

Pity Those Who Live Without Love: The Function of Love in *Harry Potter*

by

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Abstract

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels are extraordinarily popular; readers zealously respond to these texts with unprecedented adoration and dedication. Generally, critics attempt to explicate the popularity of *Harry Potter* in one of two ways: through an examination of either Rowling's literary artistry, or an analysis of the relentless marketing of the culture industry. Coupled together, the aforementioned analyses sufficiently explain the initial success of Rowling's series. However, the only way to understand the unflagging popularity of *Harry Potter* is to elucidate the emotional adoration that these texts inspire in readers. This can be accomplished by explicating the primary theme of this series and then rationalizing the way that readers typically react to the connotative meaning of this theme. Subsequently, the conclusions that are drawn from this line of reasoning can be reinforced by juxtaposing the primary theme of *Harry Potter* with the themes that generally surface in *Harry Potter* fan fiction.

Throughout this series, Rowling's heroic protagonists are characterized as figures who are capable of altruistic affection. Conversely, her antagonists are ambitious figures who neither practice nor experience selfless love. This antithesis demonstrates that love is the primary point of contention and the principle theme in *Harry Potter*. It is possible to definitively prove that readers are responding to the theme of love in *Harry Potter* by examining the way that love functions in the fan fiction surrounding this series. The themes presented in fan literature reinforce and champion the fundamental meaning of Rowling's novels. As a result, an examination

of *Harry Potter* fan fiction indicates that readers are attracted to Rowling's portrayal of love. Consequently, it is this theme which inspires readers' adoration, and thus the series' overwhelming popularity.

Rationalizing the Sensational: Making Sense of Harry's Popularity

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels traversed the globe with much fanfare—generating a commercial craze in nearly every nation in which they appeared. The marketing mania that surrounds this series was particularly palpable in the weeks preceding the publication of the seventh and final installment, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). Borders was just one of the many bookstores that hosted a global “Potter Party” to herald in the concluding chapter of this series. The store had magicians, face painters, palm readers, sorting ceremonies, and live music to appease those who anxiously waited to receive their preordered copy of *The Deathly Hallows* (Grant and Showley). The ostentatious displays staged by the store were ultimately successful: Borders sold an outrageous 1.2 million copies of the text during the first twenty-four hours of distribution (Rich). However, Pottermania is not confined to literature. Rowling's texts have turned into merchandizing machines, worming their way into nearly every aspect of society and making Rowling the first author to bank over a billion dollars. Various companies currently produce video games, candies, toys, clothes, costumes, jewelry, and even brands of cologne and toothpaste that are devoted exclusively to *Harry Potter* (Watson and Kellner).

Yet, to the individuals who read these texts, *Harry Potter* is much more than a product. The immense emotional attachment that readers have to this series was clearly displayed by a devoted fan in Australia, who was so emotionally invested in discovering the fate of Rowling's characters that he dove into icy lake waters in an attempt to retrieve his *Deathly Hallows* preorder voucher (Grant and Showley).

Likewise, in Great Britain, government officials were deeply concerned about the way that readers would respond to the series conclusion. They feared that many individuals would become distressed upon discovering the unfortunate fate that awaited some of Rowling's more popular characters. Consequently, various agencies organized a phone counseling service to help console those who became distraught over the numerous deaths in *The Deathly Hallows* (Grant and Showley).

Because of the commercial and emotional mania that surrounds this series, it is nearly impossible to discuss anything in *Harry Potter* without simultaneously addressing the popularity of these texts. Generally, critics account for the *Harry Potter* phenomenon in one of two ways: they allege that it was produced by either the creative originality, or the derivative familiarity of Rowling's writing. In his review of *Harry Potter*, Harold Bloom attempts to explicate the popularity of this series by using both approaches. Bloom argues that, to create a tale that was assured to sit well with audiences, Rowling insipidly mimicked the devices used in other popular forms of literature. Alleging that Rowling stole her characterization, storyline, and plot from traditional texts—such as fairytales, boarding school narratives, and adventure stories—Bloom claims that Rowling recast these archetypal works “in the magical mirror of Tolkien,” adding fantastical creatures and magical characters to make her narratives seem creative and original (Bloom A26). Thus, Bloom concludes that readers are drawn to *Harry Potter* because of the nostalgia induced by Rowling's hackneyed but fanciful revamps.

Several critics have rallied around Bloom's allegations regarding the derivative nature of Rowling's texts. In *Sticks and Stones*, Jack Zipes attempts to explain the popularity of this series using the arguments made by Theodor W. Adorno concerning the homogenization that takes place in "the culture industry."¹ Citing Adorno's theory on the subject of mass media production, Zipes argues that, in order to be accepted into mainstream society "a person or commodity must conform to the tastes of hegemonic groups which determine what makes up a phenomenon" (Zipes 175). Thus, he asserts that Rowling's novels are so appealing, not because of their creative ingenuity, but as a result of their absolute adherence to society's desires, expectations, and demands. Like Bloom, Zipes ultimately concludes that readers enjoy these books because of their conventionality and predictability: "they sell extraordinarily well precisely because they are so cute and ordinary" (175).

Many of the allegations made by Zipes and Bloom cannot be repudiated. The conventional is frequently fashionable in modern industrial cultures; society often nostalgically devours what is familiar and easily understood; individuals are often compelled, and even forced to buy into what is new and fashionable. In modern society, art has been transformed from a creative enterprise into a commodity. As a result, in order to make artistic productions appeal to a larger audience, modern industry relies upon the revision and repetition of traditional forms of creative expression: "The constant pressure to produce new effects (which must conform to the old pattern) serves merely as another rule to increase the power of the conventions

¹ See: Adorno, Theodor. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. J. M. Bernstein. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.

when any single effect threatens to slip through the net. Every detail is so firmly stamped with sameness that nothing can appear which is not marked at birth, or does not meet with approval at first sight” (Horkheimer and Adorno 128). Since successful products are recurrently little more than clichéd pantomimes of traditional devices that have been repackaged and revised to cater to the unceasing demands of the masses, the imitative familiarity of *Harry Potter* can likely account for a portion of its popularity.

Ultimately, Zipes and Bloom’s avowal of the derivative familiarity of *Harry Potter*, coupled with Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory of the culture industry, provides critics with a feasible way of explicating why readers were originally drawn to this series. However, although it is possible to elucidate *Harry Potter*’s initial success through an examination of the way that Rowling revamped traditional literary styles, a more nuanced analysis is necessary in order to understand the *unceasing* adoration that readers display in response to these texts. Rowling’s series is over four thousand pages long; more than ten years passed between the first print of *The Sorcerer’s Stone* and the publication of *The Deathly Hallows*. It is unlikely that anyone would stick with *Harry Potter* over the course of seven books and ten years simply because the texts are simultaneously original and familiar. Given the length of this enterprise, we can conclude that the characters, themes, and ideas presented by Rowling lost their novelty long before the series’ conclusion. As a result, the continued popularity of this series must be owing to something more than the originality of Rowling’s fantastical revisions.

The only way to explicate the unflagging popularity of these novels, and explain the emotional adoration evidenced by readers, is by clearly expounding the nature of readers' emotional outpouring. Hitherto, critics have failed to fully explicate the *Harry Potter* phenomenon because they have attempted to rationalize the popularity of this series without considering the individuals who made the books successful—the readers. To a certain extent, the readers of a text are more important than the text itself. This is because the success of a book is not dependent upon how extraordinary it is. Rather, as literary critic Henry Jenkins notes, successful literature largely depends on “not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings” (284). In a similar manner, reader-response theorist Marjorie Godlin Roemer states that, “a reader projects his own desires on a text,” using his own experiences and beliefs to generate meaning and significance (911). Consequently, when reading, individuals generally take what they want from a narrative. This suggests that, at times, a reader may latch on to aspects of a novel that other individuals may find insignificant or trivial. As a result, in order to determine why a reader finds a specific text engaging, critics must examine what draws the reader in and appeals to him or her. The assertions made by Jenkins and Godlin Roemer highlight the troubling nature of this reader-response approach: given the numerous characters, storylines, and ideals that are woven throughout a text, and taking into account the divergent backgrounds and belief systems of the readers, explicating the popularity of a specific book or series seems nearly impossible.

However, many cultural analysts that specialize in contemporary audience research argue that it is possible to isolate what readers take from a text by analyzing fan communities. The *Harry Potter* fandom is a community that is both energetic and popular. Many fans regularly join in community activities by attending conventions, interviews, and fan screenings; devotees share short stories, movies, songs, drawings, and even book length novels—all dealing exclusively with *Harry Potter*. Online *Harry Potter* fandoms are particularly lively. One website, *harrypotterfanfiction.com*, currently boasts over 67 thousand stories and receives over 30 million visitors a month. Another popular site, *fanfiction.net*, is an international database with *Harry Potter* fan fiction in over 20 languages and a huge archive filled with various stories, poems, and plays. This site has works from hundreds of fandoms, the *Star Trek* community being one of the most active and prosperous. This fandom has been around for well over forty years; *fanfiction.net* hosts roughly 19 thousand submissions that deal with both the *Star Trek* movies and the various *Star Trek* series. By comparison, the *Harry Potter* fandom is relatively new, forming some ten years ago. However, *fanfiction.net* already houses a collection of over 400 thousand submissions devoted to this fandom. Additionally, *Harry Potter* has remained popular on both *fanfiction.net* and *harrypotterfanfiction.com*; despite the series conclusion in 2007, each site has continued to receive dozens of new *Harry Potter* submissions each week.

The prosperity of this fandom is significant for two primary reasons. First, it demonstrates the heteroclitic nature of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Second, as

previously mentioned, this fandom provides critics with a practical way of rationalizing the extraordinary phenomenon that surrounds these novels. Theorists that specialize in media culture contend that people participate in fandoms because of the way that *the meaning* of an urtext resonates within them.² Jenkins adheres to this understanding and argues that individuals in literary fandoms normally place a considerable amount of emotional weight on the urtext. Furthermore, he asserts that this emotion often surfaces because of the extraordinary value that fans place on the “transcendent meanings” that they perceive in this literature (17).

In his analysis of the way that fandoms function in relation to specific societies and political organizations, Cornel Sandvoss provides a way of understanding the aforementioned meaning, and thus emotion, that readers obtain from an urtext. In his examination, Sandvoss states that fans read all objects in a fandom the same way that they read the urtext of the community: “Whether a given fan object is found in a novel, a television program, or a popular icon, fan objects are read as texts on the level of the fan/reader. They all constitute a set of signs and symbols that fans encounter in their frames of representation and mediation, and from which they create meaning in the process of reading” (*Death* 22). Consequently, Sandvoss claims that no object, be it fan produced or authorial, exists as a subordinate part of the fan community. Rather, fan produced objects form a “field of gravity” with the urtext that “corresponds with the fundamental meaning structure through which all these texts are read” (Sandvoss *Death* 23). As such, works that are fashioned

² In order to make my analysis more intelligible, I will be using “urtext” to indicate the object that is the basis, or focal point, of any given fan community.

through fan artistry generally operate in concert with the underlying meaning that readers perceive in the urtext.

Accordingly, an analysis of the *Harry Potter* fandom significantly contributes to our understanding of the fundamental meaning that readers take from this series. Since fans are active participants in the meaning-making process, and often reinforce and contribute to the ideals that they believe are promoted in an urtext through their artistry, it is possible to determine what readers are responding to in *Harry Potter* by analyzing the themes and ideals that generally surface in *Harry Potter* fan fiction. By clearly demarcating the primary theme or meaning of Rowling's texts, and juxtaposing this thesis with the principal themes of fan produced literature, it is possible to determine what readers read in *Harry Potter*. Furthermore, by rationalizing the emotional reaction that these themes generally evoke in readers, it is possible to explicate the appeal of Rowling's novels and thus expound why this series is so fantastically popular and successful.

Most critics accept that this series is defined by the dichotomy that Rowling establishes between good and evil; they argue that the primary focus of *Harry Potter* is the contention that Rowling creates between Harry, who represents the side of good, and Voldemort, the personification of evil. However, a majority of the fan fiction that surrounds this series does not deal with this dichotomy. Instead, many of these texts focus on love. In fan literature, Harry does not represent goodness or virtue; he represents altruistic love. This realization prompted me to return to Rowling's texts to examine the antithesis that she establishes between Harry and

Voldemort. Consequently, I discovered that Rowling problematizes—and ultimately redefines and thus revitalizes—the traditional binary of good and evil by retiring these indistinct qualifiers and exchanging them for a newer, more nuanced calibration: love and ambition. In this series, altruistic love is far more alluring than personal ambition. As a result, love is able to easily overpower a character’s selfish desires. Thus, in *Harry Potter* evil (Voldemort’s ambition) is effortlessly and exhaustively vanquished by good (Harry’s love). Since love is such a powerful and influential force in Rowling’s novels, it comes as no surprise that it is also the foundational force which drives the plot of many of the more popular *Harry Potter* fan fictions. Ultimately, my examination of fan fiction serves as a coda; it reinforces my understanding of the primary theme of *Harry Potter*, the meaning that readers take from this theme, and my interpretation of the texts’ overwhelming success.

In order to explicate both the meaning that readers take from this series and the effect that this meaning has on readers, a majority of my analysis will focus on an examination of how love functions in *Harry Potter*. Accordingly, in Chapter Two, “Love and Ambition: The True Dichotomy,” I will engage in a close textual analysis of the seven *Potter* books in order to clearly establish love as the fundamental theme of *Harry Potter*. Beginning with an analysis of how critics typically understanding the theme of good and evil in this series, I will demonstrate that previous readings of this dichotomy appear to be overly simplistic, leading to inaccurate interpretations of Rowling’s characterization, plot, and the basic structuring that she used in the formation of her novels. Subsequently, an analysis of key events surrounding the rise

and fall of the series' principal antagonist, Lord Voldemort, will be used to both expound the antithesis that Rowling uses to characterize her literary figures and reinforce the primary dichotomy in *Harry Potter*: love and ambition.

Ultimately, this portion of my examination will demonstrate that Rowling characterizes her heroic protagonists as figures who are altruistic and selfless. All of these figures understand the meaning of love and recognize that true affection often necessitates sacrifices. This will be demonstrated through an analysis of Lily Potter's sacrifice in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2008) and Harry's sacrifice in *The Deathly Hallows*. Conversely, antagonists will be shown as figures who are wholly ambitious and entirely incapable of love. This will be revealed through an examination of Merope Riddle's selfishness in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) and Barty Crouch's uncaring neglect in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000).

In Chapter Three, "Steadfast Protagonists and Transformative Villains," the resolute nature of Rowling's loving protagonists will be juxtaposed with the alterable makeup of her ambitious antagonists. This section will commence with an analysis of how love shields Rowling's literary figures from the temptations of villainy. I will first analyze characters that receive or impart genuine love. Subsequently, I will demonstrate that these figures do not succumb to their ambitions because love is more alluring than personal desire. Ultimately, this section will illustrate that loving characters are virtuous and are unable to transform into villains. This will be shown through an analysis of the relationship that Harry has with the depraved Dursley

family, and which Percy Weasley has with the Ministry of Magic. Following this, I will examine the nefarious characters whom love transforms into selfless and affectionate figures. This will consist primarily of an analysis of Draco Malfoy in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) and Severus Snape in *The Deathly Hallows*. By juxtaposing Rowling's steadfast protagonists and malleable antagonists, I will thoroughly expound how the theme of love functions in relation to Rowling's characters and reveal the ultimate meaning of this series: love is all that is needed to convert ambitious villains into virtuous and loving figures.

Ultimately, in the fourth and final chapter, "Escapism and the Appeal of Harry Potter," I will explicate the way that readers typically respond to Rowling's idealistic vision of love. I will argue that readers have such a fervent emotional attachment to *Harry Potter* because of the way that love functions in this series. Since virtuous characters are not able to degenerate, and depraved figures can only improve, *Harry Potter* insinuates that people do not need to worry about the violence that permeates society because love *cannot fail* to transform the world for the better. As will be shown through an analysis of *Harry Potter* fan fiction, readers respond to these sentimental assertions with zealous emotional adoration. I argue that it is this fervent emotional response that is responsible for the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. In order to reinforce these conclusions, and support my understanding of the meaning that readers typically get from *Harry Potter*, I will briefly examine the primary themes that surface in fan fiction, analyze how fan texts operate in concert with the

fundamental theme of Rowling's novels, and finally, explicate how readers respond to these fan texts.

Love and Ambition: The True Dichotomy

Reading Good and Evil

There are a number of storylines that Rowling develops over the course of the seven *Potter* books. However, the tension that is established between Harry and Voldemort is the dominant theme in each of these texts. Throughout this series, Harry is portrayed as the symbolic representative of all that is good—such as morality, tolerance, love, justice, and friendship. In contrast, Lord Voldemort is characterized as the personification of all that is evil: ambition, injustice, bigotry, and enmity. In her texts, Rowling makes continual allusions to the antithesis between Harry and Voldemort. Ultimately, these allusions emphasize the bifurcation between Harry's nobility and Voldemort's depravity and serve to reinforce the series' underlying focus on the opposition between good and evil. In her examination of Rowling's texts, Elizabeth D. Schafer reinforces this understanding of the principal theme of *Harry Potter*: "The novels revolve around the fundamental theme of good versus evil in the form of confrontation between Harry and Lord Voldemort" (42). Schafer's continues her analysis by using the antithesis between these characters to classify the other figures that appear in *Harry Potter*. Since Harry represents the side of good and Voldemort the side of evil, Schafer concludes that Rowling's literary figures can be characterized as moral or immoral based on which side they aided during The Second Wizarding War: Harry or Voldemort's. Consequently, in her analysis Schafer never qualifies the terms "good" and "evil." Instead, she relies upon Harry and Voldemort to describe these words.

A majority of the critics who discuss the theme of good and evil in *Harry Potter* fail to expound the meaning of these terms. Rather than using a close textual analysis to clearly explicate the attributes that constitute morality and depravity, analysts generally use Harry and Voldemort as signifiers for vice and virtue. Jack Zipes describes Harry as “the classic Boy Scout,” a character who is wholly virtuous: “He does not curse; he speaks standard English grammatically, as do all his friends; he is respectful to his elders; and he has perfect manners. . . . He is a straight arrow for he has a noble soul and will defend the righteous against the powers of evil” (178–79). Conversely, Zipes reads Voldemort as a figure who is utterly depraved. As a result of this stark contrast, Zipes uses Harry and Voldemort as a way of defining good and evil and rationalizing the moral positioning of the other characters presented in *Harry Potter*: “If evil in the Harry Potter books is defined by the actions of Voldemort, the Dursleys, and like-minded individuals such as Malfoy, Malfoy’s father, Barty Crouch, and Wormtail, then goodness is of course, embodied by Harry and his friends” (182).

However, many of the figures whom Zipes groups with Voldemort are *not* characterized as being wholly depraved—such as the Malfoys, Wormtail, and Dudley Dursley. Although they are generally vile, many of the aforementioned figures intermittently act virtuous and altruistic. Moreover, using Harry and Voldemort as qualifiers for good and evil leaves critics with no feasible way of understanding the more problematic characters in this series, characters who appear to aid neither Harry nor Voldemort, or who aid both simultaneously—such as Dolores Umbridge,

Cornelius Fudge, Kreacher, Percy Weasley, and Severus Snape. Furthermore, reading virtue and vice as analogous to Rowling's representation of Harry and Voldemort leads to a problematic understanding of the most important protagonist in this series: Harry Potter.

Schafer claims that "Harry attracts friends because he is loyal, kind, and courageous and continues these relationships despite the others' flaws and limitations" (Schafer 46). However, although Schafer notes the flaws that are often displayed by Harry's friends, she fails to find any true faults in Harry. Rather, like Zipes, Schafer sees Harry as "an extraordinary defender of goodness" (Schafer 45). Consequently, the worst she can say is, "Harry represents the contradictions of adolescents. He is primarily selfless...but can be self-absorbed when solving a mystery related to his parents" (Schafer 47). Schafer's wording makes it seem like Harry's "flaws" are really virtues. Instead of a character who spitefully lashes out at his friends, wrongly condemns others, is overtly arrogant, and seriously considers committing homicide, Schafer describes a hardworking figure who doggedly pursues his parents' murderer. Ultimately, Schafer is unable to portray Harry in any other light. Since her classification of characters depends entirely upon Harry's virtue, Schafer cannot cast him as an imperfect figure.

I do not dispute that Harry is the embodiment of good in this series. However, Harry's goodness and nobility is neither extraordinary nor uncompromising. Although he represents the side of good in the struggle against Voldemort, Harry is *not* categorically virtuous. In his review of *Harry Potter*, Michael D. O'Brien notes

this aspect of Rowling's characterization. O'Brien confirms that Voldemort is portrayed as a character who is wholly corrupt. However, he asserts that Harry is not always moral. Rather, O'Brien claims that Harry is often malevolent and acts unjustifiably malicious: "He blackmails his uncle, uses trickery and deception, and 'breaks a hundred rules'....He frequently tells lies to get himself out of trouble, and lets himself be provoked into revenge against his student enemies. He 'hates' his enemies" (O'Brien).

Most telling of all these failings is the hatred that Harry has for his adversaries. Throughout this series Harry habitually despises characters who do not understand him, or who seem to disagree with him. Harry's enmity is thoroughly characterized through Rowling's narration of the rancor that he feels when initially confronting Sirius Black, the man whom he believes killed his parents. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), Harry is forced to relive the events surrounding his parents' demise. After uncovering this tragedy, he becomes bitter and incensed. Rowling portrays the harshness of Harry's feelings by writing that "[a] hatred such as he had never known before was coursing through Harry like poison" (213). The odium that Harry feels for Sirius is both harmful and unproductive. These unhealthy feelings will not revive the Potters, and they cause Harry significant emotional duress. Ultimately, Harry's inability to let go of his anger causes him to be hostile towards classmates, friends, and teachers.

Moreover, the malice that Harry experiences is misplaced. Sirius was wrongly accused of the Potters' murder. He was sent to Azkaban—the wizards' prison—without

a trial by the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Barty Crouch senior.³ However, Harry never stops to consider whether Sirius is really to blame. Instead, he thoughtlessly clings to popular opinion and erroneously condemns Sirius for another character's crimes. Furthermore, when he finally confronts Sirius, Rowling indicates that Harry would kill him if he were able: "A boiling hate erupted in Harry's chest, leaving no place for fear. For the first time in his life, he wanted his wand back in his hand, not to defend himself, but to attack...to kill" (*Prisoner* 339). Thus, like Crouch, who jumps to conclusions and condemns Sirius without a trial, Harry gets carried away by his righteous anger. He would murder Sirius and denounces him without giving him a chance to prove his innocence.

Harry's tendency to judge characters before they have an opportunity to speak for themselves is further illustrated through his numerous confrontations in *The Order of the Phoenix*. In this text, there are several factors that contribute to both Harry's emotional instability and his violent outbursts. First, he is constantly mocked by the Ministry of Magic and the Wizarding newspaper, *The Daily Prophet*. Second, he has frightening visions regarding Voldemort's activities and begins his first romantic relationship. Lastly, in the previous books Harry recurrently displays his expert wizarding skills as he battles against the Dark Arts; these numerous accomplishments are always in the back of his mind. This is clearly shown as Harry unjustly screams at Ron and Hermione for seemingly forgetting him while he was at his relatives' home: "I'VE BEEN STUCK AT THE DURSLEYS' FOR OVER A MONTH! AND I'VE

³ Henceforth, simply referred to as Crouch

HANDLED MORE THAN YOU TWO'VE EVER MANAGED AND DUMBLEDORE KNOWS IT—WHO SAVED THE SORCERER'S STONE? WHO GOT RID OF RIDDLE? WHO SAVED BOTH YOUR SKINS FROM THE DEMENTORS?" (Rowling, *Order* 65).

This outburst demonstrates how these experiences and achievements affect Harry, causing him to be both volatile and conceited. Additionally, the semantics of this statement is noteworthy. This is one of the only instances in *Harry Potter* where Rowling uses all capitals. This structuring underscores the intensity of Harry's anger and simultaneously reveals that Harry's emotional outbursts are often more explosive than other characters'. Particularly relevant is Hermione's criticism of Ron in *The Deathly Hallows*. Ron abandons Harry and Hermione for several weeks, leaving them to search for Voldemort's Horcruxes by themselves. When Ron finally returns, Hermione attacks him: "Never before had he [Harry] seen her lose control like this; she looked quite demented....She was pointing at Ron in dire accusation: It was like a malediction" (Rowling, *Deathly* 380). Later, Rowling writes that Hermione was completely "out-of-control" (*Deathly* 381). However, unlike Harry's denunciation, Hermione's dire accusations are not emphasized with capital letters or italics. Consequently, we can conclude that Harry's unjust attack of Ron and Hermione in *The Order of the Phoenix* was wilder than Hermione's "out-of-control" condemnation of Ron in *The Deathly Hallows*. As such, Harry is characterized as being more ireful and acerbic than most characters.

As S. Joel Garver states, “Harry grows into an impetuous and headstrong teenager, often cocky in his own insights and quick to dismiss both friends and authorities that he should trust” (182). Rowling’s narration of Harry’s instantaneous dislike of Dolores Umbridge reinforces Harry’s characterization as a headstrong adolescent whose perceptions are often unthinkingly biased and unfair. When meeting Umbridge, Rowling narrates that “Harry felt a powerful rush of dislike that he could not explain to himself; all he knew was that he loathed everything about her, from her stupid voice to her fluffy pink cardigan” (*Order* 212). Since Umbridge turns out to be a prejudiced and depraved character, Harry’s premature conclusions could be considered insightful or perceptive. However, Harry is recurrently a poor judge of character; he fails to recognize Snape’s virtue, believes that Dumbledore is self-absorbed, and wholly trusts Professor Moody—who turns out to be a Death Eater in disguise. Additionally, Rowling emphatically states that Harry loathes Umbridge, not because of any meaningful personal trait, but because of her nasally voice and feminine attire. This makes Harry’s preconception seem more misogynistic than perceptive. Consequently, it is logical to conclude that Harry’s instantaneous dislike of Umbridge is unfairly judgmental, not astute or insightful.

Later in *The Order of the Phoenix*, Rowling details how these biased preconceptions and hasty judgments lead Harry to erroneously attack others. Particularly noteworthy is Harry’s confrontation with Dumbledore. Dumbledore always treats Harry kindly and places his interests before his own. However, Harry feels slighted by the Headmaster during his fifth year at school. Rather than

questioning Dumbledore or providing him with an opportunity to explain himself, Harry immediately assumes that Dumbledore is being selfish and uncaring. As a result, Harry lashes out at the Headmaster for his apparent indifference: “Harry roared, and he seized one of the delicate silver instruments from the spindle-legged table beside him and flung it across the room. . . . Harry screamed, so loudly that he felt his throat might tear, and for a second he wanted to rush at Dumbledore and break him too; shatter that calm old face, shake him, hurt him, make him feel some tiny part of the horror inside Harry” (Rowling, *Order* 824). Harry is angry at Dumbledore for several reasons. First, Dumbledore avoided Harry all semester. Second, the Headmaster refused to disclose all he knew about Harry’s connections to Voldemort. Lastly, through his refusal to disclose specific information, Harry believes that Dumbledore failed to give him aid when it was needed and is thus responsible for Sirius’ death—a man who was once Harry’s adversary but grew to be his confidant. As it turns out, Dumbledore was trying to protect Harry; he had a justifiable reason for acting the way that he did. However, in the same way that Harry prejudicially judges and attacks Sirius, Umbridge, Ron, and Hermione before giving them an opportunity to speak for themselves, Harry does not provide Dumbledore with an opportunity to explain himself. Instead, he lashes out at the Headmaster, giving free reign to his unproductive rage.

Although there are a number of other characters whom Harry perceives with an equal amount of enmity and ill will, compiling a list of all these characters would soon grow tedious and repetitive. Moreover, an exhaustive catalogue of Harry’s

rancor is unnecessary. The aforementioned instances clearly detail the spiteful emotions that plague Harry, and sufficiently demonstrate how these feelings are frequently unwarranted and unreasonable. Notably, these feelings often prompt Harry to commit immoral actions: at various points throughout this series Harry uses the Cruciatus Curse, the untried Sectumsempra Curse, and a variety of other hexes against Draco Malfoy, Vincent Crabbe, Severus Snape, Aunt Marge, and a plethora of other characters. Not only are these curses illegal and inhumane, they are also the spells that are most closely associated with Voldemort. Consequently, although he is not wholly immoral or corrupt, Harry is portrayed as an imperfect character.⁴ His incensed reactions are hardly what one would consider positive or virtuous. As a result, it is illogical to rely on him as an unmitigated signifier for what is good in *Harry Potter*.

Ultimately, labeling characters as good or evil based upon which side they aided during the Second Wizarding War—Harry or Voldemort’s—leads to an inaccurate understanding of not only Harry, but many of the literary figures who appear in these texts. Rowling populates her novels with complex characters, each with their own beliefs, aspirations, and experiences. Although two characters may act the same, generally, their motivations are entirely different. Additionally, characters’ motivations often change. As such, Rowling’s literary figures frequently alternate between moral and immoral actions. Since the characters in this series are so multifaceted and complex, they cannot be easily shunted into strict categories.

⁴ The conclusions and inferences that are revealed through protagonists’ immoral actions will be clearly detailed in my examination of Sirius and Harry’s fallibility in chapter two.

Through the aforementioned statements, I am neither denying the dichotomy between good and evil nor refuting the obvious tension that stands between Harry and Voldemort. Rather, I suggest that, in this series, the tension between good and evil cannot be accurately summarized through an unexamined reliance on the contention between Harry and Voldemort.

Accordingly, the only way to understand the diverse characters in *Harry Potter* is to closely analyze the texts to definitively explicate what actions are characterized as good, and what actions are portrayed as evil in this series. Explicating the way that good and evil functions in *Harry Potter* is advantageous and rewarding for several reasons: it provides critics with a feasible way of understanding Rowling's characterization; allows critics to elucidate the principal theme of these texts; and ultimately, it aids in explaining the phenomenal popularity of *Harry Potter*.

The True Dichotomy

An analysis of the way that the theme of good and evil functions in *Harry Potter* reveals that love is what truly distinguishes the former from the latter; the primary contention is between those who realize the value of altruistic love and those who are consumed by their own selfish goals and ambitions. In *Harry Potter* "altruistic" is synonymous with loving and good. As a result, the noblest characters in this series willingly sacrifice themselves in order to provide for those whom they love.⁵ Conversely, "ambitious" is synonymous with unloving and evil. Immoral

⁵ In this respect, Rowling's definition of love follows the highest form of love as indicated in The Bible, John 15:13: "Greater love hath no man then this, that a man lay downe his life for his friends" (sic).

characters are selfishly unwilling to sacrifice anything for others. Characters who pursue their ambitions too far, or who are unwilling to make sacrifices for others, ultimately corrupt and destroy love. The most immoral characters are *entirely incapable of love*. Thus, understanding the dichotomy that Rowling establishes between love and ambition is tantamount to understanding *Harry Potter*: it is the key to elucidating Rowling's characterization, her construction of good and evil, and the fundamental meaning of this series.

Rowling emphasizes the importance of love by characterizing the series' primary protagonist and antagonist according to the value that they place on this emotion. Rowling portrays Voldemort—the series' foremost villain—as a self-centered and egotistical figure who has neither experienced nor practiced selfless love. Epitomized by his greed and selfishness, Voldemort stands as the ultimate symbol of evil. He feels no affection for other characters and thoughtlessly kills all who stand in his way. Voldemort is obsessed with his ambition to defeat death and destroys his soul to attain this goal. Ripping himself apart to create Horcruxes, the Dark Lord demonstrates that he fails to love even himself. Voldemort's absolute depravity is thoroughly described at the series' conclusion, through Rowling's characterization of the abandoned remnant of Voldemort's soul that dies with Harry: "It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath" (*Deathly* 706–07). As critic Scott Sehon notes, in *Harry Potter*, "the soul is associated with that which makes us most human, with our

capacity to love and our moral conscience” (17). As a result, Rowling’s narration of Voldemort’s deliberate destruction of his soul—which gives him his humanity and allows him to love—demonstrates that the Dark Lord is wholly incapable of expressing love for any person or thing.

In contrast, the series’ principal protagonist, Harry Potter, personifies all that is good by representing love and selflessness. In the Mirror of Erised Harry sees his family alive and well. Dumbledore tells Harry that the Mirror “shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desires of our hearts” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s* 213). As a result, this scene reveals that, above all else, Harry values his family and loved ones. Ultimately, he desires nothing more than to be with them. The sincere love that Harry has for his friends and family causes him to have sympathy and affection for all people. As a result, Harry constantly places others’ needs before his own. Eventually, Harry sacrifices himself to bring about Voldemort’s destruction, protect the citizens of Hogwarts, and safeguard his surviving friends and family. Thus, Harry is characterized by the love that he has for others; his selfless affection defines him and is constantly described as his greatest quality.

Because of the way that Rowling characterizes Harry’s noblest qualities and Voldemort’s vilest, love is revealed as being both the principal theme and primary point of conflict in this series. However, in *Harry Potter* love is more than just a pleasing or noble emotion; it a vital part of existence which characters need in order to prosper and be content. Ultimately, Rowling uses the other protagonists and antagonists in this series to reinforce love’s necessity. Through Merope Gaunt,

Rowling unequivocally portrays the importance of love by displaying the devastation that occurs when this noble emotion is twisted into something selfish and perverse. In *The Half-Blood Prince*, Rowling details Merope's obsessive infatuation with Tom Riddle senior. She characterizes Merope's love as something that is corrupt and fanatical. It is not a thoughtful, kind, or sympathetic emotion. Rather, it is an insatiable "burning passion" that is based upon jealousy and greed (Rowling, *Half* 212). Tom was a squire's son; he had wealth, good looks, a normal family life, friends, and freedom. Conversely, Merope was poor and lived a wretched life; she was abused and berated by both her brother and her father, she was kept a virtual slave, and knew nothing of friendship or love. Merope was determined to free herself from this abuse and "escape from the desperate life she had led for eighteen years" (Rowling, *Half* 213). As such, Merope became fixated on Tom, whom she saw as a person who could release her from her pathetic situation.

The unhealthy and corrupt nature of Merope's fixation becomes plainly visible when Dumbledore describes how Merope tricked Tom and enchanted him with a love potion. If Merope had honestly cared for Tom, if she had genuinely valued and respected him, then she would have seriously considered his needs and desires. Instead, she uses a love potion in order to force him to marry her: "enslaving him by magical means," Merope used witchcraft to subvert Tom's will and replace it with her own (Rowling, *Half* 214). In his examination of Merope's use of love potions, Gregory Bassham reinforces this idea and states that Merope's enchantment of Tom indicates that she did not sincerely love him: "She wanted what was in *her*

interests, not *his*. She may have felt amorous affection or entertained an unhealthy obsession for him, but clearly she did not feel the deep love that respects the true interests and considered preferences of the beloved” (71). Thus, Merope’s use of a love potion indicates that the affection that she feels for Tom is not altruistic. It is not based upon sincere regard or appreciation; neither does it have anything to do with empathy or the honest consideration of others’ needs and desires. Rather, Merope’s affection is centered on her own yearnings and aspirations. She did not love Tom, but wanted him for the freedom and happiness which she believed he could provide. These selfish longings drove Merope to use magic in order to enthrall Tom and thus pervert all of love’s most noble qualities: selflessness, kindness, and sacrifice.

Eventually, Merope frees Tom; she stops using a love potion and unfetters him to do as he pleases. Soon after discovering how Merope had inveigled him into marriage, Tom abandons her and returns to his hometown, claiming that he had been “hoodwinked” and “taken in” (Rowling, *Half* 214). Thus, Merope is once more destitute. However, this time she is utterly alone, without even the merest semblance of family or friends to call upon for aid or support. Yet, the most grievous result of this twisted and abnormal romance is not Merope’s unmitigated isolation and abandonment. The climax of this corrupted love affair is the birth of Tom Riddle junior. Shortly after her child is born, Merope perpetrates a kind of suicide. Rather than accepting the situation that her careless actions created, instead of changing, learning from her mistakes, and thinking of others, Merope selfishly abandons her child by succumbing to despair and yielding to death. As previously noted, the

noblest characters are willing to die for those whom they love. However, Merope Riddle could not even be bothered to *live* for her son. Consequently, Merope is guilty of selfishly destroying love in two ways. Through her greedy enslavement of Tom, and her thoughtless abandonment of the child whom she should have loved and cared for, Merope polluted all that is good and noble about love.

In truth, Merope's actions are the same as the atrocities committed by Voldemort. Both characters selfishly consider only their own needs and desires, use others as it suits them, commit a kind of wanton suicide, and know nothing of love or friendship. However, where Voldemort's actions were global and affected the whole of society, Merope's selfish exploits were local. Initially, the ramifications of her actions affected only those who were closest to her. However, her perversion of love—her blatant disregard for others' needs and desires—ultimately spawns the series' greatest villain and antagonist: Tom Riddle junior, Lord Voldemort, a character who is the most nefarious figure in *Harry Potter* and is selfishness personified.

It must be acknowledged that not all critics read Merope as a selfish character who is wholly incapable of love. Although he initially states that Merope knows nothing of true love, Bassham disagrees with critics who assert that her death was greedy and self-centered. Ultimately, Bassham concludes that Merope frees Tom and sacrifices her own desires—and eventually her life—because of the genuine love that she has for her husband. Bassham argues that, “she could continue to manipulate Riddle, or she could stop, though at great personal cost. . . . Merope chose the death of her body, rather than the death of her character, and her own pain before the

domination of another” (75–76). Thus, Bassham states that Merope’s death does not indicate that she failed to love her child, but that she sincerely loved Tom and was willing to die in order to set him free.

I advocate a more cynical reading of Rowling’s portrayal of Merope for several reasons. First, Merope never rightfully owned Tom. As such, we can conclude that she did not martyr herself or display genuine love when she allowed him to go free. Rather, she acted as any individual should. If we admit that Merope displayed sincere or sacrificial love when she released Tom, then we must conclude that all slavers who allow their captives to go free display genuine sacrificial love. Such a loose and obscure definition of love is illogical and extremely unhealthy; although such actions may be kind, they are not analogous to a loving sacrifice. Second, there is no indication that Merope freed Tom for altruistic reasons. As Dumbledore notes, it is possible that Merope stopped using a love potion on Tom because “besotted as she was, she had convinced herself that he would by now have fallen in love with her in return” (Rowling, *Half* 214). Consequently, the love that Merope has for Tom is, at best, highly questionable.

Moreover, Merope was not killed or sacrificed when she stopped using the love potion. As such, she does not choose the death of her body over the death of her character. Rather, of her own volition, she chooses to yield to her depression and die. Had she not succumbed to despair, she could have chosen both the continuance of her character and the continuance of her life. Instead, “Merope refused to raise her wand even to save her own life” (Rowling, *Half* 262). Lastly, we cannot ignore the fact that

Merope chose the painless embrace of death over her child, “chose death in spite of a son who needed her...” (Rowling, *Half* 262). If she was capable of genuine love and sacrifice, it is surprising that Merope succumbs to death and deserts Voldemort—the child that she willingly brought in to the world.

Of course, my intent is not to undermine or belittle the significant pain and depression that Merope likely experienced. As previously noted, after Tom left her, Merope was destitute and alone. This is a very frightening situation to be in. In his argument, Bassham successfully articulates the severity of Merope’s torment. However, in *Harry Potter* characters who truly love will make almost any sacrifice for their friends and family. Through her abandonment of her child, Merope left her son in the exact same situation that she had twice fled: Voldemort is impoverished and utterly alone, deserted by all those who should have cared about him. Since Merope failed to stay alive for Voldemort, and instead gave way to death, it must be concluded that she did not demonstrate genuine love as it is calibrated by Rowling in this series. Thus, Merope Riddle is portrayed as a thoroughly selfish character who is incapable of love. Unsurprisingly, her ambitious actions create an ambitious and entirely depraved character, Lord Voldemort.

Barty Crouch is another selfish and greedy figure who Rowling uses to display the importance of love. Like Merope, Crouch’s actions are the same as the Dark Lord’s, albeit in miniature: neither of these men allow anything to stand in the way of their goals, they act cruelly towards their families, and go to any length to get what they want. Ultimately, Crouch is portrayed as an egotistical and “power-hungry”

character who cares about his own reputation more than justice or morality (Rowling, *Goblet* 526). Crouch longs to be the Minister of Magic; he believes that stopping Voldemort will guarantee him this position. In order to attain this ambitious goal, Crouch is willing to cast aside morality and ignore the law. During the First Wizarding War, “Crouch fought violence with violence, and authorized the use of unforgivable curses against suspects.” In order to stop the Death Eaters, “he became as ruthless and cruel as many on the Dark Side” (Rowling, *Goblet* 527). Furthermore, Crouch forsakes his family in favor of his career aspirations. Just as Merope inconsiderately deserts her child, Crouch cares nothing for Barty, his son, and abandons him when his actions threaten his career: “Anything that threatened to tarnish his reputation had to go...Crouch’s fatherly affection stretched just far enough to give his son a trial, and by all accounts, it wasn’t much more than an excuse for Crouch to show how much he hated the boy...then he sent him straight to Azkaban (Rowling, *Goblet* 528).

Many believe that it is Crouch’s greedy callousness that initially drives his son to seek fulfillment as one of Voldemort’s Death Eaters: “[people] started asking how a nice young lad from a good family had gone so badly astray. The conclusion was that his father never cared much for him.” “Should have spent a bit more time at home with his family, shouldn’t he? Ought to have left the office early once in a while ...gotten to know his own son” (Rowling, *Goblet* 529–30, 528). An analysis of the statements made by Barty after he is captured by Dumbledore reinforces the assumption that Barty was motivated to join the Death Eaters as a result of his

father's neglect. Upon successfully aiding Voldemort in his second rise to power, Barty exuberantly states, "I will be honored beyond all other Death Eaters. I will be his [Voldemort's] dearest, his closest supporter... closer than a son" He continues his elated soliloquy by asserting, "The Dark Lord and I... have much in common. Both of us, for instance, had very disappointing fathers... very disappointing indeed" (Rowling, *Goblet* 678). Ultimately, Barty concludes by stating that, like Voldemort, his own father never did anything for him because "he had never loved me" (Rowling, *Goblet* 684).

Coupled together, these statements are extremely illuminating; they reveal that Barty aligns himself with Voldemort because he sees the Dark Lord as a person who is capable of providing the recognition that his father did not. The way that Barty juxtaposes himself with the Dark Lord, combined with his other references to family and kinship, indicates that—although Barty does not see his connection to the Dark Lord as a father/son relationship—he nevertheless sees Voldemort as a person who is capable of giving him the acknowledgement and acceptance that his own father owed him, but was too busy or thoughtless to provide. Thus we can conclude that Crouch's selfish ambitiousness, the uncaring obliviousness with which he views his son, drives Barty to seek acknowledgement as a Death Eater. Ultimately, Barty's collaboration with Voldemort culminates with Harry's capture and the Dark Lord's second rise to power.

Yet another selfish and ambitious character who contributes to Voldemort's ascension is the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. Fudge is a character that is

wholly consumed by his ambitious aspirations. The Minister fears that Voldemort's return would wreak havoc on both society and his career; this would create more work for himself and possibly reflect poorly on his leadership skills. As a result, in an attempt to keep popular opinion in his favor, Fudge ignores and denies all signs which suggest that Voldemort is regaining power. After learning that Voldemort has created a new body and returned from death, Dumbledore encourages Fudge to openly take action against the Dark Lord. However, sputtering about the tenuous state of his career, Fudge refuses: "I'd be kicked out of office for suggesting it!" (Rowling, *Goblet* 707). At this point, Dumbledore berates the Minister and again encourages Fudge to openly act against Voldemort: "You are blinded... by the love of the office you hold, Cornelius... take the steps I have suggested and you will be remembered, in office or out, as one of the bravest and greatest Ministers of Magic we have ever known. Fail to act—and history will remember you as the man who stepped aside and allowed Voldemort a second chance to destroy the world we have tried to rebuild" (Rowling, *Goblet* 708).

Ultimately, Fudge refuses to accept Dumbledore's advice. In an attempt to placate the wizarding world's fears about Voldemort, and thus cement his tenure in office, Fudge vehemently denies all allegations made about the Dark Lord's second coming. Additionally, he launches a campaign to discredit Harry and suppresses statements made by those who believe that Voldemort has returned to power. In order to invalidate Harry's claims, Fudge publicly questions Harry's motivations, morality, and even his sanity. The Minister even breaks the law in an effort to silence Harry's

declarations regarding the Dark Lord. These transgressions are noted by Dumbledore, who sarcastically states to Fudge, “[i]n your admirable haste to ensure that the law is upheld, you appear, inadvertently I am sure, to have over looked a few laws yourself....Why, in the few short weeks since I was asked to leave the Wizengamot [the wizards’ high court of law], it has already become the practice to hold a full criminal trial to deal with a simple matter of underage magic!” (Rowling, *Order* 149). Although Fudge is not Harry’s father, by selfishly slandering Harry, Fudge actively sacrifices a young person for his own ambitions. In this respect, the Minister’s actions are the same as Merope and Crouch’s.

Rowling does not provide any commentary on how Fudge views love. Nevertheless, his characterization as a fervently ambitious figure indicates that the only things that Fudge has true passion or affection for is his occupation and reputation. Through her narration of Fudge’s delusions, Rowling demonstrates that the Minister considers only what is best for himself. As David Lay Williams and Alan J. Kellner note in their examination of power relations in *Harry Potter*, Fudge “craves power, but his insecurity leads him to use that power for his own advantage, rather than for public good” (Williams and Kellner 135–36). Consequently, the Minister does not work for Harry or Voldemort during the Dark Lord’s second rise to power. Instead, Fudge works only for himself. However, in so doing he inadvertently aids Voldemort and the Death Eaters. As Dumbledore asserts, the Minister is blinded by his desire for command—his self-centered refusal to act against Voldemort gives the

Dark Lord the time that he needs to gather his Death Eaters and carve out a modicum of control.

Consequently, characters who are ambitious and overly selfish, and who have neither experienced nor practiced altruistic love, are responsible for the worst atrocities in *Harry Potter*. Through her enslavement of Tom and subsequent abandonment of her child, Merope creates Lord Voldemort. Likewise, by prioritizing their careers at the expense of others, Crouch and Fudge pave the way for Voldemort's rise to power. However, as previously mentioned, Rowling uses both her protagonists and antagonists to display the importance and necessity of love. Consequently, an examination of the Potter family is crucial to our understanding of the way that love operates in these texts, and the effect that this emotion has on both Rowling's plot and characterization.

The love that Lily and James Potter have for their child is the exact opposite of the selfish affection that Merope has for Tom senior, or the stoic indifference that causes Crouch to merely tolerate his own son. Just as Merope and Crouch reveal what love should *not* be like, the Potters establish the characteristics that constitute genuine love. In *Harry Potter*, true love is selfless and kind. It is not self-seeking or greedy, but noble and self-sacrificing. Characters who sincerely care for others do not prioritize their own needs, but always place others before themselves. This fact is clearly illustrated at the series' outset through Rowling's narration of the sacrifice that Lily makes for Harry. In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, readers learn that Lily's sacrificial love ensures Harry's survival. At the close of this text Dumbledore tells Harry, "if

there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love....Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good” (Rowling, *Sorcerer's* 299). Through Dumbledore's statements, the reader discovers that it is not Harry's courage or talent that sets him apart and allows him to defeat the Dark Lord. Rather, Lily Potter sacrificed her life to save that of her child; in so doing she gave Harry eternal protection from Voldemort.

In *Harry Potter* a character's willing martyrdom acts as a powerful counter-curse, protecting the potential victim—or victims—from their would-be attacker. Accordingly, through her death Lily ensures Harry's survival; the protection that Lily gives to Harry flows through his veins and is a part of his very being. Thus, after killing Lily, Voldemort attempts to use *Avada Kedavra* against Harry. However, the Dark Lord's hex is reflected back upon himself and he is destroyed, or nearly so: “My curse was deflected by the woman's foolish sacrifice, and it rebounded upon myself...I was ripped from my body, I was less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost...but still, I was alive” (Rowling, *Goblet* 653). Consequently, Lily's love prompts Voldemort's first death and simultaneously provided Harry with eternal refuge from the Dark Lord. This fact is reiterated by Dumbledore, who states, “[w]hile you can still call home the place where your mother's blood dwells, there you cannot be touched or harmed by Voldemort” (Rowling, *Order* 836). Thus, the unreserved and selfless love of his mother is what makes Harry remarkable; it allows Harry to survive Voldemort's attack and ensures that he is protected during any future

confrontations with the Dark Lord. Ultimately, the love that Lily has for Harry, and the sacrifice which she makes for him, is perfectly contrasted with the self-centered indifference that Merope has for her child: in the same way that Merope Riddle's unloving selfishness spawns Voldemort (*Harry Potter's* evil antagonist), the sacrificial love that Lily has for her child produces Harry, the noble protagonist of this series.

It is important to note that the parental love that Lily has for Harry is not valued above any other form of affection in *Harry Potter*. Harry slowly learns that his death is his destiny; it is the only way to ensure Voldemort's absolute annihilation. Once he realizes that his own destruction will guarantee the overthrow of the Dark Lord, Harry never questions what must be done: "Harry would not let anyone else die for him now that he had discovered it was in his power to stop it... Like rain on a cold window, these thoughts pattered against the hard surface of the incontrovertible truth, which was that he must die. *I must die*. It must end" (Rowling, *Deathly* 693). Like his mother before him, Harry voluntarily sacrifices himself to protect those who are precious to him. Just as Lily dies for Harry, thereby giving him eternal protection, Harry sacrifices himself for the defenders of Hogwarts and shields them from all future attacks from the Dark Lord. As Harry relates while mocking Voldemort, "I've done what my mother did. They're protected from you. Haven't you noticed how none of the spells you put on them are binding? You can't torture them. You can't touch them" (Rowling, *Deathly* 738).

There are a number of other characters who sacrifice themselves for friends and family and, in so doing, help bring about Voldemort's destruction. Sirius dies while attempting to protect the members of Dumbledore's Army; his sacrifice allows Harry to escape from the Death Eaters and return safely to Hogwarts. Regulus Black sacrifices his life to allow Kreacher to return from The Cave with one of Voldemort's Horcruxes. Dobby is killed while aiding Harry, Ron, and Hermione in their escape from Malfoy Manor. Dumbledore sacrifices his life to ensure that Draco will be given time to redeem his soul and sever his affiliation with Voldemort. Ultimately, the sacrifices made by the aforementioned characters culminate with the annihilation of Voldemort. Had any of these characters refused to make these sacrifices, it is likely that Voldemort would never have been defeated. Accordingly, characters who understand the value of love—who forsake their own needs and sacrifice themselves for others—are responsible for the triumphant conclusion to this series. Moreover, these sacrifices reveal that, in this series, all forms of selfless love are equally valuable and have the same result. Regardless of whether love is filial, parental, romantic, platonic, brotherly, or of the self—it is the strongest force that characters can use to protect themselves and those whom they love from wizards and witches who use the Dark Arts.

Ultimately, juxtaposing Rowling's loving and self-sacrificing characters with her ambitious and unloving figures reveals how love functions in *Harry Potter*: just as selfish actions are responsible for the numberless atrocities that take place in this series, altruistic love begets the heroic victories that dominate the concluding chapters

of all seven *Potter* books. Thus, love—in all its variety—is both the principal theme and primary point of conflict in this series. It drives a majority of the action that takes place in *Harry Potter* and provides a feasible way of understanding Rowling's characterization. In fact, the only definitive way to explicate Rowling's literary figures is by analyzing whether their actions are lovingly selfless or unfeelingly ambitious. Ultimately, such an analysis reveals whether characters' actions are good or evil, and exposes which side they truly supported during the Second Wizarding War.

Steadfast Protagonists and Transformative Villains

Ultimately, love is such an important theme in *Harry Potter* because it has the ability to convert even the most nefarious villains into selfless and altruistic figures. Consequently, in order to comprehend the way that love functions in this series, it is necessary to delineate how this emotion effectuates transformations in Rowling's depraved characters. However, this can only be accomplished by attaining a clear understanding of the way that love operates in relation to both moral and immoral figures. Anne Collins Smith, Charles Taliaferro, and Gregory Bassham are just a few of the critics who have analyzed how love improves villains in *Harry Potter*. However, the aforementioned critics do not offer any commentary on moral characters' inability to degenerate. As such, with the purpose of gaining a clear understanding of the transformative power of love, this portion of my analysis begins with an examination of how love prevents ethical characters from succumbing to true villainy. Subsequently, the static and incorruptible nature of these figures will be juxtaposed with the alterable and malleable nature of Rowling's immoral villains.

Vindicating "Immoral" Actions

Although they sometimes appear mean or immoral, all of the heroes in Rowling's texts ultimately cling to altruism and selflessness; they never succumb to true villainy or allow their ambitions to overwhelm them. The steadfast virtue of these characters has led critics like Harold Bloom, Jack Zipes, and Suman Gupta to conclude that Rowling's heroic protagonists are entirely static and invariable. However, although they may not undergo significant transformations, these laudable

characters are not entirely unwavering. Rowling does not set her narrative in a Disneyesque fairyland where noble characters are unrealistically unvarying or faultless. Rather, throughout the series, these virtuous figures frequently resort to violence and immorality when angered or attacked. However, these vile actions do not make moral characters appear evil. Rather, Rowling's characterization of the enmity that is felt by her protagonists rouses feelings of empathy and camaraderie in readers.

Sirius Black is a perfect example of a character whose cruelty inspires commiseration. In *The Goblet of Fire* Harry becomes apprehensive when Sirius suggests meeting in Hogsmeade. Harry fears that his godfather may be captured by the Ministry of Magic and sent to Azkaban—or even worse—handed over to the Dementors and killed. As a result of this anxiety, Harry refuses to meet with Sirius: “don't come up here, whatever you do, if Malfoy recognizes you again.... I just don't want you chucked back in Azkaban!” (Rowling, *Order* 305). Sirius responds to Harry's sensible trepidation by cruelly mocking him: “You're less like your father than I thought.... The risk would've been what made it fun for James” (Rowling, *Order* 305). Sirius is an adult. More importantly, he is Harry's godfather and role model; Harry looks to him for advice and support. As a result, Sirius should seriously consider what is best for Harry, not selfishly dare him to take risks that put his safety in jeopardy. Additionally, through these derisive remarks, Sirius implies that Harry has failed to live up to his father's expectations. By itself, this insinuation seems

hurtful and mean. Since Harry's father was murdered, Sirius' verbal attack appears thoroughly inappropriate and malicious.

However, instead of making Sirius look heartless and selfish, Rowling's narration of this scene underscores Sirius' loneliness and isolation. Ultimately, his unkindness reinforces his characterization as a frustrated and depressed man who feels abandoned and alone. As Amy M. Green notes, "[i]n the case of Sirius Black, Rowling depicts a man in a state of psychological distress" (89). Sirius has been emotionally stunted by his incarnation in Azkaban, his subsequent confinement in Grimmauld Place, and the death of his best friend. As such, Sirius' immature statements underscore, not his vile nature, but his inability to maturely cope with the intense emotional turmoil that he is experiencing and the frustration that he feels over his complete separation from society. Green reinforces this understanding of Sirius by asserting that, although Sirius seems unkind, "he never comes across as inherently evil" (90).

Harry Potter is another protagonist whose actions are frequently dubious and problematic. Although Rowling characterizes Harry as selfless and moral figure, he is far from perfect. Like Sirius, Harry can be pitiless and unsympathetic. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Rowling thoroughly portrays Harry's insensitive cruelty shortly after he reaches Grimmauld Place. Several weeks earlier, Dumbledore stated that Harry was not to be told any news or information regarding Voldemort's activities so long as he remained with his relatives. As a result, Ron and Hermione were not allowed to openly communicate with Harry. Rather than trusting his friends, Harry immediately

becomes suspicious and resentful of their secrecy. He never considers Ron and Hermione's helplessness. Instead, Harry thinks only of his own incapacitation and exclusion. Consequently, Harry injudiciously and selfishly attacks his friends.

Ron attempts to placate Harry after his outburst, telling him that he and Hermione fought against Dumbledore's edicts: "We told Dumbledore we wanted to tell you what was going on... We did, mate. But he's really busy now, we've only seen him twice since we came back here and he didn't have much time, he just made us swear not to tell you important stuff when we wrote" (Rowling, *Order* 64–65). However, Harry refuses to listen to either Ron or Hermione when they approach him. Instead, he berates them and accuses them of being thoughtless and uncaring. Ultimately, Harry orders Hedwig to attack his friends until they give him the information that he desires—but which they are unable to provide. Subsequently, Harry sees the cuts and scrapes on Ron and Hermione and "was not at all sorry" (Rowling, *Order* 63). Instead, he is pleased that Hedwig was able to ensure that he was not the only one feeling pain and frustration.

However, like her portrayal of Sirius' cruelty, Rowling narrates Harry's maliciousness and simultaneously indicates that this spite does not spring from true immorality, but from his weakened emotional state. Harry's brutality is not produced by his sincere desire to inflict pain upon others. Instead, it stems from "his frustration at the lack of news, the hurt that they had all been together without him, his fury at being followed and not being told about it" (Rowling, *Order* 65–66). Unlike evil characters, who willfully decide to use their malevolence to achieve their ambitions,

Harry's wickedness is not a conscious choice made to further his own interests. Rather, like Sirius, Harry's spiteful reactions result from the severity of the tribulations that he faces. Thus, the selfish and cruel actions of protagonists are not meant to offer any dark or insidious insights into their inner nature. Rather, this callousness often makes protagonists appear more sympathetic because it underscores the frustration that they feel as a result of their inability to ease the emotional trauma that they are experiencing.

Moreover, the cruelties of Rowling's protagonists reinforce how much these characters depend on love: it guides them even during their most desperate emotional outbursts. In his confrontation with Harry, Sirius reveals that he cannot let go of the love that he has for James Potter. Ultimately, this scene shows that Sirius is using Harry to try and recoup the relationship that he had with Harry's dad: he treats Harry as he would James and expects him to respond the same way that his father would have. Consequently, when Harry cautions Sirius, Sirius reads this as a betrayal of his old friendship. Instead of seeing Harry's comments as the fearful concerns of an adolescent, Sirius reads them as treachery and an unfaithful representation of his friendship with James; they are interpreted as a rejection of love rather than an appropriate and wise precaution. Thus, Sirius is not attempting to mock or taunt his godson with his cutting remarks. Instead, he is displaying the sincere hurt that he feels as a result of Harry's supposed betrayal. In the same way, Harry feels ignored and neglected by Ron and Hermione. Although they still love and care about him, Harry feels that he has been abandoned and rejected by his friends. He yells at them partly

because he wants to force a reaction and authenticate their love. In this sense, Harry's outburst is successful; it causes Ron and Hermione to affirm their loyalty and remorse: "'Harry, we're really sorry!' said Hermione desperately, her eyes now sparkling with tears. 'You're absolutely right, Harry—I'd be furious if it was me!'" (Rowling, *Order* 66). Thus, Harry berates Ron and Hermione because he wants to make them feel guilty, causing them to repent and seek his forgiveness and love.

Love: The Great Shield of Virtue

As previously mentioned, all of the heroic protagonists in *Harry Potter* understand the value of love and their lives are protected by this emotion. However, love guards not only the lives of Rowling's protagonists, but also the integrity of their moral character. Ultimately, all of the figures that encounter love are shielded from the temptations of villainy by this selfless emotion. As Dumbledore tells Harry, "[y]ou are protected, in short, by your ability to love....The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort's! In spite of all the temptation you have endured, all the suffering, you remain pure of heart..." (Rowling, *Half* 511). Dumbledore's statements indicate that Harry remains "pure of heart" because selfless love is more alluring than the power or control offered by the Dark Lord. As a result, characters who are capable of love consistently choose selfless affection over greedy ambition. Thus, a character's virtue is safeguarded by his or her ability to love. Since love has such a powerful appeal, no character who loves or is loved by others can become, or truly is, villainous and evil.

The resolute virtue of characters who experience love is clearly illustrated through an analysis of Harry Potter. Harry was adopted by his Aunt and Uncle as an infant. Yet, he never becomes a part of the Dursleys' family. Instead, Harry's relatives regard him with vicious cruelty; they treated him "as though he wasn't there—or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug" (Rowling, *Sorcerer's* 22). However, unlike Sirius' unkindness, which emanates from his frustration and depression, Rowling reveals that the Dursleys' cruelty stems from their selfishness and depravity. The Dursleys' immorality is clearly illustrated when Vernon discovers that Voldemort wants to murder Harry. Rather than considering the terror that Harry must be experiencing, Vernon is only concerned with how this news affects him. Ultimately, Vernon is completely unsympathetic and casts Harry out into the street: "You've had it! You're history! You're not staying here if some loony's after you, you're not endangering my wife and son, you're not bringing trouble down on us, if you're going the same way as your useless parents, I've had it! OUT!" (Rowling, *Order* 39).

In this series, such vehement desertions—even to save the life of your family—are not typical of characters who are virtuous. Rather, throughout these texts moral characters sacrifice everything for their friends and family. These assertions are reinforced through an examination of Harry's friendship with the Weasley family. Mr. Weasley is nearly killed by Nagini while trying to keep prophetic information from the Dark Lord and protect Harry. Similarly, the Weasley's home is ransacked by Death Eaters during Bill's wedding and Ron is seriously injured by Voldemort's

followers at the Ministry of Magic. Nevertheless, despite the danger that they face, the Weasleys remain loyal and faithful to Harry. Although they receive troubling attention from Voldemort, they invite Harry into their home, allow their children to be his friends, and approve of the romantic relationship that he begins with their daughter. Ultimately, the Weasleys hide Harry in their home and protect him as though he were their own son. As a result, by refusing to defend Harry and immediately expelling him from his home, Vernon distances himself from the virtuous characters in this text.

Throughout this series the love that the Dursleys have for one another is cross-cut by their ambition and selfishness. This is most evidently seen through the attitude that the Dursleys have towards Petunia's sister, Lily Potter, and the rest of the Potter family. The Dursleys are obsessed with perfection. Rowling writes that they "were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you would expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense" (Sorcerer's 1). Above all else, Vernon and Petunia value presenting themselves as normal members of their community. As a result, their worst fear is being the focus of gossip and rumor. This desire for normalcy causes the Dursleys to renounce and disown the magical members of their family: "They didn't think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs. Potter was Mrs. Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs. Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister.... The Dursleys

shuddered to think what the neighbors would say if the Potters arrived in the street” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s 2*).

When Harry’s parents are murdered, Vernon and Petunia are forced to take Harry into their home. However, he is never welcomed or wanted. Instead, Harry’s presence is merely tolerated. Moreover, after the Dursleys learn that Harry is a wizard they ignore him completely. Rowling writes that, “Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon didn’t shut Harry in his cupboard, force him or do anything, or shout at him—in fact, they didn’t speak to him at all. Half terrified, half furious, they acted as though any chair with Harry in it were empty” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s 88*). Accordingly, the Dursleys are characterized as selfish figures who are concerned—not with familial ties or others’ needs—but with simply maintaining their delusions of perfection. As a result of this characterization, we can conclude that Vernon does not dismiss Harry from his house because he genuinely fears for his family’s safety; such selfless concern is not a trait that Vernon ever evidences in these texts. Rather, it is probably that Vernon selfishly abandons Harry because he sees it as an opportunity to rid himself of the one thing that taints his otherwise perfectly normal family—Harry, a person who he sees as a significant “waste of space” (Rowling, *Deathly 40*).

Since Harry was raised in the same socio-cultural environment as the Dursleys, it stands to reason that he would have a temperament and moral configuration that is similar to their own. However, Harry is nothing like his relatives; he understands the value of altruism, consistently puts others’ needs before his own, and never abandons a friend or member of his family. Although Harry bore constant

witness to the greed, selfishness, and enmity of Vernon and Petunia, Rowling indicates that Harry is protected from the influences of these nefarious characters by his mother's love. Dumbledore tells Harry, "love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign...to have been loved so deeply, even though the person is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin" (*Sorcerer's* 299). As Anne Collins Smith notes, in *Harry Potter* "love and compassion overwhelm greed and ambition, overcoming them without attempting to defeat them" (80). As Dumbledore's statements reveal, this defeat is accomplished so easily because love penetrates characters completely, becoming an intimate and inextricable part of their being. Since love irrevocably entwines itself with both the character's body and spirit, characters who are loved are unable to deny this emotion. As a result, love prevents Rowling's characters from succumbing to evil and committing vile actions.

In the same way that the Potters' love keeps Harry from yielding to temptation, love prevents other characters from succumbing to immorality and the Dark Arts. An analysis of Percy Weasley reinforces my understanding of the protective power that love provides Rowling's characters. Percy is portrayed as a figure who is overly ambitious and selfish. He hopes to have a career in the Ministry of Magic. Like so many others who enter the Ministry, Percy becomes obsessed with his professional goals. Eventually, Percy's career aspirations cause him to denounce Harry and openly rage against his family, siding with Fudge and the Ministry of Magic against those whom he has known and trusted all his life. At one point, Ron

even suggests that Percy would hand the Weasleys over to the dementors if it would aid his career ambitions (Rowling, *Goblet* 534). Like Barty Crouch, who is egotistical, power-hungry, and disavows familial relationships in favor of his personal ambitions, Percy is characterized as “a Ministry-loving, family-disowning, power-hungry moron” (Rowling, *Deathly* 606).

However, unlike the other Ministry officials, who mindlessly obey the demands of their superiors as a way of safeguarding their careers, Percy eventually realizes that he was wrong to put his occupation before all else. This realization is significant for two reasons. First, it results in Percy’s break from the Ministry, which signals a complete abdication of his personal ambitions. Second, when Percy returns to Hogwarts he immediately reconciles with his family. As such, we can conclude that Percy disavows his personal desires largely because he is remorseful and experiences guilt over his abandonment of the Weasleys. This remorse causes Percy to return to Hogwarts, apologize to his family, and ultimately betray those who are inadvertently aiding Voldemort (Rowling, *Deathly* 606). Had Percy’s family been ambitious and unloving, it is likely that he would not have experienced regret. As a result, he never would have repented and returned to Hogwarts. Consequently, it is ultimately the Weasleys’ love that causes Percy’s atonement; it saves him from his selfish ambitions and prevents him from succumbing to true immorality.

The Changing Nature of Villainy

Characters who are loved sometimes display negative traits: like Sirius and Percy, they make bad choices and are selfish; like Harry, they break important school

rules and governmental laws. Yet, characters who are loved are never truly villainous, nor do they ever transform and repudiate the value of this emotion. However, vile characters are capable of transforming and becoming good and altruistic. In fact, these texts imply that even the vilest characters—if genuinely loved—*cannot fail* to recognize the value of this emotion and eventually display selflessness and virtue. In *Harry Potter*, the way that love effectuates a transformation in cruel characters is most readily seen through an examination of Rowling’s portrayal of the Malfoys and Dudley Dursley. Like the Dursleys’ love, the affection that the Malfoys have for one another is polluted by their ambitious desires. However, as will be shown, these characters are not as evil as Voldemort and the other wholly ambitious figures because of their experiences with genuine love.

Draco is one of the most nefarious characters in *Harry Potter*. At the start of the series Rowling establishes Draco as a person who is prejudiced and utterly intolerant of Muggles,⁶ Half-Bloods,⁷ and Muggle-Borns.⁸ When introducing Draco, Rowling reveals that he sees all non-pure-bloods as unworthy half-breeds who are tainted by their affiliation with Muggles: “They’re just not the same, they’ve never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it [Hogwarts] in the old wizarding families” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s* 78). Although these statements do not seem overly harsh or critical, Draco soon reveals the deep-seated bigotry that he harbors by

⁶Non-magical humans.

⁷ Wizards or witches with one magical parent.

⁸ Wizards or witches who have non-magical parents.

viciously berating Hermione: “No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood” (Rowling, *Chamber* 112). “Mudblood” is a derogatory term, similar to a racial epithet; it is “a disgusting thing to call someone....Dirty blood, see. Common blood.” (Rowling, *Chamber* 116). Consequently, through these harsh statements, Draco displays his hateful and prejudicial nature. Furthermore, shortly after this rancorous outburst, Draco rejoices over the opening of the Chamber of Secrets and joyously speculates about who the Heir’s next victim will be. With visible delight, Draco states, “last time the Chamber of Secrets was opened, a Mudblood *died*. So I bet it’s only a matter of time before one of them’s killed this time....I hope it’s Granger” (Rowling, *Chamber* 223). It is impossible to say whether these statements are meant to be merely boastful, or if Draco is being honest and sincerely hopes Hermione will die. Nevertheless, these comments show that Draco is a vain character who frequently makes depraved and malignant claims.

It is important to note that Rowling’s characterization of Draco indicates that he is hateful and bigoted because of his parents’ questionable morality. Both Lucius and Narcissa are prejudiced and ambitious characters. Instead of being sincerely giving, they are focused on impressing others with their generosity and liberality, using their money and social status to wheedle their way up to authority figures. When angered, Lucius Malfoy threatens Harry: “You’ll meet the same sticky end as yours parents one of these days, Harry Potter” (Rowling, *Chamber* 338). These sentiments are echoed by Draco when he becomes irate and attempts to intimidate Harry: “I’d be careful if I were you, Potter....Unless you’re a bit politer you’ll go the

same way as your parents” (Rowling, *Sorcerer's* 109). Additionally, Draco emulates his father when mocking the Weasleys' financial hardships. Lucius harasses Mr. Weasley when Arthur is forced to buy secondhand books for his children: “Dear me, what’s the use of being a disgrace to the name of wizard if they don’t even pay you well for it?” (Rowling, *Chamber* 62). Similarly, Draco taunts Ron by stating, “I heard your father finally got his hands on some gold this summer, Weasley....Did your mother die of shock?” (Rowling, *Prisoner* 80).

Furthermore, both Lucius and Draco act in an obsequious manner when confronted with people of power. In order to magnify their own importance, the Malfoys fawn over influential persons and attempt to cajole authority figures into trusting them. As Draco blatantly asserts after completing his O.W.L.s, “it’s not what you know...it’s who you know. Now, Father’s been friendly with the head of the Wizarding Examinations Authority for years—old Griselda Marchbanks—we’ve had her round for dinner and everything” (Rowling, *Order* 707). Similar to Lucius’ servile placating of Griselda, Draco wheedles up to Professor Umbridge. He imitates his father’s subservient groveling for ascendancy by joining Umbridge’s Inquisitorial Squad; in order to curry favor and gain a small semblance of power, Draco acts as Umbridge’s personal operative.

The similarities between Draco and his parents—the way that their actions parallel throughout this series—suggest that Draco learned his hateful bigotry from his parents. Although Rowling never claims that Draco was openly taught to be insidious or immoral, her characterization of Draco’s mimicry indicates that many of his vile

habits spring from his observance of his parents. However, later in the series there is a notable shift in Draco's attitude and actions. As Rowling notes in an interview regarding the *Harry Potter* series, in the first five books Draco "shut down his pity, enabling him to bully effectively. He's shut down compassion...he suppresses virtually all of the good side of himself" (*Leaky*). However, Draco's veneer begins to crack in *The Half-Blood Prince*. Previously, Draco intimidated other students with death threats, endlessly bragged about his talent and abilities, and openly reveled in others' pain and torment. Yet, in *The Half-Blood Prince* Draco seems fearful and uncertain. He breaks down and laments his distresses to Moaning Myrtle, who claims that "he's sensitive, people bully him too, and he feels lonely and hasn't got anybody to talk to, and he's not afraid to show his feelings and cry!" (Rowling, *Half* 462). Harry later bears witness to Draco's emotional collapse: "Harry realized, with a shock so huge it seemed to root him to the spot, that Malfoy was crying—actually crying—tears streaming down his pale face into the grimy basin" (Rowling, *Half* 522). The meaning and significance of this breakdown becomes evident at the end of *The Half-Blood Prince*: Lord Voldemort has ordered Draco to kill Dumbledore.

However, Draco is unable to fulfill this task and commit himself to becoming a Death Eater. Draco's hesitation and reluctance is palpable when he falteringly tells Dumbledore that he intends to murder him. The Headmaster questions Draco's determination and openly acknowledges his irresolution: "My dear boy, let us have no more pretense....If you were going to kill me, you would have done it when you first disarmed me, you would not have stopped for this pleasant chat about ways and

means” (Rowling, *Half* 591). This encounter with Dumbledore is a watershed moment for Draco. After this point, his tenacity continues to wane and his facade rapidly deteriorates. In the subsequent text, *The Deathly Hallows*, Draco is no longer portrayed as the cocky, brazen character he once was. He neither celebrates his cruelty nor pines to be a Death Eater. Although he still claims to despise Mudbloods and Muggle-lovers, Draco fails to identify Harry, Ron, or Hermione when they are captured by Snatchers. Instead, he repeatedly gives a noncommittal “I don’t know” when asked if he recognizes his old classmates (Rowling, *Deathly* 459).

Draco’s hesitancy and indecision raises important questions about his characterization and moral positioning. Several critics have proposed that Draco suddenly develops a conscience, becoming uncertain and reluctant in *The Half-Blood Prince*, because he has his first taste of true immorality in this text. In an interview, Rowling reveals that even she adheres to this understanding; she suggest that, “he’s playing with the big boys, as the phrase has it, and suddenly, having talked the talk he’s asked to walk it for the first time and it is absolutely terrifying” (Rowling, *Leaky*) However, Draco’s first encounter with true villainy *does not* occur in *The Half-Blood Prince*. In *The Goblet of Fire* the citizens of Hogwarts are forced to face the death of Cedric Diggory. Draco handles his classmate’s murder with mock remorse and flippant amusement. This is seen when he brazenly ridicules Harry over Cedric’s death and the horror that he suffered at the hands of Voldemort:

You've picked the losing side, Potter! I warned you! I told you you ought to choose your company more carefully, remember? When we

met on the train, first day at Hogwarts? I told you not to hang around with riffraff like this.... Too late now, Potter! They'll be the first to go, now the Dark Lord's back! Mudbloods and Muggle-lovers first! Well—second—Diggory was the f[irst]. (Rowling, *Goblet* 729)

If Draco was affected by the way that “the big boys” play, he would have become distraught and tremulous after Cedric was murdered without provocation. However, Draco appears to dismiss Cedric’s murder without sorrow or regret. Although confronting another’s death is not the same thing as causing another’s death, it is bewildering that the former provokes amusement and satisfaction in a character while the latter incites outright horror and fear. Additionally, Rowling’s assessment of Draco’s hesitancy cannot elucidate the more troubling aspects of his characterization: the extreme reluctance that Draco displays when asked to identify Harry, Ron and Hermione; his total failure to follow through with his ambitions as a Death Eater; and his recognition as a hero following the end of The Second Wizarding War. Through this, I am not implying that Rowling’s understanding of Draco is wrong or erroneous. Rather, in order to understand Draco’s failure to kill Dumbledore and his other selfless actions, a more complex and nuanced examination of his characterization is needed.

Accordingly, I argue that Draco transforms because he recognizes the value of altruistic love. A close analysis of this series indicates that Draco is able to appreciate the importance of love because of the authentic affection that his parents have for him. Readers are first introduced to the affection that the Malfoys have for Draco in

The Goblet of Fire: “Draco Malfoy’s eagle owl had landed on his shoulder, carrying what looked like his usual supply of sweets and cakes from home” (Rowling 194). This scene illustrates that Lucius and Narcissa think of their son’s happiness, frequently sending him presents so he knows that he is remembered. However, readers do not witness the sacrificial nature of this affection until *The Half-Blood Prince*. Here, in order to ensure Draco’s protection, Narcissa risks Voldemort’s wrath by divulging the Dark Lord’s plans to Snape. Narcissa is berated by Bellatrix for this emotional weakness: “‘You should be proud!’ said Bellatrix ruthlessly. ‘If I had sons, I would be glad to give them up to the service of the Dark Lord!’” (Rowling, *Half* 35). However, Narcissa is not glad to sacrifice her son. In order to protect Draco, Narcissa asserts that “[t]here is nothing I wouldn’t do” (Rowling, *Half* 21). After this point in the series, Narcissa affirms this statement by consistently sacrificing her own needs and ambitions in deference to what is best for Draco.

As the series progresses the sacrifices that both Lucius and Narcissa make for Draco become increasingly prominent. Eventually, Lucius and Narcissa completely abandon their personal ambitions and are concerned only with Draco’s safety. This is first glimpsed when the prisoners are attempting to escape from Malfoy Manor. Here, Narcissa places Draco’s well-being before her desire for glory as a Death Eater. Instead of confronting the captives and supporting the Death Eaters, she drags Draco to safety (Rowling, *Deathly* 474). Likewise, in The Battle of Hogwarts, Rowling clearly describes the genuine love that the Malfoys have for Draco when Harry witnesses “Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy running through the crowd, not even

attempting to fight, screaming for their son” (*Deathly* 735). This scene demonstrates that Narcissa and Lucius have completely abandoned Voldemort’s cause; rather than endeavoring to win renown by fighting alongside Voldemort, the Malfoys look for Draco and attempt to ensure his safety.

In his analysis of transformation in *Harry Potter*, Garver attempts to elucidate why the Malfoys eventually betray Voldemort. Ultimately, He concludes that “the Malfoys begin to see Voldemort for what he truly is once Voldemort’s own ambitions threaten the life of their son, Draco” (Garver 182). After Voldemort places Draco’s life in jeopardy, Lucius and Narcissa realize that the Dark Lord has no sympathy or affection; he will sacrifice anything for his goals. In the same way, the Malfoys realize that they cannot guarantee both the success of their personal ambitions and the safety of their child. Ultimately, they perceive that, like Voldemort, they will have to choose between their love and their desires. By selflessly abandoning their own ambitions in order to protect Draco, the Malfoys reveal that they value their child above all else. As such, their love is altruistic and genuine. Since they are capable of sincere affection, we can conclude that, just as Lily Potter’s love ensures Harry’s nobility, it is the Malfoy’s selfless love that initially causes Draco to waver between morality and depravity, and which eventually forces him to completely renounce his greedy ambitions.

Draco cares for his parents as much as they do him. This fact is revealed when Rowling indicates that Draco obeys Voldemort’s orders, not because he is ruthless and has aligned himself with the Death Eaters, but because he fears for his parents’

safety. When faced with Dumbledore's murder, Draco laments that he must follow through with the Dark Lord's demand: "I've got to do it! He'll kill me! He'll kill my whole family....I've got no choice" (*Half* 591). Through these words Rowling makes it apparent that Draco is driven to attack Dumbledore by the fear that he has for his family, and not his own aspirations. This is reinforced when Dumbledore offers to conceal Draco and his family from the Dark Lord: "Come over to the right side, Draco, and we can hide you more completely than you can possibly imagine. What is more, I can send members of the Order to your mother tonight to hide her likewise. Your father is safe at the moment in Azkaban" (Rowling, *Deathly* 591–92). In response, Draco lowers his wand, revealing that what he desires most is not the renown he will receive by murdering Dumbledore, but his parents' protection. Harry later affirms this understanding of Draco: "[Harry] had not forgotten the fear in Malfoy's voice on that tower top, nor the fact that he had lowered his wand before the other Death Eaters arrived. Harry did not believe that Malfoy would have killed Dumbledore....Where, Harry wondered, was Malfoy now, and what was Voldemort making him do under threat of killing him and his parents?" (Rowling, *Half* 640).

Throughout this series the Malfoys waver between morality and depravity. They are fiercely loyal to their friends and family, but often unimaginably cruel to their enemies. In the earlier texts, they act completely vile and hateful. However, they eventually betray Voldemort and the Death Eaters in favor of the love that they have for one another. The altruistic love that James and Lily have for Harry makes Harry remarkable; it helps him understand the value of selflessness and protects him for

succumbing to true immorality. In the same way, the Malfoys are initially depraved and concerned only with their own ambitions. However, they become capable of selflessness as a result of the genuine devotion that they have for one another.

Although the Malfoys are conflicted because of the contention between their personal ambitions and their genuine love, ultimately their love wins out. In this series, it always does.

Just as the Malfoys metamorphose as a result of their experiences with love, Dudley Dursley is significantly altered by his experiences with this altruistic emotion. Like Draco, Rowling's characterization of Dudley is strikingly similar to her portrayal of Mr. and Mrs. Dursley. In *The Sorcerer's Stone* Rowling describes Vernon's typical day: "He yelled at five different people. He made several important phone calls and shouted a bit more. He was in a very good mood" (4). This description is echoed in Rowling's rendition of Dudley's habits: "he and his gang spent every evening vandalizing the play park, smoking on street corners, and throwing stones at passing cars and children" (*Order* 3). The aforementioned commentary reveals that both Dudley and Vernon are thoughtlessly mean characters who impulsively abuse others. Additionally, Rowling portrays both these characters as selfish figures. Vernon and Dudley are obsessed with material goods and believe that others are constantly trying to scam them. Ultimately, their fixation on wealth and material possessions makes these characters pompous and irrational. After counting his birthday presents and realizing that he received two less than last year, Rowling writes that Dudley turns red, insists on receiving at least three more gifts,

and nearly has a tantrum: “Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down his bacon as fast as possible in case Dudley turned the table over” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s* 21). Likewise, Vernon constantly thinks that people are attempting to cheat him and is obsessed with getting his money’s worth. When the Dursleys are targeted by Voldemort and forced to flee into hiding, Vernon believes that it is all just an elaborate scheme to steal his property: “I believe it’s all a plot to get this house. . . . House prices are skyrocketing around here! You want us out of the way and then you’re going to do a bit of hocus-pocus and before we know it the deeds will be in your name” (Rowling, *Deathly* 32).

Thus, like Draco, Dudley emulates the thoughts and actions of his parents; through this mimicry, Rowling indicates that Dudley’s greedy belief system was forged by observance of Vernon and Petunia. However, similar to Draco, Dudley undergoes a significant transformation in the later texts. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Dudley makes tea for Harry and goes out of his way to ensure that Harry feels welcome and wanted. He shows genuine concern for Harry by refusing to leave with the Dursleys until he is told what is going to happen to his cousin, and later, defending Harry from Vernon’s malicious accusations. For the first time in this series, Dudley listens to another’s advice and seriously considers what he believes is right. This fact is acknowledged by Harry, who applauds Dudley for standing up to Vernon: “Dudley . . . for the first time in your life, you’re talking sense” (Rowling, *Deathly* 35). Dudley’s transformation is clearly described when Rowling narrates his farewell to Harry: “Dudley gently released himself from his mother’s clutches and walked

towards Harry.... Then Dudley held out his large, pink hand.... ‘See you, Harry.’”

Although this simple conversation may not appear to be very noteworthy, as Harry states, “coming from Dudley... that’s like ‘I love you’” (Rowling, *Deathly* 42, 41).

Rowling indicates that Dudley experiences this transformation because of Harry’s selfless actions in *The Order of the Phoenix*. In this text, Harry risks his life in order to defend Dudley. Rather than running for safety, Harry stays with his cousin and protects him from the dementors. Ultimately, Harry saves Dudley from the Dementor’s Kiss, allowing him to keep both his soul and his life. Prior to this event, Dudley was cruel to Harry and thought only of himself. Additionally, Dudley would go to almost any length to hurt others; he used this bullying to force others to fear him and ensure that they catered to his demands. However, Dudley is transformed by Harry’s selfless actions. After he is rescued, Dudley displays a serious concern for others’ safety and thinks of others’ needs and desires. Dudley’s transformation is so striking that Harry remarks, “Blimey Dudley... did the dementors blow a different personality into you?” (Rowling, *Deathly* 42). This statement is important because it underscores the totality of Dudley’s transformation. Additionally, Harry’s allusion to the incident with the dementors indicates that it was this event that triggered Dudley’s metamorphosis. Consequently, like the Malfoys, who are transformed by love, we can conclude that Dudley’s actions alter so significantly because of his experiences with Harry’s genuine selflessness and altruism.

Another character who is influenced by the transformative power of love is Severus Snape. After analyzing Snape’s characterization, Schafer concludes that he is

an immoral villain; he is a figure “who serves others when it advances his interests, who severs allegiances, and who snipes at students he dislikes or fears, such as Harry, whom he resents for his fame” (58). Like Draco, Snape is hateful and prejudiced. He despises Muggles and all individuals who are affiliated with them. Snape’s bigoted beliefs are clearly displayed by his use of the derogatory epithet “Mudblood.” The only time which Snape uses this term in *Harry Potter* is in thoughtless anger. As a result, it could be argued that Snape is simply responding rashly, and does not sincerely believe that non-pure-bloods are contemptible or unworthy. However, this argument is discredited through the commentary that Lily provides regarding Snape’s use of this term: “I’ve made excuses for you for years. None of my friends can understand why I even talk to you. You and your precious little Death Eater friends...you call everyone of my birth Mudblood, Severus. Why should I be any different?” (Rowling, *Deathly* 675–76).

Furthermore, Rowling insinuates that Snape has participated in murder. Dumbledore chidingly taunts Snape for the moral dilemma that he faces after learning that Harry must be martyred: “Don’t be so shocked, Severus. How many men and women have you watched die?” Snape responds to Dumbledore’s query by stating, “[I]ately, only those who I could not save” (Rowling, *Deathly* 687). Although Snape’s response is slightly sarcastic, it nonetheless indicates that there was a time when he did not try to aid people whose lives were in jeopardy. As a result, we can conclude that Snape is partially culpable for an undeclared number of deaths.

Despite this immorality, Snape is characterized as one of the most selfless heroes in *Harry Potter*. Although he bears Voldemort's Dark Mark, and at times acts cruelly, Snape eventually sides with Dumbledore and works against the Death Eaters. He risks his life by working as a spy for Dumbledore, faces a vicious three headed dog in an effort to protect Hogwarts, and saves Harry from falling to his death. Ultimately, Snape dies as a result of his endeavor to defeat Voldemort. As is noted by Deavel and Deavel, "he deliberately chooses to act according to love—in the sense of doing what's best for others" (62). Thus, the conclusions of Deavel and Deavel are at odds with Schafer's inferences. Deavel and Deavel note Snape's benevolence and compassion, while Schafer acknowledges his depravity and immorality. Like Draco and Dudley's characterization, these contradictions in Snape's moral positioning are puzzling. However, the vacillating nature of Snape's conduct can be explicated through an analysis of the affection that he has for Lily Evans.

Snape's genuine love is most evidently displayed when readers learn that his Patronus is a doe, the same as Lily's. Rowling defines a Patronus as a positive force "which will work only if you are concentrating, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory" (Rowling, *Prisoner* 237). As a result, the Patronus reflects the caster's personality and innermost nature; it takes the shape of what defines a character and gives him or her hope and strength. Schafer defines it as "a wispy protector and supporter produced from love and joy that forms a screen between a victim and his or her tormentor" (69–70). Additionally, Schafer argues that Harry masters this difficult charm more easily than other spells because its effectiveness

depends upon the caster's faith and love (352). Consequently, the commentary that Rowling offers regarding Snape's Patronus reveals that he is defined by the love that he has for Lily Evans. Harry is remarkable and outstanding because of the selfless, genuine love that his parents had for him. Unsurprisingly, Harry's Patronus is a stag because his "father was always a stag when he transformed," and it is his parents' love that most influences him (Rowling, *Prisoner* 424). In the same way, Snape's Patronus represents the undying love that he has for Lily and simultaneously exposes how wholly this feeling defines him.

However, initially Snape's love is greedy and insincere. As Snape watches Lily and Petunia, Rowling writes that "[t]here was undisguised greed in his thin face as he watched the younger of the two girls swinging higher and higher than her sister" (Rowling, *Deathly* 663). Literary critic Charles Taliaferro also notes the greedy nature of Snape's love. In his analysis of death and rebirth, Taliaferro argues that Snape initially values his pride and ambitions more than Lily. He asserts that, as a result of his conceit, Snape "made the disastrous mistake of calling her [Lily] a Mudblood," and later, "made the even more tragic error of inadvertently giving Voldemort the information he needs to find and kill Harry" (Taliaferro 241).

However, by the end of the series we are able to clearly see that Snape's affection has transformed his ambitious pride into genuine love. After Lily's death, Snape confronts Dumbledore as a sad and broken man: "Snape was slumped forward in a chair and Dumbledore was standing over him, looking grim. After a moment or two, Snape raised his face, and he looked like a man who had lived a hundred years

of misery” (Rowling, *Deathly* 678). Dumbledore notes Snape’s sincere remorse and encourages him to prove that his love for Lily is genuine: “if you loved Lily Evans, if you truly loved her, then your way forward is clear . . . You know how and why she died. Make sure it was not in vain. Help me protect Lily’s son” (Rowling, *Deathly* 678–79). However, Snape loathes Harry. Throughout this series Rowling reiterates that “Snape didn’t dislike Harry—he *hated* him” (Rowling 136). Yet, despite this animosity, Snape protects and defends Harry; he risks his life and reputation in order to ensure that Lily’s son is kept safe: Snape saves Harry from falling to his death, kills Dumbledore, and ultimately dies in order to give Harry the opportunity to defeat Lily’s murderer. Through his selfless decision to aid the son of the woman he loves, Snape proves that his love is sincere and demonstrates how absolutely this love has transformed him.

Initially, Snape was one of the most depraved characters in this series: he was prejudiced and ambitious, attacked the weak and defenseless, willingly aided Voldemort, and is largely responsible for the death of Lily and James Potter. Yet, Snape is one of Rowling’s greatest heroes. Displaying sincere remorse, Snape sacrifices his time, ambitions, and eventually his life in penance for his contemptible actions. The exhaustive nature of Snape’s metamorphosis indicates that love has the power to transform any character in *Harry Potter*.

Love Tames the Savage Beast

In *Harry Potter* humans are not the only figures who are transformed by love; this altruistic emotion alters beasts and monsters the same way that it changes

Rowling's human characters. Despite the dramatic transformations that take place throughout *Harry Potter*, Rowling's companion volume *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001) asserts that some beings are so wholly depraved that they are beyond redemption: "Several highly intelligent creatures...are incapable of overcoming their own brutal natures. Acromantulas and Manticores are capable of intelligent speech but will attempt to devour any human that goes near them" (Rowling xiii). Although this quote relates specifically to beasts, and does not necessarily apply to humans, the implications are incontrovertible: if true, these claims reveal that love is not always the strongest force in *Harry Potter*. However, an analysis of Rubeus Hagrid indicates that the author of *Fantastic Beasts*, Newt Scamander, was incorrect and underestimated the awesome power of love. Since Scamander is "almost solely responsible for the creation of the Werewolf Register⁹ in 1947" this is not entirely surprising (Rowling vi).

Hagrid is portrayed as a figure who has affection and respect for all creatures; just as Harry sacrifices himself for his friends, Hagrid willingly martyrs himself for the fantastical beasts whom he loves. Rather than surrendering helpless creatures to those who would kill them, Hagrid defends his innocent companions and risks himself in order to protect them. Hagrid's refusal to abandon and betray those whom society has renounced, specifically the Acromantulas,¹⁰ culminates in his imprisonment in Azkaban. In a similar manner, Hagrid endures severe physical pain

⁹ A prejudiced and unjust registry that requires all persons infected with lycanthropy to disclose their personal medical information to the Beast Division of the Ministry of Magic.

¹⁰ An Acromantula is "a monstrous eight-eyed spider capable of human speech" (Rowling, *Fantastic* 1).

in an effort to help his giant brother, Grawp. As a giant, Grawp's nature is violent and barbaric. As Ron notes, "they're just vicious giants. It's like Hagrid said, it's in their natures, they're like trolls... they just like killing, everyone knows that" (Rowling, *Goblet* 430). However, Hagrid refuses to believe that Grawp's nature is inalterable: "I knew if I jus' got him back... an' taught him a few manners—I'd be able ter take him outside an' show ev'ryone he's harmless!" (Rowling, *Order* 690–91). Hagrid is determined to civilize Grawp. However, this is a long and painful enterprise during which Hagrid suffers much physical abuse from his brother. After one incident with Grawp, Rowling writes that "Hagrid's hair was matted with congealed blood, and his left eye had been reduced to a puffy slit amidst a mass of purple-and-black bruises... he was moving gingerly, which made Harry suspect broken ribs" (Rowling, *Order* 421). Ultimately, the punishment that Hagrid endures in order to maintain his friendship with these outcast creatures reveals the sincere and sacrificial love that he has for all living beings.

In *The Chamber of Secrets* Rowling indicates that these ferocious beasts are transformed by Hagrid's altruistic affection. This is most clearly seen through an analysis of Hagrid's friendship with one of the most bloodthirsty creatures in *Harry Potter*, Aragog the Acromantula. Aragog speaks fondly of his relationship with Hagrid, stating, "Hagrid is my good friend, and a good man. When I was discovered, and blamed for the death of a girl, he protected me... and you see how our family has grown, all through Hagrid's goodness" (Rowling, *Chamber* 277–78). However, Acromantulas are supposed to be vile beasts who know nothing of friendship or

civility: “Despite its near-human intelligence, the Acromantula is *untrainable* and highly dangerous to wizard and Muggle alike” (emphasis added, Rowling, *Fantastic* 1–2). Nevertheless, when Harry asks Aragog if he ever attacked another person, the Acromantula states, “[i]t would have been my instinct, but out of respect for Hagrid, I never harmed a human” (Rowling, *Chamber* 278). Accordingly, although he is not necessarily *trained*, Aragog is *transformed* by Hagrid’s sacrificial love. The Acromantula admits that he has a brutal and vile nature. However, Aragog abstains from true villainy and refuses to consume human flesh; it is a sacrifice that he willingly makes because of his friendship with Hagrid. Dumbledore states that “it is our choices. . . that show us what we truly are” (Rowling, *Chamber* 333). Since Aragog chooses to refrain from attacking humans, we must conclude that, although he still desires human flesh, Aragog displays virtue and selflessness. Thus, he is transformed because of the reciprocal love between himself and Hagrid.

In the same way, Grawp metamorphoses in response to Hagrid’s loving ministrations. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Rowling reveals that Grawp is sincerely attached to Hagrid and honestly cares about his brother. After Hagrid is attacked by Dolores Umbridge and forced to flee from the school, Grawp becomes concerned by his brother’s absence and questions Harry and Hermione about his whereabouts. In this scene, Grawp appear distressed and frantic over Hagrid’s disappearance. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Grawp is not really concerned about Hagrid, but simply curious or confused. However, later in the series, Rowling unequivocally displays the true affection that Grawp has for Hagrid. In *The Half-Blood Prince*

Grawp attends Dumbledore's funeral and comforts Hagrid during his sorrow:

“Hagrid's eyes were so swollen it was a wonder he could see where he was going.

Harry glanced to the back row to which Hagrid was heading and realized what was guiding him, for there, dressed in a jacket and trousers ... was the giant, Grawp, his great ugly boulderlike head bowed, docile, almost human. Hagrid sat down next to his half-brother, and Grawp patted Hagrid hard on the head...” (Rowling, *Half-Blood* 643). Consequently, all of the characters who encounter altruistic love, no matter how nefarious or beastly, are transformed into more magnanimous figures. Thus, because of the extraordinary power of love, no character or creature in *Harry Potter* is beyond redemption.

Escapism and the Appeal of Harry Potter

Schafer argues that a large portion of *Harry Potter's* popularity stems from the plausible authenticity of Rowling's texts. In order to ensure that her series appealed to readers, Schafer claims that Rowling imitated everyday life. By reproducing characters and events that many people can relate to, Schafer asserts that Rowling consciously created "a fictional world that borders on realism" in which "nothing is considered too bizarre or impossible" (73, 75). Despite the magical creations which permeate nearly every aspect of these texts, Rowling's fantastical world is generally realistic. Ultimately, Schafer concludes that it is this realism that captivates readers' imaginations; Rowling's interweaving of the fantastic and the real "causes readers to wonder if they should look behind a picture in a pub or step on the correct stone or confidently approach a wall to move into Harry's world" (85). However, despite the realism of the various aspects of Rowling's magical world, the author's vision of love is spectacularly idealistic.

Through their love, noble and selfless characters like Lily and James pass their benevolence and compassion on to their offspring. The genuine love that these characters have ensures that their children will be protected from the temptations of villainy. Likewise, although vile characters like the Malfoys and the Dursleys are able to transfer enmity and immorality to their children, nefarious characters are becoming altruistic as they experience genuine forms of love. As a result, in *Harry Potter* love ensures that the good stay good and the bad are getting better. From this optimistic sentimentality *Harry Potter* insinuates that love might one day free the world from all

evil. Clearly, this is a fantasy. However, that is what *Harry Potter* is all about. Ultimately, *Harry Potter* inspires devotion and adoration by continually alluding to the fantastic power of love and insisting that this emotion is literally the strongest and most powerful force in existence. Readers are captivated by these auspicious insinuations; they adoringly champion Rowling's picturesque vision of love and the utopian world it can create. Ultimately, I argue that it is the conceivability of Rowling's idealistic vision of this selfless emotion that appeals to readers and inspires such fantastic devotion.

An examination of the fan fiction that surrounds this series irrefutably reveals that readers' intense emotional reactions spring from the idyllic way that love functions in this series. If readers were principally drawn to Rowling's fantastical creations, it stands to reason that a majority of the fan produced texts would focus on spells, enchantments, and magical beings. However, the most popular fan fictions focus entirely on emotional relationships and feature characters who are redeemed through love. As a result of this focus, we must conclude that many readers are devoted to *Harry Potter* because of the love that permeates nearly every aspect of this series.

"Cauterize" is one of the most popular texts in the *Harry Potter* online community *fanfiction.net*. In this tale we see nothing magical or supernatural. Instead, readers get a heartrending glimpse of the sacrifices that characters are called to make to save the lives of their loved ones. In this piece, the author chronicles the aftermath of the Second Wizarding War and focuses on the wounds that remain long after the

battle's conclusion. The protagonist of this text is Dennis Creevy, the brother of amateur photographer Colin Creevy who was killed during the Battle of Hogwarts. The author writes, "Days after the battle, Dennis Creevey finds Colin's camera exactly where it was left, in perfect condition in his brother's room. And he leaves it again, because he is young and it is nothing but salt and lemon in a fresh and painful wound" (Lady 1). However, years later, Dennis' emotional wounds are covered in scars and he is compelled to make a memorial to his brother, and to the other heroes who fought and died in an effort to quell Voldemort's return to power. To do this, Dennis takes pictures of the battle scars of the heroes of Hogwarts. The author's rendition of Katy Bell's scars displays the general format of the piece:

She poses twice, and Dennis displays the photographs together. Two profiles, each of her smiling prettily off to the side. She looks lovely in one, the unblemished side of her face innocent and clean. The other is a horror of purpled, ropey veins embedded into greying skin like some parasitic vine, weaving around to sink into the outer corner of her eye and poison it liquid black (Lady 1).

The author uses ghastly metaphors to describe many of the injuries; these horrific descriptions are designed to evoke intense emotional reactions in readers. However, the most powerful sections of "Cauterize" focus on the invisible scars: "The Montgomery sisters hold a picture of their youngest brother between them, only five years old and never to grow any older. Greyback's left a deeper scar on them than any of the victims who bear the mark of his claws." Likewise, "Neville firmly, though

politely, refuses to sit for a photograph. He sends a picture of his parents instead, happy and young, with an infant version of him between them. 'If you're looking for scars...' he writes on the back" (Lady 1).

Yet, the tour de force of this piece is the commentary that the author provides regarding the scar that remains where Draco's Dark Mark used to be: "Draco Malfoy sits in the center, pale skin and hair white against the black backdrop, head bowed over his bared left forearm. There's only a scar there... faint, barely visible, the twisted black traded away for twisted white tissue" (Lady 1). This is the capstone of the text; the author calls it "the masterpiece" of Dennis' collection. Draco's picture is the last photograph that the artist takes and this section serves as the conclusion to "Cauterize." Ultimately, Draco is given such a prominent location because "Cauterize" focuses on love. Draco's removal of his Dark Mark represents his complete abdication of his personal ambitions. Thus, Draco's picture displays how wholly he has been transformed by the love that he has for his family. As such, this photograph embodies the awesome power of this emotion. This fact is unequivocally revealed when the author states that Draco displays the scar and agrees to sit for Dennis in deference to what is best for his wife and child: "Draco balks a little when Dennis asks him to sit. Astoria is firm. 'For your son, Draco.' His eyes meet hers, and there's a current between them and Dennis truly wishes his camera hadn't been across the room at the moment because that's the photograph he really wants" (Lady 1).

What Dennis is trying to capture in his pictures is not the grisly wounds worn by the battle weary, but love. He is trying to see beyond the scars to the love that lies

underneath. In the scene with Draco and Astoria, Dennis reveals that he is trying to take a picture of the “current” that connects two loved ones. Dennis’ collection is not meant to bring pain, but to remind people what the heroes of Hogwarts fought and died for. “Cauterize” could be written about the wounds of any war. It does not emphasize magic or enchantment. Rather, it centers on the most important aspect of Rowling’s novels—the sacrificial nature of genuine love and the redemption that is offered through personal encounters with this emotion.

Ultimately, “Cauterize” is so popular in the *Harry Potter* fandom because the theme of this narrative coincides with the primary thesis of Rowling’s series. This point is reinforced through readers’ reviews of “Cauterize.” One avid fan reveals that she enjoys “Cauterize” because of the way that love functions in the text: “Wow, this is incredible. The rhythm of your writing really brings out the pain—and within pain, the love.”¹¹ Similarly, another reader states that she is drawn to “Cauterize” because of the way that the author narrates the love that Rowling’s characters have for one another: “I felt bad when Colin died and now I had goosebumps from reading about Colin again. Your story showed how much Dennis loved-loves his brother, i love it” (sic).¹² So far, “Cauterize” has received over 400 reviews. Like the two previous commentators, many reviewers state that they are drawn to this text because of the emphasis that the author places on love. Additionally, readers recurrently reference this text as one of the best *Harry Potter* fan fictions, with many readers openly

¹¹ PeanutTree. “Re: Cauterize.” Fan fiction comment. *FanFiction.net*. N.p., 20 Mar. 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2011.

¹² XxXs T a R i n T h E s K yXxX. “Re: Cauterize.” Fan fiction comment. *FanFiction.net*. N.p., 16 Feb. 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2011.

admitting that they cried while reading the piece: “This is honestly one of the most beautiful things I’ve read on this site. I just sat and read it with tears running down my face. I don’t know how you managed to capture the character’s emotions like you did, but all I can say is that you did an amazing job.”¹³ These comments reveal that readers are drawn to “Cauterize” because of the love that is displayed within this text. Since love is the primary theme of *Harry Potter* and the focal point of one of the most popular *Harry Potter* fan fictions, it is logical to conclude that Rowling’s vision of love is what appeals to readers.

“Taking the Cheesy Way Out” is another fan text that centers on love, sacrifice, and loss. The author puts a humorous spin on this narrative by having the protagonist, Teddy Lupin, interview for a job at a wizarding cheese factory. However, the text has a serious twist at the end. In the conclusion, Teddy is asked why he chose such a dreary career. He responds that, although he got top marks in many of his classes, he pursues this job because, “Greta, my new boss who I told you about....she knew my dad [Remus Lupin]” (Melian 1). The author states that Teddy is not particularly excited about becoming a cheese maker: “Cheesemaker wasn’t really what he had in mind for when he’d finished school” (Melian 1). However, Teddy has a strong desire to know his father. This is running theme throughout this narrative; the text begins with Teddy lamenting to his grandmother, “I wish you had more stories about my dad. I feel like I’m missing out” (Melian 1). Subsequently, the author reveals that Teddy has been unable to learn who his father was because most of the

¹³ Sly as a Fawkes. "Re: Cauterize." Fan fiction comment. *FanFiction.net*. N.p., 25 Feb. 2011. Web 03 Apr. 2011.

people who were closest to Lupin died during the Second Wizarding War. As a result, Teddy takes this tedious job because his employer went to school with his father and can, potentially, help him discover who his father was. By taking this monotonous position, Teddy reveals how important his family is to him and simultaneously displays the sacrifice that he is willing to make for even the minutest chance of being closer to them.

Working at a cheese factory seems like a silly sacrifice. Nevertheless, it is an altruistic and selfless action that a character takes because of the affection they have for their family. In this respect, Teddy's martyrdom of his career is similar to the various sacrifices that characters make in Rowling's novels. Although "Taking the Cheesy Way Out" is a simple text that is not meant to be taken too seriously, it has been well received in the *Harry Potter* fandom because of its sentimental imitation of Rowling's primary theme. One reviewer affirms these conclusions by stating that she liked the text because of the love and sacrifice that Teddy's grandmother displays: "Teddy is the reason she continues to get up every morning. She loves him more than life itself and wants to do what's best for him but reluctantly admits to herself that he's going to have to figure things out on his own.... you've done a fantastic job."¹⁴ Moreover, like "Cauterize," there is no magic or sorcery in this text. Rather, like Rowling's texts, this narrative focuses on love and the importance of family.

Another piece that successfully imitates the primary theme of Rowling's novels is "Why Are We in a Cupboard?" This text is a serious short story. The plot

¹⁴ HoneyDukesKid. "Re: Taking the Cheesy Way Out." Fan fiction comment. *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*. N.p., 25 Mar. 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2011.

centers on Harry and Hermione, who are locked in the library overnight. To pass the time, the two begin talking about the future and their most cherished desires. The text centers entirely upon this casual conversation; it ends with Dumbledore finding Harry and Hermione early in the morning and sending them on their way completely unscathed. The most important moment in the text—and the only action that really occurs—surfaces when Hermione asks, “What is your ultimate dream in life, Harry?” Harry responds after a moment’s hesitation, “To be loved and to love in return. . . . I want to grow up happily, having a family to love as much as I can (Nilrem 1). Like “Cauterize” and “Taking the Cheesy Way Out,” this text contains no magic. Rather, it focuses on Harry’s unabashed desire for love. By concentrating on this aspect of Harry’s characterization, the author indicates that Harry’s genuine desire for love and family is the most appealing and memorable aspect of his personality. Also, much like the two previous fan stories, this text is highly praised in the *Harry Potter* fandom, receiving over 400 reviews. As such, this text once more reinforces that love is the most alluring feature in the *Harry Potter* series.

A text that focuses specifically on the transformative power of love is aptly titled “Argus Filch's Tale of Love at Hogwarts.” This story takes place several years after the events in *The Deathly Hallows*. The author generally adheres to the conclusion that Rowling offers readers. However, she takes Rowling’s epilogue a step further by inventing a redemption story for another depraved and seemingly uncaring character from *Harry Potter*: Argus Filch. The author begins by mocking Rowling’s clichéd portrayal of Filch as the stereotypical villain: “His name was Argus Filch. He

was the evil, mean caretaker of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry” (MemoriesFade 1). Subsequently, the author complicates Filch’s characterization by asserting that “Argus was the man who sought to bring discipline within the walls of the school, to teach the children the rules and guidelines that would help them move into the real world. Of course, these values were often overlooked” (MemoriesFade 1). In this text, Filch is not a crass bully who gleefully tortures students. Instead, he is a man who has been hardened by his harsh existence and seeks to ensure that the students of Hogwarts are prepared for the unforgiving brutality of adulthood.

Ultimately, the author characterizes Filch like many of Rowling’s protagonists. He is painted as a sympathetic character whose villainy stems, not from true depravity, but from painful experiences and emotional turmoil. As a squib,¹⁵ Filch has been relegated to the outskirts of society. He is forced to be a part of the magical world. However, Filch is simultaneously denied a genuine place in this community. The author belabors Filch’s status as an overlooked outcast: “No one valued his role... which is why he blended into the walls of the school, into the very core” (MemoriesFade 1).

After thoroughly casting Filch as a character who is isolated and alone, the author narrates Filch’s fascination with the characters who managed to find love and acceptance despite the horrors of the Second Wizarding War. Filch is amazed that anyone could have any faith in love after witnessing such death and destruction. However, he eventually recognizes that genuine love is tenacious and powerful.

¹⁵ “A Squib is someone who was born into a Wizarding family but hasn’t got any magic powers” (Rowling, *Chamber* 145).

Subsequently, he begins to wonder “if perhaps, just maybe, he could live a normal life, one where he wasn't viewed as the spawn of Satan, as one Muggleborn called him” (MemoriesFade 1) Eventually, Filch’s encounter with love causes him to become hopeful; he begins to believe that perhaps he can find friendship or even love.

In the turning point of the text, Filch sees the love that exists between a Slytherin and a Gryffindor—two people who supported different sides during the War. This love has a powerful effect on Filch. The author concludes this narrative by displaying how Filch is transformed by the unlikeliness of the genuine love that he witnessed between these students: “They inspired him to go after his own romance. If two people could come together after so many years, he could start a romance in his old age. It wasn't entirely impossible. Love wasn't impossible” (MemoriesFade 1). Consequently, love transforms Filch into a character who recognizes the value of faith, friendship, and affection. Focusing on the transformative power of love, this tale imitates many of the key themes in Rowling’s texts. Predictably, it has been positively received in the *Harry Potter* fandom.

Not all fan fiction adheres to Rowling’s characterization in *Harry Potter*. Nevertheless, even in the fan fiction that is set in an alternate universe where Harry is villainous, love is still the dominant theme and Harry is still portrayed as a selfless character who honestly cares for his friends. Furthermore, like Rowling’s characterization of her vindictive protagonists, in these alternate universe texts Harry is generally not characterized as being *truly* evil. Rather, he is a victim of circumstance. One tale that follows the aforementioned outline is *Poison Pen*. This

text is set in an alternate reality, one where Harry is the heir of Slytherin and nurtures his darker side. *Poison Pen* revolves around *The Daily Prophet*'s tirade against Harry, and the retribution that Harry attempts to exact as a result of the newspaper's unjustifiable attack. In this piece, instead of relying on his friends or meekly accepting defamation, Harry "decides to embrace his Slytherin side to rectify matters" (GenkaiFan 1). However, Harry does not turn into a brutal beast who seeks to control all that is said about him. Rather, like a vigilante, he savagely fights against those who knowingly publish lies and slander innocent figures. Thus, Harry is not villainous. Rather, his feelings of frustration and powerlessness cause him to fight, not only for himself, but to tenaciously champion the rights of Muggle-Borns and other marginalized characters.

Ultimately, Harry becomes so ardently committed to combating the prejudices of society because of the love that he has for his friends. Shortly after taking action to defend himself, Harry realizes that he is not the only person who is disparaged by the media and forced to the lower dregs of society: many Muggle-Borns and Half-Bloods face discrimination on a daily basis simply because of who they are. After this realization, Harry commits himself to avenging all those whom society unjustly assaults. A large portion of Harry's tirade is against the prejudiced Ministry of Magic. Harry continually berates the wizarding government and points out the imbalances inherent in the system. Ultimately, Harry is accused of treason and, if captured, will be sent to Azkaban. However, Harry is willing to sacrifice anything to ensure that justice prevails. As a result, he continues to speak the unadulterated truth. When

discussing the career opportunities available to Hogwarts graduates, Harry writes, “[t]he career you want is just waiting for you, right? It depends. Are you a pure blood? If not, then your career choice has just narrowed appreciably. The only ministerial positions open for you are secretarial, custodial, or food service. There is no advancement, only long hours and little to no benefits” (GenkaiFan 17). Ultimately, Harry persists in being “a voice of reason in an insane world” because of the love that he has for all beings (GenkaiFan 31). He is outraged that so many are oppressed and mistreated, and he is scared for his Half-Blood and Muggle-Born friends. Consequently, just as he does in Rowling’s texts, the Harry Potter in this alternate universe places others’ needs before his own and risks everything in order to defeat a corrupt and biased society.

Of the aforementioned texts, *Poison Pen* is the only narrative that contains any magic. The rest of the texts are focused exclusively on love, redemption, and altruism; they have no sorcery or fantastical beings. Since the *Harry Potter* texts have been flaunted as magical tales of witchcraft and sorcery, it is surprising that so many fan fictions contain no wizardry at all. The only way to rationalize this inconsistency is by concluding that Rowling’s novels are *not* popular because of the spells, jinxes, and magical beings that they contain. Rather, these books are so appealing and popular because of the sentimental way that Rowling calibrates love. The fan fictions examined in this analysis unequivocally reveal that readers cling to, reproduce, and champion Rowling’s idealistic portrayal of selfless affection.

Obviously, not all fan literature deals with love. However, to cement my analysis, I specifically examined fan fiction that has been frequently read and positively reviewed by other members of the *Harry Potter* community. *Poison Pen* has been praised by over six thousand reviewers and read thousands of times. “Cauterize” has been promoted to the “Instant Classics” section on *fanfiction.net*. Likewise, both “Cauterize” and “Why Are We in a Cupboard?” have been reviewed over four hundred times, with many commentators requesting that the authors continue their stories and develop them into longer pieces. Although both “Cauterize” and “Why Are We in a Cupboard?” received fewer reviews than *Poison Pen*, these stories are “one-shots” and consist of a single chapter. Conversely, *Poison Pen* is thirty-two chapters long. Generally, shorter pieces receive fewer reviews; most have been evaluated less than a dozen. As a result, the statistics and reviews for both “Cauterize” and “Why Are We in a Cupboard?” indicate that these one-shots are fantastically popular in the *Harry Potter* fandom. Furthermore, I selected “Taking the Cheesy Way Out” because this one-shot was published very recently, within the last month. Although it is one of the newest fan fictions, it has already been “favorited” by several readers and positively reviewed several times. Moreover, this text is important because it reveals that, years after the conclusion of this series, readers continue to be devoted, not to Rowling’s sorcery, but her vision of love.

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