Emilie Flyen Andresen

‘And They Say We Shouldn’t Teach Children About Evil…’

Harry Potter as a Tool for Understanding Evil

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Department of Language and Literature Faculty of Humanities
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‘And They Say We Shouldn’t Teach Children About Evil…’[1] - *Harry Potter as a tool for understanding evil and how evil in literature affects children*

Trykk: NTNU Grafisk Senter

[1] Rowling in Winfrey 2010

Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of evil in the seven *Harry Potter* novels, written by J. K. Rowling. With its roots in the criticism raised against the books, the thesis attempts to answer if the concerns about children and young adults reading these books are justified. Firstly, I study the different conceptions of right, wrong, and evil as understood by philosophers and scholars such as Immanuel Kant and Hannah Arendt, trying to create a basis on which the characters' morality can be determined. Then I give an account of some of the criticism the series has received, and the aspects of the books which are often problematized, followed by an attempt to show why the evil depicted in the books seems unproblematic. My argument is that evil in books may function as a less frightening projection of the evil young readers might encounter in the real world, and that reading about it, therefore, is a valuable experience in safer surroundings, which might help these young readers to develop their advanced moral reasoning.

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Abbreviations

In order to ease the reading of this thesis, every formal reference to the primary sources will be made by abbreviations, as can be found in the list below. Note also that the books are often are referred to in the text simply with the part of the title unique for the particular book, such as ‘Philosopher’s Stone’ or ‘Goblet of Fire.’

Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone	*PS*
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	*CoS*
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	*PoA*
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	*GoF*
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	*OotP*
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	*HBP*
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows	*DH*

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1.0 Introduction

Fantasy has become very popular genre within literature, and represents, for many, an escape from the real world. The genre is often considered to be aimed mainly at children or youths, and to deal with themes distant from our own lives. Such a view has labeled the fantasy genre – mistakenly – as unimportant and trivial. However, there is no denying that a great deal of fiction novels intended for adults deals with far more shallow themes, such as work or fashion, while fantasy books intended for children seem to deal with the greater questions; those concerning our existence, the meaning of love and what it means to be good. Christina Littlefield starts her chapter in *Harry Potter's Worlds Wide Influence* with this suitable description:

> The beauty of fantasy, of myth, of children's tales is in its depth, lying just below the surface. With their simple prose and delightful images, such stories point to deeper truths; they illuminate aspects of the human condition; they teach us how to live. (Littlefield 125)

It should be noted, as Professor and Ph.D. in comparative literature, Maria Nikolajeva (2012), points out, that fantasy for children traditionally is given a higher literary status than fantasy within general literature (60), perhaps because fantasy worlds and magic is considered juvenile and childish, and not serious or intellectually challenging enough for adults. Yet, what might inaccurately be judged as unimportant, might very well be part of what is actually teaching children to separate right from wrong, to develop their moral compass. Studying fantasy is, in other words, to study our new generation's moral values – or at least parts of it. Nevertheless, popular literature should not be underrated.

Having said that, there is always more than one side to a story, and the perception of fantasy and the *Harry Potter* books is no exception. The books have had their share of criticism, being accused of promoting both immoral values, evil and the occult. Parents, particular within American religious groups, have fought to have the books removed from all education and forbidden from school libraries. According to The American Library Association, the *Harry Potter* books took an enormous leap in the new millennium, from being the 48th most frequently challenged or banned books[2] between 1990 and 1999, to topping the list the following decade ("100 Most Frequently Challenged Books: 1990–1999"). The Reasons given were the promotion of 'anti-family, occult/Satanism, religious viewpoint, violence' ("Top Ten Most Frequently Challenged Books Lists.") In Arkansas, the Cedarville school board banished the

[2] All the seven books are gathered in one entry on the list, as '*Harry Potter* (series).'

books to a restricted section that required students to bring their parent's permission to borrow them. The board argued that the books endorsed the idea that magic can be good, and that authorities and rules are ‘stupid' and should be ignored (Karolides 241).

In their article in *Critical Perspectives on Harry* Potter, Deborah J. Taub and Heather L. Servaty-Seib – both Professors in educational studies – discusses the potentially harmful aspects of the Potter books, each one which has been the object of criticism. Their discussion deals with the glorification of the occult, the potential problem of mixing fantasy with reality, the generally frightening character of the story, and the books way of dealing with death. One of the more extreme accusations was made under the title ‘Ban Harry Potter or Face More School Shootings’, where an American mother claimed that ‘[…] books that promote evil - as […] the Potter ones do - help foster the kind of culture where school shootings happen.’

Even so, controversy, critics, and censorship seem to have done nothing to prevent the popularity of the books about the young wizard. In the BBC documentary ‘Harry Potter and Me,’ Rowling addresses the criticism of her books, saying that she finds it ‘[…] interesting how parents think that they have the right to dictate you because you’re writing reading materials for their children’ (Rowling in Pattison). Rowling does, however, make it very clear that she will not let that influence her writing, that she will not let anyone influence her writing; ‘I’m not writing to make anyone’s children feel safe’ (Rowling in Pattison). Taub and Servanty-Seib also conclude their article by stating that ‘forbidding the books is not the answer,' because doing so will simply increase ‘the temptation of the forbidden fruit' (27). We can only guess that Rowling herself quite agree with this conclusion, as she very fittingly put it, through the words of Hermione Granger:

> Oh, Harry, don’t you see? If she could have done one thing to make absolutely sure that every single person in this school will read [it], it was banning it! (OotP: 513)

1.1 Thesis

This thesis will concentrate on the portrayal of evil in the *Harry Potter* books, based on the heavy criticism and book banning the series has caused. However, even though a great deal of the criticism has roots in religion, I will not use this as the main angle for my thesis – although avoiding it completely is challenging. The links between *Harry Potter* and religion – Christianity in particular – has already been studied to a great extent, and the amount of articles on the area is numerous. I have therefore chosen to focus mainly on the criticism stating that the evil portrayed in these books is not suitable for children; that the *Harry Potter* books depict role models and values which are inappropriate and immoral. My aim will be to delve into the

evil described in the books, and attempt to explain it in light of theories of evil and moral reasoning.

I will further discuss the consequences of writing about evil for children, both by problematizing it, and by investigating the possible advantages. My thesis is that the *Harry Potter* books are not damaging for children, even though they depict several evil or morally ambiguous characters – Harry Potter himself being one of them. My hypothesis is that children are influenced mainly by those characters who they are able to relate to, and that those characters portraying evil or immorality are – for various reasons – not relatable for the average young reader. I also propose that the *Harry Potter* books conveys such a realism that the evil described may function as a projection of evil which exists in the real world, and that by reading about it, encountering it in books, children are able to develop their moral reasoning in a context real enough to be valuable, but distant enough to make it less upsetting and frightening.

1.2 The Influence of Harry Potter

The *Harry Potter* series consists of seven fantasy novels, one for each of the seven years Harry Potter spends at Hogwarts. Although originally intended for children and young adults, the books are highly popular amongst all age groups. The combination of adult fascination and self-consciousness about enjoying children's books, led to the publication of an adult version of the cover by the time the fifth book hit the stores. The books were initially published by Bloomsbury; the first in 1997 and the last ten years later. In the United States, the books were published by Scholastic Press the following year, and the title of the first book changed to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.* The second and the third book quickly became best-sellers, and since then, each book beat the previous one in being the fastest selling book in history. Now, nearly twenty years after the first publication, the series has been translated into 78 languages and has sold over 450 million copies worldwide.

Harry Potter has become a cultural phenomenon, involving an adaptation in eight parts, a studio tour in Leavesden, Hertfordshire, a theme park in Orlando, Florida, along with endless amounts of merchandise. On The Guardian's list of 'Top 100 Best Selling Books of All Time,' the books by Rowling made up seven of the ten first places, making it the best-selling book series of all time. The fan base of *Harry Potter* has grown enormous, and caused a craze often referred to as 'Pottermania.' Not only has the book launches caused countless numbers of fans to spend hours in line – dressed up in Hogwarts uniforms – outside bookstores, eager to get their hands on the books as quickly as possible; the fandom has also resulted in numerous fan sites, podcasts, and fanfictions. Fan conventions have been held, fan spin-off movies have been

made, and setting *Harry Potter* as a wedding theme has become a trend – all attempts to share theories about the stories, imagine the continuation, and trying to integrate the *Harry Potter* world into their own. The enormous investment 'Potterheads'[3] make in bringing the magic world to life, makes the study of the *Harry Potter* series all the more interesting, as it shows how important these books are to so many people, and what a major influence they have. For fans, Severus Snape's quote '[i]t's real for us' (DH 535) have become a mantra, showing exactly how devoted these fans are, and proving the fact that Rowling has managed to create a world which appears tangible and real.

The author, Joanne Rowling, known under the pseudonym J. K. Rowling, was born July 31st, 1965. Living as a single mother on the verge to poverty, she famously got the idea for the story about *Harry Potter* on a train journey from Manchester to London in 1990. Rowling describes the feeling of getting the idea as 'that incredibly elated feeling you get when you've just met someone with whom you might eventually fall in love.' (Rowling in Pattison 2001). Her books about the young wizard were turned down by 13 publishers until Bloomsbury finally picked them up and had them issued. In a few years, Rowling went from living on social support to having a billion-dollar fortune. In 2008, she was appointed the 12th richest woman in the UK, and in 2010 she was appointed 'most influential woman in the UK' by National Magazine Company (Pearse). In 2009, she was a runner-up to the title 'Person of the Year' by Time Magazine, with the justification that she has given people '[…] a way to discuss culture and commerce, politics and values' (Gibbs).

After the publication of *Deathly Hallows* final *Harry Potter* book, Rowling has published several books unrelated to the *Harry Potter* universe; lastly *Career of Evil* in 2015. She has also repeatedly stated that for now, she has no plans for any additional books to the Potter series. However, she has made sure to keep the magical universe alive by recurrently dropping new facts about the wizard world. In 2011, she announced that the world of *Harry Potter* would get an extra-textual life through the web site 'Pottermore,' where she regularly publishes small details or longer texts about the characters or what happened after the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Rowling has described the books as being '[…] books for obsessives' (Rowling in Pattison), arguing that:

> [They are books] for the kind of people who enjoy every little tiny detail about a world. Because I have every little tiny detail about the world. (Rowling in Pattison)

[3] The fans refer to themselves as "Potterheads," along with "Pottermaniacs" or "Potterholics."

She had earlier made it clear that she would continue feeding this information to the public, and to add to the universe of *Harry Potter*, even though the last book was published. As she stated:

> '[i]t gives me a certain satisfaction to say what I thought happened and to– to tell other people that because, um… Because I would like my version to be the official version still, even though I've not written it in a book.' (Rowling in Runcie).

The way she has provided so many facts and details, unimportant to the actual plot, is what has made the *Harry Potter* books come to life for so many readers, and which, as I will argue in the next chapter, creates a story that is perceived as realistic and probable to so many readers.

1.3 Methodical Approach

My study of the book will be on a macro level, meaning that I will examine the texts on a higher level, by looking at the meaning of different quotations and phrases. I will attempt to connect the smaller pieces on a superior level, trying to paint a complete picture of the characters and the theme of evil.

I will not analyze the books in isolation, but rather the development of a few chosen characters. The seven books, as I see it, contains seven stories of seven adventures, but the tale of morality versus immorality, of discovering the meaning of goodness and fighting evil, is one story split into seven parts. Therefore, choosing only two or three of the books as my primary source would have proved impossible, and I fear the remaining would have played the part as primary either way. My work with these books will, however, not be limited to being textual internal. To better be able to study the description of evil and the representation of duality of good and evil, I will use literature conserving philosophical, as well as some religious, conceptions of morality and evil – and of right and wrong.

In the main, this will be a thematic criticism of the books. Scholar Farah Mendlesohn and historian Edward James describe such an approach as 'a form of archeology that digs the layers of a text' (Mendlesohn 125), where one chooses a theme, and then perform a study of that particular theme in the chosen literature, e.g. gender studies or race thematic. Thematic criticism is often comparative but may also focus on one specific text – which will be the case of this thesis. As Mendlesohn points out, thematic criticism is not a theoretical approach to literature in itself, but it is strongly connected to other angles of interpretation, such as psychoanalytic criticism, and is also easily placed within well-established theoretical approaches to fiction, such as deconstruction, postmodernism, and structuralism (125). Thematic criticism in its simplicity basically involves deconstructing the text to that level where the deeper meaning is revealed (125), a method best approached by asking critical questions

(127). The property fantasy literature has of dealing with deeper issues and themes in a metaphorical way is often used as an argument in defense of the genre, which sometimes is judged as superficial and trivial (125).

As mentioned, thematic criticism is closely linked to psychoanalytic criticism, which will also be utilized in this thesis. Psychoanalytic criticism is based on the psychoanalysis established by Sigmund Freud, built on the idea that the unconscious plays a role in all actions. Ph.D. in English literature, Catherine Butler, argues that psychoanalytic criticism is a ‘useful theoretical approach in analyzing fantasy' (91), and refers to Ursula K. Le Guin, claiming that ‘fantasy is the language of the inner self' (91). Psychoanalytic criticism aims to uncover psychological struggles, unsettles emotions or uncertainties, either within the author, the reader or the characters (Delahoyde). Psychoanalytic analysis of the characters both has its appeal and its boundaries. On the one hand, being able to psychoanalyze the characters contributes to their realism – the more the analysis applies, the more realistic the characters seem. On the other hand, on may quickly fall into the trap of treating the characters as if they are real people when psychoanalyzing (Parker 124). Parker argues that ‘to interpret the characters psychoanalytically as if they were nonfictional people would often misconstrue them grotesquely.' (124)

2.0 What Is Evil and Who Is to Decide?

The theoretical chapter will start by an account of the fantasy genre, and the placement of the *Harry Potter* books within this genre. Further follows an attempt to define morality, and make the distinction between right, wrong, and evil.

2.1 Fantasy – the Genre of Good and Evil

Fantasy is a fiction genre that typically makes use of magic or other supernatural elements as a main part of the setting or as a plot element. One of the most famous definitions regarding the fantastic within literary theory is that made by Tzvetan Todorov, who explained the fantastic as having two possible relationships to reality; fantastic uncanny or the fantastic marvelous. The fantastic uncanny and the fantastic marvelous differs in the way 'laws of reality' applies to the world surrounding the fantastic events (Todorov 136). The uncanny, made famous by Sigmund Freud, refer to something strangely recognizable, but at the same time unfamiliar, which invokes an eerie sensation. The uncanny is realized by such as illusions, dreams or hallucinations, where the fantastic event has taken place within the normal laws of reality, and therefore must have a rational explanation – for instance in *Alice in Wonderland*. In the fantastic marvelous, which the *Harry Potter* series is an example of, the events are real. Therefore, the 'laws of reality' must be altered to make the events possible (Todorov 136). Yet, rather than changing everything the reader knows about the world, Rowling implements these new laws of reality to the reality we know, explaining why we never knew magic existed before. Like the reader, Harry has no knowledge of the magical world; not of its laws and norms, but neither about its existence. As Harry learns along the way, the reader follows the same journey, making it all the more plausible for the reader. Rowling's writing seems to seek, not only for the reader to accept this world as they read, but to ask themselves: 'could it actually be true?'

Although fantasy itself is a subgenre of speculative fiction, it may still be further separated into several subcategories, where two of the most well-known are high and low fantasy. Roughly explained, what separates these two subgenres is whether the magic or fantastic events takes place in our world or in a separate world. While low fantasy describes fantasy stories set in the world we know, high fantasy is set in a different world, that may or may not be related to our own. High fantasy may further be divided into three sub-types, as explained by Nikki Gamble; stories set in a world completely unrelated to ours, e.g. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (121), a world that is separated from ours by a portal, such as C. S Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* (121) or a world that co-exist with our world, but is separated by a physical barrier – a sort of world within a world (122). The setting is important, as it sets the

frame and the mood for the story, and also determines how far from the reader's reality it is. A setting far from our everyday life might add to the excitement and mystery, but at the same time, the reader will relate more to the story, the more realistic and familiar the setting is.

Harry Potter definitely qualifies as the third category of high fantasy, as the wizard world is parallel to the 'normal' world, and also takes measure to keep Muggles – non-magical people – out of it. For instance, Diagon Ally is kept hidden behind a charmed brick wall (PS 55-56), the Ministry of Magic is entered through enchanted telephone booths or toilets (OotP 116, DH 198), and according to Rowling, Hogwarts would only look like an empty old ruin should a muggle stumble over it (GoF 148). At the same time, magic does not only take place in this world; although gathered in magical communities, wizards and witches do live side by side with Muggles, and their lives do intertwine. As Hermione Granger and Lily Potter are examples of, non-magical people may have magical children, and will, therefore, be included in the magical world. Muggles and wizards may also live together, making ('half-blood'), or wizards may at rare occasions have non-magical children ('squibs'). There are incidents when Voldemort and his followers attack Muggles (HBP 10) – making it look like 'crashes and explosions and derailments' (DH 34), and we learn that the Minister of Magic and the Prime Minister of Britain collaborate (HBP 12). We could, therefore, argue that there are elements of low fantasy – that the magic secondary world exists in a parasitical relationship with the primary world.

This definition seems to agree with Rowling's own description of the relationship between the magical world and the world of the reader; she argued that there are no portals, no time warps, but the magic world lives 'shoulder-by-shoulder with the real world' (Pattison). Therefore, *Harry Potter* may be easier for the reader to relate to that other 'high fantasy' books, and as a result affecting them more. This close connection between the magical world and the mundane world is part of the shift that has taken place in fantasy as a genre the last half-century. Butler describes fantasy of the 1960s as typically following a pattern, where fantastic events took place in a space delimited by time and reality, and the end of the story would be marked by the return to a non-fantastic reality (Butler 225). Characters and moral plots, while allowed to be somewhat complex, would 'ultimately [be] underwritten by a set of universally agreed values' (224), thus, in the end, to some extent undermining the complexity. The changes seen in the fantasy genre the last fifty years, Butler argues, has involved 'blurring the sharp divisions implied by portal fantasies between the fantastic and the mundane; by picking away at good-versus-evil dualism [...]' (228). These steps have, one could therefore argue, brought the

fantastic world closer to the world we know. While keeping the safe distance from real life the element of magic applies, the story and the characters become more recognizable, thus – as studies which we will come back to later in this thesis (4.1) has shown – making it easier for the reader to identify and consequentially more likely to become influenced by the story.

2.2 Defining Evil

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, Jennifer L. Geddes, in her article 'Banal Evil and Useless Knowledge: Hannah Arendt and Charlotte Delbo on Evil after the Holocaust,' aims to clear up some misconceptions about evil. According to Geddes, three divisions have marked the research on evil, the first being a split between studies of offenders and studies of victims (104). While some have reservations against studying perpetrators, arguing that they do not deserve the effort, others maintain that evil needs to be understood in order to be prevented. The second partition traditionally made, is the distinction between evil intentions and evil consequences; '[i]s an event evil because of the intention of the actor to inflict harm or because the event results in great suffering?' Geddes asks (104).

The third division is the split between theoretical and empirical studies of evil; studying the general problems of evil or specific historical events. Such divisions can be damaging, according to Geddes, and she consequently intent to bring the parts together, creating a complete picture. Evil is a relational affair, she argues, and 'the absence of evil intentions does not necessarily imply that a person is not responsible for evil' (105). The aim of this chapter will be to present various conceptions of evil. As the will show, agreeing upon one definition of morally right and wrong is virtually impossible, and, consequently, the definition of evil remains subjective as well. Still, there seem to be some aspects where the different ethical and religious perspective might agree upon what evil is.

In the main, evil is the counterpart to good, and while goodness is closely associated with morality, evil is associated with immorality. Yet, the definitions of what qualifies as good or moral, and what qualifies as evil or immorality are countless. Traditionally, evil has been seen as an external force (Hugaas 69). In Christianity, evil is personified by the Devil, who seeks to deceive the human race. Evil has also caused a dilemma in religion; if a God is all-mighty and all-good, why does evil exist? This is often referred to as 'the problem of evil,' or by the Greek philosopher Epicurus, as a trilemma; 'Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?' (qt. in Hugaas 66) The angel Lucifer chose not to obey God,

but to rebel against him. In the book of Isaiah[4], we learn that Lucifer was not content being the servant of God; he wished to take his place: 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High' (Is 14:14). As he was banned from heaven, that was the start of evil in Christian belief. His free will was the root of evil, and as we will see later, free will has been central also in more modern discussions of evil. In *Harry Potter*, free will is an interesting matter, as the magic aspect allows free will to cease through spells such as the 'Impero' curse. The link between a desire for superiority and evil, like the story of Lucifer's rebellion against God portrays, is also present in *Harry Potter*, and will be discussed further in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Nevertheless, the problem of evil has experienced a shift in perspective, as it went from being seen as a religious one, to being examined as a moral one (Hugaas 68). For the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, one of the most famous deontologist thinkers, free will is the key to moral choices, though we must always use it to act out of duty (Johnson). To act out of duty, free will is elementary, because only when our will is free, we can choose to do what is right (Johnson). As a deontologist, Kant sees the act itself as the factor determining the moral value, not the consequence. For Kant, good will is the only thing which is good without qualification; while other traits may seem good, such as happiness or courage, one might also find happiness or pleasure in doing immoral acts, or bad acts might take courage (Johnson). Equally, acting from emotions may cause good intentions, but what then if our emotions become destructive, such as anger or fear? Good will, on the other hand, will always be good, according to Kant (Johnson). Acting from good will, will, therefore, mean to act from duty.

The choice between acting from duty, and acting from emotions are, as we will see, highly present in *Harry Potter*. Draco Malfoy and Peter Pettigrew are both examples of characters who is driven by fear, something which permeates the majority of their decisions. For Severus Snape and Harry Potter, fear is not the main motivation, but rather sorrow, anger, and loneliness. As the fourth chapter will deal with, these two characters cope with a constant struggle between succumbing to their emotions, and carrying out their duty.

So the question becomes, what should determine what our duty is? The answer, according to Kant, lies in the categorical imperative; 'the fundamental principle of our moral duties' (Johnson). To establish these fundamental principles of moral duties, Kant gives us a set of formulas, where the most central ones are to never treat others merely as means to our ends, and to only commit an act if you at the same time can make it a universal rule. To establish

[4] https://www.bible.com/bible/1/isa.14

an act as moral, we must ask ourselves if we would accept anyone acting the same way at any time, and only if the answer is yes, this can be a universal rule – and a moral one at that. Consequently, Kant's perception of evil end up being very banal; in theory, it might mean telling a simple white lie (Hugaas 74). For Kant, evil is radical, precisely because it is so fundamental in human nature. As Hanson puts it; 'Kant's account of radical evil demonstrates how evil can be a genuine moral alternative while nevertheless being an innate condition' (Hanson).

That evil may be banal was later discovered by Hannah Arendt, who made the term 'the banality of evil' famous - a theory based on evil, in reality, being very simple. However, her reasons were different from Kant's. While he saw evil as radical because it is so basic in our nature – and because it is impossible to escape, Arendt saw how simple and effortless we are able to perform evil acts. Her thesis was based on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a previous Nazi and SS officer. She saw Eichmann as someone who was ultimately following orders, rather than being a sadistic monster himself. The fact that one could lay the responsibility for their actions on the commands, with such little regard for their consequences, led Arendt to the realization that the problem of evil was its simplicity (Geddes 2013: 108). The essence of Arendt's thesis, of the banality of evil, is how normal and ordinary evil can be. She realized that '[…] the intention to do evil was replaced with a thoughtlessness' that may enable us 'to do evil in the guise of doing [our] job' (108). The banality of evil as Arendt saw it was scientifically confirmed by a study carried out by Stanley Milgram, which will be further described in the following chapter. Considering this aspect of evil in relation to *Harry Potter* is interesting because, as mentioned, fear is such a great motivation for several of the character, but also because examples of characters committing evil acts on orders are widespread among Voldemort's follower. In this thesis, they will be represented and exemplified by Draco Malfoy and Peter Pettigrew.

Defining evil, as we can see, is no easy task. For deontologists, such as Kant, what is evil is wrong, and since what is wrong is determined by universalizing of laws, there are few shades of gray. Yet, utilitarians would disagree, arguing that doing what is evil might be the right choice in some situations, the choice of highest moral value. From their perspective, a moral act is that which best serves the majority. Professor of psychology, Ervin Staub defines evil as human destructiveness, expressed through violent or harmful acts of various scopes (5). His definition greatly coincides with the one of Paul Ricoeur, who sees evil doing as '[…] always, either directly or indirectly, to make someone else suffer. In its dialogic structure evil committed by someone finds its other half in the evil suffered by someone else.' (qt. in Geddes

2013: 105) The problem with harmful acts, Staub argues, is differentiating between those done in justified self-defense, and those of pure evil character. Evil, as he sees it, is rooted in actions, not in the human nature, although people '[…] can develop characteristics that make it likely that they will repeatedly engage in such actions' (Staub 5).

As previously explained, the distinction between good and evil is a philosophical one, built on social norms. However, what makes humans act one way or another is a psychological question, with scientific answers. What follows is an account of some scientific explanations as to why someone would commit an act of evil, and why doing so differs from the human norm. Because relatability and realism, as Chapter Four will reveal, are set as preconditions for the book to have an influential effect on its readers, the link between psychological science and the characters of the books is relevant.

2.2.1 Evil from a Scientific Perspective

As Patrick and Patrick point out, extreme violence and vicious acts are believed to have genetic causes – inborn factors that influence our behavior and our moral reasoning (231). In fact, researchers have found that the hormone oxytocin seems to be the key to empathy; when people with no emotional bond to each other, who did not know each other, were asked to cooperate in a team sport, their levels of oxytocin in the brain increased (Stockley). Traditionally, oxytocin has been famous as the 'love hormone,' but according to these studies, it seems that oxytocin is what makes us be kind to people – also the ones we do not necessarily love. Neuroscientist Paul Zak consequently chose to call it the 'moral molecule'(Stockley).

Neuroscientist James Fallon studied a variety of brain scans of different people, and without knowing who the scans belonged to, found a pattern. Some of them seemed to function differently in the front part of their brain; the frontal lope – the part of our brain that is connected to animal drives (Stockley). As it turned out, all of these brains belonged to murderers. In the search for an answer to why some brains seem to work differently, Fallon and his team found the MAOM gene – and a significant lack of it in psychopaths (Stockley). However, Fallon also found the same difference in gene codes and brain activity in himself, which led him to the question – why was he not a killer? It seemed that the ability to do evil was biological, but whether it was activated or not depended on the environment – in particular the childhood.

One of the most famous experiments done on the trigger of evil in human nature, is the Stanford Prison experiment, performed by the lead of Philip Zimbardo, Professor of psychology at Stanford University. Voluntaries were parted in prisoners and guards, and placed in an

artificial prison. The experiment was meant to go on for two weeks, but had to be stopped after only six days due to its unexpected violent nature (Hitlin 50). The ‘guards' started to harass the ‘prisoners,' and the abuse escalated so quickly and to such an extent that the experiment was prematurely called off due to psychological torture. No particular instructions had been given prior to the experiment, except telling the guards to maintain law and order, and avoid physical violence (Zimbardo). The voluntaries participating in the experiment had no criminal record, psychological disorders or medical conditions of any sort, and the pick between guards and prisoners was entirely random. It is important to note that not all of the ‘guards’ showed signs of cruelty; some showed a fair style of ruling, while others where even compassionate. However, about a third became hostile, aggressive and sadistic;

> These guards appeared to thoroughly enjoy the power they wielded, yet none of our preliminary personality tests were able to predict this behavior. The only link between personality and prison behavior was a finding that prisoners with a high degree of authoritarianism endured our authoritarian prison environment longer than did other prisoners. (Zimbardo)

Zimbardo writes that ultimately, what they learned from the experiment, was how ‘ordinary people could be readily transformed from the good Dr. Jekyll to the evil Mr. Hyde.’ Zimbardo later used this experiment to show that authority and power over others have the capacity to turn anyone evil.

The opposite was shown in the Milgram experiment, conducted by social psychologist Stanley Milgram in the early 1960s. The experiment showed to what extreme lengths people will go to obey authority. Volunteers were told to deliver electrical shocks to what they thought was another test subject. In truth, the subjects were part of the experiment, and was only acting as if the shock hurt them, but the participants never knew this during the experiment (De Vos 225). The participants were instructed by what they thought was a doctor, to give greater and greater electrical shocks. The actors would act as if they were in great pain, but the doctor would encourage the participants to continue if they hesitated, telling them that it was essential that they carried out the experiment (De Vos 226). The study showed that most participants were willing to deliver shocks up to lethal strength. Several of the participants later said that they were traumatized for life, knowing what inhuman actions they were capable of doing (Brannigan 2).

2.2.2 Right, Wrong and the Definition of Morality

If the disposition for being evil or not is in our genes, implemented in our DNA and in the patterns of our brain activity, is it then possible to fight evil outside a lab? Fallon found these

predispositions in his own genes, and asked himself why he had not killed someone. The answer was found in the environment, in the childhood. To a great extent, what happened during a person's life, especially in the early years of his or her life, would determine if the genetic disposition for evil would actually be activated. It seems, in other words, that moral behavior can be taught. What contributes to children's moral development and understanding of right and wrong will be further investigated in this thesis, along with a discussion of how the *Harry Potter* books may impact this development. However, first, the concept of morality should be defined.

Put simply; morality is the distinction between those intentions, decisions and actions considered proper and those considered improper. Traditionally, the term morality is closely connected to those considered proper, and thus seen as synonymous with 'rightness' or 'goodness.' Morality can be a set of principles derived from a particular philosophy, religion or culture, a standard that in the eyes of the beholder are believed to be universal principles (Gert). However, working out a universal expression of morality has proven difficult. Suggestions have included deontological ethical systems, which follows a set of established rules, and normative ethical systems which rather consider the quality of each action. Immorality serves as the opposition to morality, while amorality is defined as ignorance, indifference, or skepticism towards any set of moral standards or principles. Hitlin explains it as:

> '[a]n orientation toward understandings about what is right and wrong, good and bad, worthy and unworthy, just and unjust, that are not established by our own actual desires, decisions, or preferences but instead believed to exist apart from them, providing, standards by which our desires, decisions, and preferences can themselves be judged.' (Hitlin 17).

Moral defined in a scientific sense cannot be reduced to 'good' versus 'bad,' but rather seems to be a conception of 'right' versus 'wrong,' a notion which we are believed to develop from a simple system of reasoning to a rather complex one (Doris 35). This theory of moral reasoning was developed by American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, and will be further dealt with later in this thesis (4.1).

2.2.3 Evil as Defined in the Primary Sources

What qualifies as evil acts seem to be highly subjective. A moral act from a deontological perspective might be immoral from a utilitarian perspective, and vice versa. Yet, some sort general perceptions of what is acceptable and what is not must exist for a society to remain somewhat stable, and not succumb to total anarchy. As legislation is human made, and often democratically determined, it must derive from a set of social norms shared by the majority of

society. As neuroscientist Paul Zak proved, it is our inborn instincts – the chemistry of the human brain – tells us that being kind to each other is the right choice (Stockley).

In the society we enter as readers of *Harry Potter*, the society of the magical world, the definition of evil is identified by the three 'Unforgivable Curses.' The 'Unforgivable Curses' are introduced to Harry and the readers in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. These three curses; 'Avada Kedavra', 'Cruciatus', and 'Imperiatus', are all spell of such a sinister character, that any use automatically will qualify for a life sentence in the wizard prison Azkaban. In a way, this could be seen as Rowling's establishment of what evil is. These curses represent acts so malevolent that they cannot be forgiven; taking someone's life, torturing someone and depriving someone of their free will. The way these three curses are separated from other curses, where all use is considered unforgivable and punished with the severest penalty, suggests that this is how Rowling would define evil acts. The line between moral and immoral, between good and evil, is defined by social norms of the society or the world in which it exists. As we read, we are likely to mentally enter the world of the books, and with that get influenced by the moral context of the story (Flood). Considering the books implied definition of evil – murder, torture, and absolute domination – in the character discussion, will, therefore, be highly relevant.

3.0 Problematizing *Harry Potter* as a Moral Tale

As mentioned in the introduction, a lot of criticism has been raised against the novels. In the article 'Harry Potter: Good or Evil?' on *Christianity Today.com*, arguments of several sceptics are gathered. 'Potter is unhealthy spiritually and psychologically as it invariably leads to the type of things children from 5-18 find intriguing and will try to imitate,' a Reverend named Judy Lang argues, while another – named Chris Jordan – stated that:

> I am a senior pastor and a parent of four children ages 7-13, and I will not let my children read the Harry Potter books. I believe that they are wrong for many reasons—calling evil good and good evil, […] ('Harry Potter: Good or Evil?')

Taking the criticism into consideration, the following chapters will attempt to describe the evil described in the books which might be seen as problematic, before dealing with a few of the arguments problematizing *Harry Potter* as a moral tale – as well as possible answers for these accusations.

3.1 Evil in the Harry Potter Books

There is no denying that the *Harry Potter* books depict a fair share of evil. In a recent poll done by National Book Tokens on the occasion of World Book Day, 7000 readers were asked to identify the worst villains in children's literature. Of the top ten list, characters from *Harry Potter* made out 38% of the votes ("Female Heroes and Villains Outnumber Males in National Book Tokens Poll of Favourite Children's Book Characters"). Not unexpectedly, Voldemort was the clear winner, but perhaps more of a surprise was it to find a ministry official and Hogwarts teacher as a runner-up; Dolores Umbridge. In sixth place, beaten by Cruella de Ville (*The Hundred and One Dalmatians*), The White Witch (*The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*), and Miss Trunchbull (*Matilda*), we found Death Eater and Voldemort's most faithful servant, Bellatrix Lestrange.

The heptalogy expose a great deal of evil of the sort you would not necessarily expect to find in a book for children. Harry is frequently bullied, on the verge to mental abuse, by adults in his life. For ten years of his life, Harry lives with his aunt, uncle and his cousin – the Dursleys. There, he is neglected, bullied and mistreated by his own family, which sets the perfect backdrop for a 'Cinderella story'. His life is misery, and magic becomes the savior. Yet, life at Hogwarts is no bully free zone for Harry either, as he is repeatedly picked on and put down by Professor Severus Snape. The books also describe more physical sorts of evil acts, such as torture and cold blooded murder. Torture in the books is mainly realized through the use of the Cruciatus Curse, which inflicts excruciation pain on the victim. No visual damage is

done to the victim, which implies that it manipulates the nerve system. The lack of visual damage makes it close to impossible to detect use afterward, which simply makes the curse more horrifying. Unlike non-magical ways of torture, the Cruciatus Curse is impossible to perform unless the desire to harm someone is true; according to Bellatrix Lestrange, you need to 'really want to cause pain… to enjoy it…' (OotP 715), stating that 'righteous anger won't hurt me for long' (715).

Throughout the books, we see several examples of characters trying to use the curse, without succeeding, and the list of characters who accomplish to use the spell contains mainly Death Eaters or other 'evil' characters. Harry himself repeatedly try to use the spell in great moments of anger, but is never able to perform it properly, until the last book. Harry then becomes the first and only 'good' character to perform the curse, as we know of, stating that 'I see what Bellatrix meant, you really need to mean it…' (DH 477). Besides the Cruciatus Curse and the Imperiatus Curse[5], Avada Kedavra is the last of the three unforgivable curses, also referenced to as the 'killing curse.'

Like the Cruciatus Curse, Avada Kedavra is, as far as the reader knows, never used by any of the 'good' characters[6]. It is made clear that several characters from both sides die during the final battle, and consequently, it is understood that characters from the 'good' side are responsible for several of these deaths. However, none of the deaths which are described directly, are caused by the killing curse. The use of the killing curse shows clear intentions to kill, and only that – and is a distinct violation of Kant's Categorical Imperative. Death as a side effect of self-defense, on the other hand, remains morally acceptable according to Kant's definition, as it is the act itself that matters, and the prosecutor is held irresponsible for the consequences. While realistic portrayal of war demands casualties on both sides, which leaves Rowling unable to keep her heroes morally impeccable and her story realistic at the same time, this might be an intentional move on her behalf to show that good character may do harm, but not what is directly evil – and possibly also remain morally justifiable.

[5] Takes control over the victim's body, mind, and free will.
[6] Severus Snape is the only exception, but whether he should be considered 'good' has been much debated, and will be discussed in chapter 4.3.3.1.

3.2 Harry Potter as a Moral Tool

Richard Abanes (2005), a writer specialized in socio-religious issues, discusses whether the books depict good role models, and claims that ‘good’ in Rowling’s books is defined as anyone who is not on the side of Lord Voldemort. He argues that such a definition of what ‘good’ is, is not only inadequate, but also ‘blurs the lines between good and evil’ (220). Abanes describes the morality of the books as too simplistic (149), where extreme evil rules one side, while the other is considered good, no matter what immoral acts they may commit. He points to their obedience to rules and authority, lying and even their willingness to kill (149, 290) as proof.

Abanes focuses a great deal of his criticism towards the books arguing that they portray seemingly good characters committing bad acts (Abanes), and that this results in a confusing and unclear picture of what is right and wrong. These examples are mostly related to breaking rules and disobeying authorities. Yet, we never witness any of the ‘good’ characters do so in order to hurt anyone or due to their own selfishness which will eventually affect others. There is always a reason of justice and a sense of doing it ‘for the greater good.' By employing Kohlberg's model for moral reasoning, it is possible to argue that ‘good' in a higher sense does not automatically mean following the rules determined by a democracy or authorities, but rather a ‘set of universal ethical principles, which exceeds mutual benefit' (2.3.1). Using this angle, this thesis will, therefore, argue that lawbreaking and lying not automatically signify that the intention, nor the outcome, is evil.

Laurie Miller Hornik, author, and holder of a B.A. from Harvard University, writes that books can be a good medium to introduce children to situations where moral reasoning is needed, in order to develop the child’s own moral values. Yet, she argues that not all books containing moral issues are suited for children’s development; she points out that books often ‘take a preachy, didactic tone, making it clear all along what the narrative voice thinks should be done’ (Hornik). When the characters in the book make moral decisions quickly and without struggle, Hornik says, that choice will easily be perceived as the only right choice. If the author rewards the ones doing good, and punishes the ones being evil, that reinforces the pre-determined moral reasoning set by the author, and thus preventing the development of the child's own moral reasoning. Such a way of teaching morals, and the difference between good and bad, can be linked to the two first stages of Kohlberg's developmental extraordinary theory, where reasoning is obedience orientated, and not based on an internal set of values (Doris 34-35).

According to Hornik, there should be no definite answer, no path clearly more right than the other. That way, the literature can help form a discussion, or a process in the child's mind. Hornik argues that '[f]ar more meaningful than simply telling children what to think is helping them create their own value system through careful reasoning'(Hornik). Books with realistic situations, where the reader can experience recognition, and put him or herself in the place of the character is, she says, most valuable. Yet, elements of the fantastic and the supernatural add an exciting and engaging dimension to the experience.

4.0 Why Evil Has a Place in Children's Literature

Defining what actions are evil, and determining which people who commit these acts is one thing, but alone they bring us no further in understanding evil. It is the motivation and the psychology behind it we seek, because it is the only thing that can make such actions comprehensible – and only by understanding it are we able to prevent it (Staub 6). The clean good versus evil, the classic fairytale story, is appealing as an escape from reality. It is easy, it sends a simple moral message to the reader, but it does not reflect the real world - there is no motivation behind the actions, and it quickly becomes unrealistic. Several theatrical spin-offs have proven the desire to comprehend evil, such as the West End Musical *Wicked*, telling *The Wizard of Oz* from the perspective of 'the Wicked Witch of the West,' and American Disney movie *Maleficent* (2014), where the classic *Sleeping Beauty* is seen from a new angle.

4.1 How Moral Reasoning Works

The cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning evolving through six stages, is a theory presented by Lawrence Kohlberg. The six stages represent the different stages humans go through in the process of developing a moral reasoning (Doris 34). The first stage is referred to as the *pre-conventional morality*, which is obedience and punishment orientated, and where the moral reasoning is left to an authority. Typically, this stage is realized when children experience the difference between right and wrong due to them being punished by adults, or they learn that others get punished when they do something wrong (Doris 34). The second stage is fairly similar to the first, but is more angled towards rewards. Instead of avoiding doing what is wrong to evade punishment, we will aim for doing what is right in order to get rewarded (Doris 34). Both stages are very ego-orientated, and is only motivated by selfishness and self-interest, not interest in others. At the third stage, however, we will start adopting a conformist attitude towards morality, and do what is right to please the majority (Doris 35). The next, and fourth, stage, converts the aim for doing the right thing into a duty. We now obey rules and social laws as a matter of course, and for many adults, their moral reasoning never exceeds this stage. At the fifth stage, the moral reasoning is controlled by personal values, but a great respect for laws is maintained. The sixth, and last, stage, brings a set of universal ethical principles, which exceeds mutual benefit, and may or may not be in contract with democratically determined laws (Doris 35).

In order to develop their moral reasoning, children need examples which they can model their behavior after (Doris 44). While adults may serve as moral models in everyday life, literature may be a great additional tool, as it can portray moral dilemmas and difficult situations

to a larger scale than everyday choices can. It may also actualize more complex questions, examining greater, existential problems. While questioning whether it is right or wrong to lie or steal might fit into daily life, questioning whether it is right to sacrifice one to save the majority, do not. Bringing up these dilemmas in literature helps actualize them, but at the same time put them in a context separate from the child's own life, thus making it less disturbing or frightening. However, we could question if portraying the difference between right and wrong is the same as portraying evil.

4.2 Why Does Evil Have a Place in Children's Books?

The fact that the *Harry Potter* books display extreme evil is fairly clear. Some of the characters and some of the acts are truly horrific to the extent that we may ask ourselves if they really belong in a book series written for children and young adults. How can murder, torture – even attempts at genocide, possibly belong in a children's book? Could the parents who protest against these books perhaps be right – could children take damage from reading these stories? In her article 'Facing the Dark Side in Children's books,' Ellen Howard – author of *Gillyflower*, shares her thoughts about writing about evil for children;

> I decided I believe in telling children the truth, even when the truth is unpleasant. I believe that children have a right to know about their world. I believe they cannot learn to recognize and rise above evil if they are not taught it exists. (Howard 9)

She further explains how she came to realize that it is not necessarily the horrible experiences that most damages a child's life, it is not having the possibility to talk about it or having to live with the lie that such evil does not exist. Consequently, she decided that she would include human evil in her books for children[7], in order to show children that it exists and to offer a possibility to talk about it. Howard argues that she believes children need to have knowledge about the dark side of life, not just the light, and that such knowledge will empower them (Howard 11). Rowling seems to agree with Howard on this point, as mentioned in the introduction, she refuses to sugar this part of human society:

> If you are writing about evil, which I am, and if you're writing about someone who is essentially a psychopath, you have a duty to show the real evil of taking human life. (Rowling in Pattison 2001)

Marina Krcmar and Stephen Curtis, both professors in communication, explains the impact fantasy literature might have on children by the use of mental models. Mental models can be understood as a personalized understanding of 'how something works,' and is individual to

[7] *Gillyflower* (1986) is a book about a young girl who gets sexually abused by her father.

every person. These models are based on experiences, however; the experience is not necessarily real, but might very well be from constructed incidents, such as those in literature or other media (460-61). Each person uses their personal mental models to ‘to guide incoming information, to reason and problem solve’ (461). In order to understand how mental models work, Krcmar and Curtis illuminate the concept of priming, meaning a ‘process by which a mental cue or association can serve trigger related thoughts and behaviors' (461). In other words, priming explains how people can get influenced by something whey watch or read, to act in a specific way. Theory suggest that what we are exposed to through various media, might affect how we act in real life, and that experiencing violence and evil though fiction may trigger the same within the audience. However, the context has proved to play a big part, meaning that ‘[…]it is not just the exposure to the violence that generates a node in the network, but the context for that violence that becomes crucial as well' (465).

The study conducted by Krcmar and Curtis revealed that when exposed to conflicts solved with violence, children tend to resolve to a less advanced moral reasoning than if the exposure is nonviolent (464). Yet, their judgment of the violence was highly affected by whether they had been exposed to a violent build-up to the conflict or not, suggesting that whether the violence is seen as justified or not is decisive (474). What the study of Krcmar and Curtis shows, is the importance of understanding the characters' motivation for their actions. If the reader is able to relate to the character's motivation, they will resolve to a more advanced level of moral reasoning, such as described by Kohlberg. Dr. Shira Gabriel and Ariana Young, both holding a Ph.D. in psychology, found, in their study, that readers seem to identify with the characters they read about, and mentally enter the same social context (Flood). This can help improve their social skills, but as they are also able to understand the characters’ feelings and actions from an internal point of view, they are able to develop their emphatic abilities.

The study of Krcmar and Curtis suggests that whether evil and violence in literature and other media have a bad influence on the reader is highly determined by the motivation of the character committing the evil or violent acts. Evil or violence judged as unmotivated or unjustifiable will trigger a less advances moral reasoning. If, additionally, the reader can relate to and identify with this character, this could have a negative effect on the development of the reader’s moral reasoning. As the study of Gabriel and Young showed, readers are able to enter the character’s social context if they find them relatable, and in that way improve their social skills. Considering this in light of the finds of Krcmar and Curtis, it seems reasonable to suggest that this development could be negative as well as positive, depending on what sort of values and morals the character demonstrates. Therefore, in order to judge whether a book – in this

case the *Harry Potter* books – may have a bad influence on the reader, it seems sensible to consider the following questions; how is evil portrayed in *Harry Potter*? Does it have any justifiable motivation? And are the characters who commits these acts relatable for the reader or not? These are the questions that will be the discussion for the following chapters.

4.3 Finding The Motivation for Evil

In this chapter, I have chosen a few characters whose moral reasoning I find interesting to investigate. As both the Stanford Prison experiment and the Milgram experiment revealed, both the rush of power and the respect for authorities can bring people to commit horrible acts. Power and authorities will, therefore, make up two main categories for evil motivation. The last category will deal with those mostly driven by their emotions; Harry Potter and Severus Snape. As explained by Kant, and as these two men can show us, using our emotions as motivation may start with good intentions, but also leaves our actions much too depended on what emotions we are experiencing. Acting from emotions is, therefore, considered immoral from a deontological perspective, due to its instability.

4.3.1 Evil as a Result of Power

Social and psychological studies showed that authority might bring out the worst in people – as is also described in the heptalogy. Sirius Black correctly states that '[i]f you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals.' (GoF 456). As illustrations of how power may be a motivation for evil or morally questionable acts, I have chosen Tom Marvolo Riddle Jr., also known as Lord Voldemort, Dolores Jane Umbridge, and, perhaps surprisingly, Albus Dumbledore.

4.3.1.1 Lord Voldemort and Dolores Umbridge

Discussing evil in the *Harry Potter* saga, Lord Voldemort is unavoidable, and without a doubt the most frequently studied character. The dark wizard is a personification of the most extreme level of pure evil, the sort of sheer and absolute evil that you would expect to find in a horror story rather than a children's book. A complete psychopath; who murders and tortures without blinking – and sometimes even takes pleasure in it. We never, not even once, see any hints of compassion in him – he is simply filled with downright hate. But the fact is that he *is* human, so where does as this hate come from?

The life of Voldemort, born Tom Riddle, undeniably comes off to a rough start. Lord Voldemort was conceived in a loveless relationship, with a mother who had lured her great obsession, Tom Riddle Sr. – with the help of a love potion – to be with her. When, after a period

of time, she decided to stop giving him the potion[8], Riddle Sr. abruptly left her and his unborn child. Her passing away in childbirth, Voldemort was left at an orphanage, with a childhood stripped of the affection or attention a child needs. One could perhaps argue that his turn to evil was nothing less than expected. Patrick and Patrick compare Lord Voldemort to the *Lord of the Rings* antagonist Sauron, claiming that he was '[…] seduced over to the Dark side by the lure of power and immorality' (222). This description does, however, imply that Lord Voldemort once found himself on the good side – that he has not always been evil. Such a seduction is never suggested in the books, on the contrary; Voldemort is described as evil from birth to death. Mrs. Cole, a matron at the orphanage, described him as '[…] a funny baby' who '[…] hardly ever cried' (HBP 250). She also states that he '[…] scares the other children' (250), suggesting that not only was he an outcast, but he had the upper hand with people from the very start.

Voldemort is, from the beginning, driven by the search for power and superiority. He desires to be anything but common; he reacts with 'wild happiness' when he first learns that he has magical powers, exclaiming that 'I knew I was different, [...] I knew I was special.' (HBP 254), and shortly after expresses dislike for his birth name 'Tom,' arguing that '[t]here are a lot of Toms'[9] (HBP 257). Already as a young boy, he shows clear narcissistic signs, taking big pleasure in knowing he is different than the ones he surrounds himself with[10]. Like Harry, Voldemort found his place in life – his first home – at Hogwarts (HBP 404). Yet, their reasons were completely different. Where Harry found a place he could make friends and meet people similar to him, Voldemort found a place to cultivate his special abilities.

Unlike Harry, Voldemort never made friends. Unable to see anyone as his equal, anyone he divides the world into followers, subjects or enemies. His eagerness to dominate others emerges already as a young boy; when telling Dumbledore about his abilities, his only focus is on how he is able to control others (HBP 254). He has a pathological need to dictate every situation, and reacts with surprise whenever someone fails to obey his wishes. In his search for power and strength, Voldemort grows to despise two of the most common traits of being human

[8] We never learn the reason for this decision, and can simply trust Dumbledore's guess; that she 'had convinced herself that he would by now have fallen in love with her in return. Perhaps she thought he would stay for the baby's sake' (HBP 203)

[9] In *Chamber of Secrets*, Voldemort states that he changed his name because he would not 'use [his] filthy Muggle father's name for ever' (CoS 231). However, when he first tells Dumbledore he dislikes the name, he believes his father to be the one with magical powers, suggesting that his aversion started before that, simply due to the commonness of the name.

[10] This is also noted at the end of the same chapter, 'The Secret Riddle' (HBP 259), by Dumbledore - who has dedicated much of his life to study and analyze Voldemort.

– love and death, seeing them as signs of weakness. He devotes his life to avoid death, and ironically, it is ultimately in his ignorance for love he meets his end.

Voldemort certainly comes off as the least complex character we meet in *Harry Potter*; he is evil through and through. Rowling, in an interview with James Runcie, said that she believes Voldemort represents an extreme evil;

> He has killed not out of self-defense, not to protect, not for any of the reasons that we might all be able to envisage, or most of us could envisage ourselves killing in certain extreme situations. If people we loved were threatened or in- in war. He's killed cold-bloodedly, sometimes for enjoyment and for his own personal gain. I call that evil. (Rowling in Runcie 2007)

He shows no signs of empathy or remorse – he seeks to conquer the world, to defeat death itself, and he will stop at nothing. All things considered, there are very few shades of gray, which make him appear both unrelatable and unrealistic. Yet, placing him within the profile of a typical serial killer might prove less difficult than expected. Patrick and Patrick refer to psychological science, writing that '[m]ost knowledgeable experts believe that inborn […] factors play some role in causing this type of extreme violence.' (231)

We could of course assume that Voldemort might have been born with such a predisposition. However, we can also find hints or evidence, both in the extra-textual material offered by Rowling, but also in the canon itself. In a web chat hosted by Bloomsbury, Rowling evidently claimed that Voldemort was unable to love because he was conceived under influence of a love potion, i.e. a manipulated conception. His father had never loved his mother, and whether his mother felt true love for Riddle Sr., or whether it was simply a mere obsession, could be argued as well. Nevertheless, their son was not created with love, he never knew love, and as a result, he was completely deficient of the ability to feel love. The way Mrs. Cole at the orphanage describes him, as a baby who hardly ever cried (HBP 250), might also suggest that his emotional range, in general, was limited from the very start. As explained earlier (2.2.1), the disposition for evil could actually be inborn. Yet, whether it is activated will depend a great deal on what happens during childhood. In the case of Voldemort, he experienced an extreme lack of presence or love from anyone during his pre-teens, and accordingly, his predisposition would have been activated in the worst kind of way.

I have discussed several theories and perceptions of what evil is, and what it means to do what is wrong. Although they all differ more or less, in none of these perceptions would Voldemort's acts qualify as good. The way he uses, hurts and kills other people shows a pure

sort of evil, both in a deontological perspective and in a utilitarian perspective. Neither can this behavior set a universal standard, nor does it serve the majority. Voldemort acts merely out of self-interest, with no consideration of others. Breaking with Kantian thinking, he has no scruples against using others merely as means to his end, and his resurrection in *Goblet of Fire* where he takes blood from Harry and Pettigrew's arm is an example of that (GoF 556-57).

The evil of Voldemort is perhaps the purest sort of evil depicted in the books. His concerns are only with himself; there is never any signs of love or affection for anyone but himself. Fans have questioned if his incapability anyone other than himself might have had one exception; his pet snake Nagini. Dumbledore tells Harry that "[he thinks] he is perhaps as fond of her as he can be of anything" (HBP 473), yet in the same sentence, he suggests that Voldemort might have made Nagini one of his Horcruxes, a suspicion which is later confirmed. Voldemort's fondness for Nagini may, in other words, not be an evidence of his capability to care for someone else after all, but rather a confirmation that his own life is all that matters to him. As we learn throughout the books, the Horcruxes holds parts of Voldemort's soul, and it is not unlikely that his fondness is directed towards, not the companion that Nagini is, but the immortal part of his soul that she represents.

As mentioned in the attempt to define evil, the conception of evil is subjective, and what qualifies as evil may change depending on what ethical perspective one chooses to part with. Yet, in Voldemort, we get a character who is evil regardless of perspective – he has no intentions of doing anything for the good of others, let alone any 'greater good.' He has no scruples using people as a means to an end – he tortures, harm and kills others, occasionally for his own pleasure. His persona is incompatible with any usual conceptions of morality, and might, therefore, seem distant and unrealistic to the readers. However, as explained, his suggested predisposition for evil and his urge for power all have scientific roots, thus roots in reality. In a highly distorted way, Voldemort is – in other words – somewhat realistic, but is he relatable? I will attempt to answer that at the end of this chapter, but first we should have a look at another character who falls into the same morally questionable category as Voldemort.

Besides Lord Voldemort, there is one other character which is, in the many fan-made polls and ratings, frequently named the most evil and scary one in the *Harry Potter* books; Dolores Jane Umbridge. The small, malicious woman with a partiality for rules is not introduced until the fifth book, as Under-Secretary to the Minister of Magic. She is present at Harry's hearing, in the aftermath of him using magic outside school to defend himself from a

dementor attack[11], and immediately reveals herself to be an unlikeable character. Later in *Order of the Phoenix*, she is introduced as the new Professor of Defense against Dark Arts at Hogwarts, which is when her true nature is truly revealed. In spite of her seemingly harmless appearance, always dressed in pink, with a taste for sweet bows and fluffy kittens, there is nothing sweet about her actions.

Her practice as a teacher, in general, may, of course, be questioned, as she insists on a textbook-based approach to magic defense, stubbornly denying the return of Lord Voldemort and the need for more practical protecting skills. Yet, her grotesque detentions with Harry is what really stands out, where she forces him to use a magic quill which writes with his own blood. Not only is she the only character to use anything other than the Crusiatus Curse in order to torture, but she is also the only one – aside from Lord Voldemort – to ever give Harry a physical scar.

In many ways, Umbridge resembles Voldemort in her degree of evil, and her lack of moral. Like Voldemort, she is no stranger to using others as means to her ends. For instance, she is both willing to torture students in order to get the information she wants (OotP 658), and to use them as a human shield to protect herself (OotP 663). In a Kantian perspective, the actions of Umbridge is in no way justifiable, as they cannot qualify as universal laws. Yet, her own perception of what is right and wrong, and her fixation on the fact that Harry must 'not tell lies' (OotP 221) bears a slight resemblance to Kant's thinking. She clearly shows double standards, as she herself is more than willing to ignore the categorical imperative. More than anything, this double standard confirms what a twisted mind she has. It is highly likely that she is under the illusion that she is elevated above everyone else, and therefore can allow herself to act differently. In fact, the way she persuades herself into torturing Harry, serves as a great example of precisely that;

> 'Very well,' she said, and she pulled out her wand. 'Very well … I am left with no alternative … this is more than a matter of school discipline … this is an issue of Ministry security … yes … yes … […] You are forcing me, Potter … I do not want to,' said Umbridge, still moving restlessly on the spot, 'but sometimes circumstances justify the use … I am sure the Minister will understand that I had no choice …' (OotP 657-58)

We see her acting uncertain and torn; an act she most likely puts on to give the impression that – although she is reluctant to perform the Cruciatus Curse – her actions come from a more utilitarian perspective – that she wants to do what is best for the majority, and that it

[11] Which we later learn was ordered by Umbridge herself, to silence Harry about Voldemort's return.

consequently justifies the means. However, in reality, she is simply reassuring herself, telling herself that she will not get in trouble. Her concerns are merely with herself, and she has no empathy for Harry whatsoever – something which is revealed by the ‘nasty, eager, excited look on her face' (OotP 658).

Her complete lack of empathy is, in fact, one of the traits that labels her a psychopath. Like Voldemort, she is very willing to do whatever it takes to get her way, and she is happy to use other people to her advantage. Like Voldemort, she also has a manipulative and somewhat charming side, which allows her to get allies (The Minister, The Inquisitorial Squad, Argus Filth) and stay in her position of power. Much like Voldemort, it is precisely the lust for power which is her motivation. Still, what separates her from the Dark Lord, is her seemingly bigger respect for authority - perhaps because she needs to fit into the role of the abiding citizen. For while Voldemort has chosen to live completely outside society and common social norms, Umbridge needs to fit into the social order to remain in control. Dolores Umbridge clearly shows what authority might do to a person, which might also be why she is regarded by many as the most frightening character. While Lord Voldemort is the ultimate evil antagonist – the super villain of the story, Umbridge is the everyday villain. While Voldemort is the sort of evil that exceeds all legal and moral boundaries, Umbridge exemplifies the ‘lawful evil.' She cares about loyalty and order, but she has no compassion or inhibitions. She is difficult to expose, because, even though she bends them in her favor, she follows the laws, and being an authority too, she is given free rein. Umbridge is frightening because of her untouchability; not only does she play by the rules, she makes them.

Dolores Umbridge typifies a character who, due to her own twisted mind and psychopathic traits, may truly believe that her actions are moral and right. However, seen from the outside, it is difficult to morally defend her behavior, both from a deontological perspective and a utilitarian perspective. She repeatedly violates Kant's imperatives, e.g. by lying and torturing – actions which in no way can be declared universal laws. She recurrently uses other people as a means to an end, and she is no stranger to self-assertiveness. Her main priority is the well-being of the Ministry of Magic, but more than anything her own well-being. She cannot be said to act with the intention of creating the best possible outcome for the greatest possible amount of people, which makes her actions immoral in a utilitarian perspective as well. So all of these aspects point to her immorality – but is she evil? Using the conclusion that evil is intentionally committing immoral acts, aware that they will harm others, there is no denying

that she is. Her lack of empathy, and the revelation of excitement in her eyes as she is about to torture a child, suggests that she is well aware of her behavior.

Her relatability, on the other hand, is questionable, as is the relatability of Voldemort. Professor of special education, Lauren Binnendyk, and Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, Ph.D. in educational psychology, argues that identifying with the evil characters in *Harry Potter* is made difficult by Rowling, as these characters are 'described as physically repulsive' (197). They use the example of Severus Snape, who is described as having 'greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin' (PS 94), but Voldemort and Umbridge are also obvious examples. They both have an unpleasant look, and are both even described as animalistic. Voldemort with his serpent-like appearance, and Umbridge with her toad-like features. Not only does Rowling make them unappealing to the reader with their looks, but she nearly dehumanizes them – making them difficult for the reader to relate to. Should we believe Gabriel and Young (Flood), the typical young reader is, therefore, unlikely to get influence by these characters them. Rather than serving as the mental models Krcmar and Curtis talk about, Voldemort and Umbridge seem to function rather as projections of cruelty in the real world.

4.3.1.3 Albus Dumbledore

Arguing that Albus Dumbledore embodies any sort of evil might be a highly controversial point of view in the eyes of many fans. He is Harry's mentor and guide for a long time, and represents a sense of absolute safety; '[...] everyone says Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who was ever afraid of. With Dumbledore around, You-Know-Who won't touch you.' (PS: 190). However, he is also a great authority, and with authority comes great responsibility. As we learn, mainly in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore is not perfect. What starts as the old wise man with the long beard, put on a pedestal by young Harry – and his many fans at the same age, as a flawless, reliable – almost perfect – savior, bit by bit reveals himself as the complex human he is. He makes mistakes, and being greatly intelligent, he argues himself, his mistakes tend to be 'correspondingly huger' (HBP 187).

The moral fall of Dumbledore is perhaps more shocking to the readers, than the persistent evil of Voldemort and Umbridge. His actions might seem like more of a betrayal, due to the high expectations of him. He is not the infallible and all-knowing saint he seems to be in the beginning, but is he evil or immoral? In the first six books, we learn that Dumbledore's main goals are to defeat Voldemort, and to protect Harry. While Harry is Voldemort's biggest obstacle, Dumbledore is his equal - his nemesis, and the only one he fears. For Voldemort, Dumbledore is his counterpart. However, in Rita Skeeter's publication *The Life and Lies of*

Albus Dumbledore (DH 288-93), Dumbledore is revealed to have explored the same path as Voldemort. Together with his friend Gellert Grindelwald, they planned to '[establish] wizard rule over Muggles' (DH 292). In a letter between the two, Dumbledore writes;

> *Gellert –*
>
> *Your point about wizard dominance being FOR THE MUGGLES' OWN GOOD – this, I think, is the crucial point. Yes, we have been given power and, yes, that power gives us the right to rule, but it also gives us responsibilities over the ruled. We must stress this point, it will be the foundation stone upon which we build. Where we are opposed, as we surely will be, this must be basis for our counter-arguments. We seize control FOR THE GREATER GOOD. And from this it follows that where we meet resistance, we must only use the force that is necessary and no more. (This was your mistake at Durmstrang!)* (DH 291)

His way of thinking as a young man is surprisingly similar to that of Voldemort. Magic is power, lack of magic equals weakness. Dumbledore tries to justify the ideology with the phrase "for the greater good." He seems to believe that he knows what is best for others, and that as a bright wizard, he is in a position to do what he believes best.

Both his similarities and his differences to Voldemort and Umbridge is exposed as he writes 'where we meet resistance, we must only use the force that is necessary and no more.' He is not willing to kill unnecessary or for the joy of it, but he is no stranger to casualties. Accordingly, his ethics clearly breaks with Kantian moral thinking, as he is willing to use others merely as a means to an end. His justification is rather a utilitarian one; he seeks to do what he thinks is the best option for the majority. Yet, I say justification and not intentions, because between the lines we can discover that they did not necessarily coincide. There is every reason to believe that this ideology had roots in Dumbledore's wish for self-assertion. As the oldest of three siblings, and their main caretaker, his life revolved more around them than him, and little time remained for him to nurture his own abilities. Acquiring world domination and becoming famous as a revolutionary would without doubt sound very tempting. As Dumbledore finally admits to Harry; 'I was gifted, I was brilliant. I wanted to escape. I wanted to shine. I wanted glory.' (DH 573).

While age and experience eventually steered him onto the right path, his vision of acting 'for the greater good' remained. As the full truth is uncovered in *Deathly Hallows,* we learn that Dumbledore knew the truth about the prophecy from the very start, and that he had discovered the existence of a last Horcrux inside Harry. He knew, in other words, that Harry would eventually have to sacrifice his life, and decided to let it happen. Refraining from telling Harry about the sacrifice he would have to make, we learn, was a conscious choice to steer

Harry on the right path – and evidence of Dumbledore's cynicism. He is, until the very end, willing to use someone he cares for as a means to an end.

Arguing that Dumbledore bears similarities to the two greatest villains of the story – Lord Voldemort and Umbridge - might seem controversial to some, but the fact is that they all share the motivation that drives them to evil acts. He admits to having been thirsty for power, and for a while getting the better of him. Then again, Dumbledore differs from the two others in the sense of relatability. Dumbledore clearly shows love and empathy for others, both his family, his students and for Harry. His motivation leads him to actions of an evil character, but the nature for Dumbledore himself is sympathetic – in line with Staub's arguments about differentiating between evil spirit and evil actions (5).

Dumbledore's flawed character is part of what makes him more human, more realistic, and accordingly more relatable. With his great age and high position as headmaster, he is not very likely to be the character most young readers identify with, but rather someone who they recognize as a mentor and protector. His appearance, with long, white hair and a lengthy beard reassembles other safe role models and counselors, such as Santa Clause, Gandalf of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* or the stereotypic grandfather figure – all which are likely to evoke the feeling of trust, hope, and safety. For Harry, Dumbledore represents the father figure that he never had, and he is greatly loyal to and influenced by his headmaster, exclaiming that he is 'Dumbledore's man though and through […]' (HBP 326). As Harry is affected by Dumbledore, one can suppose that readers who identify with Harry are likely to be as well, as we know what readers are able to enter the mental context of the character (Flood).

4.3.2 Evil Encouraged by Authorities

The Milgram experiment demonstrated how the respect for authorities could make people commit gruesome acts. In *Harry Potter*, we see several examples of people blindly following authority, namely the Death Eaters – Voldemort's loyal supporters.

4.3.2.1 Draco Malfoy

Out of Harry's nemeses, Draco Malfoy is the most harmless, but also the very first. Initially he represents the more everyday type of evil – he is essentially a bully. At the very outset of the story, Draco Malfoy is drawn to Harry's fame, and even seems open to forming some sort of friendship with him. For Draco, this attempt has roots in insecurity and a desire to assert himself. Even though Draco comes off as successful; he is the leader of his gang, he is son of a wealthy and well known family, his insecurities shines through, and are quite possibly the reason for his foul behavior. His constant need to put himself above others is present throughout the books,

and is revealed already at our very first encounter with Draco, as he talks degradingly about Muggles and boasts about his skills in Quidditch at *Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions* (PS 60.

The evil of Malfoy slowly progresses throughout the books; from being a harmless bully, be becomes fouler and more unpleasant as the story advances. It is not until the sixth book that he actually psychically hurts Harry (HBP 147) – up until that point his abuse has been merely vocal. In the sixth book his evil actions peak, as he works on mission for Lord Voldemort himself. He is to create a possibility for the death eaters to enter Hogwarts, and he is set out to kill Dumbledore. Yet, at this point, his evil nature is starting to really break down, showing what lies underneath. The climax is reached as he is finally faced with Dumbledore, but fails to commit the murder. As Dumbledore points out, he has every possibility to go through it; Dumbledore is weak, alone and unarmed, and seemingly, the only thing holding Draco back is his own morality (HBP 551). At this point we learn what truly drives Draco Malfoy; fear of the authority Voldemort represents, and fear of missing his family: 'I haven't got any options! […] I've got to do this! He'll kill me! He'll kill my whole family!' (HBP 552). His hands are described as shaking uncontrollably – murdering Dumbledore is clearly not something he wants to do. The mission, which is presented as 'a great honour' (HBP 38), seems to be more of a punishment for his father's sins, and it is evident that Draco is acting out of fear, not out of evil intentions.

The way Draco hesitates once his moral dilemmas become serious and possibly fatal, suggests that he is more morally ambiguous than we first assume, and that there are more layers to his character than one might think. Nevertheless, Draco is very obedient to the authorities that Voldemort and his parents represents, consequently acting in a certain way because it is demanded or expected of him. Draco is, perhaps along with Snape and Harry, one of the characters which faces the biggest struggles with moral choices, and along with Harry, one of those young readers are more likely to relate to.

4.3.2.2 Peter Pettigrew

Peter Pettigrew, nicknamed 'Wormtale,' is perhaps not of the most significant characters in the books. Yet, he is noteworthy when discussing moral choices and motivation for evil. Pettigrew was originally one of James Potter's best friends, but as Voldemort started to seize power, he decided to shift his loyalty out of fear. Pettigrew leaked the information about the Potters' hiding place to Voldemort, causing him to find them the fatal night when he killed Harry's parents. As that night became fatal for Voldemort himself, Death Eaters believed Pettigrew to have tricked

Voldemort, and Pettigrew faked his own death and went undercover as a rat[12]. After years in hiding, he was revealed to be alive by Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, but once again managed to escape, and this time found back to Lord Voldemort. In *Goblet of Fire*, Pettigrew helps Voldemort regain human form by sacrificing his arm. In favor, he is granted a silver arm, and remains Voldemort's faithful servant until *Deathly Hallows*, where he is strangled by his own silver hand.

Like the Malfoy family, Pettigrew in a good example of how self-interest and search for acceptance may cause people to do evil. He shows no real intentions of doing evil, nor any pleasure; he simply acts on orders from what he believes to be the most powerful authority. Pettigrew's motivation is his own wellbeing, and he will, consequently, do anything he is told in order to preserve it. The way he so easily gives up his friends' whereabouts to the man he knows is planning to kill them, ultimately sentencing them to death, brings Arendt's concept of banal evil to mind. His actions do not origin in any particular vendetta, nor in any actual admiration for Voldemort – he seeks to please authorities simply to keep himself safe. As Sirius Black puts it, in response to Pettigrew's arguments that he spent three years close to Harry as a rat, without hurting him;

> […] you never did anything for anyone unless you could see what was in it for you. Voldemort's been in hiding for twelve years, they say he's half-dead. You weren't about to commit murder right under Albus Dumbledore's nose, for a wreck of a wizard who'd lost all his power, were you? You'd want to be quite sure he was the biggest bully in the playground before you went back to him, wouldn't you? (PoA 271)

When he finally returned to Voldemort's service, it was '[…] not out of loyalty, but out of fear […]' (GoF 563). When he is granted the silver hand, to replace the one he cut off, Voldemort declares '[m]ay your loyalty never weaver again' (GoF 563). As Voldemort slowly rises to power again, Pettigrew makes sure to stay on his side. However, his intentions are never truly evil, which he reveals in the last book. As he ends up in a fight with Harry and attempts to strangle him, Harry reminds Pettigrew that he owes Harry his life – which causes Pettigrew to hesitate (DH 380). His hesitation shows a very small sign of mercy, as if his instinct or subconsciousness kicked in for a moment. As his allegiance flickers for a second, his silver hand turns on him and strangles him to death, which implies that Voldemort had enchanted it to punish him should his loyalty ever 'weaver again.'

[12] He is, as previously mentioned, an animagus.

As a young boy, his situation might be somewhat relatable. He was the boy who never really fit in – the one who was neither brave, nor popular. Still, he had friends who protected him – friends whom he would eventually betray. It might seem like Pettigrew was concerned mainly with his own self-perseverance, which is why he found it so important to attach himself to whoever was the strongest party. In Hogwarts, he found this safety in Remus Lupin, James Potter and Sirius Black – the two latter who were some of the most popular students in school. However, as time went by, as they got older and the war was breaking out, Pettigrew had to find a new allegiance. He sold out his friends, the Potter, who were in hiding. In order to conceal his mistakes, he staged his own murder, and framed Sirius Black for it. In a very short time, Pettigrew showed to what lengths he was willing to go in order to keep himself safe – how his fear of what those more powerful than him might do to him made him destroy the lives of several of his loyal friends. Pettigrew is, in no way, a moral character. He has no concern for the majority, only himself, in addition to being willing both to lie and to commit murder - thus breaking severely with both the utilitarian and the deontological perspective on moral behavior. His evilness coincides greatly with Arendt's concept of Banal Evil, as well as the findings of the Milgram experiment – he is a good example of someone who would do whatever he is ordered. One may, consequently, suggest that he has a touch of realism. Along with Draco Malfoy, he functions as a portrayal of how cowardice and disclaiming of responsibility make people commit evil acts in the real world.

His relatability, however, is questionable. Again we see an example of how Rowling dehumanizes her villains; he is described as having '[…] small, watery eyes [and] a pointed nose', greatly reassembling the rat he spent his life as for thirteen years. As explained by Binnendyk and Schonert-Reichl, the 'physically repulsive' descriptions of the villains make it harder for the reader to identify with them (197).

4.3.3 Love and Sorrow as the Ultimate Motivation – But for What?

While the characters discussed so far are driven to a great extent by either their search power or their fear of those with power. Yet we have two characters who do not conform to any of these categories, but who we should still have a closer look at due to their moral ambiguity and their possible relatability; Severus Snape and Harry Potter.

4.3.3.1 Severus Snape

Relating to Professor Snape can be as complicated for the reader as it is for Harry, as Snape represents both the villain and the good guy at the same time. Schanoes repeatedly claims in her text that 'Snape is not evil' (134), and while she may be right, this does not exclude him

from being an evildoer. Snape definitely fits into the reasoning of Staub; people are not evil, but their actions might be (5). To completely dismiss that Snape is evil might be problematic. Although his basic moral intentions are good, a great deal of his actions is malicious and immoral. Being an adult and a teacher, his behavior towards some of his students, and Harry Potter in particular, is unacceptable. He makes it clear from the very start that he hated Harry's father, and that he, therefore, hates Harry as well.

Much like Harry, Snape is driven by his emotions, and like Harry, a great deal of his emotions originates in loneliness. It is suggested that, much like both Harry and Voldemort, Severus Snape did not have a happy childhood. We learn that his parents fought a lot, and that his father abused his mother mentally – and possibly physically as well (DH 535, OoTH 521). His ragged appearance as a young boy, with "[…] too-short jeans [and] a shabby, overlarge coat that might have belonged to a grown man […]," untidy hair and sallow skin (DH 532), also imply that young Snape was neglected. Yet, Snape remained a lonely wolf. While Harry eventually got friends, and even Voldemort had his loyal followers, Snape had no one. That is, apart from Lily Evans, Harry's mother. As they met as young children, they became friends, and remained so until Snape's interest in dark magic drew them apart. Yet, his great affection for her – and his secret love – continued, and persisted until his death. This great love for the woman he never got was what eventually made him change his allegiance, from being one of Voldemort's faithful servants, to being Dumbledore's secret infiltrator, and from then on remained his main motivation for every choice and every action.

From the very start of the series, Severus Snape is painted as a villain. Harry's negative impression of him is immediate; his appearance is almost vampire-like, with black hair and pale skin, and his eyes gives Harry the feeling that '[…] he didn't like Harry at all.' (PS 94) Snape's dislike becomes evident upon their first meeting, and their relationship is solely a negative one from that point on. Not until the last book, following Snape's death, do Harry and the reader learn the truth – that he has devoted the last sixteen years of his life to keep Harry safe, as a last tribute to his love for Lily. Through Snape's memories, Harry learns that he has lurked around behind the scenes throughout all of Harry's life, secretly keeping him safe, and Harry is challenged to see the man he despised in a new light. Apparently, Harry chooses to forgive Severus Snape, naming his second son after him and telling his son that Snape was '[…] probably the bravest man [he] ever knew.' (DH 607) The readers followed Harry, and declared Snape as their favorite character in a poll held by Bloomsbury (Pauli).

In spite of this, Snape's choices remain morally questionable, and his motives dubious. Upon learning that his potions professor had saved his life, the young Harry is left confused; '[…] Snape always seemed to hate me so much.' (PS 210) The answer he gets from Quirrel sums it up perfectly:

> 'Oh, he does,' said Quirrel causally, 'heavens, yes. He was at Hogwarts with your father, didn't you know? They loathed each other. But he never wanted you *dead*.'
> (PS 210)

For Professor Snape truly seems to hate Harry, without any real reason to do so at all, except the loss Harry represents for him. Harry is repeatedly said to look very much like his father, James Potter – the man who won his one great love. The man who recurrently mocked and bullied him through school – a man that he hated. For Snape, Harry is a constant reminder of his miserable teens and his great heartbreak. But more so than anything, Harry is the reason why Lily died. The prophecy about Harry is what brought Voldemort to the Potter house in the first place, and Harry is who Lily sacrificed her life to save. Seeing Harry alive is a constant reminder that Lily is not. Snape's boundless sorrow and hopeless love lead him to verbally abuse an innocent young boy for many years – a choice which is highly immoral and un-defendable from any ethical perspective.

In Snape we find a certain element of relatability – the lonely teen boy who and his unhappy love. Readers might relate to his sorrow, his solitude and, consequently, his anger. The moral message which Rowling conveys through Snape's story is, therefore, an important one; she illustrates that it is never too late to change allegiance, that you can atone for your sins by doing good. However, his attitude towards Harry is never exuded, and should, therefore, be more likely to be condemned by the reader, according to the findings of Krcmar and Curtis – yet his popularity among the readers tells otherwise. Still, the answer to this might be, not in the relatability of Snape, but in that of Harry, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

4.3.3.2 Harry Potter

Harry, as the protagonist and the main hero of the story, also represents the 'good side' in the war. He shows great courage, altruism, and resolution, and perform acts that no one would expect from a young boy, let alone any adult for that matter. He devotes his life to ending the war against Voldemort – a task he was quite randomly chosen for – and finally commits the ultimate sacrifice by surrendering, prepared to give up his life. Yet, Harry struggles with a lot of anger and emotions, which creates a darkness inside him. As a matter of fact, we are more than once witnesses to his concerns about being evil and not being able to control it.

> ‘Not Slytherin, eh?' said the small voice. ‘Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that – no? Well, if you're sure – better be GRYFFINDOR!' (PS: 91)

Harry’s fear of ending up in Slytherin can be seen as an example for his fear of having forces, or urges, inside him that he is not able to control. Instead he ends up in Gryffindoor, and in the role as a famous hero. In fact, the role as the hero is appointed to him long before he is able to acquire it himself. Unaware of his fame, he grows up with his extended family, who badly mistreat him. As a result, Harry ends up as a shy and modest boy. Traveling to Hogwarts, he is quickly confronted with his fame in the wizard world, a role he never truly embraces. He works hard to live up to people's expectations of him, but at the same time, he strives to show that he is just like anyone else, and that he does not wish for himself or anybody else, to place him on a pedestal. For instance, he is uncomfortable with being whispered about (PS), writing autographs and being taken a picture of (CoS), and he finds it very unpleasant having people thinking he gets special treatment when he is included as a champion in the Triwizard Tournament despite the fact that he does not meet the age requirements (GoF 239).

Harry’s great sense of right and wrong is proven already his first year at school, and he quickly established that sometimes, what is right and what is determined by the rules do not necessarily coincide. He chooses to disobey Madam Hooch to help Neville Longbottom when Draco Malfoy steals his possession and humiliates him (PS: 111), and also goes to extreme lengths to protect the Philosopher’s Stone; a mission no one should expect an eleven-year-old to take on. Whether it is his internal sense of morality that drives him, or whether he feels an obligation due to his special connection with Voldemort is unknown. Never does Harry revel in his achievements; he stays humble. Neither when his effort help Gryffindor win the Quidditch Cup, when his bravery earns them enough points to win the house cup, nor when his courage stops Lord Voldemort from acquiring the stone what could give him eternal life, he seizes the opportunity to boast. In the first book, it is precisely his selflessness that saves the world from the return of the Dark Lord, as Dumbledore’s protection ensures that only the one who wishes to find the stone, but not for the purpose of his own fortune or health, would be able to obtain it.

However, Harry is not a hero without flaws. He is impulsive and impatient, and often acts before he thinks. He has a tendency to let his feelings and opinions blind him and interfere with his judgment. Consequently, he drifts and loses focus. However, more than once, we see him doing quite the opposite, almost taking it to the extreme. He becomes so focused on

something that it borders on obsession, as seen for examples with the diary of Riddle in *Chamber of Secrets* and the potion book in *the Half-Blood Prince*. He is, in both cases, warned by Hermione about to possible (and as it turns out, actual) dangers of both books, but in his obsessiveness, Harry is unable to let it go. In both cases, the result is nearly fatal; one leading to the release of Voldemort's Horcrux, and the other almost leading to the death of Draco Malfoy. Aside from obsession, Harry is clearly driven by his emotions, which at times brings himself and his friends into dangerous situations. In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry is fully aware that the quest he has sat out on only involves locating and destroying the Horcruxes, and that every minute counts in this pursuit to make Lord Voldemort mortal. Nevertheless, he decides to visit Godric's Hollow, the place where his parents lived and died – his only true home.

The loss of his parents affects a great deal of Harry's actions. His self-sacrifice, for example, might have roots in the knowledge that his parents did the same for him, and that he feels an obligation to make amends, to make their sacrifice worth it. Similar to Snape, the majority of Harry's emotional struggles originates in loneliness. All his chances of having a real family are stolen away from him; his parents murdered when he was only one, and his godfather estranged until he was thirteen, and then quickly taken away from him again at fifteen. He has no friends until he moves to Hogwarts, which becomes the first time he is part of a fellowship. Yet, he is regularly reminded that his friends have families, and that he is the only one without. Perhaps is this the reason why he so easily is able to accept that he must sacrifice his life, in *Deathly Hallows*, in order to stop Voldemort, as he recognizes that he is the only one without a family to affect.

Similar to Dumbledore, Harry's flaws are what makes him a more realistic and relatable character. Harry is, as mentioned, the hero of the story, but he is not a perfect one. He makes mistakes, putting himself and others in danger, and he struggles with his motivation for carrying out his mission. Out of the characters discussed in this thesis, Harry is most likely the one young readers will relate most to, and whose mental context they are most likely to enter. The absolution of Snape might be evidence of precisely that, as it seems like readers instantly chose to forgive Snape for all his sins when Harry did. Harry's relatability makes the question of evil, and whether his actions are justifiable, a very important one. Abanes argues against the morality of Harry, and seen from a deontological perspective, his actions are undeniably immoral. Nevertheless, his intentions are, with a few exceptions, never to harm anyone.

Still, Harry is one of the few 'good' characters who uses the 'unforgiveable curses.' He, as mentioned earlier, unsuccessfully attempts to use 'Cruciatus' at Bellatrix Lestrange

following her murder on Sirius Black (OotP 715), before he successfully uses it at Death Eater Amycus Carrow in *Deathly Hallows* (DH 477). Although clear acts of evil, we should consider Kcrmar and Curtis finds about violent and non-violent build-ups (474) before deciding if this makes Harry a character which influence is dangerous. As showed by Krcmar and Curtis, children would resolve to less advanced moral reasoning if they judged the violence as justified by the build-up prior to the conflict (474). In Harry's case, these where both acts of anger and sorrow, originating from fact that these characters had tortured or murdered someone he cared about. Unlike actions by characters such as Voldemort, Umbridge or Pettigrew, Harry's actions are therefore more likely to be judged as justifiable. Additionally, the Horcrux which exists inside Harry might also be relevant, as he does, in fact, have a part of Voldemort living inside him. One could therefor argue that these actions of evil originates from Voldemort, rather than Harry himself. As we know little of Harry's choices in the time after the Horcrux, this is left up to speculation, but it seems plausible.

5.0 Conclusion

The battle between good and evil has been, and probably will continue to be, a popular theme in children's literature – and especially in fantasy. Although trademarked by magical surroundings, mystical creatures or fantastical events, the way fantasy literature deals with the questions of morality and problems of the society adds a touch of reality. And perhaps it is precisely the realistic aspect of these stories that make people react; the way these books are able to describe the world we live in so accurately, both the good and the bad.

The aim of this thesis has been to argue that, although they convey immense evil, the *Harry Potter* books do not damage their young readers. Critics have argued that the books encourage immorality and evil, such as lying, stealing – and even torture and murder. Richard Abanes judges the distinction between good and evil as too simplistic, as – he claims – anyone who stands against Voldemort is considered good (149). His argument is very similar to that of a deontologist; one cannot be good and moral, and at the same time ignore the categorical imperative and allow oneself to lie, steal or be open to murder. It seems like Abanes, along with other critics, are of the opinion that Harry Potter could have been a moral role model only if he had made the right moral choice in every situation.

However, one could argue that had Harry done so, the books would quickly have taken that '[…] preachy, didactic tone, […]' which Hornik refers to (Hornik). Repeatedly, we see Harry struggling with his decisions, and should we believe Hornik, this is exactly what makes a book suited for developing children's moral values. In her opinion, making the distinction between good and evil too clear, will only serve as a way of preaching the author's moral opinions, thus limiting the moral reasoning to being obedience orientated, coinciding with the primary stages of moral reasoning as explained by Kohlberg. In order to appeal to a more advanced level of moral reasoning, the dilemma should not have one obvious solution, and the character should not decide upon a solution too easily.

Consequently, Harry may function as a moral model for young readers because of, rather than in spite of, his moral ambiguity. As explained by Kohlberg's theory (Doris), our moral reasoning gradually develops from being externally motivated, internally. When our reasoning develops, we internalize a set of values concerning what is right and what is wrong, as determined by society and social norms. In order to incorporate these values, we need to be exposed to moral dilemmas (Doris 36), and we need characters which we can model our behavior after. Similarly, the study of Gabriel and Young indicated that readers may develop

their social skills and increase their level of empathy through reading fiction (Flood), but only if they find the characters relatable. What we can derive from this is, consequently, that only the characters in *Harry Potter* which comes off as realistic and accordingly relatable, are able to influence the readers.

The character analyses of this thesis have attempted to decide to what extent the characters are relatable for young readers, in addition to determining the motivation behind their actions. As the article of Krcmar and Curtis (460-465) denoted, literary characters may function as mental models for young readers, meaning that they might imitate the actions of the character. Still, the study conducted revealed that the motivation for evil greatly affects the way the audience judge the evil actions. Motivation seen as justifiable seemed to activate moral reasoning on a higher level, coinciding with the theory explained by Kohlberg (Doris 34-35). In order to function as advantageous mental models, the books should, therefore, provide information explaining the characters' motivation, which – in order to create a beneficial context for the reader – should be realistic.

As argued in the preceding chapters, all characters show motivation which, when linked to theory, can seem realistic and possible to explain – although exaggerated by the fantastical aspect of magic. Voldemort and Umbridge, with their complete lack of empathy, both shows signs of psychopathy, and inborn predispositions for evil, as it is explained by Paul Zac and James Fallon (Stockley). Along with Dumledore, the two also exemplifies the effect of power, as described through the Stanford Prison experiment (Zimbardo). They all illustrates how a wish for domination may cause people to commit acts of evil. In another category of motivation for evil, we find Draco Malfoy and Peter Pettigrew, who both demonstrates the effect of obedience, as described by Hannah Arendt (Geddes 104-108) and scientifically proved by Stanley Milgram (De Vos 225-226). The touch of realism ensures that all characters might serve as relevant projections of evil one might encounter in the real world. Accordingly, they create a good basis for moral situations which are authentic and realistic enough for the reader to resolve to moral reasoning and thus allow moral development, but at the same time distant enough to feel safe and harmless.

However, as discussed, several of these characters have traits which makes them less relatable, such as revolting appearances. As claimed by Binnendyk, and Schonert-Reichl (197), this makes it more difficult for the reader to identify with the character. Some of these characters are, additionally, described as having animal-like traits, which – a conscious decision on Rowling's behalf or not – helps dehumanize them. That readers should relate to characters such

as Voldemort, Umbridge or Pettigrew seems, in other words, highly improbable. As argued, it also seems unlikely that young readers would identify with Dumbledore, although there is a possibility that they might recognize him as a mentor, due to their identification with Harry.

Harry is, perhaps along with Draco Malfoy, that character of the ones discussed whose mental context young readers are most likely to enter, thus also the character they will be most influenced by. Although criticized for being immoral (Abanes 220), this is exactly what makes *Harry Potter* as good story for understanding evil and developing moral reasoning, should we believe Hornik. According to Hornik, stories where the characters struggles with their choices – like both Harry and Draco do – and there is no definite distinction between right and wrong is necessary for the reader to be challenged enough for moral development to take place. The moral ambiguity and flawed character are, in other words, precisely what seems to make *Harry Potter* a good tool for understanding evil and learning to make the distinction between right and wrong.

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Brief Summary of the Primary Sources

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone tells the story about a young, orphaned boy – Harry Potter – living with his cruel aunt and uncle. On his eleventh birthday, he is surprised to find out he is, in fact, a wizard, and shortly after he leaves to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He quickly befriends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, who become Harry's faithful sidekicks. The first book of the series, and Harry's first year at Hogwarts, revolve around the truth about the evil wizard Lord Voldemort, the man who killed Harry's parents, and the trio's quest to prevent Voldemort from obtaining the Philosopher's Stone and with that gain eternal life. Near the end of the year – and the book – Harry finds himself face to face with Voldemort, who just barely escapes their encounter – but not without revealing what poor shape he is in after the fatal night they last met.

During Harry's second year at Hogwarts, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, strange incidents start to happen, leaving a number of students and teachers at Hogwarts petrified. The perpetrator is unknown, but Harry hears voices leading him to believe he is connected to the one responsible, and even makes him doubt his own innocence. However, the perpetrator turns out to be a basilisk[13], living in the hidden Chamber of Secrets, and the question is who opened it and set the basilisk free. The trio devotes themselves to solving the mystery, but is slowed down when Hermione becomes one of its victims. The story climaxes as Ron's younger sister, Ginny, is taken a hostage, and Harry and Ron follow her into the Chamber. There they find the guilty; a fragment of Voldemort's soul, kept alive in an old diary. Harry destroys the diary, and with that Voldemort's soul.

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry learns that his godfather Sirius Black[14] has escaped the wizard prison Azkaban. Following a particularly unfortunate incident with the Dursleys, Harry leaves Privet Drive and spends his last days of summer at the Leaky Cauldron, while he waits to start his third year at school. Misread prophecies and misunderstandings lead Harry to believe that Black is seeking him out to kill him. His fear and anger for Black increase as he learns that Black evidently was the one to betray Harry's parents, leading to their murder. Yet, the final resolution of the book reveals the real betrayer to be Peter Pettigrew, a childhood

[13] A reptile, known from Greek mythology. Said to be king of all serpents, and to have the ability to kill with a single glance. None of the characters in the book is killed by their encounter with the basilisk, as no one looks it directly in the eyes, but rather through a lens**,** the reflection in a mirror or in water.

[14] Harry is unaware of the fact that Black is his godfather in the first part of the book.

friend of both James Potter and Sirius Black, who has lived a concealed life as an animagus[15] ever since the murder of Lily and James. As Black has already been convicted of the crime, Harry and Hermione must go back in time to set things straight and help the innocent Black to escape.

Harry starts his fourth year at Hogwarts in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. This quickly becomes a special year at the magical school, as they welcome visitors from two other schools of wizardry and witchcraft; Durmstrang and Beauxbaton. The reason is the quinquennial Triwizard Tournament, where one champion from each school competes in various challenges. When the champions are to be elected, Harry's name mysteriously ends up among them, and he is forced to become a fourth champion. The first two challenges prove dangerous and demanding, yet at the last one, a plot is revealed. Disguised as auror[16] Alastor 'Mad-Eye' Moody, Death Eater Barty Crouch Jr. has taken place as a teacher at Hogwarts, set up the contest so that Harry will be the winning champion, and arranged for the trophy to be a portkey[17], transporting Harry to a graveyard. There he encounters Voldemort who, with the help of Harry's blood, his ancestors' bones and his servant's flesh, re-emerges in human form.

Harry's fifth year in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, is tarnished by the return of Voldemort. As the only witness, Harry has a hard time getting people to believe in him, and the Ministry of Magic, in particular, is in denial. For the Ministry, Harry's attempt to spread the truth is a great danger to maintain law and order. Consequently, they infiltrate Hogwarts by appointing a secretary of the Ministry, Dolores Umbridge, as Professor of Defense against Dark Arts. As a reaction to the Ministry's wish to keep them in ignorance, a group of students – lead by Harry, Hermione, and Ron – form the opposition group Dumbledore's Army[18]. When Harry comes to suspect that Sirius Black is taken prisoner by Voldemort inside the Department of Mystery in the Ministry building, he and a small group of friends travel to London to save him. Once again, Harry meets Voldemort, along with his faithful followers, and the students are in great danger until a group of Aurors joins them to fight. In the heat of the combat, Sirius Black is murdered by Death Eater Bellatrix Lestrange. Moreover, Harry learns that a prophecy was

[15] An animagus is a human who is able to take the shape of a specific animal through advanced transfiguration (shapeshifting). There are five known animagi in the *Harry Potter* books; James Potter (stag), Sirius Black (dog), Peter Pettigrew (rat), Rita Skeeter (beetle) and Minerva McGonagall (cat).
[16] Highly trained officer assigned to fight the Dark Arts.
[17] A magically enchanted object that transports the one touching it to a set destination.
[18] A similar, larger opposition group against Voldemort was formed in the first Wizard War, and continue their work in the second Wizard War. The group includes, among others, Dumbledore, Lily and James Potter, and Ron's parents, and is named 'The Order of the Phoenix.'

made the day he was born, predicting that he would be the one to defeat Voldemort, and that 'neither can live while the other survives' (OotP 741).

Harry returns to Hogwarts for the last time in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince.* Harry stumbles over a used potions book, full of mysterious spells and instructions. The book bears the signature 'the Half-Blood Prince,' and Harry becomes obsessed with finding out who the previous owner was. Harry also grows suspicious of Draco Malfoy, believing that he may have become a Death Eater[19]. Early in the book, the reader learns that Draco has been given a task by Voldemort, and that his mother has pleaded Severus Snape to guide and help him. Meanwhile, Professor Dumbledore and Harry has regular lessons, where Dumbledore shares his knowledge about Voldemort, in order to better prepare Harry for meeting his enemy. Harry learns that Voldemort has split his soul into smaller parts carefully hidden in special objects, a phenomenon is known as Horcruxes. Until they are destroyed, Voldemort cannot be killed as his soul will continue to live outside his body. Dumbledore and Harry ultimately go on a quest to find and destroy one more part of Voldemort's soul, but the dangerous mission severely injures Dumbledore. Upon their arrival back to Hogwarts, they discover that Draco has helped Death Eaters break into Hogwarts, and that he himself is set to murder Dumbledore. However, he is unable to go through with it, and Snape shows up, fulfilling his vow to Draco's mother and completing Draco's task by killing Dumbledore.

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* Harry sets out to complete the work started by Dumbledore, in order to find and destroy all parts of Voldemort's soul, making him mortal. The trio is able to locate and annihilate three of the four remaining Horcruxes[20], the last of which brings them back behind the walls of Hogwarts. However, their search is interrupted by the intrusion of Voldemort and his Death Eaters, who threaten to invade Hogwarts unless Harry surrenders. Slowly coming to the realization that there is a last, unknown Horcrux inside him, and that he will have to die in order to make Voldemort mortal, he silently decides to give himself up. Knocked out by the Killing Curse, Harry meets Dumbledore in a dreamlike sequence. Dumbledore helps him understand that by taking his blood in *Goblet of Fire,* Voldemort ensured that Lily Potter's sacrifice and protection was kept alive, making it impossible for Harry to die while Voldemort still lived. Harry then returns to his allies to fight the final battle. As the last Horcrux is eventually destroyed, Voldemort is rendered mortal, and

[19], The inner circle of Voldemort's followers.
[20] The first turned out the be Riddle's diary, destroyed by Harry in CoS, and the second a ring from Voldemort's grandfather, destroyed by Dumbledore in OotP.

is killed when his own curse backfires. The aftermath of the battle reveals that plenty of lives was lost in the fight. Yet, the Wizard War is over, and peace is restored.

The Professional Relevance of this Thesis

I believe that the topic of this thesis will be highly relevant for my future work as an educator and English teacher. Fantasy is a highly popular genre among young readers, with famous examples from the recent years such as *Twilight, Percy Jackson* and *Game of Thrones* - not to mention the *Harry Potter* books, which are still being read all around the world. The popularity of older publications such as *Narnia* and *Lord of the Rings* also proves the great admiration for this genre. To investigate fantasy is, consequently, to investigate the literature that teens are already reading. Being able to bring this sort of literature into the classroom might, therefore, be a good way to teach reading strategies and literary analysis in a way that engage the students.

As this thesis is specifically angled towards the effect books might have on children and young adults, it is able to provide useful knowledge to use in the guidance of young readers, in addition to knowledge which might be valuable to bring into the classroom. An understanding of philosophical and ethical theories of good and evil, and the link between these theories and popular culture, be a good starting point for discussing the effect media – both written and audio-visual – has on its audience, and the importance of being able to consider it from a critical angle. The significance of such competence is almost directly mentioned in the *Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway,* where we read: '[t]he young must understand that moral standards can be a source of conflict.'[21]

[21] Udir. 'Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway,' 2006, pp. 9.