such an interpretation of the motives supplied in the text by saying in an interview that Voldemort never loved anyone, "he loved only power, and himself. He valued people whom he could use to advance his own objectives" (Rowling, Web Chat 2007). It can be argued that Voldemort was blinded to the reactions of people who *did* love. An example of this blindness can be found in the case of Regulus Arturus Black and his house-elf, Kreacher. Regulus was a loyal Death Eater until Voldemort decided to torture Regulus's house-elf Kreacher to test the defences surrounding one of his Horcruxes. He poisoned Kreacher and made him relive his worst memories before he left him to die (*DH* 160). However, because Voldemort saw the house-elf as beneath him he did not bother learning his magic, and by so doing he made another mistake because the elf was able to escape. When Regulus found out, he then devoted the rest of his life to fighting Voldemort by searching for Horcruxes in secret.

I would argue that Voldemort constantly underestimates objects and forces that are not traditionally considered powerful. For instance, in *CoS* where Harry is given Fawkes and the

Sorting Hat as help, Riddle laughs mockingly and jeers at Harry: “This is what Dumbledore sends his defender! A songbird and an old hat! Do you feel brave, Harry Potter? Do you feel safe now?” (*CoS* 233). But indeed, these are the things that enable Harry to defeat the Basilisk and eventually destroy his first Horcrux; the diary. Voldemort’s pride is his downfall. When Harry explains to the teenage Riddle how he came to survive the curse, Riddle exclaims “So. Your mother died to save you. Yes, that’s a powerful counter-charm. I can see now - there is nothing special about you, after all. [...] it was merely a lucky chance that saved you from me” (*CoS* 233). Riddle constantly underestimates incidents and abilities other than pure power, which is - in his opinion - the only thing worth having. To Voldemort, there “is no good or evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it” (*PS* 211). It can be assumed from this quote that Voldemort does not distinguish between good and evil, and hence does not shy away from any means in his pursuit of it. This ruthlessness reinforces the argument that Voldemort displays psychopathic tendencies, and also brings back the definition of “radical evil” that was mentioned in the section on evil as a “form of evil so extreme that it can no longer recognize its own atrocity” (Shattuck 50). The question, then, is whether Voldemort recognised the atrocity of his actions, even to begin with?

According to Guanio-Uluru, Voldemort's desperation for power distinguishes him from Harry in the sense that “[h]e cares only about power, and with no notions of good or evil all means are justified in the pursuit of it” (257). In other words, Voldemort cannot be argued with or appealed to on a moral foundation, because he does not acknowledge the same values as the people he is fighting. As Guanio-Uluru puts it, “the ideological gap between Voldemort and those who oppose him is exposed” (257). Still, the reader recognises the presence of evil in Voldemort’s character, even if Voldemort does not acknowledge the existence of good and evil. Through glimpses at his actions and motives, which are provided by the Harry-Voldemort connection, the reader understands his true motivations. Catherine J. Deavel and David P. Deavel comment, in “Choosing Love: The Redemption of Severus Snape” (2010), that “Voldemort opted for power over love, selfishness over altruism, conquest over the vulnerability of friendship and genuine relationships of any sort” and the sum of these choices led to his downfall (56). While Harry, as the opposite to Voldemort, is both willing and able to love, and he sacrifices himself for it. The power of love, sacrifice and selflessness - namely, all the things that Voldemort does not represent and does not possess - will be discussed further in Part II, but before that a look at some of the evil methods Voldemort uses.

1.4 Evil Methods

In the *Harry Potter* series there are not only evil people, but some very vicious and evil curses, inventions and creatures that are part of making the *Harry Potter* universe a dark

place. In this section, a selection of these “weapons” will be discussed, starting with the Horcruxes, moving on to Inferi and werewolves, before finishing off with psychological warfare.

The Horcrux is an invention that is important to understand as Harry Potter himself is one. Wolosky calls the Horcrux “[o]ne of Rowling's most original and powerful symbolic figures” (44). As we know from the *Harry Potter* series the Horcrux is one of the most evil magical inventions. When Hermione does research about the Horcruxes, she discovers very little apart from a short entry in “*Magick Moste Evile*” where the Horcrux is described as the “wickedest of magical inventions, [which] we shall not mention nor give direction” (*HBP* 357). In other words, the invention Voldemort is using is too wicked to even be discussed in some of the darkest literature available in the *Harry Potter* universe. This secrecy is probably the reason why Tom Riddle had to ask Professor Slughorn about it; there were no written descriptions to be found. Through Slughorn’s memories we witness the interaction and the information Voldemort was first given: “A Horcrux is the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul” (*HBP* 464). Slughorn goes on to explain that you need to split your soul and “hide part of it in an object outside the body. Then, even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged”, at the same time Slughorn says that “few would want it, Tom, very few. Death would be preferable” (*HBP* 464, 465). Wolosky sees this splitting of the soul as a symbol of the damage done to the soul by destructive deeds (45). She maintains that such deeds do not only injure the victim, but that “[d]estructive acts are destructive to those who perform them. Their very souls are torn apart” (45). Wolosky's view of the Horcrux corresponds to Slughorn’s description of how to create one; you must do damage to your own soul: “the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against nature” and is only achieved through the “supreme act of evil” (*HBP* 465). Voldemort, revealing his callousness, inquires what might happen should one want to split one’s soul into several pieces, and comments, “I mean, for instance, isn’t seven the most powerful magical number, wouldn’t seven-?” and Slughorn’s answer reflects the disgust and horror the idea provokes: “Seven! Isn’t it bad enough to think of killing one person? And in any case ... bad enough to divide the soul ... but to rip it into seven pieces” (*HBP* 466). This splitting of his soul into seven pieces might explain the physical transformation Voldemort goes through, and the instability of the broken part of his soul that remains in his body. Furthermore, the Horcrux explains the evil within the character of Harry; the piece of Voldemort's soul has been influencing Harry and has been giving him similar qualities and abilities as Voldemort. Thus, when this piece is removed, Harry is left without any prominent faults, which will be discussed in Part II. One might speculate on whether Rowling has created a character this

lacking in human qualities such as kindness, compassion and the ability to love, in order to make him appear monstrous and capable of committing horrible crimes. Voldemort is the one person who represents pure evil in this series – among the numerous ambiguous characters.

Another tool the darkest wizard uses is Inferi. “They are corpses,’ said Dumbledore calmly. ‘Dead bodies that have been bewitched to do a Dark wizard’s bidding” (*HBP* 63). Voldemort creates armies of Inferi, dead, rotting bodies fighting for him, which the readers see in *HBP* where the Inferi guards a Horcrux (*HBP* 537-539). This description (which bears remarkable similarities with the image of zombies) is not only disturbing in itself, but the idea that you might lose a loved one and then have their body used as a weapon against you later, as a puppet controlled by Lord Voldemort, is terrible. This method is another reminder of Voldemort’s evil and his ruthlessness - how far he has removed himself from normal people with emotions and feelings of love he cannot understand. It also borders on psychological warfare, which is a method Voldemort does not hesitate to make use of.

Voldemort uses threat and terror as a means of controlling people and stopping them from rebelling against him. His use of werewolves and Dementors are examples of this, especially the way in which he uses the most notorious werewolf of all; Fenrir Greyback. “Greyback specializes in children ... bite them young, he says, and raise them away from their parents, raise them to hate normal wizards. Voldemort has threatened to unleash him upon people’s sons and daughters; it is a threat that usually produces good results” (*HBP* 314). This threat demonstrates both Voldemort’s lack of decency, respect, moral and feelings. It is one of the few unanimous rules of warfare: you do not go after children.

In addition to his use of Dementors to spread fear and terror, the Dark Mark is an aspect of Voldemort's reign of terror that belongs to psychological terror. When Harry first encounters the Dark Mark in *GoF*, he does not understand its significance, but Mr. Weasley explains it as follows: “You-Know-Who and his followers sent the Dark Mark into the air whenever they killed [...] The terror it inspired... you have no idea [...] Everyone's worst fear... the very worst...” (*GoF* 127). Strimel mentions the Dark Mark in her article “The Politics of Terror: Rereading *Harry Potter*” and writes that “[t]he sign removes all physical violence and places it in a scarier realm: the mind” (40). This psychological warfare is a familiar characteristic of Voldemort's struggle to gain power, where secrecy and lies were vital. Another example of this secrecy is Voldemort's frequent use of the Imperius Curse (the Curse that allows him to control people), which makes it close to impossible to know who to trust. In this way, he creates an atmosphere of insecurity and distrust. As the fake Alastor Moody says in *GoF* about the last time Voldemort had power, “there were a lot of witches and wizards being controlled by the Imperius Curse [...] [and it was] some job for the Ministry, trying to sort out who was being forced to act, and who was acting of their own free will” (*GoF* 188).

1.5 The Malfoys

According to McEvoy “Rowling’s theme about the redemptive power of love”, is one of the most important messages offered in the *Harry Potter* series (214). She bases this assertion on the various types of heroism represented throughout the series, and in particular on the Malfoys. In the following section the redemptive power of love and its effect on the Malfoys will be discussed.

Apart from Lord Voldemort himself, Draco Malfoy is arguably the most persistent antagonist, as he is present throughout all of Harry’s years at Hogwarts and is a constant source of trouble. From the very first novel - and Harry’s first introduction to the magical world - Harry dislikes Draco. He was the first Hogwarts student Harry met and from the beginning it is evident that the two will not get along. The readers are encouraged to see Draco as a villain from the first encounter with his character where he mocks Hagrid and says that only pure-bloods should be allowed to go to Hogwarts (*PS* 60). Harry and Draco's second meeting, on the train to Hogwarts, only strengthens the first impression Draco made, as he insults Ron and warns Harry that unless he is more polite “you’ll go the same way as your parents. [...] You hang out with riff-raff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid it’ll rub off on you” (*PS* 81). While Draco is initially only a bully, he shows early signs of taking after his father’s opinions and ideas, obvious in his attitude towards the Weasleys, Hermione and Hagrid as inferior to them, calling them names such as “blood-traitors” and “mudbloods” (*CoS* 86)

Compared to Voldemort, however, Draco is purely a nuisance and a bully, but - as opposed to the Dark Lord - he is a *constant* source of trouble. As Voldemort grows in strength, and Harry grows older, Draco grows in intensity and evil methods, and goes from being a bully to being a proper villain. In *HBP*, Draco Malfoy has been given a mission by Voldemort - to murder Dumbledore - and his increasingly desperate and reckless attempts to fulfil this mission endanger many other students. This example illustrates the issue of whether evil intentions or effects should be taken into consideration. Malfoy’s mission is to murder Dumbledore, something he attempts rather half-heartedly as Dumbledore points out: “You have been trying, with increasing desperation, to kill me all year. Forgive me, Draco, but they have been feeble attempts ... so feeble, to be honest, that I wonder whether your heart has really been in it ...” (*HBP* 547). Draco betrays his fear and reluctance to killing Dumbledore right before they are interrupted “‘I haven’t got any options!’ said Malfoy, and he was suddenly as white as Dumbledore. ‘I’ve got to do it! He’ll kill me! He’ll kill my whole family!’” (*HBP* 552). The question remains, does this incident signal the presence of goodness in Draco, or is he simply afraid for his own life and family?

McEvoy claims that in *DH*, after Draco, Crabbe and Goyle have chased after Harry, Ron and Hermione into the Room of Requirement, Draco is trying to keep Crabbe and Goyle from

murdering Harry as a sign of Draco's goodness (McEvoy 213). Yet, in my reading, as Crabbe and Goyle are aiming to kill, and Draco shouts "STOP! [...] The Dark Lord wants him alive", this is a clear indication that Draco's main reason for trying to keep Harry alive is not his own goodness, but because he is afraid of how the Dark Lord might react had someone other than him murdered Harry (*DH* 506). However, there are some extenuating signs that Draco might be improving, for instance, he appears to be regretting joining the Death Eaters, which is evident in his hesitance to murder Dumbledore when he finally has the chance - in addition to his clear distress at having been given the task to begin with (*HBP* 555). While these are signs of improvement of Draco's character - and can be read as him moving away from evil - I would argue that it does not necessarily mean that he is moving towards good, but probably simply towards a lesser evil, or a neutral ground. McEvoy writes that "The characterization of Draco shows that even people who have behaved in villainous ways in the past can make the right decision when the time comes" (213). This may be the kind of moral that parents reading aloud to their children might want to see, but there is actually very little in the novel to sustain McEvoy's well-meaning interpretation of Draco's transformation. McEvoy also comments that Draco walks away from evil, and that this action is brave, because "serving Voldemort would be the easiest and safest choice for him to make" (213). While it is true that he removes himself from evil I disagree that Voldemort would be the safest choice, because at this point - the very end of the final novel - Draco has seen enough evidence of Voldemort's mercilessness to know that neither his enemies nor his followers are safe. Therefore, Draco removing himself from Voldemort in the final battle can be seen as purely an action of self-interest. Contrary to McEvoy's argument that "Draco's actions also show young readers that people are capable of redemption" (213), I would argue that Draco's character remains selfish throughout the entire series. Similarly, when McEvoy interprets Draco's tendencies as moving towards goodness as a demonstration of how "selfish and cruel behaviour, while destructive, may not be the precursor to evil" and that his evil family does not necessarily mean that he must follow in their path (213), I would argue that this is an overly positive reading of his development. The question remains; while there are many demonstrations of redemption from evil in other characters in the series, is Draco's family one of them?

Narcissa Malfoy is the one member of the Malfoy family that the reader barely gets to know. We do not know her character or her motivation, why she married Lucius, or why she joined the Death Eaters. We only know that she is the mother of Draco and the sister of Bellatrix LeStrange, so we naturally assume she is evil. Her first real appearance is in *HBP*, where, in the first chapter of the novel, she visits Snape to beg him to help Draco and keep him from failing in his mission to murder Dumbledore (as the Dark Lord would undoubtedly murder him). "There is nothing I wouldn't do anymore!" Narcissa breathed, a note of hysteria

in her voice” (*HBP* 27). This proves to be true; there is nothing Narcissa Malfoy will not do to save her son. In *DH* she chooses to defy Voldemort and spare Harry in the forest to be able to get to Draco; “Narcissa knew that the only way she would be permitted to enter Hogwarts, and find her son, was as part of the conquering army. She no longer cared whether Voldemort won” (*DH*, 582). McEvoy has also noticed these tendencies, as she comments that “Narcissa’s primary motivation is selfish - she cares only for the safety of her son - though it grows out of love” (214). Narcissa is the member of the Malfoy family that we have seen do the least evil of the lot, and while we can assume that she is a bad sort of person based on her family and connections she is the one Malfoy who is the least involved with Voldemort and evil actions. She is fighting for her son, and this is something most people can understand and admire. However, I would question McEvoy’s overly sympathetic reading of Narcissa’s decision to stop helping Voldemort as “a decision to reject evil and to assist the forces of good” (214). Instead I would argue, that the probability of her motivation being selfish is reinforced by her allegorical name; Narcissa. This functions as a strengthening of the already existing characterisation, rather than as a separate indicator, which is a common function of allegorical names according to Rimmon-Kenan (67). As a reference to “Narcissus”, who fell in love with his own reflection, the connection invites the reader to regard her motivations as selfish. The Malfoys’ connection to evil is, in a similar fashion, strengthened by their name’s likeness to words beginning with “mal-”⁸.

When it comes to Narcissa’s husband and Draco’s father, Lucius Malfoy, McEvoy argues that he is cruel, even to his son, and “nothing that Lucius does throughout nearly the entire series redeems him; he continues to glory in evil throughout the first six books” (214). However, I would argue that in the last book there is an evident change as Lucius has fallen out of Voldemort’s good graces and begins to care more about his family. McEvoy writes that “Lucius is a hard, cruel man, but he is not willing to side against his family” (214). While it is quite possible that Lucius loves his family, as McEvoy implies, I would claim that the main reason for his betrayal seems to be founded on the mistreatment he suffers at the hands of Voldemort towards the end, and that he does not see any chance of getting back in his good graces. In addition, it becomes obvious to Lucius that Voldemort is going to lose his battle against Harry, and Lucius Malfoy has always been a character who first and foremost saves his own skin, and in my opinion he remains so until the very end.

In the final chapter of *DH*, the Malfoys are sitting huddled together in the Great Hall, and no one is paying them any attention. They seem to be accepted, or tolerated, by the rest, because at the very end they chose family over Voldemort. My own interpretation leans more towards the one suggested by J. K. Rowling, who has described the Malfoys as “weasel[ing] their way out of trouble (again) due to the fact that they colluded (albeit out of self-interest)

⁸ Examples are, malevolent and maleficent. In addition to French, where “Malfoy”, or “mal foi” translates as “bad faith”.

with Harry at the end of the battle” (Rowling, Web Chat 2007). I would argue that the Malfoys represent a sort of evil grown out of selfishness and with personal gain as their driving force. While McEvoy constructs an implied author that seeks to communicate a theme of redemptive love, there is actually little to sustain such an interpretation: there are elements of both character and plot that work against such a well-meaning implied author - at least in relation to the characters in the Malfoy family. I would argue that there is more textual evidence to be found in support of the real author's views, than of the author implied in McEvoy's analysis. While I disagree with McEvoy's interpretation of the Malfoys I will draw on her comments on both Harry, Dumbledore and Snape in the next part of this thesis, where several of her arguments coincide with my own interpretations.

2 - Part II

2.1 Harry Potter

Harry Potter is the protagonist, and as such the one character that the readers follow most closely throughout the series. The heptalogy narrates the story of Harry from his eleventh birthday until he is seventeen. Through six (out of seven) years at Hogwarts, and a final year where he goes Horcrux-hunting (and eventually kill Voldemort) the reader witnesses Harry's trials. These are undoubtedly the most important and challenging years in Harry's life, as he is repeatedly faced with physical and emotional challenges throughout the story that far exceeds his maturity level. In this sense the Harry Potter series - as a whole - can be said to be a *Bildungsroman*, which is a notion that was briefly introduced in the introduction of this thesis. A *Bildungsroman* is defined as “[a] novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person” (OED Online, 2014), and in the article “The Way of the Wizarding World: *Harry Potter* and the Magical *Bildungsroman*” (2012), Robert T. Tally Jr. studies exactly this. He argues that while the *Harry Potter* series does not fit into the historical setting of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, it does chronicle “a young person's development from childhood to adult maturity, as well as from ignorance and naivety to knowledge and mastery” and in this sense the heptalogy can be viewed as “a fitting example” of a *Bildungsroman* (38). The *Bildungsroman* has certain distinct characteristics, such as; a focus on one character - his growth and development, in both a biographical and social context; a quest-like structure; a primary concern with the development of the self; and it ends with the protagonist's “assessment of himself and his place in society” (Tally Jr. 39). Nikolajeva writes that “[a]ccording to conventional genre definitions, all children's literature can be labeled as bildungsroman” (*Rhetoric* ix). She supports this claim by writing that child protagonists are all – by definition – under development, because they have not matured yet, neither physically nor psychologically (*Rhetoric* x). Without delving deeper into the discussion about the extent to which the *Harry Potter* series complies with such an established pattern of character development, it may be useful to determine and use this term about the series. Merely the fact that the series has been defined as a *Bildungsroman* says something about the character of Harry's development, and parts of this will be discussed further in the sections to come.

2.1.1 Harry's Beginnings

Harry Potter becomes famous from the moment his parents are murdered by Lord Voldemort, while Harry mysteriously survives. He is first referred to as “The Boy Who Lived” - the only person ever known to have survived the Killing Curse, *Avada Kedavra*, and later in the series as “The Chosen One” - believed to be the only one who can put a stop to Voldemort. From the

age of one, Harry is famous throughout the wizarding world for surviving and for the inexplicable disappearance of Voldemort that occurred as a result of Harry's survival. No one knows what happened or how it was even possible, but from that moment he is known as the boy who defeated the most evil wizard who ever lived. Greg Garret writes that Harry is "notable not for anything he has done himself, but for an accident of birth" (64). Almost automatically Harry is set as the good in contrast to Voldemort's evil. At the beginning of the series,⁹ in the very first chapter, Harry is introduced as the implied hero, the destroyer of evil, without the reader actually knowing anything about his character. Jack Zipes writes that the readers "know from beginning to end that Harry will triumph over evil" (182), one may ask whether it was possible for the reader to see Harry as anything but a hero. Does the reader expect anything but for Harry to prevail? This is what the majority of this part of the thesis will concern itself with; the different aspects of Harry's character, both the good and the bad.

Harry grows up unaware of his role in the (apparent) defeat of Voldemort. In No. 4 Privet Drive, where he grows up he is mistreated and emotionally abused, but he appears surprisingly normal, considering the circumstances. In the article "Harry Potter and the Resilience to Adversity" (2006), D. M. Provenzano and Richard E. Heyman address the issue of Harry's ordinariness despite the abuse, trauma and neglect he suffered as a child (105). Harry's normality is something that is easy to ignore and take for granted, but in reality - according to Provenzano and Heyman - Harry's ordinariness is extraordinary (105). Growing up, Harry has experienced nothing but emotional abuse, neglect and physical abuse from his "family". He has been excluded, ignored, ridiculed and mistreated, at times being locked up for weeks and denied food as a punishment. If one were to apply psychological theory to Harry's character, the way one would with a real person - as Provenzano and Heyman have attempted - one might expect Harry to feel unloved and defected (105-109). Harry has survived on a minimum of sustenance and no emotional support or kind feelings. According to Provenzano and Heyman, such maltreatment may increase the risk of behavioural problems, emotional problems and problems at school, but Harry seems to have managed to escape more or less unharmed (109). The only exception can be his anger issues, which will be dealt with in a later section.

In many ways, Harry's childhood and upbringing bear many similarities to Lord Voldemort's childhood. The Tom Riddle from the diary points this out himself: "there are strange likenesses between us, Harry Potter. Even you must have noticed. Both half-bloods, orphans, raised by Muggles. Probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even *look* something alike" (*CoS* 233). Provenzano and Heyman embellish on this similarity of upbringing: "Consider that Harry and Lord Voldemort

⁹ Arguably, it is revealed already on the cover of the novels, as "Harry Potter" is part of all the titles – hence the readers will automatically assume he is the hero.

are connected by a prophecy but not a trajectory: both are nurturance-starved orphans, but only Lord Voldemort is unable to form loving bonds with others, and only Lord Voldemort seeks to use his magical powers to exact pain, death and retribution” (105).

The reader is made to understand that Harry inherited both physical and personality traits from his parents that helped protect him from the abuse, in addition to receiving thirteen months of nurture and care before he was left with the Dursley's (Provenzano and Heyman 113). As we learn in *PS*, Lily sacrificed herself for Harry and by so doing left him protected by a force strong enough to keep him alive and save his life on several occasions. Provenzano and Heyman expand on this protective love by writing that the love Harry received from his parents, both in their last moments and in his infancy, is probably the reason why he managed to survive the years of abuse from the Dursleys, in addition to the magical protection offered by Lily's sacrifice (113).

Nikolajeva mentions a particular characteristic of children's fantasy, namely that there is often an abundance of archetypical characters. She specifically mentions “the archetypal hero of unknown parentage destined to save the world from evil” (“Development” 57). In this description of the archetypical hero one may easily spot similarities to Harry. While Harry's parentage is not unknown, he is an orphan, and he does not learn anything about his parents for many years. As for him being “destined to save the world from evil”, it does turn out that by a complicated chain of events containing a prophecy and Voldemort's fear of dying, Harry is indeed chosen - by Voldemort himself - as the only one who can defeat the evil in the world. Both Sattaur and Zipes support the idea that well-known archetypes are to be found in the *Harry Potter* series and Sattaur writes that there is a boy hero – who is an orphan – and he is marked as the Chosen One, in addition there are loyal friends, a teacher and a fight between good and evil (7). Zipes continues this description of Harry by writing that he is “one of the mythical chosen heroes, called upon by powers greater than himself to rescue his friends and the world from diabolical evil” (175). The likeness of Harry to these pure archetypes, however, is challenged by the connection between Harry (“The Boy Who Lived”, “The Chosen One”, the protagonist and good of the story) and the unquestionable evil; Voldemort – which will be further discussed in the next section.

2.1.2 Harry's Connection to Voldemort

Harry and Voldemort are connected. Their wands both have a feather from Dumbledore's phoenix, Vulcan, as their core, they have partial access to each other's minds, and as mentioned they both speak Parseltongue - and even look somewhat alike. An essential topic to investigate is whether all of the similarities and abilities they share are a result of the connection created the night Voldemort murdered Harry's parents, or whether some of these dark qualities belong to Harry himself?

When Harry mentions the likenesses he has noticed between the teenage Riddle and himself to Dumbledore, Dumbledore explains to him that many of the similarities are there because Voldemort “transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar” (*CoS* 245). Dumbledore's comment confirms, to both the reader and Harry, that some of the similarities are there as a result of Voldemort and cannot be attributed to Harry. Yet, by gradually connecting Voldemort and Harry throughout the series, not always explaining the connections - thereby encouraging speculation from the readers - the implied author problematises Harry's character. From being the boy who made Voldemort disappear, he becomes linked to him by the likenesses they share.

When Harry first arrived at Hogwarts and the Sorting Hat considered what House to put him in, Slytherin was a valid option because Harry possesses many of the (somewhat dubious) qualities valued by Slytherin House. When, during the Sorting Ceremony, Harry is repeating “Not Slytherin” in his head, the Hat replies “Not Slytherin, eh? [...] Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that” (*PS* 91). Nonetheless, Harry is determined in his refusal, which prompts Dumbledore to explain that even though Harry “happen[s] to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. His own very rare gift, Parseltounge ... resourcefulness ... determination ... a certain disregard for rules”, Harry distinguishes himself from Voldemort because he *asked* the Hat not to place him in Slytherin house (*CoS* 245). He chose not to be a part of Slytherin. This moral based on individual choices echoes throughout the novels in the character of Dumbledore who famously says, “it is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (*CoS* 245). This emphasis on choices is something that is essential to the reader's understanding of Harry, because while there are plenty of incidents and coincidences that question Harry's character during the series, his choices continue to define him. This knowledge forces the reader to, as Strimel points out, “look inward in order to distinguish between what makes someone or their actions good and what makes them bad. It is here where Rowling makes a moral statement about free will and Harry's past” (50).

I would argue that some of Harry's traits are obvious results of his connection to Voldemort. Harry's ability to speak Parseltounge is the clearest one. Dumbledore himself says “You can speak Parseltounge [...] because Lord Voldemort - who is the last remaining descendant of Salazar Slytherin - can speak Parseltounge” (*CoS* 245). This ability then, appears to be solely a result of their connection, i.e. a result of Harry being a Horcrux, and not a reflection on Harry's ancestry or character. J. K. Rowling confirms this assumption in an interview where she was asked whether Harry was still a Parselmouth after he was no longer a Horcrux. Her reply was “No, he loses the ability, and is very glad to do so” (Web Chat 2007).

Strimel writes that “Harry possesses abilities that make him very much like Voldemort and place him in line with characteristics of Slytherin House, the house that produced many dark wizards, including Voldemort” (49). However, Strimel wrote her article before the entire series had been published, so one might rephrase her statement to include the development taking place in the latter half as follows: Rowling creates Harry with flaws that are a result of having a piece of Voldemort's soul within him. I argue that this is problematic as it removes Harry's dubious moral characteristics and rationalises them as being a result of an external evil.

Harry and Voldemort's shared mental connection, or ability to access each other's minds, is another direct result of the Curse. For Harry, this connection is centred on his scar, which stings and hurts depending on Voldemort's mood and emotions. At times the connection gives him access to Voldemort's mind in the form of glimpses and more elaborate visions: “his scar had burned again as something flashed across his mind like a bright light on water. He saw a large shadow and felt a fury that was not his own pound through his body, violent and brief as an electric shock. [...] 'I just felt anger - he's really angry'” (*DH* 143, 144). Not only does Harry share Voldemort's feelings and vision, but also his voice: “In an explosion of agony, he felt the rage that did not belong to him possess his soul, saw a long room, lit only by firelight, [...] Harry spoke in a high, cold, merciless voice” (*DH* 145). In this example Harry is regarding the world through Voldemort's eyes and perspective, even to the point where he perceives Voldemort's voice as his own. Harry is fighting forces both inside and outside himself in the form of Voldemort. While Harry's struggle cannot be transferred directly to the lives of the readers it can function as a metaphor of the struggles most people experience, hence a battle most people can relate to.

2.1.3 Harry's Anger

Harry's greatest flaw is his anger. As mentioned earlier concerning Harry's childhood, Provenzano and Heyman argue that “[c]hild maltreatment increases the likelihood of [...] negative outcomes such as behavioral problems [...], emotional problems [...], academic problems, poor peer relations, and drug/alcohol problems” (109). In Harry's case, aggression and anger seem to be the prevalent behavioural problem and a lesser form of evil in his character. Of all the questionable qualities he possesses, his anger seems to be the one trait that is undoubtedly his. It is especially prominent in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) where Harry spends the majority of the novel angry and brooding over one thing or another. In an interview with Lev Grossman in connection to the release of *OotP*, “JK Rowling - Hogwarts And All” (2005), J. K. Rowling admitted that “[t]his book is a bit of a departure. Harry is very angry. Very angry. And he's angry for most of the book. But I think that is fair enough given what has happened to him and that he hasn't been given an awful lot

of information" (Rowling, *Hogwarts* 3). Harry has been left alone all summer, is talked about, stared at, written of in the paper, misunderstood and misrepresented. His sanity is being questioned as a result of his claim that he witnessed the rebirth of Voldemort. Hence, Harry's anger at being left in Privet Drive without any information, makes sense to the reader. In the opening chapter of *OotP* some of this anger and frustration is evident: "The injustice of it all welled up inside him so that he wanted to yell with fury. If it hadn't been for him, nobody would even have known Voldemort was back! [...] These furious thoughts whirled around in Harry's head, and his insides writhed with anger" (*OotP* 14, 15) Harry shows an evil streak as he wishes Dudley and his gang would attempt to attack him: "He [Dudley] wouldn't want to lose face in front of the gang, but he'd be terrified of provoking Harry... it would be really fun to watch Dudley's dilemma, to taunt him, watch him, with him powerless to respond" (*OotP* 16). Although both of these reactions are reasonable when considering Harry's situation, as well as the fact that he has endured years of abuse from Dudley, the extent of Harry's anger can still be perceived as worrisome. At the same time, the fact that the main character – supposedly representing goodness - can become this angry, is arguably a good quality as he is proving that the hero is flawed, but that his choices (in this case, his choice *not* to act) define him - not his thoughts.

Harry is frequently warned against letting his emotions get the best of him, but he does not pay these warnings much heed. This is comprehensible to the reader as the clearest admonitions appear rather harsh and judgemental, and throughout the books the reader has come to know Harry as proud and not prone to accept critique from people he dislikes. In addition, the mocking tone used by, for instance, Snape when commenting on Harry's temperament does not increase Harry's likelihood of listening to him: "Fools who wear their hearts proudly on their sleeves, who cannot control their emotions, who wallow in sad memories and allow themselves to be provoked so easily - weak people, in other words - they stand no chance against [Voldemort's] powers!" (*OotP* 473). Comments like these - condescending and mocking - do (understandably) not affect Harry in any other way than increasing his dislike of Snape. However, he is also warned by Hermione not to make rash decisions or let his emotions get the best of him, as seen, for instance, in *OotP* when he wants to rush off to the Department of Mysteries in case Sirius is there (*OotP* 646, 647).

While Harry's fits of anger happen most frequently in the presence of people he dislikes, such as Snape, Malfoy and Umbridge, on occasion it also happens in the presence of people he loves, like Ron, Hermione and Dumbledore. After Sirius's death, Harry takes out his anger on Dumbledore: "Harry felt the white-hot anger lick his insides, blazing in the terrible emptiness, filling him with the desire to hurt Dumbledore for his calmness and his empty words." (*OotP* 726). Again in *HBP* when he disagrees and feels misunderstood: "Harry sat in

seething silence, glaring at Dumbledore. [...] Harry sat there feeling mutinous. [...] He still felt angry at the reception his confidences had received, but could not see what was to be gained by arguing further” (*HBP* 336, 337). McEvoy writes that Harry's reactions in *OotP* seem completely understandable as he is an emotional teenager who has experienced an exceptionally large number of horrible things in his life, but nevertheless she claims that "rage, aggression and a thirst for vengeance hardly seem suitable character traits for the hero of a story aimed at adolescents" (209). I disagree with this view because Harry's flaws are part of what make him a good and beneficial role model. What lesson could he teach the readers if he did not have flaws to conquer? Although his anger is not too serious a flaw, it is still one that many children and teenagers will recognise as their own. McEvoy does revise this statement slightly by writing directly after that "[h]is flaws do make him seem real, though, and perhaps that is more important" and continues by saying "she [Rowling] crafts a hero who is like her readers, a warts-and-all kid who still manages to do the right thing, who acknowledges his mistakes, learns from them and moves on to the next trial" (209). However, Harry's anger seems, at times, to be tied up to Voldemort, as seen in *OotP*: "Harry's scar burned white-hot, a though the old wound had burst open again – and unbidden, unwanted, but terrifyingly strong, there rose within Harry a hatred so powerful he felt, for that instant, he would like nothing better than to strike" (419). If Harry's anger, even, is connected to Voldemort it would be problematic, because the one flaw that has definitely seemed to belong to Harry is his anger. If his most prominent fault is tainted and influenced by Voldemort - whose presence is certainly cause for anger - is Harry left with any human flaws at all?

I would claim that the genre of psychomachia and Singer's take on how the *Harry Potter* series fits into it in relation to Harry's anger, is also worth mentioning. Psychomachia is "a literary genre based on Christian morals", which translates directly as "battle of the soul" (Singer 36). It originates from the Latin text "Psychomachia", written by Prudentius, a Spanish fourth-century monk (26). It is a poem describing female warriors - who are the allegorical representations of the virtues - and their fight against the vices in order to liberate the soul (26). Singer describes the narrative structure as follows: "first, virtue and vice are presented as opponents; second, virtue is challenged by vice in an actual battle; third, virtue is triumphant over its corresponding vice" (27). This process, Singer writes, can also be found in the *Harry Potter* series where it is repeated seven times, one time for each book in the Potter series - which explains the somewhat repetitive structure of the books. "Eventually, the vices destroy themselves in their grapple for his soul because, unlike the virtues, they can neither support each other nor do they work together as one body" (27). Singer compares the character of Harry to "Everyman" (a commoner through which the warriors conduct their battle) and lists the various vices and virtues we meet in the series; largesse and greed,

chivalry and lust, patience and wrath/anger, abstinence and gluttony, humility and pride, diligence and sloth, and finally, charity and envy (28). Singer's main focus is on Harry's feelings of charity, and, in the last book, the immaterial sides of charity: love, kindness and unity (29). I would argue that Harry does indeed seem to be fighting an internal battle throughout the entire series.

In my opinion, Singer's most valuable contribution is her pointing out the most prominent vices and virtues in the series, because these may tell us something of the characters. While she says that there is no moral hierarchy of the virtues in the *Harry Potter* series, she still points to one virtue and one vice that seem to be the principal ones; charity and pride. According to Singer, these are also the traits that are most prominent in, respectively, Harry and Voldemort (29). This reading of the series may be taken in support of my claim that Harry is destined to be good from the start, and that the complexity of his character is removed through his battle with evil.

Dumbledore comments that Harry has a "certain disregard for the rules, like his father before him" (*CoS* 245), which is another aspect of Harry's character that can appear challenging to the readers. From the very first book, Harry exhibits clear indications of a reckless behaviour, in addition to a tendency to seek out trouble. While the reader may understand his motivation for breaking various rules - such as sneaking out at night to smuggle Norbert the dragon out of the school, and breaking into Umbridge's office to contact Sirius (*PS* 175, 176, *OotP* 649-653) - there are also some incidents where his actions are motivated by nothing other than pride or curiosity. For instance, the midnight duel with Draco Malfoy in *PS* (114-118), and diving into the Pensieve without permission in *GoF* (507-519). Pride and curiosity are two other prominent and problematic features of his character, but like his anger, these faults seem to belong to him and are not primarily a result of his connection to Voldemort. Curiosity and a youthful playfulness can be argued as the motivation behind some of his questionable behaviour. For instance, Harry uses spells that he finds in the Half-Blood Prince's book on people, spells he does not know the function of. For the most part it is harmless, and the spells are humorous for the onlookers and slightly uncomfortable for the victim. For example:

There had been a hex that caused toenails to grow alarmingly fast (he had tried this on Crabbe in the corridor, with very entertaining results); a jinx that glued the tongue to the roof of the mouth (which he had twice used, to general applause, on an unsuspecting Argus Filch); and, perhaps most useful of all, Mufflatio, a spell that filled the ears of anyone nearby with an unidentifiable buzzing, so that lengthy conversations could be held in class without being overheard.
(*HBP* 224)

None of these spells are directly harmful, but they are not pleasant, good spells either. Hermione is the only person who seems to be concerned and doubtful of Harry's blind faith in the book, and his use of unfamiliar spells. Indeed, Harry uses some of the spells on friends and enemies without apparent worry that something bad could happen. An example of this is his use of a spell called *Levicorpus*, which he accidentally aims at a sleeping Ron, and the spell makes Ron dangle upside-down in midair (*HBP* 225). Youthful carelessness and a playful attitude towards friends combined with a hostile feeling towards people he dislikes make the scenes act as a comic relief, but they also reveal Harry's reckless side. Later on he uses a spell - *Sectumsempra* - from the Half-Blood Prince's book marked as "for enemies" on Draco Malfoy, and the results are serious: "Blood spurted from Malfoy's face and chest as though he had been slashed with an invisible sword" (*HBP* 489). Although Malfoy was about to use *Crucio* - an Unforgivable Curse - and even though Harry did not know exactly what the *Sectumsempra* curse did, the fact that he would take that chance is worth noticing.

Snape's acute perception combined with his strong dislike of Harry allows him the ability to brutally, but surprisingly accurately, describe him in a way that a critical reader can recognise: "[Harry] has fought his way out of a number of tight corners by a simple combination of sheer luck and more talented friends. He is mediocre to the last degree, though as obnoxious and self-satisfied as was his father before him" (*HBP* 36). While this description is strongly tainted by Snape's dislike of Harry, it does point to some of the most important aspects of his character. In certain ways Harry is mediocre - he is just like the majority of his peers - but he has two traits that sets him apart; his moral superiority and his unfaltering bravery. In other words, he always does the right thing, the brave thing, and is always willing to sacrifice himself for a person in need.

2.1.4 Harry's Choices

The characters' actions are an important tool of characterisation in a work of fiction, and it is important to distinguish between "one-time" and "habitual" actions (Rimmon-Kenan 61). While habitual actions can reflect the unchanging, static aspect of the character, one-time actions can show us a more dynamic side of the character (though not necessarily a more uncharacteristic one) (61, 62). In the following section we will explore some of Harry's choices and actions and discuss how they affect the possible readings of his character.

The spells a witch or wizard chooses to use say something about their personality, and while the *Sectumsempra* incident - where Harry cursed Malfoy - appears to be a one-time action, Harry does make other mistakes. For instance, in *OotP* Harry tries, but fails, to use the Cruciatus Curse on Bellatrix after she murdered Sirius. As Harry chases after her he attempts to curse her, and Bellatrix retorts "Never used an Unforgivable Curse before, have you boy? [...] You need to *mean* them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain - to enjoy it -

righteous anger won't hurt me for long" (*OotP* 715). Then, in *DH*, Harry successfully uses the Cruciatus Curse on Amycus, the implications being that he really wanted to hurt Amycus, and that he enjoyed it. "I see what Bellatrix meant," said Harry, the blood thundering through his brain, 'you need to really mean it'" (*DH* 477). This incident is noteworthy, as it depicts the hero of the story acting in the same way as the Death Eaters. However, it should be pointed out that Amycus has been torturing Harry's friends, and seconds before he spat Professor McGonagall in the face, which are mitigating factors. Even though Harry uses evil curses more than once, these still seem to fall within the category of one-time actions, because Harry is primarily known for consistently choosing harmless spells. Singer writes, that while Harry loves his friends and allies, he distinguishes himself even further from Voldemort by showing compassion and a willingness to defend people he dislikes, even hates (Singer 32). An example of this behaviour can be found in his insistence on not using curses that could seriously injure his opponents (even when they are attempting to kill him), which is an example of an habitual action. This reluctance to use harmful spells is evident when Harry and Ron rescue Draco and Goyle, in *DH*, from the Fiendfyre Crabbe set off in the Room of Requirement, even after Crabbe and Goyle attempts to murder Harry, Ron and Hermione, Harry still refuses to use spells or curses that could injure them (*DH* 507-510). Another example can be found in *DH*, when the seven Harrys are escaping from Privet Drive, the real Harry is identified by his use of *Expelliarmus* - a disarming spell. He is warned by Lupin not to make it his signature spell, and Harry retorts "I won't blast people out of my way just because they're there [...] That's Voldemort's job" (*DH* 64). Singer, rightly, notes how this is another an example of Harry's "superior morality", and that in this particular case is presented as heroic, but at other times it makes Harry seem naive and stubborn (32). Both Harry's habitual and one-time actions contribute to the readers' opinion of him, and are important to take into consideration.

Harry's "superior morality", or moral bravery, is according to Strimel one of the most important issues in the series (47). It is a recurring character trait of Harry's (as he repeatedly makes choices that set him apart from the rest) that his choices always seem to be based on consideration for people around him. Strimel writes that "Harry's moral decision to die, if necessary, reflects deeply moral issues as it explores the fact that ethical decisions are rarely easy and can be dangerous" (47). These moral issues are explored in the series as Harry is faced with many situations where his courage is tested. J.K. Rowling has stated in an interview that "[I] prize courage in all its various ramifications. I value it more highly than any other virtue and by that I mean not just physical courage and flashy courage, but moral courage" (*CBBC* 2005). However, she points to other characters as representatives of this sort of courage, not just Harry. Neville is one of the most prominent examples, as he decidedly

does not display “that showy macho type of courage”, at least not in the first novels, but still has the courage to stand up to both his friends and his enemies (CBBC 2005). By the end of the final novel however, Neville has become much braver and tougher. McEvoy writes that “Neville becomes a shadow-hero, the hero who might have been” (218). He lives up to this by the end of the final novel as “[a]t a critical point in the final book, Harry entrusts Neville with a crucial task: destroying one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes, an honour previously held only by the series’ primary heroes. Harry appoints Neville as his successor, not even hesitating to put his trust in him” (McEvoy 218). Even more surprising, Neville succeeds, sending the message that moral bravery and courage goes a long way, as he alone charges at Voldemort after Harry is accused wrongly of trying to escape the final battle, and remains loyal even after he thinks Harry is dead, shouting “Dumbledore’s Army!” (DH 586). This kind of courage, shown by the decidedly slowest and most awkward of the Gryffindors, sends a powerful message that moral bravery is the most important kind, a message that Rowling admits to having intended.

Strimel, like McEvoy and Singer, also points out that the *Harry Potter* series “tackles many morality issues” (43). She points to the example of Peter Pettigrew in *Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), where Harry stops Lupin and Sirius from murdering Pettigrew to revenge the Potters' murder. “Harry's moral sense makes it impossible for him to allow the slaughter of another living being” and furthermore, Harry realises that had Lupin and Black murdered Pettigrew, they themselves, would have become killers (Strimel 44). This decision reverberates throughout the series, as this mercy allows Pettigrew live on and to aid Voldemort in his return to power. As Strimel puts it “The escape leads to a continued study of the effects of morality” (44).

Choices are repeatedly emphasised to be important throughout the series, as they mark the difference between what we are expected to do, and what we choose for ourselves. An example is Sirius Black and his choice to run away and distance himself from his family. Instead of following the family’s “pure blood” tradition, he broke free and made a life for himself (*OotP* 103-106). Harry’s choice of friends is another example. Often consisting of outsiders, it marks a decision on his behalf not to care what other people say, and to make up his own mind. Harry keeps hanging out with underdogs and “riff-raff” as Malfoy calls them, and in Garrett's words “it becomes one of his finest and most defining qualities” (69). Anne Klaus, in her article “A Fairy-tale Crew? J. K. Rowling’s Characters under Scrutiny” (2012), also points out this noble quality in Harry’s character, and emphasises that from the first novel he “reveals a careful consideration and an inner moral compass: he picks his friends based on like-mindedness, regardless of whether these companions will earn him a great reputation” (27). All of these examples emphasises the importance and value of choice.

McEvoy points out that in the Potter universe, “choice matters, seemingly above all else about a person’s character” (207). In that way Harry and Voldemort are fundamentally different, as Neil Franklin points out in his article, "The Social Dynamics of Power and Cooperation in the Wizarding World" (2006). They “[b]oth have an enormous amount of power at their disposal. Both have a loyal band of willing followers (for Voldemort, the Death Eaters, and for Harry, his admiring schoolmates). Voldemort declares himself to have absolute power, while Harry seems to enjoy his role as an apprentice and prefers a democratic style with his peers” (Franklin 173). The way they choose to act differently is vitally important when judging their characters. “Characters in the series choose to be good or evil, to behave in laudable or morally repugnant ways, and their choices shift as the characters develop” (McEvoy 207). Does Harry Potter choose to be a hero then? Does he actually have a choice? Or was he just in the wrong position at the wrong time? The presentation of the prophecy, as well as Dumbledore preparing him for his vital role as the destroyer of evil are all influences from the outside that make it seem like Harry himself never had a choice, but simply followed the road laid out for him. Still, both the reader and Harry himself need to believe that Harry has a choice. What is the moral, what is the possible educational outcome for the reader if Harry never was in any real danger of doing evil? One might argue that, there is no real educational outcome *because* Rowling never made it plausible for Harry to choose evil.

2.1.5 Who is Harry, Then?

As we have seen in this discussion of the character of Harry, he is a complex figure, and many – real critics and fictional characters from the series alike - seem to have an opinion of him. From the very beginning of the series, in *PS*, he is presented as a lifelike and complex character through his mysterious connection to Voldemort. The reader, and Harry himself, are constantly surprised by the revelations offered concerning him in the wizarding world. His character has been much discussed by critics, for instance by Klaus, who finds similarities between the *Harry Potter* series and the traditional fairy-tale; the general plot, the ending, the orphaned child and the quest-structure (Klaus 22, 24). Another example is Nikolajeva who points out the likeness of Harry’s character to the romantic hero, mentioning the “mystical circumstances around his birth”, and the fact that he is “dislocated and oppressed and suddenly given unlimited power” (*Development* 13). Furthermore, his lightning-shaped scar serves as the mark of “the chosen one”, he is seen by the wizarding community as their future saviour, while also “demonstrat[ing] ambiguity in the concepts of good and evil, gender transgression and other tokens of the postmodern aesthetics” (Nikolajeva *Development* 13). Klaus and Nikolajeva both outline the rather traditional aspects of Harry's character, as a representation of the fairy-tale and romantic hero respectively, while Katrin Berndt and Lena Steveker, on the other hand, in the introduction to their *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*

(2011), focus primarily on Harry as a reintroduction of the hero in fiction in general. They write that “[i]n the course of the twentieth century, we have become suspicious of the idea of heroism. Looking back on decades that taught us like none before how easily humans fall prey to corruption, avarice and evil, we have indeed grown cynical and distrustful of heroes” (1). They point to the *Harry Potter* series as a changing point of this development, and write that; “[t]he Harry Potter books, it is justified to say, have reintroduced the literary hero to public recognition” (2). Indeed, as we have seen, the character of Harry represents all of the ideals of moral and bravery that is expected of a hero in a children's fantasy – perhaps to a fault, because, as I argue, what can a purely good hero offer the readers in terms of moral guidance and lessons?

When asked whether she thought Harry was a good role model for a generation, Rowling replied:

I see Harry as someone who is struggling to do the right thing, who is not without faults, who acts impetuously as you would expect someone of his age to act, but who is ultimately a very loyal person, and a very very courageous person. So, in as much as he has qualities that I admire most I would say he is a good role model. That doesn't mean that he is saintly, but then frankly, who is? But I think you do see enough of Harry's inner life, the workings of his mind in the books to know that he is ultimately human, struggling to do the right thing, which I think is admirable. (Rowling, *CBBC* 2005)

This interpretation of the character of Harry is supported by many critics. However, in my opinion, these faults of Harry's seem to lessen towards the end of the series as the plot developments forces him to become a less round and lifelike character and increasingly flat. McEvoy writes that "Harry's heroism is effective because it is tempered with imperfection. [...] Harry is like Rowling's young readers, exhibiting character traits, both positive and negative, that are familiar" (210). While this reading of his character is in many ways similar to mine, it excludes Harry's development towards the end, where his imperfections (mainly the traits he shares with Voldemort) are eradicated alongside the Dark Lord. McEvoy also hints at Harry's success as a role model and moral guide for his readers. This focus on the reader and the ways in which the Harry Potter series can actually influence them are also emphasised by Garrett who writes that “Rowling has created a very human, but very noble, person from whom we can learn much about heroism and sacrifice. This arises from the tropological level of reading, where great stories can impel us to do something: Harry's story tells how not to act, and suggests how we *should* act” (68). As evident, Garrett focuses on Harry's willingness to sacrifice himself, to make the right choice between what is moral and what is easy (68). It is obvious that the notion of Harry's humanity is supported by many critics, but in my reading of the series, the reader is not entirely convinced that Harry is a saint. Except for a few one-time incidents – such as the use of Unforgivable Curses – Harry

repeatedly makes the good, moral decision. Hence, while his biggest flaws are his pride and his anger, Harry seems to be on a relatively straight path towards heroism throughout the entire series.

Rowling has also stated that “Harry is not, and never has been, a saint. Like Snape, he is flawed and mortal” (Rowling, Web Chat 2007). Yet, I would argue against this. While Harry's character certainly offers the reader cause for reflection and consideration throughout the series, he does not appear to be “flawed and mortal” - at least not to the same extent as Snape. His faults are never considerable enough to cause actual doubt. Admittedly, he goes through confusing times where some might argue that his goodness and morality is called into question, as when in *CoS* Harry himself is unsure whether he is Slytherin's heir (*CoS* 156), or when he uses Unforgivable Curses which require true hatred. Yet, it is not a question of “is Harry good?”, but rather of “how long do we have to wait before this confusion is resolved”? The reader inherently knows that Harry represents the moral good, and his story is one of moving towards the ultimate sacrifice for good, rather than a story of fighting evil inside.

To return to the issue of whether or not the *Harry Potter* series may be considered as a melodrama, which was discussed briefly in the introduction: Bousquet writes that the particular contribution of melodrama is the “creation of a victim hero, misunderstood and misrecognized, in a plot that drives relentlessly toward clarification and recognition” (180). I agree with Bousquet that Harry can be argued to represent a victim hero, he is continuously misunderstood and misrepresented throughout the plot of the seven novels. While ministry, magical society, class-mates and close friends (Ron and Seamus) distrust him or blame him for incidents that are not his fault, and doubt him when he is telling the truth, Harry remains steadfast and firm in his pursuit of truth. Hence, I would argue that, in this sense, the *Harry Potter* series is not so much the story of a boy struggling with evil within, but a boy who consistently tells the truth and is faced with difficulties mainly because people doubt him. Bousquet concludes that in a melodrama the story is over when “the victim hero's virtue is known” (180). This coincides with the *Harry Potter* series, where the end of the series brings about a wide recognition of Harry's virtue and inherent goodness, and his defeat of evil. The victim hero's virtue is known, and “[a]ll was well” (*DH* 607).

Garrett sums up Harry and his actions quite aptly: “self-sacrifice, courage, decency [...] Harry is the purest and truest of heroes – someone who risks himself and all he has in behalf of others – and whose sacrifice makes a difference in the world” (71). Harry starts out “truest and purest” and remains so, through all of the challenges he faces - until the very end.

2.2 Severus Snape

Severus Snape's upbringing shares many likenesses with Harry and Voldemort's, which is something that Deavel and Deavel point out in their article. For instance, Snape is a half blood said to have grown up in an unhappy home, and to have experienced a feeling of relief and belonging once he arrived at Hogwarts – a feeling which both Harry and Voldemort also admits to (55, 56). The first time Professor Severus Snape is introduced to both the readers and to Harry Potter, is during the welcome feast in Harry's first year at Hogwarts. As Harry looks up at the teacher's table during dinner he happens to meet Snape's eye without knowing who he is, or anything else about him other than his appearance. Harry describes him as “a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin” (*PS* 94). It is relevant to distinguish between the features - like height, facial features, etc. - that are beyond the control of the individual, and those that depend on the character (at least in part), like hair style and clothes (Rimmon-Kenan 66). Professor Snape is a good example of this as he continuously dresses in long, black, billowing cloaks, making him look like “an overgrown bat” (*PS* 209), in addition to his customary “greasy black hair” (*GoF* 242). These are elements that Snape could alter, should he wish to, and can be counted as components of the “image” he wishes to create for himself.

Harry's initial reaction to Snape is immediate: “The hook-nosed teacher [Snape] looked past Quirrell's turban straight into Harry's eyes - and a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on Harry's forehead” (*PS* 94). This first contact does not give neither Harry, nor the reader, a favourable impression of the teacher, as both his appearance and Harry's physical reaction (a pain in the scar that is connected to Voldemort) hint that Snape is someone to beware of. Percy's comment when Harry inquires about the teacher is not reassuring either: “No wonder he's looking so nervous, that's Professor Snape. He teaches Potions, but he doesn't want to - everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows and awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape” (*PS* 94). This antagonistic impression is sustained the first time they meet face-to-face, and converse, which is during Harry's first potions lesson. Snape actively targets and bullies Harry, thereby setting the precedent for the remaining six novels where the dislike and bullying - from both parts - only increase. As Snape's past as a Death Eater is known, the distrust grows, and even his membership in the Order of the Phoenix does not do much to decrease the intensity of Harry's dislike of him – or the other way around. In fact, Harry suspects Snape of being evil through six whole years, and has his suspicions first confirmed in his sixth year and then disproved at the end of the final novel. Here, Rowling makes use of narrative tools to influence the reader's perception of Snape. As Rimmon-Kenan writes, “[t]he text can direct and control the reader's comprehension and attitudes by positioning *certain* items before others” (121). As we shall see, Rowling's focus on Snape's dubious

characteristics and questionable actions - a focus that is reinforced throughout the series - shapes the reader's opinion of him. This initial information is crucial to the process of perception, because "information and attitudes presented at an early stage of the text tend to encourage the reader to interpret everything in their light" (121). Hence, opinions formed early on tend to remain with the reader for a long time, and are often hard to alter. However, the revelations concerning Snape's character forces the reader to reconsider their initial reading of him.

In the final novel, *DH*, the truth about Snape's character is finally revealed as Snape is murdered by Voldemort and manages to give Harry some of his memories before he dies. As Harry dives into Snape's memories in the Pensieve, the truth is uncovered; Snape loved Lily Potter - Harry's mother - from the time they were children, and although she married James Potter and had Harry, Snape still tried to protect her. When he could not - when Voldemort proved too strong - he was convinced by Dumbledore to honour her memory by protecting her son, Harry. "Severus Snape wasn't yours,' said Harry. 'Snape was Dumbledore's, Dumbledore's from the moment you started hunting down my mother. And you never realised it, because of the thing you can't understand'" (*DH* 593). This revelation of Snape's motivation explains the constant dislike and reluctance Snape has shown toward Harry: Lily sacrificed herself for Harry, and so Harry was a constant reminder of Snape's lost love and the wrong choices he made in his life. When dying, Snape asked Harry to look at him - Harry having inherited Lily's eyes - so that the last thing Snape would see was Lily's eyes staring back at him (*DH* 528). It is also disclosed that Snape murdering Dumbledore was planned in advance by the two, as Dumbledore was already dying, and wanted to spare Draco Malfoy from having to do it. Still, from Harry (and the reader's) perspective it looked like Snape was mercilessly killing an unarmed man that had always given him his trust, as can be read in the scene depicting the murder: "Dumbledore was pleading. [...] Snape gazed for a moment at Dumbledore, and there was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face. 'Severus — please ...' Snape raised his wand and pointed it directly at Dumbledore. 'Avada Kedavra!'" (*HBP* 556). Because the reader sees this incident from Harry's perspective, Harry's prejudice towards Snape colours the scene. For instance, the "revulsion and hatred" Harry sees might be revulsion towards having to commit the murder, or it might be a completely different emotion altogether. However, as a tool of the revelation plot it certainly supports the reading of Snape as a bad character, leading up to the climatic revelation in *DH*.

This final revelation of Snape's brave character will have a profound effect and influence on the reader, who, up until that point, has not been sure whether Snape was good or bad. The majority had probably been convinced of Snape's character after he murdered Dumbledore in the previous book. The timing of this revelation is obviously a conscious choice by J.K.

Rowling who chose to wait until the very end before revealing the true character of Snape. This forces the reader to reconsider everything they have read about Severus Snape - again! The late revelation changes the reader's opinion of Snape, a narrative device known as the recency effect, which is described by Rimmon-Kenan as "encourag[ing] the reader to assimilate all previous information to the item presented last" (121). Presumably, it was Rowling's intention to surprise and alter the reader's (and the characters in the series') opinion of Snape, and make him a hero. As she has stated herself in an interview when asked whether she thought Snape was a hero: "Yes, I do; though a very flawed hero. An anti-hero, perhaps. He is not a particularly likeable man in many ways. He remains rather cruel, a bully, riddled with bitterness and insecurity – and yet he loved, and showed loyalty to that love and, ultimately, laid down his life because of it. That's pretty heroic!" (Rowling, Web Chat 2007). This description of Snape seems accurate, for while it can be agreed that he is extremely brave, he is also unpleasant and cruel throughout the entire series. This is proven when Harry dives into Snape's memories in *DH*, where he is shown a conversation between Dumbledore and Snape where Snape begs for Dumbledore's help to save Lily:

‘If she means that much to you,’ said Dumbledore, ‘surely Lord Voldemort will spare her? Could you not ask for mercy for the mother, in exchange for the son?’
 ‘I have - I have asked him -’
 ‘You disgust me,’ said Dumbledore, and Harry had never heard so much contempt in his voice”.
 (*DH* 543)

It is a testament to Snape's flawed character that he asked to have a baby murdered to save Lily, *her* baby, no less. However, Dumbledore promises to try to keep the Potters safe, and in exchange Snape says he will give him “[a]nything”, which is incredibly brave and proves extremely dangerous (*DH* 544). In a sense, Snape's character changes for the better through his hopeless love for Lily, as pointed out by Deavel and Deavel: “Snape’s romantic love for Lily is tainted with selfishness at first, but his love deepens as he accepts the role Dumbledore proposes” (59).

The character of Snape has several of the characteristics and interests that are connected to dark wizards and villains, for instance his interest in the Dark Arts and his features (such as his choice of clothes) that immediately associates him with Dark wizards. At the end of *PS*, when the readers discover that it is Quirrell, not Snape, who has been attempting to get hold of the Philosopher's Stone on Voldemort's orders, Harry's surprise is understandable: “‘*You!*’ gasped Harry. [...] ‘But I thought - Snape -’” and Quirrell replies “Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn't he? So useful to have him swooping around like an overgrown bat” (*PS* 209). Quirrell's description is fitting as Snape's character is constantly described as slightly dark and ominous, both his physical characterisation and his personality are certainly more

commonly connected to that of the traditional villain. His interest and fascination with the Dark Arts proves to be a grievous mistake, as they influence the company he keeps and drives Lily away.

Critics seem to agree that Snape is one of the most ambiguous characters, as is evident in McEvoy's note that, "[t]hough he ultimately proves to be a hero, he certainly behaves in villainous ways throughout the earlier novels" (212). McEvoy mentions his repeated cruelty towards Harry, which is probably a product of years of bitterness and spite, but this resentment does not stop him from living through great personal risk and eventually sacrificing himself so that Harry can murder Voldemort (212). Deavel and Deavel also choose to view Snape's development in a positive light, which is obvious in their writing that "Snape's love for Lily pushes him beyond selfish desire and changes him fundamentally. Snape's ongoing love for Lily, even after her death, spurs him to choose actions that gradually make his love more like hers, turned toward the good of others and capable of self-sacrifice" (60). While I do not agree that Snape changes "fundamentally", he does become a more noble character through his sacrifice. However, his bitterness and unfair treatment of the students he dislikes – especially Harry - proves a lack of restraint, pettiness and a continued hatred in his character. Still, his capability of self-sacrifice is undoubtedly strong, and works as a counterweight to his wickedness. This inner conflict is without question part of Snape's appeal and complexity. Strimel adds to this by pointing to Severus Snape as the most challenging character for the child reader to understand (45). In her words, Snape might be "the best example of Rowling's ability to force children to consider characterisations of goodness and badness" (45). She uses Snape's appearance, behaviour and history as reasons why most readers are suspicious of him from the beginning. Had Strimel read the entire series at the time of her article she would, undoubtedly, also have pointed to his development towards the end. In *HBP*, after Snape murders Dumbledore, not many saw him as an ambiguous character, but as a purely evil one. However, in the final novel, *DH*, Snape is redeemed and Dumbledore denounced in Harry's eyes. I would argue that this ability of Rowling's, to wreak havoc with the opinions and truths her readers make of the characters, can be extremely beneficial, as they force the reader to redefine, rethink and question the difference between good and bad people, and good and bad actions. Furthermore, the revelation of Dumbledore's past raises the question of whether your past should haunt you forever, or if one can redeem oneself. Strimel writes that "[c]hildren may notice that a person's appearance should not be used to judge everyone who looks similarly" and continues by writing that it is made clear "that even past action prove to be a poor litmus test as an indication of a character's worth and goodness" (45). Guanio-Uluru also maintains this idea, that Snape's function is to emphasise the lesson that one must look beyond external appearance and history to find the true character (341).

Even though his appearance, character and history indicate a villain, Snape's character is in some ways a hero. McEvoy sums Snape up quite aptly by writing that: "He is not evil, but it is impossible to call him good" (212). However, the impression the readers are left with is a positive one, since Rowling finished on a positive note, where Snape is revealed to have performed heroic actions.

As we have seen, ambiguity is frequently found in the characters of the Harry Potter series, as throughout the series the characters develop and alter, and previously unknown details are revealed. We have now explored the ambiguity in the character of Snape, yet, such ambiguity is also obvious in the character of Albus Dumbledore – although in a less obvious way.

2.3 Albus Dumbledore

In his lifetime, Dumbledore acts as the unequivocal good moral leader of the series, but after his death his character is questioned by many as a teenage friendship with Gellert Grindelwald - a dark wizard - is revealed. Dumbledore never tells Harry of this friendship while he is alive, but it is possible to assume that he alludes to it through some of his comments: "I make mistakes like the next man. In fact, being - forgive me - rather cleverer than most men, my mistakes tend to be correspondingly huger" (*HBP* 187). He could here be referring to the friendship with Grindelwald that led to the death of his sister and a lifetime of regret. He spent the rest of his life trying to make up for this mistake, and consequently accomplished great amounts of good, but his having kept this from Harry, and the readers, calls Dumbledore as a moral guide into question.

Strimel writes about the ambiguity of the characters in the *Harry Potter* series, and observes that "[t]hroughout the series, very few characters remain unwaveringly good or evil" (45). She continues by writing that "[w]hile Dumbledore and Voldemort appear to be the only unwaveringly good and evil characters respectively, most of the other characters – including Harry – at least appear in an alternate light throughout the series" (45). However, Strimel's article was written before the publication of the final novels when Harry's character, in fact, becomes less ambiguous. Hence, her comments do not cover the revelations made concerning some of the main characters towards the end, and especially important; they do not cover Harry's development. At the same time, some of Strimel's observations remain relevant, for instance that, "[p]eople, both 'good' and 'bad', make mistakes in the series and in the real world. The ambiguity, then, in *Harry Potter* is more realistic for young readers as they navigate the complexities of morality" (46). Dumbledore shocks both Harry and the readers with the revelation of his past, and forces the readers to reconsider his character. A constant questioning and adding of information, as a feature of the revelation plot, adds both new

information and information from the past. This narrative device leads to a consideration of what makes someone good and bad, and it has the potential of teaching “children that 'good' people sometimes make poor decisions and perpetrate bad acts just as 'bad' people are capable of positive acts”, this offers the child readers a better understanding of the “morally ambiguous areas” and the free will connected to actions (Strimel 46). McEvoy also acknowledges many of the same claims, and in her article, when she writes that Rowling presents her readers with “much ambiguity where heroism is concerned” and that she shows “there can be goodness in bad people and bad in good” (207). While both McEvoy and Strimel comment on the ambiguity found in the majority of the characters, neither of them pay attention to Harry's development in the opposite direction. As the rest of the series grows increasingly darker and more complex, Harry goes from being complex and well-rounded, to becoming flat and one-dimensional as all evil is taken from his character. Therefore, as I argue, the lesson offered by the majority of characters – and pointed out by Strimel and McEvoy – namely, that good people can make bad choices, and vice versa, is in fact substantially lessened towards the end of the series where all traces of evil are removed from the main character.

Dumbledore errs, and according to McEvoy his flaws are more serious as "his failings are magnified by the fact that after so many years fighting evil, he really should know better" (210). Still, the fault Dumbledore repeatedly makes, as Snape observes, is that “he has to believe the best of people” (*HBP* 36). Garrett offers an insight concerning Dumbledore's character and this, his greatest weakness, by writing that “it is significant, I think, that the wisest of characters in the Potter novels seems to believe in the inherent goodness and trustworthiness of people, the potential for almost all to be redeemed in the end” (74). Undoubtedly, this tells the reader something of what the implied author values, and what the moral message of the series might be. The way I interpret it, if the “inherent goodness” of people is what Dumbledore believes in, and if the reader recognises Dumbledore's influence as guidance, then this ideal becomes an important moral message. This is a different kind of lesson than the one the reader could potentially have learned had the character of Harry been in real danger of choosing evil and not been “purified” when he sacrificed himself for goodness. In this sense, I would claim that it is possible to separate between two sets of lessons found in the *Harry Potter* series. The first concerns the inherent goodness in people, as constantly emphasised through Albus Dumbledore and his guidance. The second lesson is the one found in the ambiguous characters, namely; that good and bad people need to be separated from good and bad actions. This is the lesson I argue is lessened by the development of Harry's character from a round and dynamic to a flat and lifeless one. I would still argue that the second lesson is more valuable for children than the first, since it

encourages independent thought concerning characters, and also because it emphasises the importance of individual choices.

McEvoy comments on Dumbledore's reasons for erring, when writing that Dumbledore loved Harry, and so he wants to protect him from harm by keeping information from him that he knows Harry should learn, but that could be hurtful (211). McEvoy extracts from this lesson that "mistakes made out of love and a desire to protect the people we care about are more justifiable than mistakes made out of greed or ignorance" (211). McEvoy continues to emphasise the importance of love, and she interprets the implied author's most important message to be that love has a redemptive power. While I have refuted this message in the case of the Malfoys, I think, in connection to some of the other characters, such as Dumbledore, McEvoy has a point when she writes that "[i]n Rowling's world, it seems the only prerequisite to heroism is the ability to love. Love is also an intensely important factor in the series' villains, for it is only through love that villains are redeemed" (211). In other words, one of the most important messages is the extraordinary power of love.

Concluding Thoughts: What Can We Learn From Harry Potter?

When children read, their parents want to ensure that they are reading something worthwhile, and that will not affect their children negatively. Therefore, it is important that children's literature has a moral at the end of the narrative. Nikolajeva claims that the best examples of children's fantasy “provide moral and spiritual guidance”, which is necessary when the readers are at an age where they do not have “any firm distinction between reality and imagination” (“Development” 60, 61). As a consequence, these readers can be argued to have a stronger potential for “secondary belief”, and this potential is what makes it possible for authors to deal with difficult and troubling topics in children's literature - by using a fantasy setting as a narrative tool to help communicate meaning (“Development” 60, 61). I would argue, that the *Harry Potter* series is an excellent example of how the fantasy setting functions as a way of distancing the story, still, the characters and issues remain familiar enough to the readers to offer believable and relatable moral guidance. The purpose of this thesis has been to prove that *the triumph of good over evil in the Harry Potter series is problematic, because it leads to a loss of both meaning and potential educational power by deflating the character of Harry, and making him less believable to the reader*. I have supported this claim by looking at several aspects of the *Harry Potter* series; such as theory concerning children's literature and its effect on the readers; theory on narrative and the nature of evil; characterisation of the main character, Harry, and his nemesis, Voldemort; in addition to offering descriptions of other important characters.

As we have seen, there can be argued to be two important moral lessons in the *Harry Potter* series. The first of which is the emphasis on the inherent goodness in the characters, while the second repeats the difference between good and bad people, and good and bad actions, where the focus is kept on the importance of moral choice. Both morals have been recognised by several critics, some support the first; such as McEvoy and Garrett, who agree that Harry's inherent goodness is important, while others focus on the second; such as Strimel, who write of the importance of ambiguous characters. This thesis has argued that the second lesson is most valuable, because it can teach readers that everyone has to make choices between good and evil, but that the development of the main character in fact weakens this instructive and pedagogical potential of the novel. Put differently, I found that Rowling's decision to “purify” Harry - removing all traces of evil from him - leads to an extensive loss of meaning at the end of the series. Moreover, when Harry's actions are excused as a result of the Horcrux's influence, the moral lesson connected to the most important character vanishes.

Although there are other characters that do highlight the importance of the moral, they are not Harry and do not have his power to influence the readers.

Nikolajeva maintains that in some of the finest examples of children's fantasy, the fantastic form is used as a "metaphor for reality" ("Development" 61). The *Harry Potter* series can be argued to make use of this aspect of the fantasy genre, by externalising the inner conflict between good and evil, and representing it in the battle between Harry and Voldemort. Yet, I would claim that even if that is the case, it does not make up for the consequent loss of meaning, because the hero could still win without obliterating evil both within himself and in the world. As Sattaur writes: "The battle between Good and Evil will not end in Evil being reformed, but in Evil being destroyed altogether. [...] The message transmitted to readers, therefore, is unyielding. It is a message of no mercy" (10). It can be argued that this complete cleansing of evil is part of the narrative strategy, or indeed a reflection of the series being a part of the children's fantasy genre where the good is expected to win. Either way, the complete cleansing of evil is, in my opinion, problematic.

Nikolajeva writes that the fantasy genre allows authors of children's literature to deal with "important psychological, ethical and existential questions in a slightly detached manner", which is an approach that has often proved more successful than "straightforward realism" (61). Hence, by using the fantastic form the author can communicate stories and lessons that might be more persuasive – but less frightening – because they are described in an imagined universe which is removed from the readers' (60). This utilisation of the fantasy genre as a means of discussing dark topics in a safe, detached setting is something that I would argue is adopted in the *Harry Potter* series. For while the themes that are dealt with are dark and intense, the presence of magic moves the story to a realm different than our own.

I would claim that the character of Harry starts out as relatively complex, especially with the continued revelations of his connection to Voldemort. The revelations of an increasing number of qualities he possesses, that are associated with the Dark Arts, creates an air of apprehension concerning his character. However, I would argue that Harry himself is never at risk of turning to evil. John Granger, in his *Looking for God in Harry Potter* (2004), emphasises one of the most important differences between the good and bad characters in fiction, by referring to the way they make decisions (24). While the bad characters do not struggle with a moral decision, but simply do what is best for them or their group, the good characters – while they might be tempted to do the wrong thing – either make the right choice or repent their wrong (Granger 14). This description corresponds well with the good character of Harry, who, when faced with a decision, always attempts to make the right choice (and should he make the wrong choice, he regrets it). Most of Harry's "evil" characteristics are explained as a result of his connection to Voldemort. Therefore, at the end of the heptalogy –

when we learn that Harry himself is a Horcrux – he is excused from all of his previous faults, as they were not his own, and the readers' doubt concerning the morality of his character is removed as they were only a projection of Voldemort.

The most central question I attempted to find an answer to was: if Harry is solely good, can he be a realistic role-model for the readers? While many critics emphasise the importance of Harry's inherent goodness, my thesis statement was instead concerned with the problematic elimination of evil, and the fact that Harry never appears to be in any real danger of choosing evil over goodness. Admittedly, he uses the Cruciatius Curse, but the failure he experienced in his first attempt only reinforces his goodness: Harry is too good to feel the kind of hatred necessary to use the Unforgiveable Curse. Then, when he is finally able to use one, it is overshadowed by his imminent sacrifice for the people he loves. Harry's hesitance every time he is forced to make a morally difficult decision reinforces the goodness of his character, and his willingness to sacrifice himself is obvious from the very first instalment in the series - where he bravely faces evil in an attempt to stop Voldemort getting to the Philosopher's Stone. This inclination follows him throughout the heptalogy to the very end, where he makes the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good – a sacrifice Dumbledore had subtly prepared him for. Therefore, while Harry is periodically angry and proud, he still represents the superior morality in the series. It can be said that he does risk his life for selfish reasons too, such as proving himself or “getting a kick out of it”, but his primary motivation is always the triumph of goodness. His bravery is his most valued trait, and his goodness only make his bravery appear more noble.

Harry's goodness is problematic in relation to the implied readers. The use of children's fantasy as a means of introducing and reflecting on difficult moral topics has already been discussed, and furthermore, the educational outcome for the young readers depend on communication of a valuable and believable moral from the narrative to the audience. When Harry, the protagonist, and therefore the character the reader is most likely to identify with, does not face any real challenge in his relationship to evil, then what lesson is left for the reader to learn? Or, if one does argue that Harry's character appear ambiguous or dubious throughout the series; is it not still problematic that all of his battles with evil - both within and without - are trivialised as a projection of Voldemort and declared as not belonging to Harry? This question prompts a discussion of the ambiguous characters in the series. Characters such as Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore challenge the reader with the revelations made concerning their personas. When Snape is revealed to be a hero in disguise, and Dumbledore's reprehensible past is exposed, the reader, alongside Harry, is forced to reassess and reconsider their opinion of these characters. By now, however, most readers are older than when the first book was published and can assimilate the new information better.

This distinction between good and bad people, and good and bad actions is stressed - which in my opinion is the most important lesson the reader take away from this series.

Rowling herself has said, that “I would hope that it has made people think, I mean I do not write the books thinking what is my message for today, what is my moral, that is not how I set out to write a book at all” (Rowling, *CBBC* 2005). She repeats this claim in an interview with Lev Grossman, but admits that, “undeniably, morals are drawn” (Rowling, *JK* 2005).

Therefore, even though she is claiming not to be consciously trying to instruct her readers, she concurs that “morals are drawn”, and while reading the series it is not hard to find morals and messages in the characters and story, which is proven by the already existing criticism on the subject. An example of such criticism can be found in Garrett, who writes that “Voldemort and those like him can teach us much about how evil works, where evil comes from, and how we can recognize evil even in places where we don't normally look” (72). McEvoy, in her reading of the series, finds that “while encouraging her readers to fight evil, Rowling is also telling them to pity evil people. After all, what could be more terrible than being incapable of love? Clearly, in Rowling’s view, nothing” (216). As we can see, various morals are being interpreted and communicated. This presence of a moral brings us to the heart of the problem of this thesis; is J.K. Rowling's presentation of moral lessons in the series a beneficial one? Is it beneficial for the reader?

I have explored the character of Voldemort, a purely evil figure, who, while fascinating, does not offer much to the reader in terms of morality. His resemblance to psychopaths differentiates him from normal people, which leaves him difficult to identify with and instead creates a contrast to most readers. While it is “tempting to compare Voldemort to Harry, who also grew up disadvantaged, [...] Harry’s deprivation was of a different sort. Cold, vain and vapid though they might be, the Dursleys were family” (McEvoy 215). However, the targeted physical, mental and emotional abuse Harry experiences at No. 4 Privet Drive might be worse than any he could experience in an orphanage¹⁰. To me it seems implied that Harry’s soul itself is unsullied, pure and good from the start, which enables him to survive the mistreatment of the Dursleys and still function normally - whereas Voldemort’s soul was evil from the start. Voldemort's sadistic qualities do not seem like something that could have been “loved away”, and it appears that his sadistic traits were almost predetermined due to his family history - with cases such as inbreeding and possibly being the descendant of Salazar Slytherin. This unfortunate upbringing probably only reinforced his evil nature and made him ambitious to rule the wizarding world.

Klaus writes that while Harry Potter “corresponds perhaps most likely to the upright and virtuous fairy-tale hero [...] Rowling’s side characters reveal nuanced moral profiles,

¹⁰ Family does not have to be better than strangers, after all, Harry found a new family in the Weasleys, who were, to start with, only his best friend's family.

psychological depth and self-determination” (32). Characters like the Malfoys and Snape - the more ambiguous types - have proven to present an exceptionally varied and diverse image of which forms evil can present itself in. The Malfoys are inconsistent and selfish, doing whatever is best for them; even though they do show tentative signs of redemptive actions towards the end – which I have discarded as just another example of their selfishness, or at best a moving towards a “neutral ground”. While Snape is unpleasant and downright abusive, he is secretly a hero and Dumbledore's spy, fighting against Voldemort and his dream of total dominion over the wizarding world. Snape's character challenges the reader's idea of how a hero should conduct himself and what he should look like, as he consistently behaves - and appears - a villain. Garrett comments on the presence of evil and on ambiguous characters in the series by writing that “there can be no question that J.K.Rowling also recognizes the power and allure of evil” (72). Snape functions as the most obvious example of a character whose life has been destroyed by evil forces, but no life remains untouched, and Draco Malfoy is an example of a young boy who is close to having his life ruined, and soul ripped, as a result of his affiliation to the Dark Arts.

The fear of death remains a central theme throughout the series as it represents Voldemort's one great fear. Garrett compares the opposing attitudes to death that the heroes and the villains have in the series by writing that while “[t]he heroes seem willing to give their lives; the villain clings to it, doing whatever evil is necessary to keep it” (71). Here, Garrett, points out the core of the evil in the *Harry Potter* series; “the evil side” has as its ultimate goal to defeat death, and become immortal. However, I would argue that the “good side” is also tempted towards the same goal, but in the form of Hallows, not Horcruxes – which, in the end, is more a source of power than immortality and hence, a lesser form of evil. Garrett cautions against the dangers of an obsessive fear of death that can be all-consuming, as exemplified in Voldemort and his use of unicorn blood, dark spells and Horcruxes as a means of staying alive at all costs. Dumbledore represents the opposite of Voldemort, which is apparent when he says that “to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure” (PS 215). This “demystifying of death” is according to Garrett a recurrent theme throughout the story (72), which culminates in Harry's sacrifice. In a sense, Harry follows in Dumbledore's footsteps as he willingly faces death in order to save his friends: “The conflict between good and evil, between virtues and vices, is finally resolved by Harry's complete and voluntary self-sacrifice out of love” (Singer 34). There is a distinction between Voldemort's death as “the end”, Dumbledore's death as something welcomed and Harry's “good” death in the form of a sacrifice for others.

To return to our protagonist; Harry's moral superiority is a recurring theme. Singer writes that it is Harry's sympathy for the creature that is Voldemort that in the end “proves that Harry

has further developed his sincere consideration and empathy in the course of his quest” (35). Harry does not strive for neither fame nor glory, he has lived with both without wanting them, and near the end all he seeks and does is based on his sincere affection for his friends and family. Therefore, in the end, when Harry defeats Voldemort - doing what Dumbledore failed to do - “[i]t is his decision to destroy the Horcruxes rather than follow the lure of the Hallows that makes Harry stronger than either Dumbledore or Voldemort” (Singer 35). As it turns out, Harry possesses all of the Deathly Hallows as well, at one point, but destroys the Elder Wand and lets go of the Resurrection Stone, and in the end he is left with the one universally “good” Hallow; the Invisibility Cloak.

Sattaur writes that, “Harry, then, is a symbol for hope, and following his story allows the reader something else - an escape into a world where there is more hope than in our own. Both for children and adults, the Harry Potter novels offer vicarious relief” (8). While I agree that Harry's world holds more hope than our own, I argue that the ending of the series is problematic since Harry is left entirely pure and good - better than the best of men (Dumbledore) - as he rids the world of evil. My claim is that it would have been more realistic had Harry been left with some evil; an internal struggle that all people can recognise. When he is completely purified it becomes difficult to view him as a believable role-model, because no one is completely, unquestionably good - and striving to be so would be pointless. If the story had continued the theme of the importance of choices, which is emphasised throughout the heptalogy, Harry could have *chosen* to do good until the very end. Hence, instead of being rid of evil he could have continually chosen not to act on evil, or immoral, impulses, a decision process most readers might have recognised and could have learned from. In this sense, there is a loss of meaning resulting from Harry's “purification”. The moral that could have been is confiscated by the author, and as a result the conclusion of the series brings about “a destruction of evil” that can in no way be mirrored in the real world of the reader. As Sattaur writes: “Although Rowling does go to pains, especially in the later books, to blur the lines between 'good' and 'bad', to make characters and actions ambiguous, and find areas of grey between the black and white [...] there is no question in the end about which is 'good' and which is 'evil’” (10). The moral of the story might have been more realistic had this not been clear, but after all, one must keep in mind that this is children’s fantasy.

I set out to analyse evilness in Harry, and discovered his development from a round towards a flattening of his character, which was a result of the revelation plot. I also ended up finding that the character of Snape does not live up to the role of the hero that he is given, as he is actually thoroughly unpleasant, wicked and unprofessional towards the majority of his students - and people in general - which poses the question: even if you perform heroic actions, does this automatically mean that you are a hero? My argument is that good should

triumph over evil, but not eradicate it, as evil is necessary in order to emphasise the need for good. In addition, the presence of evil makes the idea of good more believable. If, in the end, “[a]ll was well”, how can the readers relate this to our world – where all is not well? The question the readers are left with is not: will Harry triumph over evil? But rather; how will Harry triumph over evil? At the conclusion of the *Harry Potter* series, what is left for Harry to vanquish now that he has eradicated evil from his world?

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