Harry Potter, Gothic Convention, and the Innocent Child: Protecting Innocence and the Ascent to Adulthood

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Kasey Butcher

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Joyce Huff

Ball State University
Muncie, IN

May 2009

Graduation May 2009
Abstract

Gothic literature comes in a variety of forms, from horror films to children's books, but regardless of where the Gothic is found, it reflects the fears of the contemporary reading public. This thesis examines the *Harry Potter* series as Gothic literature and argues that the *Potter* books reflect a cultural anxiety over the loss of innocence in children through overexposure to information, pressure to grow up too quickly, or other threats. I argue that there is a persistent tension in the series over how much children should be protected, and that often protecting children makes them more vulnerable. As the series progresses into the teen years, the Gothic elements become more pronounced as the main characters are in a liminal stage in adolescence. Voldemort himself may be a monstrous projection of cultural anxiety over teenagers. Finally, I conclude that the heroes of the series are so captivating and personable because they bring the innocence of their childhood into adulthood through the *bildungsroman* of the series. As Harry, Ron, and Hermione mature, they become adults who strike a medium between the emotional vulnerability of children and the strength and maturity of adults, depicting changing notions of the adult/child binary and perhaps a new ideal.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Joyce Huff for advising me during the research and writing of my honors thesis. Her knowledge of both gothic literary theory and *Harry Potter* was extraordinarily helpful. Plus, our thesis meetings not only challenged me to think more critically about my research, they were engaging and fun as well.

I would also like to thank Dr. Karen Britland of Keele University and the University of Wisconsin Madison, whose spring 2008 tutorial on Gothic fiction initially inspired my interest in the genre.

In the spirit of *Harry Potter*, I would also like to thank my friends and family for listening to me talk about *Harry* and gothic theory for hours on end during the production of this thesis.
A Note About Abbreviations

Standard abbreviations for citing the books in the Harry Potter series are as follows:

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (SS)
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (CS)
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (PA)
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (GF)
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (OP)
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (HBP)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (DH)
In conversations about the *Harry Potter* books and films, fans frequently note the increasing darkness in the latter installments of the series. As the central characters grow, so does the centrality of Gothic conventions. While Gothic elements are present in the story from the first chapter, doppelgangers, transgression, abjection, and other staples of the genre become more prevalent as Harry and his classmates move through their adolescence toward adulthood. As the series blurs boundaries between childhood and adulthood, home and school, good and evil, in its complexity it appeals to adults as well as young readers. The blurring of these boundaries puts the characters in a vulnerable position as heroes and victims of a Gothic novel. The reader, however, is also made vulnerable as the series questions cultural ideas about innocent children and safe homes. In the books, the innocence of childhood is continually the subject of intense anxiety for both adults who wish to protect children and for children themselves, who often flout adult authority and grow to resent adults’ protectiveness. The preoccupation in the series with childhood and innocence is displayed prominently by Gothic literary devices that depict anxieties played out in contemporary culture over the protection of children from strangers and “bad guys,” which often results in limiting of their freedom and restriction of their movement, as well as fears over the exploitation of children, and finally concern that with growing busyness, over-availability of information, and violence in society, children are being forced (or tempted) to grow up too quickly. Through the use of Gothic techniques, *Harry Potter* raises important questions about the way our culture views and treats children.

Children’s literature as it is known today emerged in the Victorian Era (Jackson 3), during which notions of childhood were adapting in relation to the shifting world of adults.
Issues of child labor, changing ideas about domesticity, and a growing sense that the world outside the home was threatening, or at least corrupting, fed an attachment to the Romantic ideal of the innocent child. Previously, children had been viewed as "miniature adults," but this time marked a persistent idealization of childhood as a period of innocence. Thanks largely to philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, children were viewed as instinctively innocent and as moral models for adults. Parents were bombarded with literature about child-rearing, emphasizing the important role of parents—the mother especially—in forming their children to be reasonable adults, while also protecting them from growing up too soon. (Henderson and Sharpe 1705-07)

In tension with this rosy-cheeked vision of childhood was the stark reality that the innocent, protected childhoods depicted in children's literature coexisted with child labor and poverty in reality: "While popular ideology regarded children as innocents to be cherished, admired, and safeguarded, they were very often allowed to endure unspeakable wretchedness" (1708).

As anxieties over the changing family structures and shifting gender roles of the Victorian period came through in writing, there is a clear link between children's literature and women's literature that is helpful to illuminate the Gothic techniques that tend to pervade both. Markman Ellis writes that Gothic fiction was often the site of debate over women: "This homology between women's reading and gothic fiction had a political as well as literary critical note, as the gothic novel became the site of a heartfelt and, at times, bitter debate about the nature and politics of femininity" (48). In Gothic children's literature, the debate is instead over the nature and duration of childhood, as childhood innocence, like femininity, is tested by Gothic danger. Critic Anna Jackson notes, "The child characters would mimic their female counterparts in adult Gothic as the innocent, unwitting victims of an external malevolence" (7). The connection between the female and the child victim/hero lends itself to a borrowing of Gothic
themes from adult Gothic literature in children’s literature. Most notable in the *Harry Potter* series is the prominent use of the concept of a traveling heroine.

The traveling heroine strengthens the connection between women’s literature and children’s literature. In Victorian society, the movement of women was restricted much like the movement of children is today. Women were required to be accompanied out of the home by chaperones and were not often alone. In Gothic fiction, however, heroines break free inside or outside of the home in ways that were not permissible in reality. A traveling heroine in Gothic fictions is a figure (male, female, child, adult) who is forced to transgress customary limitations for his or her own safety. The traveling heroine theory gives a political and social importance to the action of women within the plot of a Gothic novel, as the Gothic allows women to cross boundaries of what is normally accepted or proper, often exonerating them from any shame as well. That the women were threatened by a villain, monster, or some other danger justified their breaking from decorum and transgressing the boundaries normally put on their movement: “the Gothic novel became a feminine substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction” (Moers 126). As the heroines of Gothic fictions took on the liberty of movement that men were allowed, in *Harry Potter*, children attempt to gain the freedom of movement that adults enjoy.

The convention of the traveling heroine takes on two different patterns, one of traveling within the domestic realm and the other traveling outside the home or abroad (Moers 127). The traveling heroine is not held guilty by the reader for breaking the rules, however, because she is *forced* to travel. There is no way for her to save herself, solve the mystery, or come to the rescue, except by transgressing normal cultural boundaries. The heroes and heroines of the *Harry Potter* series do most of their illicit traveling within the walls of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and
Wizardry, using trickery as a means of transgressing the boundaries placed upon them. Critic Ellen Moers writes, "For indoors, in the long, dark, twisting, haunted passageways of the Gothic castle, there is travel with danger, travel with exertion—a challenge to the heroine's enterprise, resolution, ingenuity, and physical strength" (Moers 129). In Harry Potter, this resolution and ingenuity takes the form of magic cleverly used to outsmart adults, such as Mr. Filch and Severus Snape, keen on keeping children in the classroom or in the dorms after lights out. Students are forced to transgress by the overprotectiveness of their teachers and parents and because of the threat Voldemort poses to their safety.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione frequently travel around Hogwarts—notably a haunted castle with certain labyrinthine qualities—when they should be in bed. During the first years of their education, they are given the Marauder's Map and James Potter's invisibility cloak, which allow them to see who is moving around the castle and where, as well as giving them the ability to move freely without being seen (SS 205). The invisibility cloak saves them seemingly countless times from the caretaker, Mr. Filch, and from various professors seeking to put an end to whatever investigation the trio undertakes during that school year. The garment seamlessly allows them to transgress the areas of the castle they are forbidden to enter, such as the Restricted Section of the library or across the grounds to Hagrid's cottage. The items come in handy as they are forced to travel around the castle because of the protectiveness of the adults. It is essential that the children, as traveling heroines, are forced to travel. If there is not some problem that requires them breaking the rules, they are simply naughty children, not traveling heroines.

Although Gothic children's literature has a history connected to women's literature, it also has traditions of its own. While Gothic stories had long been a standard of storytelling for
children, used as a device to scare children into obeying nursemaids, governesses, and weary mothers (Townshend 16), for years the genre was suppressed in favor of instructional books that “suited the desires of adults to construct an innocent child that could be trained up into a rational adult of Enlightened values” (Jackson 2). Still, the Gothic continued to seep into children’s literature as it saw a resurgence in literature for adults as well, emerging in books such as *The Secret Garden* or L.M. Montgomery’s *Emily* series (Jackson 3).

As children’s literature rose to popularity during the Victorian time of shifting ideas about children, the current profusion of Gothic children’s literature expresses our own changing attitudes about children, perhaps away from the ideal of the innocent child. News stories of children involved in violent or sexual transgressions provoke questions not only about adults’ ability to protect innocent children, but also over whether those children are really as innocent as society likes to believe. Jackson claims:

> When ten-year-old kids kill two-year-olds for kicks, when children take weapons to school and rain down death on their classmates, when they post sexy pictures of themselves on myspace.com, when they enthusiastically join in their culture’s jihad, we have to revise our sense of what they know and who they are. Sure we blame the adults who shamelessly exploit them, but we also begin to experience a sense of unease about the degree to which they are complicit in their own exploitation. (7)

This unease is expressed in the tension between adults and children in the culture of *Harry Potter*. While the innocents in the series are, for the most part, not involved in anything as nefarious as a school-shooting, they are still actively engaged in their culture’s battle against evil, and their desire to fight causes their guardians no undue amount of anxiety.

The children themselves are anxious too. Adolescence is a Gothic time of life and puberty is inherently scary. The teenager stands poised between childhood and adulthood, and the liminality of this position is enough to produce anxiety. To further the tension, nature throws
in an excess of hormones and physical changes. That the characters of *Harry Potter* are going through puberty at the same time as they are fighting Voldemort can only heighten the Gothic drama of the series. That they are at school, a place that is supposed to be safe, but is instead continually invaded by evil, is no less reassuring. Roderick McGillis writes:

> Our schools too have become scary places...schools at every level have their bullies, their gangs, and students who wield their weapons of choice. The schoolyards, the streets, parks, and playgrounds of contemporary urban spaces are dangerous. They understandably may generate fear among the young. Even the space we think of as home may hold its dangers. (229)

Implicit in *Harry Potter* is the idea that society needs to reexamine both notions of youth and maturity, as well as how safe our children are, even when we think we are protecting them. Furthermore, the series questions how much children need to be protected in the first place. Because the series is set at a boarding school, it is in a position to play out family and classroom dramas in a way that presents an education for both the Hogwarts student and the reader. Through the series, the reader is tacitly prompted to question his or her own ideas of morality, innocence, maturation, and security. The adolescent heroes of the series are busy constructing their adult selves, and through our privileged viewing of their growth, we are asked to evaluate how we construct our child or adult selves as well.

**A House Divided: Hogwarts as Gothic Castle and Broken Home**

Hogwarts is consistently a space that serves not only as school, but as home. It is supposed to be a safe place, but continually it becomes a place of danger as well. While children in the real world face dangers at home such as abusive or negligent parents, unguarded firearms,
or intruders, the children at Hogwarts face monsters, spells gone wrong in the classroom, and dark wizards. Hogwarts functions as both the home as a safe sphere and the Gothic castle in tension with one another. Traditionally, Gothic literature presents the view of the home as a safe space in contrast with the world outside as full of anxiety and dangers (K. Ellis xi, 3), but much of the trouble in *Harry Potter* comes about because the dangers find their way into the castle, no matter how well guarded it is by the teachers or the Ministry of Magic. In Victorian Gothic, the frightening aspects of the books were not found abroad or in supernatural events, but in the home, making the threats even more frightening to the reader. In *Harry Potter*, the natural world for the characters is one full of magic, so the magical threat posed by dark witches and wizards is not a matter of supernaturalism so much as it is a threat coming from what ought to be ordinary and comfortable. Voldemort uses the powers all magical people have; only he uses them with more skill and with malicious intent, posing a threat from within their own culture. Thus, in line with its Gothic predecessors, *Harry Potter* continually violates the comfortable notion that children are safe at home and in the classroom.

The invasion of the home by threatening, unnatural events also ties into the tradition of Freud's uncanny, which, in its German roots, *unheimlich*, means “ unhomely,” and brings terror home by introducing something frightening to that which is “homely” and familiar (Freud 124). For example, a monster invading the borders of a home is frightening, but it becomes uncanny, and therefore particularly uncomfortable, when the monster is also somehow connected to the familiar that the home stands for. Thus, the invasion of Hogwarts by dark wizards such as Voldemort, who themselves were educated at Hogwarts, is not only threatening, but also uncanny and peculiarly threatening. The uncanny also connects well to the sensation novel, which is marked by the Gothic occurring at home.
Hogwarts is frequently portrayed as a home for Harry Potter and others. In his first year of school there, Harry recognizes Hogwarts as his first real home and his friends quickly become the family he never really had. He stays at Hogwarts over the Christmas holidays with other students, receiving Christmas presents for the first time in his life (SS 194-95). Hogwarts is also home to teachers such as Professor Trelawney, who is devastated by the idea of leaving when Professor Umbridge fires her, protesting that she has been at Hogwarts for sixteen years. It is her home now (OP 595).

Hogwarts is both the Gothic castle and the home. Eve Sedgwick describes the Gothic setting as an “incoherent, indefinite, apparently infinite space” with no “stable sense of scale” (Sedgwick 26). Hogwarts, with its moving staircases, talking portraits, complicated and purposely deceptive floorplan, and hidden chambers, embodies the Gothic conventions expected of the castle in a Gothic novel. It also plays with the conventions at the same time, as it presents ambiguous borders by resisting the creation of oppressive space through the enchanted ceiling, charmed to show the night sky (SS 117). Further, Hogwarts is bewitched so it appears only as it is to magical people, additionally blurring the boundaries of the school: “If a Muggle looks at it, all they see is a moldering old ruin with a sign over the entrance saying DANGER, DO NOT ENTER, UNSAFE” (GF 166).

The way Muggles see Hogwarts, should they happen upon it, is ironically significant for the residents of Hogwarts throughout the series. Hogwarts is supposed to be their home during the school year, but is full of rivalry on the inside and often invaded by treachery from the outside. This lack of security in a supposedly safe space is also consistent with the home in a Gothic novel. Kate Furgeson Ellis writes, “it is the failed home that appears on [the novel’s] pages, the place from which some (usually ‘fallen’ men) are locked out, and others (usually
‘innocent’ women) are locked in” (ix). In *Harry Potter*, the “fallen” men are the Death Eaters, especially Lord Voldemort. In the place of the “innocent” women are the students of Hogwarts who are protected at all costs, even if the measures to protect them are hindering or simply fail. Again, the children play the woman’s role in the Gothic convention of the traveling heroine, as the violation of their home by Voldemort forces them to break the school rules to protect themselves.

Homes outside of Hogwarts are no safer. Ironically, the Dursleys’ home is the one place Harry is totally safe from Voldemort, but to receive the protection of living at Number 4 Privet Drive, Harry also has to live with his abusive relatives. Physically, the Dursleys’ home is the safest of any house in the series. It isn’t until Harry reaches the age for going to Hogwarts that the boundaries of their home are first penetrated. Once Harry turns eleven, however, they are pestered every summer by flocks of owls, screaming letters, sudden guests in their fireplace, and other annoyances. None of these are actually threatening, except to the Dursleys’ sensibilities about normalcy and proper behavior. Thus, the penetrability of the Dursleys’ home is comedic because of the excessive emphasis they put on their own ordinariness.

In contrast, the other homes where Harry takes refuge are emotionally secure but often physically dangerous. Harry takes solace with his surrogate family, the Weasleys, at their home, The Burrow, but the house often has to be protected against the Dark Arts because of Harry’s presence there. While Harry feels guilty about the danger he brings the Weasleys’ way, they often pose enough of a danger to Harry, between the twins’ tricks, the garden gnomes, and other magical blunders under their roof.

Sirius Black’s family home is used as a headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix and is protected against detection by a wide variety of charms. The house itself cannot even be seen by
those outside the Order. The house, however, is also tainted by the past, from which Sirius (and all those who fight Voldemort) will never escape. The Blacks produced a long line of pure-blood Slytherins and the family motto is *Tojours Pur* (always pure), as proudly displayed on a tapestry of the family tree, off of which members who brought dishonor to the family values are burned (*OP* 111). In the first war with Voldemort, Sirius’s brother fought with the Death Eaters while Sirius fought with the Order. Like Harry, Sirius left home at any chance he could get, trying to escape the racism and elitism of his family. Sirius is confined to the house for his own protection because he escaped from Azkaban. He is thus placed in the prison of his past, guarded by the portrait of his mother in the front hall, which berates those who enter as Mudbloods, Blood Traitors, and such (*OP* 78). The house embodies the feelings of the family that once inhabited it, depicting the return of the family history that Sirius repressed. In Gothic traditions, the emotions, memories, thoughts, or behaviors people repress, like the Gothic monster, have a way of coming back to haunt them. Freud called this phenomenon “the return of the repressed,” arguing that when something is frightening it is not always because it is new or different. He says something, the uncanny, must be added. In the uncanny, a person recognizes what he or she has repressed, visible in another person or object, and causing discomfort, anxiety, even terror (Freud 124-25). Sirius, then, is so uncomfortable in his family home because everywhere he looks his family history returns, forcing him to acknowledge and cope with the fact that he comes from a line of racist pure-bloods through the uncanny aspects of the household.

As the Order tries to clean out the house, ridding it of the artifacts of this history, the house fights back. Pictures are charmed to remain on the walls for good and the house elf, Kreacher, also assists his dead mistress in thwarting the Order’s efforts. The narrator notes, “Snape might refer to their work as ‘cleaning’, but in Harry’s opinion they were really waging
war on the house, which was putting up a very good fight, aided and abetted by Kreacher” (OP 117). In this way, the house depicts the Gothic “Fear of Furniture,” the way the commodities we possess can haunt us with the significance behind them, the wealth or injustice that produced them (Lootens 149). Fear of Furniture is especially poignant in “commodity culture” such as contemporary Western society (ironic considering the vast merchandising surrounding the Harry Potter franchise) and creates an oppressive sense that the objects we own may own us because of the meaning invested in them. The height of this pattern in the series is Voldemort’s Horcruxes, objects in which he places a part of his soul, making a locket, a diary, and a cup, among other items, essential to his survival. Voldemort no longer possesses himself completely; his objects also possess him. It is worth noting that the objects he chooses to use as Horcruxes have significance in personal and/or magical history as well. Aside from the Horcruxes, other objects hold powerful ties to memory. Photographs and paintings can move and speak. Quidditch snitches are embedded with a memory of the person who first caught them. The decorations of the Black house are “rebellious objects [that] lay bare human beings’ terrifying vulnerability to relations between things” (Lootens 150). The Black family home thus depicts the way a house can be more than just a physical shelter; it can also shelter a story and a history that one may find threatening, or simply want to forget.

The insecurity of Hogwarts and other homes in Harry Potter brings the Gothic into the domestic sphere, much like the sensation novels of Victorian literature. That the Gothic enters the “safe” home spaces indicates that the monstrous or scary represents “anxieties about the instability of identity” and the breakdown of other cultural norms (Punter 27). In the sensation novel, the supernatural invades the otherwise ordinary. Because of the way the supernatural and the monstrous infringe on the normal, the safe home, the Gothic elements can often be read in
In *Harry Potter*, the magical mixes with the Muggle under the noses of ordinary people. The boundaries are blurred between the two worlds, creating temporary discomfort for Muggles who stumble upon magic and lasting anxiety for the wizarding community, which hopes to keep its existence secret. Still, while Harry and company are wizards and witches, they have houses, homework, families, and worries just like Muggle adolescents. Although their world is magical, it still looks like, and is part of, the world of England. The treatment of magic in *Harry Potter* is consistent with Gothic tradition which “consistently approaches the supernatural as if it can be described or observed in the mode of formal realism” (M. Ellis 22).

After Voldemort returns in full form, the Ministry of Magic releases guidelines for “Protecting Your Home and Family Against Dark Forces” (*HBP* 42-43). The guidelines are taken seriously by some, but the Order of the Phoenix knows that no protection can really keep Voldemort out if he is determined to get in, as he proves each successive year at Hogwarts. As the series progresses, the issues the Gothic elements reveal become clearer and more frightening as Hogwarts is invaded time and again by darkness and danger.

**Hogwarts and Anxiety over Children’s Education**

While it is treated as a home, Hogwarts is also developed significantly as a school and a symbol of the students’ youth. Even after coming of age, students such as Fred and George Weasley are forbidden to fight with the Order of the Phoenix because they still have a year of school left (*OP* 97). Hogwarts symbolizes youth, education, and good in the fight against evil. The loss of Hogwarts to Voldemort is depicted as the worst event that could ever happen, not only because it would mean the death of hundreds of innocents, but also because it would be a
symbolic loss to evil. Voldemort, like Harry, loves the school as his first home (*HBP* 431), but unlike Harry and other virtuous wizards, he wants to dominate Hogwarts. Thus, Hogwarts becomes literally and metaphorically a battleground, displaying, in light of school shootings and sex scandals, anxieties over just how safe students are at school.

Hogwarts is rife with internal conflict as well. Since the school was founded, there has been a rivalry between the four houses—Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw—over what type of student the school will accept and teach (*GF* 176-77, *OP* 206). It is well-known that Gryffindor prized courage, Slytherin cunning and ambition, Hufflepuff loyalty and diligence, and Ravenclaw intelligence. The rivalry turned into not just four distinct houses, each with its own reputation, but also into a competition for the House Cup, involving both academic and sporting points. Psychologists Melissa J. Beers and Kevin J. Apple have described the set up of Hogwarts as a perfect storm for intergroup conflict:

> [I]f one wished to create an environment that would maximize intergroup conflict it would likely have a few distinct characteristics. First, individuals would be assigned to groups based on distinctive group characteristics. Second, group membership would be made as obvious as possible through team symbols, colors, or uniforms. Third, inequality among groups would be emphasized by showing favoritism to one group over another. Finally, intergroup contact would be limited as much as possible, and when it does occur, the situation should be competitive—not cooperative. This scenario bears an uncanny resemblance to Hogwarts School. (37)

Beers and Apple further comment that the set up of the school and the rivalry between the houses results in a "silo" structure that causes a breakdown in the flow of information and innovation. In fact, most of the transfer of information between houses takes place in the form of gossip, which is not conducive to communication or cooperation (40).
Slytherin and Gryffindor are in most direct opposition to each other. As both houses are known for producing great and powerful wizards, the competition between the two is especially heated. While Slytherin is noted for talent and for a tendency for producing dark wizards, the most dominant attribute of the house is ambition. The emphasis placed on the ambition of Slytherins complicates the good/bad binary that is often produced in the competition between Gryffindor and Slytherin, as ambition itself is not necessarily a flaw. The Sorting Hat nearly sorts Harry into Slytherin, telling him that the house could help him achieve greatness (SS 121). Clearly, the reader is supposed to regard Harry, the hero, as a "good" character. By (almost) associating Harry with Slytherin early on, and being reminded of the association recurrently, the reader is asked to rethink the assumption that all things associated with Slytherin are bad and all things associated with Gryffindor are good. Further, he or she cannot simply conclude that ambition leads to dark magic, because virtuous characters are ambitious too.

For Slytherins, the complication comes from the ambivalent attitude the books have toward ambition and cunning. While intelligence and the desire to succeed are certainly praised in the series, the treatment of ambition is more complex. Achievement is lauded, even at times the achievements of dark wizards. Steven Patterson notes that Ollivander tells Harry how Voldemort has done "terrible, but great" things (SS 85) and how Dumbledore calls Voldemort’s knowledge of magic "perhaps more extensive than any wizard alive" (OP 835), even though this knowledge is used for murder (Patterson 128).

Patterson argues that ambition is a virtue worthy of Hogwarts, but it also needs to be present in the right proportions. Too little ambition and a person is branded a slacker; too much and far worse may happen. The excessively ambitious person is one who would do anything to get ahead, resorting to violence and betrayal (129-30). Patterson writes:
If we pay careful attention to the moral characters of the Slytherins, we may learn a valuable lesson: a modicum of ambition is morally healthy, but when allowed to rule us, it can turn us into monsters like the Malfoys or Voldemort. This is something worth keeping in mind in a culture such as ours, where such a premium is put on achievement (131). Like the Slytherins, Hermione is extraordinarily ambitious and her desire for success drives her toward her extensive skill and knowledge of magic (131). She is still loyal and fair in her actions, however, showing that she is not too ambitious, and displaying the common theme of the series that the way a person chooses to behave reflects his or her moral character. A person can be ambitious and that alone does not make him or her villainous. Harming others to fulfill one’s ambitions, however, reflects a problematic moral character. The construction of good and evil will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

The Slytherin/Gryffindor conflict continuously adds drama to the series, but the tension between the houses could lead to disaster as the Sorting Hat reminds the students at the beginning of each year (i.e. *GF* 176-77). The tattered old hat knows the history of the school perhaps better than anyone else and she warns the students that the houses must stand together to be safest. If Hogwarts becomes a house divided against itself, because of the internal competition, the weaknesses inherent in the division into four houses could be fatal. For example, if Harry had not had Ravenclaw friends, such as Luna Lovegood, he likely would not have found out about Ravenclaw’s diadem, which Voldemort turned into a Horcrux, or how to get into the Ravenclaw Common Room to search for it (*DH* 584-87). Because of the problems caused by the house system, the school may not be safe, even from itself.

Ironically, the *Harry Potter* books themselves have been repeatedly put on trial in schools for posing a potential threat to the innocent child. According to the American Library Association, the books were the most challenged books of 1999 and 2000, with objections
stemming from "the centrality of magic to the topic of death to scenes that some believe are too violent, intense, or scary for children" (Taub and Servaty 53). The challenging of books in school libraries stems from a long tradition of believing that some groups of weak people, including women and children, need to be protected from various ideas (53).

Although many object to the prominence of magic in the books, the issue of death seems to be the most problematic to parents for various reasons, ranging from a concern that the violent deaths are too frightening for children to a reluctance to expose children to death or discuss it with them. Traub and Servaty observe that despite the urging of child psychologists for parents to discuss death with children before they experience a death-loss first-hand, "adults continue to struggle with addressing the topic of death with children. This hesitancy is likely due to a number of factors, including a desire to protect kids from the pain of grief, an underlying philosophy of 'let kids be kids,' and the fear associated with the direct death-related questions children are likely to ask" (64). The Potter books, however, offer various models of successfully or unsuccessfully dealing with grief and death. While the consistent link between death and an act of evil or violence in the books may be problematic (63), statistics indicate that the unexpected loss of a peer is not a rarity for children today. Traub and Servaty note that the murder of Cedric Diggory, the sudden death of a 17-year-old classmate, was the most controversial death in the series (as of 2003), but that a 1991 study showed that up to 87 percent of adolescents experience the death of a peer and a 1988 study found that 12 percent of 11-14 year olds (Harry's age group in Goblet of Fire) had experienced the death of a peer in the last year (67).

While the series presents death by murder, it also presents situations that represent ordinary contemporary fears about the safety of young people. Comically, when Harry and Ron
miss the Hogwarts Express, they use a magical flying car, stolen from Ron’s father, to travel to school (CS 69-74). The series, however, presents a parallel to a real-life fear over the unrestricted travel of children. During the student’s penultimate year at Hogwarts, they are allowed to take lessons in Apparation, the magical ability of moving from one place to another instantly. Apparating takes skill and if done improperly can result in splinching, by which body parts, or in Ron Weasley’s case, eyebrows, can be left behind (HBP 385-86). Because of the dangers involved, witches and wizards must pass a test and earn a license (HBP 382-83). Minors (those 17 and under) are forbidden to Apparate, but they can do side-by-side Apparition with an adult. This magic bears a striking resemblance to driving, a rite of passage in U.S. culture that also leads to the largest cause of death for people aged 16 to 20. In this way, the series uses magic to present a real cultural fear in a way that is not only non-threatening to the reader, but also humorous. Thus, the lessons of Apparating impress upon young readers the responsibilities and dangers of driving without the lesson putting them in harms way.

The death of a teenager is controversial to parents worrying about protecting their children, but what they are worried about not exposing their children to through literature may be a very real part of their child’s life. This notion of protecting children by keeping them from certain difficult information raises questions about censorship and children’s intellectual rights. In fact, the information available to students is also limited at Hogwarts, as certain books are kept in the Restricted Section of the library, where books scream if they are opened without permission (SS 206). While the books are restricted because of the powerful Dark Arts they contain (SS 198), Harry and Hermione frequently have to find a way around the rules to access information they need to fight Voldemort. Interestingly, when it comes to Voldemort’s Horcruxes, the magic is so dark, so unspeakable, the books censor themselves, as authors only
write that the magic is too horrible to write about: "Of the Horcrux, wickedest of magical inventions, we shall not speak nor give direction..." (HBP 381).

The attempts at banning *Harry Potter* from school libraries further ties into debates over the limiting of information available to children, as well as whether First Amendment Rights should apply to minors. The debate over what information should be allowed for children is old and heated, often labeling a certain type of information, such as the theory of evolution, parts of history, or sex education, dangerous. Chris Finan, president of the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, called *Harry Potter* a "poster child against censorship," commenting that "protests against these well-loved books make parents who protest against them seem petty and the attacks against the books can help children understand how vulnerable First Amendment rights can be and how important it is to protect these rights" (MacDonald 19). The censorship of the books also begs questions about how society constructs childhood and innocence. If innocence has to be protected from real facts about the word in which it exists, isn't it simply ignorance? In trying to protect the innocence of children, people trying to ban books may actually be limiting a relatively safe means for the children to learn about the world in which they live.

Rowling commented on an attempt to remove her books from a Santa Fe school library, "What scares me is these people are trying to protect children from their own imagination. It's my profound belief that there's a tendency to underestimate children on all sorts of levels" (MacDonald 11). In fact, the Potter series is among a list of challenged books that features a number of books that are now considered standards for children's literature, such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Little House on the Prairie* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (MacDonald 21).
The children in *Harry Potter* are also in a constant battle for access to information. The struggle depicts a displaced anxiety for the adults in the series. The children want the truth, but the adults are not prepared to acknowledge it or discuss it with them. The way the press, the Ministry of Magic, The Order of the Phoenix, and the children at Hogwarts fight over the truth and who should have access to it throughout the series results in various stories about what is really going on regarding Voldemort and the fight against him, as adults attempt to deny the truth or protect children from it. Markman Ellis writes:

Gothic fiction...hosts a contest between different versions of history. On the one hand, the aura of dark irrationality and pleasurable terror enveloping Gothic fiction offers a critique of the enlightenment construction of history as a linear account...On the other hand, the novelizing strategies of Gothic fiction, even when presented within the formal structure of romance, propose a skepticism not only towards supernatural experience and superstitious belief but towards all naïve forms of credulity. (14)

While *The Daily Prophet* stays pretty much under Ministry control, denying the return of Voldemort (*OP* 567) and printing libelous stories about Harry and Dumbledore, the often ridiculed magazine (*OP* 218-219), *The Quibbler*, takes a cue from its name and argues publicly that Voldemort has returned, printing an extended interview with Harry so that the truth will be known. The magazine is then banned from Hogwarts by Dolores Umbridge (*OP* 581), depicting censorship and what would be seen in America as a violation of First Amendment rights. In an extreme way, even the tension between Voldemort and Dumbledore shows a tension between two versions of the truth:

"Nothing I have seen in the world has supported your famous pronouncements that love is more powerful than my kind of magic, Dumbledore."

"Perhaps you have been looking in the wrong places," suggested Dumbledore." (*HBP* 844)
Thus, *Harry Potter* implies that part of the construction of history and the truth is a matter of where you look and what you choose to see. The construction of truth in the series is strongly tied to the adolescence of the central characters. As they mature, they are developing their own world views and ideas of truth, good, evil, and identity. Because of the Gothic elements in the series, the importance of this development is emphasized, as fear throws all of these concepts into anxiety.

At school, when the children are restricted from information, they often have to come up with creative ways to get it, creating their own version of what is going on in the world around them. Hermione the bookworm gets particularly upset when she cannot find information. For example, when she discovers there is nothing in her textbooks about house elves working at Hogwarts, she quips, “It’s all in *Hogwarts, A History*. Though, of course, that book’s not entirely reliable. *A Revised History of Hogwarts* would be a more accurate title. Or *A Highly Biased and Selective History of Hogwarts Which Glosses Over the Nastier Aspects of the School*” (*GF* 238).

As Voldemort relies on secrecy to get the upper hand in the early stages of his return, using ambiguity to create fear, the truth is a critical weapon that the children eagerly try to attain. Hagrid notes that he’s “Never known kids like you three fer knowin’ more’n yeh oughtta” (*OP* 423). In fact, the children’s struggle over information and the truth depicts the Gothic convention of ambiguity and contesting histories. In order to defend themselves and others, they have to figure out the truth, but that is often a messy, dangerous business.

Dolores Umbridge, an abusive, power hungry teacher sent by the Ministry of Magic to keep watch over Hogwarts, depicts anxieties about safety and the control of information at school in a particularly eerie way. Umbridge enters the school pink-clad and giggling, but her insistence on treating the children like children is upsetting to the students of Hogwarts: “they all
looked rather taken aback at being addressed as though they were five year olds” (*OP* 212). Umbridge’s emphasis on keeping the students safe and suppressing reports that Voldemort is back puts the students in danger. She asks, “Who do you imagine wants to attack children like yourselves?” and insists on teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts in a “secure, risk-free way” (*OP* 242-44). Rather than just keeping the students free of what she and the Ministry thinks is dangerous or false information, however, she keeps them from skills and knowledge they need to secure any hope of safety. Voldemort, in fact, wants to attack children like them. Umbridge is like a teacher so bent on keeping children from fear that she neglects to tell them not to accept candy from strangers. She is reactionary and dangerous, prompting the students to take learning defense into their own hands, rebelling against her and forming Dumbledore’s Army (*OP* 325, 339). As Sirius Black puts it, “better expelled and able to defend yourselves than sitting safely in school without a clue” (*OP* 371).

Umbridge tries and fails to suppress the students’ rebellion, but Hogwarts itself is ultimately on their side, hiding them in the Room of Requirement (*OP* 386) and eventually locking Umbridge out of the Headmaster’s Office to keep her from taking over the school entirely (*OP* 625). Umbridge’s totalitarian methods of teaching and discipline are frowned upon by Hogwarts teachers and readers alike. She routinely comes head to head with Minerva McGonagall and the narrator reminds the reader of her corporal punishment, repeatedly referencing the scars on the back of Harry’s hand that read “I will not tell lies” from the time Umbridge made him write lines using his own blood as ink (*OP* 267). In fact, Umbridge, who professes to be reforming Hogwarts, is the only professor to perform an Unforgivable Curse on a student (*OP* 746). As with the tension between the Hogwarts houses, Umbridge makes it clear that sometimes the dangers at school are not external forces.
Umbridge’s worst nightmare is Albus Dumbledore. As a teacher, Dumbledore is neither totalitarian nor restrictive in his methods. He encourages students to ask questions and to pursue the truth. While Umbridge restricts the flow of information at Hogwarts with increasing severity, going so far as to forbid teachers to give students information not directly related to the classes they teach (OP 551), for the most part Dumbledore is open and frank with his students when he believes they need knowledge he has to offer. He maintains an air of mystery, but he is also forthcoming with information, even information that other adults are uncomfortable giving to children. For example, when Cedric Diggory is murdered, Dumbledore addresses the school to announce that Voldemort has returned and killed the boy:

The Ministry of Magic...does not wish me to tell you this. It is possible that some of your parents will be horrified that I have done so—either because they will not believe me or they think I should not tell you so, young as you are. It is my belief, however, that the truth is generally preferable to lies... (GF 722)

Umbridge and Dumbledore represent two extreme approaches to the unspeakable in the series, depicting the discomfort that access to some information can cause.

Eve Sedgwick writes, “At its simplest the unspeakable appears on almost every page (of the Gothic): ‘unutterable horror’: ‘unspeakable’ or ‘unutterable’ are the intensifying adjectives of choice in these novels. At a broader level, the novels deal with things that are naturalistically difficult to talk about” (14). Through the unspeakable, objects of fear remain unnamed, with ambiguous borders, and thus become more frightening because they lack clarity. Unspeakability is like a rhetorical miasma, creating anxiety through secretive language. Unspeakable topics pervade Harry Potter. For example, the Dursleys forbid any talk of magic and they never allow Harry to ask questions about his parents, whose magical abilities were too abnormal for them to
comfortably discuss: “Don’t ask questions—That was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys” (SS 20). At the Ministry of Magic, there is a Department of Mysteries where employees are called “Unspeakables,” “because no one really seems to know what they do in there” (OP 539). Harry is concerned about someone slipping him Veritaserum (a potion that makes people tell the truth) because of all the secrets he is afraid he’d divulge (GF 517).

The most prominent example of the unspeakable is the unwillingness of witches and wizards to speak Voldemort’s name. Throughout the series, whenever Voldemort is brought to mind, people become particularly anxious, referring to him as “He-who-shall-not-be-named” or “You Know Who.” Even Harry, raised in Muggle society, begins to feel a “prickle of fear” when You-Know-Who is mentioned (SS 107). When Voldemort returns, there is a large faction of the wizarding community, lead by the Ministry of Magic, who will not discuss or even admit that You-Know-Who is back. Minister Fudge’s reaction, “opening and closing his mouth as though no words could express his outrage” is especially demonstrative of the unspeakable nature of Voldemort’s return (GF 707). Voldemort’s very name becomes charged with all the anxieties the community feels—about loss of family, use of unforgivable violence, racism in the wizarding world, government corruption—so his name becomes unspeakable.

Dumbledore recognizes the power of the unspeakable, that in refusing to name something and give it definite boarders, the object of anxiety only becomes more frightening because of the ambiguity it is thus provided. “Call him Voldemort, Harry,” Dumbledore says. “Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself” (SS 298). Dumbledore even goes so far as to call Voldemort Tom, his given name. In doing so, he acknowledges that behind the unspeakable image of “You-Know-Who” and the terror associated with his assumed name, Lord Voldemort, there is a former student who was once powerless: “to me, I’m afraid
you will always be Tom Riddle. It’s one of the irritating things about old teachers. I’m afraid they never quite forget their charges’ youthful beginnings” (HBP 442).

Dumbledore becomes the speaker of the unspeakable in Harry Potter, unafraid to address the issues, however terrible other people may find them. He does not actively keep information from students unless for their own good. Harry is the one exception and he is only kept ignorant because of Dumbledore’s love for him, not because Dumbledore views him as incapable of handling the truth (OP 838-39).

Even though Dumbledore is strong and wise in his verbal assaults on the Gothic threats of the series, he is physically limited in his protection of the students. As the fight against Voldemort grows more dangerous throughout the final two books, so does life in the castle. Nothing can stop students from aligning with their Death Eater parents as Voldemort builds his army again. Security is tightened one hundred-fold with anti-intruder jinxes and other precautions (HBP 159), but still, dangers lurk in the castle and the neighboring village of Hogsmede. Students have anxious correspondence with their parents and are withdrawn from school with increasing frequency (HBP 219-220). Hagrid, the gameskeeper, most acutely states the concerns over the threats to the children, “It’s terrible...all this new security, an’ kids still gettin’ hurt...Dumbledore’s worried sick...He don’ say much, but I can tell” (HBP 404). Not even Dumbledore, however, can protect the boundaries of the castle and the innocence of his students. After his death, it is left to the children to fight back against Umbridge and Snape, who are left in charge of the school, and eventually against Voldemort’s army in the Battle of Hogwarts. Again they are made traveling heroines, forced to act out because of the threats to their safety made right under the noses of their often helpless guardians. Because adults like Umbridge and Snape refuse to tell them the truth, to speak the unspeakable as Dumbledore did,
the children are forced to act as traveling heroines, displaying an activity and an agency not usually associated with innocence. They are vulnerable, but they are not naïve.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF GOOD AND EVIL: HOGWARTS AND MORAL EDUCATION

Hogwarts offers its students an education in both magic and morals. The lessons taught by professors such as Dumbledore, McGonagall, and even Snape, offer a guiding hand in teaching students what, to them, is good and evil. The series is steeped in a consistent construction of what makes a good person and a bad person, centered upon the concepts of free will and selflessness.

David and Catherine Deavel argue that in *Harry Potter*, “Evil does not really exist in itself, but is a privation, a lacking in what something is supposed to be. It is a lacking of what is good” (132). Based on the teachings of Augustine of Hippo, they further make the distinction that there is a difference between simple lacking and privation: “When something that is part of being a healthy, flourishing human (or house-elf or whatever) is lacking to it, then we have not just an absence, but a privation” (133). In the *Potter* books, the evil characters are usually lacking in compassion for other people, their quest for power leading them to sacrifice or take advantage of others for their own gain. For example, Barty Crouch, Jr. keeps Mad Eye Moody locked in a trunk all year, assuming his identity in order to carry out Voldemort’s plan to murder Harry, in hopes that helping Voldemort will help himself in the end (*GF* 679-81). Voldemort consistently uses other people to further his quest for domination. He expects Wormtail to give up his hand (*GF* 641-42), lives as a parasite on Quirrell (*SS* 291), and exploits the homes and resources of his followers (*DH* 8-9). The common thread in the evil deeds of Voldemort and the Death Eaters is that they transgress the rules and abuse other people as a conscious choice in order to get ahead: “Although boggarts and dementors chill us because of the kind of creatures
they are, Voldemort chills us most because he is one of us and represents the possibility of choosing evil freely. He represents a choice to forsake living a life of abundance, giving and receiving love, for a life of simply taking by force or deceit from another’s life” (Deavel 136).

The construction of good and evil in *Harry Potter* pushes the boundaries of our own society’s morality. In a capitalist society that often lauds “taking care of number one” and the dog-eat-dog nature of industry, the popularity of a series that promotes the idea that getting ahead at another person’s expense is immoral, potentially evil, raises questions about how we construct morality and how closely we adhere to our own constructions. The morality of the series has a potential to be edgy, even countercultural, as it promotes other-centeredness and the primacy of community in opposition to individualistic business culture.

Jennifer Hart Weed argues that the self-destructiveness of Voldemort’s evil leads him to more depravity as he loses the sense of good and evil: “Voldemort denies the very existence of good and evil (SS 291)…Voldemort either refuses to distinguish between good and evil or he lacks the ability to make such a distinction, just like an animal. Indeed, Voldemort deems all things permissible in his quest for power, including killing children” (153). I argue instead that Voldemort agrees that killing children and preying on the weak or emotionally/mentally unstable are evil and does so anyway. He takes pleasure in the evilness of his actions. He and his followers torture people for fun or simply to warn others of their power (GF 120). In fact, during Voldemort’s first reign, many Muggles were murdered just for entertainment (GF 143). Voldemort agrees with the series’ construction of evil as a lacking of compassion and as a conscious choice to do harm to others. He uses Harry’s goodness to bait him to the Department of Mysteries, leading him to believe he is going to save Sirius. Voldemort recognizes that Harry is both brave enough and caring enough to risk his life to save his godfather, and uses this virtue
against him, calling it foolishness instead. Voldemort acknowledges good and evil. He simply does evil anyway, believing that compassion is weakness, and taking pleasure in the power he has when he abuses others. In this respect, Voldemort is more frightening both as a monster and as a depiction of immorality. If Voldemort is evil because he chooses to do wrong knowingly, and believing that what he is doing is in fact wrong, what does that imply about the reader who also chooses to do the wrong thing? If we do not uphold our own moral standards are we not simply hypocrites, but also monsters?

As a villain, Voldemort is a powerful tool for drawing moral boundaries. In Gothic fictions, monsters often haunt the borders of social norms, designating how far one can venture from the center before he or she goes too far (Cohen 12). Again, this emphasis on the potential pitfalls of ambition brings capitalist culture into tension. In a society that values ambition and those who take the initiative to get ahead, the reader may find the series raising questions about how far he or she would go to meet goals. It is not pleasant to think that one may not be so far from becoming a Death Eater too. That the lines are not clearly drawn makes the anxiety even greater. In the series it is okay to be ambitious, just not as ambitious as Voldemort. It is okay to break the rules in order to help other people, but not just to help oneself. People can be powerful, but if they become too powerful they are often corrupted.

In this respect, the struggle between good and evil can be a teaching device for young readers. Because the series experiments with the boundaries of morality through the tension caused by both war and the monstrous in Voldemort, it creates a framework for readers to think about and explore their own concepts of morality in a safe, non-threatening way. By displacing difficult or uncomfortable issues onto magical people and creatures, the series allows the reader to think about complicated issues in a new way. The clearest example of this process is the way
the series deals with racism. With wizards coming from a variety of family forms—Mudblood, Half-Blood, pure-blood—snobbery and tension exists based upon bloodlines and breeding. Many pure-bloods look down on Half-Bloods and Mudbloods, names that are nothing short of slurs. These are usually the wizards who are also aligned with Voldemort and his vision of a master race of pureblooded wizards. Ironically, Voldemort is a Half-Blood himself, as is Harry, but he still wishes to eliminate Half-Bloods and Mudbloods, perhaps abjecting from himself his parentage, the part of his past that causes him the most pain (OP 784). Voldemort’s ambition to purify the wizarding race bears striking resemblance to Hitler’s desire to create a master Arian race (Hitler also failed to meet his own requirements). Alarmingly, the reader is informed that Voldemort had support from a significant portion of his community, but people “got cold feet when they saw what he was prepared to do to get power” (OP 112). Here also are echoes of Nazi Germany, in which people supported Hitler until they discovered the mass destruction he was capable of. The correlation between racism based upon bloodline and leanings toward dark magic creates a lesson plan for readers to examine their own prejudices based upon family or ethnicity, especially questioning whether or not they have prejudices that could be potentially dangerous.

In the series, prejudice based upon race is more complicated, as both characters constructed to be good and those considered evil express prejudices against different races of magical creatures. Hermoine, a Mudblood who comes to Hogwarts with no knowledge of other magical races other than what she’s read in books, becomes the mouthpiece of pluralism and acceptance in the series, expressing disgust for stereotypes against giants and werewolves (GF 433-34) and working to free the enslaved house elves (GF 224). Hermoine receives some resistance, even from her best friends. When she first brings up the idea that house elves are
slaves, Ron points out that the house elf Winky is happy and does not want to be free (*GF* 125). Even Harry agrees with Ron, only joining Hermione's efforts not to hurt her feelings. Ron's argument echoes similar arguments from white American slaveholders during the emancipation movements of the 19th century. Further, racial prejudice is also expressed by non-human races. The centaurs prefer to separate themselves from wizards and trolls view wizards as thieves. Because prejudice is treated as a complicated issue that works in multiple directions and is voiced by characters who are otherwise compassionate, loyal, and brave, the reader is forced to think more critically about the issue. The reader should not simply dismiss Ron as a bad person because he has prejudices. In that way, readers are asked to also evaluate themselves for similar lines of thinking.

To bring the moral lessons home, evil in *Harry Potter* often victimizes those who would be among the series' readers. Voldemort's victims are frequently innocents and children. He intends to murder one year-old Harry because of the prophecy that the boy will defeat him (*OP* 839). After he comes back,他 uses children as agents of his evil, first possessing Ginny Weasley, then manipulating Draco Malfoy. Other forms of innocence fall victim to Voldemort's ambition, such as the unicorns he murders in order to drink their blood for its restorative properties (*SS* 256). In the end, though, Voldemort's choice to prey on innocents for his own ambitions leads to self-destruction, as evil always does in the series (Weed 155-57). Drinking the unicorn blood tarnishes Voldemort's soul: "You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life from the moment the blood touches your lips" (*SS* 258). But that only foreshadows the horror of the Horcruxes, by which Voldemort splits his soul into seven pieces in an attempt to ensure his immortality. Voldemort's evil deeds diminish his
humanity. He sought to be higher than the rest of his kind, but in the end he becomes subhuman both in appearance and mentality.

The Deavels write, “We are evil only if we choose evil. Here, the Potter books again follow Augustine and Thomas Aquinas: moral evil results from free choice of will. Our choices involve privation when we choose lesser goods over greater goods” (144). While the choice of evil is exemplified through Voldemort, the choice of good is shown through Harry’s bildungsroman. As the connection between Harry and Voldemort through his scar becomes stronger, it begins to effect Harry’s emotions. In a very real way, Voldemort and his evil are invading Harry’s mind. As his scar burns after a nightmare, “unbidden, unwanted, but terrifyingly strong, there rose within Harry a hatred so powerful he felt, for that instant, that he would like nothing better than to strike—” (OP 474-75). This invasion comes more indirectly also, as Harry worries about the effects the grief and anxiety Voldemort puts him through will have on him. He worries that he will turn bad from bitterness as Voldemort may have. After the death of Sirius, he even protests that he doesn’t want to be human if that means he will suffer such pain (OP 824). Dumbledore reminds him, though, that he does want to be human and he does care about other people (OP 824). Harry consistently chooses to keep helping other people, working to defeat Voldemort at his own cost and risk, a choice that echoes his first decision at Hogwarts, asking the Sorting Hat to put him in Gryffindor, not Slytherin, explicitly because every wizard to go bad has come from the latter. He chooses courage over ambition. This choice is a decision Harry can take comfort in, as a marker of his own control over his character (CS 333). The importance of Harry’s struggle with Voldemort and the issues of abjection, doubling, and morality it raises are important to the thesis of this paper and will be discussed in more depth later.
Professor Quirrell describes himself as a young man who was influenced by Voldemort’s vision of power. He says, “There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it…” (SS 291). The construction of good and evil in the series is not only connected to a lacking of compassion, but also to the use or abuse of power, again emphasizing the importance of choice. For example, Dumbledore is the only wizard who Voldemort every really feared (SS 55). He is both powerful and noble (SS 11), choosing to use his powers for good means to help others, rather than selfishly and callously to suit his own purposes. When the controversial biography about Dumbledore, *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore* by Rita Skeeter, is released, it is scandalous because it presents Dumbledore as a young man with many of the same goals as Voldemort. In his youth, Dumbledore had ambitions to use his power to take over the Muggles, claiming it was for their own good. He sought to dominate the world as Voldemort does (DH 357). The difference between the two wizards, however, is that Dumbledore comes to see that his plans would be harmful, should they come to fruition, and chooses to abandon them, turning to the role of a teacher instead. Dumbledore *chooses* to do good rather than evil. The Deavels write, “Voldemort has powers Dumbledore will never have, but the opposite is also true. Dumbledore has the power of nobility, a good character and high moral ideals. He can see the world clearly in a way that is completely impossible for Voldemort” (137). Dumbledore’s past, made known in the last installment in the series, causes discomfort for the reader, as well as for Harry, because his youthful indiscretions tarnish the image of infallibility he is presented with for the majority of the series. Still, however, Harry is able to move past his disappointment, and so, it seems, should the reader. Dumbledore grows beyond his youthful ambitions and becomes the model of wisdom and virtue in the series, despite his past, because he makes conscious choices to act selflessly and compassionately. He also consciously limits his own ambitions, knowing the danger they once
posed to him. He could easily be the Minister of Magic, but instead chooses to remain the Headmaster of Hogwarts. Ultimately, the series disproves Quirrell's statement, attesting that there is no good and evil, only power and those without strong enough morals to resist it.

The moral construct of the series is often complicated by good people who do problematic things or by actions that themselves are not wrong, but have undesirable results. For example, Weed writes, “According to Augustine, goodness is prior to evil. Evil is not a thing that exists on its own; evil exists as a parasite on goodness. For example, the love that Petunia Dursley has for her son, Dudley, is good. But her habit of indulging Dudley's every wish and whim to the point of spoiling him is bad” (Weed 149).

Love is consistently constructed as the greatest good in the series—not only the maternal love of Lilly Potter, but also the friendship of Harry, the compassion he feels for his fellow students, and the loyalty they show for one another. Dumbledore tells Harry: “Yes, Harry, you can love. Which, given everything that has happened to you, is a great and remarkable thing. You are still too young to understand how unusual you are…” (HBP 509). Love can go wrong, however, when it is directed toward the wrong object—power or money. Dumbledore routinely has problems with Ministers of Magic whose love of power blinds them from the truth. When Fudge refuses to acknowledge that Voldemort has returned, Dumbledore says, “You are blinded...by the love of the office you hold, Cornelius!” (GF 708). When Barty Crouch was the Minister the first time Voldemort rose to power, he fought fire with fire and allowed the use of Unforgivable Curses, an act that is condemned by Dumbledore although Crouch himself is not (GF 527).

The good/evil binary is also complicated by the use of things connected to evil for good means. For example, Hermione innovates galleon coins that signal when Dumbledore’s Army is
meeting, using the same magic that Voldemort uses in the Death Eaters’ tattoos (OP 399). Her magic is ingenious, but it is also unsettling to her peers because of its connection to powerful dark magic. Still, the galleons are used to good ends and thus are not considered evil by the students or teachers at Hogwarts.

When Amycus, a Death Eaters’ pawn sent to teach at Hogwarts, suggests sacrificing a few students to save trouble with Voldemort, he asks “Couple of kids more or less, what’s the difference?” Professor McGonagall responds, “Only the difference between truth and lies, courage and cowardice...a difference, in short, which you and your sister seem unable to appreciate” (DH 593). Throughout the series, the students at Hogwarts are held accountable for their actions and the motives behind them as their professors seek to teach them that greatness and ambition are laudable, but ruthlessness and selfishness are not. The school upholds the ideals of others-centeredness, courage, loyalty, and service, maintaining that, especially with great power, good and evil are choices, not innate qualities. How the children of the series are educated and shaped to make these choices by their families will be discussed later.

**Innocence in Rebellion Part I: Protecting Harry**

It is notable that like the traveling heroine who steps out of bounds to escape danger, in *Harry Potter* the innocent child fights back against both overprotection and evil. Children of Gothic literature typically rebel (K. Ellis 4) and it is a common device in children’s literature to protect the innocence of the young while at the same time innovating to give them a “clever weapon with which to fight their attackers” (Jackson 7). The innocence of the children in *Harry Potter* often leaves them open and susceptible to abuse or attack. Because they are young, the students are impressionable and often easily lead by those around them. Ginny Weasley was
possessed by Voldemort through the diary in *Chamber of Secrets* not only because she did not know enough to be skeptical, but also because sibling rivalry and the desire to stand out from her family made her pride vulnerable to the encouragement Tom Riddle gave her through the diary. This emotional vulnerability is both foreshadowed and echoed by Ron when he sees himself as the Head Boy and Quidditch Champion in the Mirror of Erised in *Sorcerer's Stone* and is taunted by Voldemort through the Horcrux in *Deathly Hallows*. Ginny is noted for her strength; George Weasley uses her as proof that “size is no guarantee of power” (*OP* 100). Thus, her vulnerability does not come from any inherent lack of power or ability, but rather from her youth and naivété. While Harry, Ron, and Hermione are not much older than Ginny, they are more aware of the dangers threatening them and more educated in defense against it. This knowledge keeps their youth and physical/emotional vulnerability from becoming the weakness it is for Ginny.

The series seems to be full of moments in which characters prove themselves to be small but mighty. In fact, the powers of children are often underestimated by adults in the series. For example, Severus Snape chastises Harry:

[F]ools who wear their hearts on their sleeves, who cannot control their emotions, who wallow in sad memories and allow themselves to be provoked this easily—weak people, in other words—they stand no chance against his powers! [Voldemort] will penetrate your mind with absurd ease, Potter! (*OP* 536)

He criticizes Harry as weak for a characteristic that is simply common to adolescents—moodiness. Snape is also somewhat wrong about Harry’s power, as the previous school year Harry showed promise in fighting the Imperious Curse, something which requires great force of mind and with which even grown wizards struggle (*GF* 232).
Ironically, it is the innocence of the children that acts as their weapon in *Harry Potter*. Harry and friends are not better wizards or witches than the enemies they face; they are not cleverer or stronger. They are, however, more innocent and thus, in Rowling's epic, more capable of seeing creative solutions and able to overcome opposition without the bitterness that leads to self-defeat in dark magic. In the series, innocence is determinedly connected to the ideals of what is good. While adults may agree that serving others, hard work, courage, and loyalty are good, they are also aware that taking advantage of others is an option, even if it makes one a "bad person." Innocence, however, seems to stem from the way the children view what is good as what is natural. The threat to innocence, then, comes from opening the eyes of a child to the possibility of power through prejudice, exploitation, or treachery, actions that seem unnatural and especially sinister to innocent children like Harry and Hermione. The struggle between innocence and the disenchantedness of Voldemort and his followers is especially poignant in Harry's struggle with Voldemort and his fear of becoming like the Dark Lord. Perhaps it is the naturalness they find in fighting evil that makes children successful where the previous generation failed. Voldemort's vision of a pure-blood master race and promises of power and glory seem empty to Harry and his friends from the start. It is still their choice to do good, but they firmly believe that to choose Voldemort is inferior and unnatural. They are not tempted by Voldemort as their forefathers were, and those, like Draco Malfoy, who do turn to Death Eaters were never seen as friends to begin with. Their battle lines are already clearly drawn for them and they seem to effortlessly know what side of the line they fall on.

The innocent children, with their open minds, warm hearts, and resolute determination to fight for good, are able to fight back against both the adults who try to limit their attempts to fight and the adults who threaten the goodness of the world as they know it. This dynamic calls
for a reassessment of the innocent child: “Perhaps they are not blank slates after all, or, if they are, all the protection in the world can’t keep them from the tangled web of what we once located as a teratology, but might have to revise into a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be human” (Jackson 7). In Harry Potter, the children need the loving guidance of their guardians and mentors, not their stifling overprotectiveness. They are forced to live in a world under attack. That their parents fought the same foe and failed to defeat him for good heightens the reality of the threat for both adults and children, but the children are determined to protect themselves, their friends, and their families. In this fight, they need to be allowed to grow up on their own terms, and if they are not explicitly allowed to do so, they will cleverly or aggressively find a way around the rules.

Specifically, Harry Potter himself is engaged in a continual argument with his guardians, such as Albus Dumbledore and Molly Weasley, over the extent of knowledge they allow him to have and the degree to which he is allowed to participate in the growing resistance against Voldemort. As the series progresses, the issues become more complicated, as more information is uncovered about the inherent responsibility Harry has in the resistance, as well as the breadth of knowledge Dumbledore keeps secret from him regarding his fate as “the chosen one.” Because Harry is chosen to defeat Voldemort, he must break school rules and travel to distant lands, like the traveling heroine, in order to fulfill his destiny. He is forced to overstep the normal boundaries of childhood and achieve more than is normally expected of a child. On the other hand, because he is young, Dumbledore struggles to protect Harry. Dumbledore poignantly describes to Harry why he decided to wait each year to tell him about the prophecy, hoping to allow him one more year of innocence, ignorant of the fullness of his duties:

I cared about you too much...I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives that
might be lost if the plan failed. In other words, I acted exactly as Voldemort expects we fools who love to act...And now, tonight, I know you have long been ready for the knowledge I have kept from you for so long, because you have proved that I should have placed the burden upon you before this. My only defense is this: I have watched you struggling under more burdens than any student who has ever passed through this school, and I could not bring myself to add another—the greatest one of all. (OP 838-39)

Dumbledore is torn between the innocence he sees in Harry, through the boy’s ability to love and to forgive, and the strength he knows the boy has to face the duties at hand. Harry is physically vulnerable because of the danger Voldemort poses to him and emotionally vulnerable because of the enormous pressure the prophecy places on him. In this way, his innocence is tested by both softness in fear and the temptation to become hardened through pride. Harry, however, remains vulnerable, although not ignorantly so.

Like Dumbledore, Molly Weasley and Sirius Black engage in a similar debate when Harry attempts to get information out of the Order of the Phoenix. As a maternal figure, Molly is keen on reminding Harry and others that he is still just a boy and it is not his business to do battle. Sirius, on the other hand, still plays the role of the rebellious teenager that he played along with Harry’s father, James. Continually, he is reminded by Molly and other Order of the Phoenix members that Harry is not James (OP 88-89). Harry gets stuck in the middle, frustrated by the limitations put on his knowledge and acting as the rebellious teenager Sirius pushes him to be:

‘So that’s it, is it?’ he said loudly. ‘Stay there? That’s all anyone could tell me after I got attacked by those dementers too! Just stay put while the grown-ups sort it out, Harry! We won’t bother telling you anything, though, because your tiny little brain might not be able to cope with it!’ (OP 495)

This tension becomes especially piqued as the series progresses into the teen years of Harry and friends. While standing on the border between childhood and adulthood, Harry is in a volatile liminal phase, in which he deals not only with girls and homework, but also with questions about
what sort of man he will grow up to be. He grapples with the maturing tasks of deidolizing his father, controlling his mind, and learning about the ambiguity of life—"people are not all good or Death Eaters" (OP 302). As Harry grows in this phase, he tries to push his way into adulthood and the Order of the Phoenix, while adults push back, trying to keep him safe in the realm of childhood, where they think they can protect him.

The importance of Harry's childhood is emphasized by nothing more than by the protective charm put on him by his mother. The magic of his mother's sacrifice lasts only until the moment Harry turns seventeen, the official age of adulthood in the wizarding community (DH 35). Although readers are left with baited breath for the real moment of Harry's coming of age—the defeat of Voldemort, a moment in which Harry's parents again play a crucial part—Harry's seventeenth birthday marks the moment in which he is thrust out of the realm of boyhood and his mother's protection, even if he has yet to prove himself as a man.

**Harry and Voldemort as Doppelgangers**

Harry's relationship with Voldemort reveals much about both men's self-perceptions, fears, and growth. The doubling relationship and the role the abject plays in it, creates an arena of conflict in which Harry defines who he wants to grow up to be and how he will do so. In psychology, the abject is that which a person wishes to remove from the self. Literally, abjection means "throwing off," and consists of undesirable aspects that are forcefully psychologically removed from one's person (Kristeva 4). Abjection is similar to repression, but where repression can be subtle, abjection often evokes violent emotions. In Gothic texts, elements of a person or society that are abjected usually return in the form of a monster or a double in whom the hero has to face that which he does not want to see in himself (Freud 142-44). Voldemort embodies the abject in *Harry Potter*. He is "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a
hatred that smiles... a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you...” (Kristeva 4). As such, he is the bad against which Harry evaluates good. Harry determines who he is going to grow up to be against Voldemort precisely because Harry sees an uncanny resemblance between himself and the Dark Lord. The doubling between them begins when Harry is sold his wand, discovering that the phoenix feather inside of it was given by a phoenix who gave only one other feather—to Voldemort (SS 85). It is later revealed that “brother wands” will not work against each other, strengthening the connection of the wands and temporarily protecting Harry from Voldemort (and vice versa)(GF 697). At his sorting into Hogwarts, Harry could have been sorted into either Slytherin or Gryffindor, but he pleads with the Sorting Hat to sort him into Gryffindor because he does not want to become a dark wizard (SS 121). His sorting is in part his own choice. The following year, Harry discovers that his ability to talk to snakes, parlsetongue, is rare and is also an ability Voldemort has (CS 199). Later, as he learns more about Voldemort’s past, Harry notes the similarity between their childhoods as both of them were orphaned in infancy (HBP 262). Voldemort and Harry are both obsessed with their families (HBP 362). Although Harry’s obsession stems from a longing for a missing family, while Voldemort is concerned with the purity of his bloodline. Both Harry Potter and Tom Riddle were attached to Hogwarts more than any other place:

“Hogwarts was where [Tom Riddle] had been happiest; the first place he had felt at home.”

Harry felt slightly uncomfortable at these words, for this was exactly how he felt about Hogwarts too. (HBP 431)

For the boys, much of their affection for Hogwarts stems from their reception there. Dumbledore comments that Tom was a handsome, talented orphan who easily won the favor of his teachers
and Harry also had a warm welcome by faculty, with the exception of Professor Snape.

Doubling is not just about likeness; doppelgangers also present an irresolvable tension in which the inside and the outside life become "counterparts rather than partners" (Sedgwick 13). For all the similarities between the lives of Harry and Voldemort, the internal aspects of each keep them separate, keep Voldemort abject. Dumbledore tells Harry, "That power (love) saved you from possession by Voldemort, because he could not bear to reside in a body so full of the force he detests. In the end, it mattered not that you could not close off your mind. It was your heart that saved you" (OP 844). While Harry wishes to be ordinary but cannot because of his famous connection to Voldemort, Voldemort wished to distance himself from anything ordinary. Voldemort's deepest desire was to distinguish himself from others. Thus, he changed his name, disowning his Muggle father, and rose to the Dark Arts (HBP 277).

Still, the connection between himself and Voldemort haunts Harry, as Voldemort represents what Harry fears about himself: "Abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (Kristeva 9). Thus, Harry is perpetually afraid of not only the physical danger Voldemort poses to him, but also that the similarities between himself and Voldemort will result in him becoming evil as well. Harry's deepest fear is not death, it is the darkness in his own personality (OP 480). In this way, Harry internalizes the constructions of good and evil in the series, abjecting the ambitious part of himself and the part that wants revenge, his inner Voldemort, desiring friendship and community instead. Harry is not able to totally abject the parts of himself that remind him of Voldemort, leading to both his horror at the likeness and his sympathy for the pain of Voldemort's past.
The connection between Harry and Voldemort through Harry’s scar weakens the physical boundaries between them. Harry can sense Voldemort’s emotions through the pain in his scar, a sense that gets much stronger as Voldemort himself gets stronger (OP 554). Voldemort even uses Harry’s blood to bring about his bodily resurrection (GF 642), which gives him the protection from Harry’s mother which has been keeping Harry safe during the proceeding years (GF 657).

The abjection, however, works both ways. Dumbledore tells Harry, “Voldemort himself created his worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do! Have you any idea how much tyrants fear the people they oppress? All of them realize that, one day, amongst their many victims, there is sure to be one who rises against them and strikes back” (HBP 510). As Harry fears the doubling between himself and Voldemort, Voldemort fears it also. Voldemort abjects his inner-child and the fact that he is a Half-Blood by trying to harm Harry. In Harry he sees the parts of himself that he hates, his orphanhood and the impurity of his blood, so he reacts violently against the boy, “throwing off” his own vulnerability by attacking Harry. The connection between the two creates a powerful motivation for Harry, besides revenge, for striking back at Voldemort. He is afraid to become a villain as well, seeing the potential for greatness and evil inside himself through the mirror of Voldemort and the temptation the Dark Lord poses to him. By fighting to defeat Voldemort, Harry also fights the darkness in himself.

**Voldemort as Monster:**

The more evil Voldemort becomes, the less human he looks, appearing more catlike or serpentine (GF 644) as he sacrifices his humanity in order to become immortal. He transforms from handsome young orphan to repulsive Dark Lord. Like Frankenstein’s creature, Voldemort becomes a human-monster hybrid unable to be categorized completely either way. He is a
human, but because of his shattered soul and animal-like appearance, it is uncomfortable to call him one of us.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that, “Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself; it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again” (4). The monstrosity of Voldemort indicates an underlying anxiety, and it is noteworthy that Voldemort’s descent into the Dark Arts began in adolescence, a time of liminality and a “clash of extremes.” Typically, monsters appear at times of crisis to add a third option that complicates the conflict (Cohen 6). Adolescence is itself a third option indicating that the adult/child binary is unsatisfactory. It is then no surprise that adolescents are often tormented by monsters in literature. For example, the victims in contemporary slasher movies are usually teenagers. There is also a literary tradition of making adolescence monstrous, especially female adolescence and menarche (Cummins 180, 182). Voldemort is never far from the adolescent Tom Riddle. He is stubborn, impatient, petulant, selfish, and often acts as though he knows everything. In short, Voldemort acts like a teenager, as though his trauma and bitterness stunted him, keeping him from leaving that liminal stage to become a man. As a monster, he acts as a bad adolescent in contrast to Harry’s good adolescent—a boy who grows, matures, asks for help, and values other people.

While Voldemort is obsessed with youth, he also devalues it, consistently underestimating the skills of Harry, leading to his own demise. Starting when he was a student at Hogwarts, Tom Riddle pursued a means of procuring eternal life, preserving himself as young forever, even if it took him to the ends of the earth and to the use of the darkest of dark magic. Voldemort sacrifices his humanity, his very soul, to achieve his goal of immortality, both
through the consumption of unicorn's blood and the creation of the Horcruxes. Like teenagers oblivious to their own mortality and adults obsessed with the loss of their youth, Voldemort has an imbalanced perception of life and humanity, abusing both for his own gain. As a monster blurs boundaries between personal and national (Cohen 10), perhaps in Voldemort the reader is to see criticism of contemporary society's obsession with youth and staying young.

As a monster, Voldemort is both attractive and repulsive. Cohen writes, "The simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster's composition accounts greatly for its continued cultural popularity, for the fact that the monster seldom can be contained in a simple, binary dialectic" (Cohen 17). Voldemort is charming and he uses his charisma well. The attraction/repulsion can be seen through the Death Eaters who surround him, both attracted to his power and how they could benefit by it, and afraid of how his magic could be used against them. Bellatrix Lestrange openly adores the Dark Lord even as she is jilted by him time and again, whenever she is not immediately useful. Youth is similar. Society is attracted to youth. It only takes opening a magazine or turning on the television to see that youth is sought after, adored, and exploited. At the same time, youth is often obnoxious, or worse, dangerous, as the young tempt the old or accidentally do harm to others through inexperience or naïveté.

Voldemort begs questions about the fetishization of youth as well as the underestimation of the ability of children: "These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them" (Cohen 20). As Voldemort has warped perceptions about innocence and longevity, so too may we.
The doubling between Harry Potter and Voldemort (Tom Riddle), beginning even in childhood, begs the question of whether the innocence that the adults are trying to protect is actually inherent after all. The figure of Voldemort as a sinister child, paired with Harry, a beloved and abused orphan, calls into question whether innocence in children comes from nature or nurture.

Both Harry and Voldemort have relationships with Albus Dumbledore which reveal aspects of their own characters as children, as well as information about the role other people played in their respective formations. Dumbledore acts as a mentor and guardian for Harry during his time at Hogwarts, mirroring the way he attempted to control the darkness growing in Tom Riddle. He failed with Riddle, however, looking back and wishing he could have found and rescued the innocence there: “The time is long gone when I could frighten you with a burning wardrobe and force you to make repayment for your crimes. But I wish I could, Tom...I wish I could...” (*HBP* 446).

The resilience associated with childhood is important to the success of Harry Potter where Tom Riddle fails. Both boys experience similar childhood trauma. Both are orphaned and raised in homes void of parental love. In fact, the trauma of Harry’s childhood is played out repeatedly each time Voldemort threatens him. Where Tom Riddle became bitter and malicious in response to his trauma, however, Harry develops, finding motivation to grow, rather than becoming emotionally stunted. Psychologist Misty Hook draws a comparison between Harry and Dumbledore’s pet phoenix, Fawkes, in which both Harry and Fawkes are reborn through destruction. For Fawkes, this destruction is flames; for Harry it is grief (91-92). Hook writes:

[Harry] has a rock-solid personal foundation upon which he can build in order to survive his terrible grief...Common thought holds that children who experience major loss will have psychological problems: they will become depressed, anxious, or act out. For many
children this is certainly the case, particularly for those who not only have to deal with the actual loss itself but also with poor parental care and other negative things...This is especially true for boys who lose both parents unexpectedly...Research suggests that this tendency toward dysfunction becomes even greater when grief is not dealt with appropriately. (92)

It makes sense then, that Fawkes is the phoenix who supplied the feather for both Harry's and Voldemort’s wands, as both experience trauma and grief (Hook 102). Only Harry, however, is able to use grief to his advantage, ensuring his victory over Voldemort through the humanity he gains from overcoming trauma (Hook 92). Conversely, “Voldemort allows his grief to consume him, and his soul becomes so unbearable that he has to separate parts of it from his body. Thus, he emerges literally as a shell of a man” (Hook 103). Hook is not alone in her analysis of Harry's story as one of resilience over trauma. Psychologist Laurie J. Pahel also argues that Harry Potter serves as a “useful metaphor for childhood abuse and neglect and for recovery through psychoanalytic treatment” (312).

Innocence in Rebellion Part II: Overprotecting Dudley

Harry's relationship to his foster family further depicts his resilience as well as ideas about how overprotecting children from adversity can be dangerous. The Dursleys, the dreaded aunt and uncle left to care for Harry, may also have had a positive influence on Harry's resilience, according to Hook. She argues that because the Dursleys had no idea of the significance of Harry in the wizarding world (and likely would have rejected him anyway), they keep him not only unindulged, but also emotionally humble. Further, the neglect and sometimes emotional abuse they subject Harry to provides him with a constant stream of obstacles to overcome. In short, without the Dursleys, Harry would have arrived at Hogwarts unaware that he
was emotionally capable of overcoming adversity and also unpracticed in his resilience (Hooks 95).

Certainly, the Dursleys leave Harry unspoiled. The contrast between their parenting of Dudley, their own son, and of Harry produces two very different children and adds a new twist to the series' tacit debate over the protection of children. While Vernon and Petunia Dursley neglect Harry, they overprotect and spoil their own son. Not only do they dote on him with verbal and physical affection, they indulge him with food and gifts. While Harry grows up expecting little, Dudley acts entitled to everything his parents lavish on him (SS 21-22). The boys' physical statures reflect their upbringings. Harry is gangly, even malnourished-looking, and usually treats others with gentleness. Dudley, on the other hand, is a large boy, at first pudgy, later a muscular heavyweight teen boxer (OP 11), who likes to throw his weight around, bullying Harry and others.

The reader is first introduced to Dudley on his eleventh birthday, on which he is only prevented from throwing a fit because he has one less present than the year before by a promise that his parents will buy him two more presents during the day, bringing the total to thirty-nine (SS 21). Each summer Harry spends at home is full of fresh reminders of the pampering of Dudley, the exception being the summer Dudley is put on a diet because he couldn’t fit into the uniform for his expensive prep school (GF 27).

When he visits the Dursleys’ to secure Harry a last summer under their roof before he comes of age, Albus Dumbledore blatantly states what the narrator had only hinted at for years:

I left [Harry] upon your doorstep 15 years ago, with a letter explaining about his parents’ murder and expressing the hope that you would care for him as though he were your own[...] You did not do as I asked. You have never treated Harry as a son. He has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands. The best that can be said is that he
has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy sitting between you. *(HBP 55)*

Dumbledore, the paragon of wisdom in the series, passes judgment on the Dursleys’ indulgence of Dudley, likening it to the abuse that the reader has observed Harry suffer at the Dursleys’ hands over the course of the first five books.

There is hope for Dudley though. As the Dursleys prepare to part from Harry for the last time, Dudley shows not only gratitude to Harry for saving his life from the Dementors *(OP 18-19, DH 40)*, but also genuine concern about his cousin’s well being. He first asks why Harry is not coming with them to safety and then responds to Harry’s assertion that the Dursleys do not realize his worth to the anti-Voldemort movement, “I don’t think you’re a waste of space” *(DH 39-40)*. The moment attempts to be touching, but the years of open hostility between Dudley and Harry make it more awkward than anything. Petunia’s overwhelming pride in her son’s single moment of sensitivity (“S-so sweet, Dudders...S-such a lovely b-boy...s-saying thank you”) leaves the reader wondering, as the Dursleys leave for good, just what type of adult Dudley will grow into *(DH 41)*. While Dudley’s farewell is ambiguous, the judgment on the Dursleys’ overprotective and overindulgent parenting is not. Harry, the humble child raised through their neglect, is a better man-to-be than their spoiled son.

Dudley embodies the Gothic convention of excess. Excess in the Gothic can serve to overwhelm the reader, creating feelings of oppression or fear because of the large scale of the setting, the subject, or the character. Excess, however, can be as easily funny as it is frightening (Botting 1-3). The right balance must be struck, because even in a frightening Gothic context, if excess is taken too far it may become humorous.

Dudley is especially excessive in his consumption. He eats excessively *(PA 16, GF 27, CS 2)*; his possessions are excessive *(PA 25)*; he consumes an excessive amount of television and
video games (PA 16). While Dudley is funny in the way Rowling seems to be lampooning the overindulgence of children by their parents, this very excess also makes his character alarming. The reader may be horrified by how spoiled Dudley is, but at the same time, the narrator may be indicting parents other than the Dursleys as well. As anxiety over childhood diabetes and the effect of television and video game consumption on children is prevalent in our media and our education systems, Dudley’s sweet tooth and couch potato habits are particularly frightening. His excess is funny, so long as the reader does not think too hard about it. Thus, as a Gothic character, Dudley also evokes ambivalence, the feeling of uncertainty that there is one meaning of a character or text (Botting 3). He could be comedic relief, but he could also be a cautionary tale.

This ambivalence over Dudley fits into a larger trend in children’s literature that the Gothic elements are often paired with comedy. The fears are presented as humorous, depicting the undesirable aspects of a character in a non-threatening way. Julie Cross writes, “A common humorous way of dealing with such fears is through grotesque caricatures… individuals who are made ridiculous through gross exaggeration and who possess no redeeming features seem unreal, almost comic-strip figures, and this provides comic distancing” (59). She further argues that the humor in children’s Gothic is a psychological device that helps children cope with the issues being addressed: “[Caricatures] can even provide psychological management of the uncanny by the comic as the caricature’s threat or its disturbing quality is diminished through comic ridicule” (60). While children may see in Dudley that too much television, greediness, or throwing tantrums is bad, he is still basically a comic character, subject to their ridicule. For parents, however, Dudley’s excess could be a warning about the detriments of spoiling, as the child made to do with less, Harry, turns out more grounded and heroic than his cousin. Even more
frightening, Dudley also reminds parents that even something as natural as protecting one's children can be taken too far. As the Dursleys overprotect Dudley, they seem to ruin him, putting him in danger of obesity, spoiling, and entitlement. As such, the series takes an ambivalent attitude toward the protection of children when no real danger is present.

**Blood and Parenting: The Role of Family**

As the central characters of the series are adolescents, still dependent on their parents, families are naturally a major part of *Harry Potter*. On a very basic level, Death Eaters come from bad families. No one is surprised when Draco Malfoy is a bully. Based upon his parents, snobbery appears to run in his pure bloodline. Lord Voldemort has a seriously dysfunctional family situation. His Muggle father abandoned his mother when he discovered she was a witch, and his mother then died of a broken heart, leaving him an orphan (*GF* 646).

The question of what makes a good family and what makes a bad family is as complicated as the question of what makes good and evil. In general, however, members of a good family are loyal to one another (see Lilly Potter dying for Harry and the Weasley siblings banding together), as well as to the tenants that make a “good person”—compassion and selflessness. While a good family is strong, a dysfunctional family falls apart as the members are tempted by power or made anxious by fear. If love is the primary virtue in the series, then it stands to reason that a family comprised of people who value ambition over familial love would have dysfunction. Thus, the good/evil binary applies to families as well as to individuals.

Sometimes, however, Death Eaters come from good families and good wizards come from bad families. This dynamic creates an eerie distrust, as family is used as a major mode of judging the alliance of a person during the war against Voldemort, but it does not always work.
For example, Sirius Black does not have the same pure-blood elitism or leaning toward the Dark Arts that the rest of his family has. On the other side, Barty Crouch, Jr. became a Death Eater despite the fact that his father is a high-ranking official at the Ministry of Magic. Barty, Jr. is particularly frightening because he uses his father, who may be flawed, but is basically good, as a means of forging an alliance with Voldemort: “The Dark Lord and I...have much in common. Both of us, for instance, had very disappointing fathers...very disappointing indeed. Both of us suffered the indignity, Harry, of being named after those fathers...” (GF 678). Barty Crouch, Sr. is noted earlier in the series for allowing the use of Unforgivable Curses to fight Voldemort the first time he rose to power (GF 527). If Crouch’s attitude toward violence as the Minister of Magic bears any relationship to his parenting, then the series seems to imply that parenting that does not follow the codes of morality established in the society of Harry Potter can produce children who act out as well. Crouch’s violence begets violence.

Harry’s father also causes him some anxiety as he matures. After he found out about his father’s trouble making and brave streak, Harry idolized James as a hero in the first war against Voldemort and as a talented student at Hogwarts. He views Professor Snape’s grudge against his father as just another unjustified hatred, indicating that Snape may still be a dark wizard. Snape continually compares Harry to James, citing arrogance, carelessness, and other faults as similarities (i.e. OP 305, 520). During a private lesson in which Harry is learning Legilimency to shield his mind from Voldemort, Harry taps into Snape’s mind, where he sees that Snape’s worst memory is of James taunting him, calling him Snevellus, and suspending him upside down, exposing him to other students (OP 648-50). Harry thinks, “For nearly five years the thought of his father had been a source of comfort, of inspiration. Whenever someone had told him he was like James he had glowed with pride inside. And now...now he felt cold and miserable at the
thought of him" (OP 653-54). Harry eventually comes to terms with the fact that his father was not perfect and, like everyone else, had the capacity to be cruel. In doing so he deidolizes his father and takes a step toward maturity, his compassion for Snape in the memory showing that he has the capacity to be a better man than his father.

Even Dumbledore, one of the most revered wizards in the world, has a questionable family history. His sister Ariana was a squib (a non-magical person born to magical parents), or just an invalid, depending on who tells the story. After years of taking care of her together, he and his brother Aberforth had a falling out at Ariana’s funeral, because Aberforth held him responsible for their sister’s death (DH 18-28).

When worried about people finding out that he is half-giant, Hagrid tells Harry, “Makes a diff’rence, havin’ a decent family...Me dad was decent. An’ your mum an’ dad were decent. If they’d lived, life woulda bin diff’rent, eh?...Whatever you say, blood’s important” (OP 564). Normally, bad families, such as the Malfoys, are focused on the importance of blood. To have a loveable character, especially one who would be considered impure, voice the importance of blood in determining character demands a second look. The series seems to waver on the importance of nature and nurture. For the most part, emphasis on bloodline implies that a person is a snob, or worse, a Death Eater. On the other hand, there is a definite trend for certain traits to run in families and run fast. For example, Harry is continually compared to his parents physically (OP 47) and Neville is examined by adults to see if he has any of his parents’ courage or talent (GF 603). Since Harry cannot control his appearance and Neville was not raised by his parents, these attributes are logically expected to be passed down by blood, not parenting. While blood does seem to play an important role in family alignment and resemblance, one cannot escape the
importance of parenting for the development of character in the novels. Bad people may produce
good children, but good people nearly always produce good children.

Good families are not perfect, however. The Weasleys are Harry’s surrogate family. Molly Weasley, mother of six already, regards Harry as another son (OP 90) and takes an active interest in looking out for him, whether it’s being outraged at the Dursleys’ treatment of Harry (GF 48), anger at him being forced to compete in the Triwizard Tournament (GF 328-29), or keeping him home as long as she can so he can’t go off to find Voldemort (DH 89, 109). Harry finds comfort in Molly’s maternal treatment of him, especially after tragedies such as Cedric Diggory’s death: “He had no memory of ever being hugged like this, as though by a mother. The full weight of everything he had seen that night seemed to fall upon him as Mrs. Weasley held him to her…” (GF 714). As caring a mother as she is, Molly’s family does have its flaws. Her younger children, especially Ron, seem to feel a constant need to compete with the others for attention and honor (GF 290). Fred and George seem to find their mother’s attempts to maintain order in the household more comedic than serious (although that may just be their personalities). In general, Molly seems to be frequently frantic, reduced to yelling to try to get anyone to listen to her, and never fully getting the respect she deserves (Goodfriend 81-83). For most of the series she offers mere moral support or guidance, sometimes acting as a hindrance, as her children go out and become heroes instead. Perhaps this is why her single heroic act, killing Belatrix Lestrange to save Ginny (“Not my daughter, you bitch!”) is so satisfying (DH 736).

In the series it seems like a mother’s primary, if not only, role is to live or die for her child. The epitome of the good mother in the series, Lilly Potter, gets most renowned for the protection her self-sacrifice for Harry affords him. Lilly Potter dying for Harry becomes the benchmark of love in the series and the key to defeating Voldemort at both the beginning and
end of Harry’s story. While Lilly is integral to her son’s success, the necessity of her death makes her role in his life completely passive and absent for the vast majority of the series.

Voldemort’s mother also died in his infancy. As a foil to Lilly Potter, she dies unwilling to live for her child. The grief of discovering that his mother was a witch and could have saved herself, had she really wanted to, exasperates the anger that turns Tom Riddle into a monster. Harry draws a connection between his mother and Voldemort’s:

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. ‘Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?’

‘No,’ said Harry quickly, ‘but she had a choice, didn’t she, not like my mother—’

‘Your mother had a choice too,’ said Dumbledore gently. (HBP 262)

The implication is that Voldemort’s mother made a bad choice, that her life should have been devoted to her child, and that Lilly Potter laying her life down for Harry makes her a superior mother. Again, the value of the mothers is connected to a conscious choice regarding their actions. Lilly knows she is dying for her son. Voldemort’s mother knew she could have lived.

Lilly Potter’s sister, Petunia Dursley, also lives for her family and her situation complicates the good mother/bad mother dichotomy, as Molly Weasley does. Although she is his last remaining blood relative, for most of his life, Harry fails to realize the connection he shares with Petunia through the loss of his mother, her sister. He only grasps this shared grief briefly when the family is threatened by Voldemort’s return:

And all of a sudden, for the first time in his life, Harry fully appreciated that Aunt Petunia was his mother’s sister. He could not have said why this hit him so powerfully at this moment. All he knew was that he was not the only person in the room who had an inkling of what Lord Voldemort being back might mean… (OP 38)

While she treats Harry badly, Petunia also refuses to let Vernon kick him out because it was her sister’s last request that Petunia raise him (OP 39-41). She spoils and pampers her son and
husband so much that her life is consumed by keeping house and cooking (SS 3, 7, 33, CS 2-5, PA 19-21, GF 26-27). Petunia is, by the 50's housewife model, a good mother. The fruits of her labor, an abused nephew and a bully of a son, however, indicate that something is amiss. Petunia complicates the paradigm in the series of a good mother living for her family, because although she devotes her whole life to her son, she is not a particularly sympathetic character.

Similarly, Narcissa Malfoy devotes a great deal of energy to saving Draco. She is forced to take a passive role, enlisting Snape to work for her, because she is trapped by both her husband and the threat Voldemort poses. She takes revenge on Voldemort for using her son by not telling him that Harry is still alive, enabling the boy to be carried back into the castle where he defeats Voldemort once and for all. Thus, it is the revenge of a mother that allows Voldemort to lose the war. Despite the lengths she goes to for her child and her last minute switching of alliance, Narcissa Malfoy is not really considered a great mother in the series either.

Dysfunctional families are a common theme in contemporary literature and film, but they are also a common device in Gothic literature, as with a dysfunctional family, threats can come from within the safe sphere as well as from without. With the tension of the war, other fractures can be caused. Percy Weasley's departure from his family makes it clear that even a strong family like the Weasleys can experience fractures. Percy had always been ambitious, rising through the ranks at Hogwarts and eventually becoming the Head Boy. After he graduated and got a job working for the Minster of Magic, he shows signs of how highly he values social status and ambition when he writes Ron a letter warning him not to associate with Harry any more because of all the rumors circulating about him (OP 298). Eventually, when word gets out about the Weasleys' involvement with the resistance, Percy leaves his family, severing nearly all communication with them and blaming his father's lack of ambition for the family's perpetual
budget problems as well \((OP \text{ 72})\). Because the Weasleys are a basically good family, loyal and forgiving of each other, they take Percy back when he returns during the Battle of Hogwarts \((DH \text{ 605-6})\).

As Voldemort rises to power, the threat to the family becomes a naturally common anxiety. Visually, this anxiety is made clear through all hands on the Weasleys’ clock indicating that each member of the family is in “Mortal Peril” at all times since Voldemort returned \((HBP \text{ 85})\). Slightly obsessed with family because of the loss of his parents, Harry is particularly anxious about the strain put on families: “It was Voldemort, Harry thought, staring up at the canopy of his bed in the darkness, it all came back to Voldemort...He was the one who had torn these families apart, who had ruined all these lives...” \((GF \text{ 607})\). In fact, for those members of the Order of the Phoenix who fought against Voldemort in the first war, many of their memories center on the horror of losing family members or coming home to a deserted house. Arthur Weasley remembers, “The terror [the Dark Mark] inspired...you have no idea, you’re too young. Just picture coming home and finding the Dark Mark hovering over your house, and knowing what you’re about to find inside...Everyone’s worst fear...The very worst...” \((GF \text{ 142})\).

**Compassion: Carrying Innocence into Maturity**

As Voldemort threatens to physically or emotionally destroy families, he also threatens the innocence of his child victims. The temptation he poses by offering power and glory to his followers threatens to destroy the innocence of students, especially adolescents like those in Slytherin who are naturally ambitious. As discussed above, the conflict over power in the series often indicates that having ambition is not bad, nor is actively seeking achievement. Rather, using violent or treacherous means to achieve the ends of one’s ambitions makes the desire for
success corrupting. The students at Hogwarts are vulnerable because they are bred in a highly competitive atmosphere that often assumes they know the difference between right and wrong, actively culturing different perspectives on achievement through sorting students into houses, while at the same time ignoring the disunity caused by this system. It is possible for students, then, to be led astray when seeking achievement because much of the ethical education at the school is carried out tacitly or through trial and error.

Draco Malfoy, the Hogwarts bully, becomes an example of a child exploited, as he is used by Voldemort to kill Dumbledore. Malfoy is a double victim, targeted both as a sacrificial lamb to get to Dumbledore and as an object in Voldemort’s revenge against the boy’s father, Lucious Malfoy. Again, in Draco’s case there are also adults trying to protect him, both his mother Narcissa and Professor Severus Snape. There are also those who deny that even Voldemort would use a 16 year old boy to carry out his evil plans.

Draco’s immaturity in taking on the task to murder Dumbledore is depicted through his unwavering pride in pursuing it. While his mother is grief stricken, fearing that her son will fail and consequently be murdered by Voldemort, Draco can think only of the glory he will bring to himself (HBP 6). His motives are starkly contrasted with the sensitivity toward parents’ feelings that Harry and Hermoine later show, but in them Draco also shows a striking naïveté.

As Draco’s confidence falters, he becomes increasingly the picture of naïveté abused. He starts to fade under the pressure of the challenge, growing pale and sickly (HBP 474) and, according to Moaning Myrtle, crying alone in the bathroom several times (HBP 522). For Draco there is no way out, especially after he fails to murder Dumbledore. When Dumbledore challenges him, asserting that he is not a murderer, that he is still innocent, Draco’s petulance betrays the very innocence that he denies (HBP 585-86).
Draco is made vulnerable because of the attitude toward achievement he learns from his parents. Their alliance with Voldemort's ideology of "do anything it takes to succeed" puts him in the position of falling into Voldemort's influence. His vulnerability as a child, however, saves him. Because Draco is still young and impressionable, the counteracting perspective Dumbledore articulates is able to penetrate the boy's faltering confidence. On the other hand, Lucious Malfoy, an adult hardened by experience and years of practicing Dark Arts, does not have the emotional vulnerability his son has and thus is unwilling to change. Draco is not a man; he is still a boy, but he is a boy trapped under the power of Voldemort's evil and his family's legacy of ambition. After Draco fails, Voldemort continues to use him, taking over the Malfoy family home, keeping Draco and his parents under the constant threat of his presence (DH 8). Hook observes,

Harry realizes that Malfoy is trapped by evil. Thus, Harry goes from hating Malfoy and wanting him beaten at all costs to having compassion for him. Thus, the losses that Harry experiences allow a seventeen-year-old boy who has rarely been shown compassion to develop some and give it to one of his worst enemies. (Hook 99).

Harry goes out of his way to save Draco twice during the Battle of Hogwarts, protecting the exploited child and giving him a chance to redeem himself.

In contrast to Malfoy's ambition and self-focused quest for glory, Harry and company begin to show their maturation as they realize the impact their actions have on the adults in their lives. When the Order of the Phoenix is staying at the Black family home, Molly Weasley takes on the task of getting rid of a boggart hiding in a chest of drawers. The boggart, which takes on the form of a person's worst fears, successively appears to Molly as each of her children and finally Harry, all murdered. Harry witnesses Molly facing the boggart until she is overcome by her distress and has to be saved by Remus Lupin (OP 177). For Harry, the scene drives home not
only the danger he is facing, but also the fact that his actions really do effect the adults concerned about him: "He felt older than he had ever felt in his life, and it seemed extraordinary to him that barely an hour ago he had been worried about a joke shop and who had gotten a prefect’s badge" (OP 178). Harry not only fears his maturity, he shows it through compassion for Molly and by acknowledging that in the adult situations he is facing, the worries of his childhood do not matter so much.

Harry displays similar maturity when he breaks up with Ginny Weasley in order to protect her while he is away from Hogwarts searching for the Horcruxes (HBP 646-47). He recognizes that Voldemort has used the people close to him as bait before, and sacrifices his feelings of attraction and affection toward her in order to protect her from harm, showing notable emotional maturity for a 16 year-old boy. His actions show maturity because he recognizes the complexity of others-centered behavior that he struggled with as a young boy breaking school rules to fight Voldemort. Breaking up with Ginny may hurt her in the short-term, but, as far as Harry knows, the long-term effects will be more positive. He sacrifices his own feelings for another person, seeing that he may have to hurt both himself and Ginny for her own good. Thus, maturity maintains the innocent primacy of doing the right thing, not necessarily the preferred thing, while acknowledging the complex situations that may arise in doing so.

Hermione also shows strides toward adulthood when she takes measures to protect her parents before she leaves Hogwarts. Rather than leave her parents vulnerable to attack from a magical community they are not part of, Hermione alters their memories and sends them to live safely in Australia until the war against Voldemort is over. If she fails and is killed, they will not remember her and therefore will not grieve her death (DH 96-97). She looks out for both their
physical and emotional well-being, showing a full grasp on the danger she is putting herself in and of the emotional consequences her actions could have on other people.

The series also depicts how childhood trauma can age a child, even if they remain innocent. The traumatized children in the series are in no way naïve, having experienced massive sadness at an early age, but, like their peers, they are still dedicated to fighting evil for innocent, selfless motives. Like Harry, Neville and Luna are both children who have experienced loss and trauma in their childhoods. As Harry’s double, Neville also lost both his parents to Voldemort, a tragedy that Harry does not fully feel the weight of until he sees Neville making a Christmas visit to his parents at St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, where they have been for 16 years since the Cruciatursus Curse drove them insane (OP 513-14). Like the Potters, the Longbottoms were heroes, and Neville also copes with living in the shadow of the past, being constantly compared to his parents by his grandmother. The prophecy about the child who would defeat Voldemort could have meant either Harry or Neville, and Harry is only the chosen one because Voldemort tried to kill him and ended up marking him as his equal (OP 842). Harry thinks, “Neville’s childhood had been blighted by Voldemort just as much as Harry’s had, but Neville had no idea how close he had come to having Harry’s destiny” (HBP 139). While Harry has nightmares frequently, Neville is shown lying awake at night (GF 227). In Neville the reader sees a version of what Harry could have been without the Dursleys and without a monster to fight. Neville copes with his childhood trauma quietly and still becomes a strong young adult, standing up to his peers when necessary (SS 272-73) and making friends, despite his awkwardness. Like Harry, Neville depicts the strength and the resilience of children.

Luna also depicts resilience in the face of childhood trauma. She saw her mother die in a freak magical accident when she was nine years old and thus she can see thestrals, a creature
invisible to those who have not seen death *(OP 446)*. The thestrals become a symbol of death encroaching on the innocence of childhood, as an increasing number of students can see them after witnessing murders related to Voldemort. “I’m surprised by how many people *could* see them...Three in one class—” Ron observes *(OP 450)*. Luna is avoided by her peers because she is a little odd, but Harry shows growing compassion toward her and the two connect through the sadness of their childhood and the way they are both sometimes treated as outsiders. In a way, the thestrals represent how grief alters the perspective of traumatized children like Luna and Harry, as well as how other people view them. Although Luna copes successfully with her childhood trauma, maintaining her optimistic perspective and recognizing that she still has a father who loves her very much, she also identifies with the thestrals. Luna notes that the thestrals are “quite gentle, but people tend to avoid them because they’re a bit different” *(OP film)*. Luna’s past is marked with darkness, even if she herself seems to radiate light with her white-blond hair, pale skin, and cheery, if spacey, outlook. Luna seems to complicate the notions that a happy childhood is one free from trauma or that an innocent child is necessarily a happy one. Luna emphasizes the good in her childhood, leading the reader to believe that she is basically happy, but there is sadness to her personality that complicates the portrayal of her as an innocent child.

**Vulnerability: Strength, Weakness, and Weapon**

Finally, the series concludes with Harry Potter coming of age, depicting how taking on the responsibilities of an adult and all the pressure, fear, and danger that comes with adulthood in his world at war has made Harry a man worthy of honor from the greatest wizards of his time. In the end, it is the children who triumph, earning not only their adulthood, but also the praise they
are due for saving their world through their childlike vulnerability, innocence, and compassion, accomplishing what the adults around them could not. Following the Gothic tradition, however, *Harry Potter* blurs the boundaries. There is no distinct moment in which Harry becomes an adult. In the last sections of the series he seems to oscillate between a child and an adult, and in the end it is hard to say which he is, if either. In this way, the series continues to blur the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, creating tension surrounding the climax of the series, as well as furthering the questioning of cultural ideas about childhood and adolescence.

As Harry goes to his death in order to save his friends and their families, the Resurrection Stone brings back the ghosts of his parents, Sirius, and other Order of the Phoenix members who have been martyred for the cause. He shares a moment with them that shows both his childlike innocence and the stoic maturity with which he faces his fate:

"You are nearly there," said James. "Very close. We are...so proud of you."
"Does it hurt?"
The childish question had fallen from Harry’s lips before he could stop it.
"Dying? Not at all," said Sirius. "Quicker and easier than falling asleep."[...]
He knew that they would not tell him to go, that it would have to be his decision.
"You’ll stay with me?"
"Until the very end," said James.[...]
Harry looked at his mother.
"Stay close to me," he said quietly.
And he set off. (*DH 699-700*)
Harry’s innocence is depicted in his “childish” question and in his desire to have his mother and father near him. His maturity, however, is shown in his willingness to sacrifice his life for the greater good, a selfless act that is his choice to make.

In the end, it is the legacy of Harry’s childhood as “the boy who lived” that defeats Voldemort once and for all. It is Harry’s innocence, his ability to love, his goodness, the things
associated most clearly with the early, child Harry Potter, that enable Harry to willingly go to his death at the hands of Voldemort and not actually die. Harry masters death not only because he is the rightful owner of all three Deathly Hallows, but also because for him death is not defeat. Harry’s life is not taken from him; he lays it down willingly. He dies to his childhood and thus, he is able to come back, once again “the boy who lived,” and also the man who will rid the world of Voldemort. His first and last encounters with Voldemort mirror each other. Both times Voldemort attacks Harry, aiming to kill, and both times Harry lives. Harry is the hero because he manages to blur adult and child characteristics together. He has the maturity, intellect, and strength to overcome obstacles, but also the innocent love, curiosity, and creativity of a child that are essential for him to defeat this particular monster. Again, the lines between child and adult are not stable and this blurring is essential for the success of the series’ hero.

At the start of the series, Harry is emotionally, intellectually, and physically vulnerable. His unknowing innocence puts him in physical danger because he does not know the threats he faces with Voldemort active again, or even threats posed to him by wizards like the Malfoys. Intellectually, he is vulnerable because at Hogwarts he is being introduced to a whole new culture and lifestyle, as well as a new skill set. Harry’s mind is open for forming and if the wrong people had become his mentors he could have turned out a very different boy. Emotionally, he is vulnerable as he learns more information about his important role in the defeat of Voldemort and about how he really became an orphan. This knowledge not only opens him up to pain, it also creates the possibility for him to become bitter or proud. As a maturing hero, Harry sheds most of his unknowing innocence. He becomes educated in the ways of the world and in magic, learning how to defend himself and how to navigate the complex relationships of the adulthood. Harry is successful, however, because he remains emotionally vulnerable. Unlike Voldemort or
the Malfoys, who freeze other people out, insisting on their own superiority and individuality, Harry is able and willing to be intimate with other people. He is sensitive to other people’s feelings, and through this vulnerability he is able to perform selfless acts and create a community of people who help him through. By needing others, Harry’s innocent vulnerability does open him up to disappointment and heartache, but he also creates one of his greatest weapons—his strong friendships.

As the traveling heroine maintains her purity through her fidelity to the rules of her good upbringing (Moers 137-38), Harry maintains his innocence through his consistent mercy and devotion to doing what is right (often he decides this based upon what Voldemort would not do). This innocence, his secret weapon of sorts, earns him mild skepticism from his friends and outright mockery from his enemies. For example, at the Department of Mysteries where select members of Dumbledore’s Army and the Order of the Phoenix are attacked by Death Eaters, Harry is taunted by Bellatrix Lestrange, who calls him “little baby Potter” and laughs at his inability to successfully cast a Cruciatius Curse: “Never used an Unforgivable Curse before, have you, boy?...You need to mean them, Potter!” (OP 810).

Later, during the transport of Harry from the Dursleys’ house, which uses six doppelgangers of Harry as a decoy, the Death Eaters discover which Harry is the real Harry because he uses a disarming spell rather than stunning or killing those attacking him. Disarming rather than harming his enemies becomes a hallmark of Harry’s. Harry does as little harm to others as possible, often to the point of naivety. Although Harry is constantly vulnerable through no fault of his own, in his insistence on doing no harm and disarming, he makes himself vulnerable, depicting innocence pushed perhaps to the brink of ridiculousness. Harry is naïve
enough not to see the danger he puts himself in through his methods of defense. Thus, like Ginny, his lack of knowledge and forethought, not any lack of ability, makes him vulnerable.

This naiveté is further depicted in his insistence on believing the best of people (notably what Snape calls Dumbledore’s greatest weakness (HBP 31)). It is Stan Shunpike who he disarmed, refusing to believe that the young Night Bus driver would turn to the dark side. Harry is not perfect though, as made clear through his continual altercations with Snape, of whom he thinks the worst, usually wrongly. There is tension between unknowing naiveté, which is often dangerous, and the innocence dedicated to righteousness. The young characters often teeter on the edge. As the traveling heroine maintains her innocence by good breeding, Harry Potter maintains his by good intentions. The childlike trust he puts into doing the right thing at any cost keeps him in many ways an innocent child even as he grows into manhood.

Many themes are conveyed through the Harry Potter series: good triumphs over evil, honesty is the best policy, etc. Throughout the series, however, childhood triumphs most prolifically. Those characteristics that are associated with childhood—forgiveness, love, imagination, and acceptance of others—routinely defeat Voldemort and his army of prejudiced, cynical, ruthless wizards. Even Severus Snape, arguably the most cynical Potter character of all, is revealed in his dying moments to have been motivated in his collaboration with Dumbledore against Voldemort by an undying devotion to Lilly Potter that blossomed from puppy love (DH 678-79). Voldemort’s own underestimation of children contributes significantly to his downfall. As Albus Dumbledore put it, "Of house-elves and children’s tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped" (DH 709-10). Dumbledore points out to Harry that while he is sixteen and trying to defeat Voldemort,
at that same age Voldemort was “doing all he could to find out how to make himself immortal” (*HBP* 499). Voldemort’s evil plans took root in his adolescence, but still he underestimates his adolescent enemies (*HBP* 564-65).

**It Takes A Child to Save A Village: Harry, The Innocent Hero**

Of course, it may be that, like the Victorians, we are romanticizing children. Perhaps, like Voldemort, contemporary society underestimates the abilities and the intelligence of children and overestimates their innocence. Harry and friends consistently prove themselves more capable of defending themselves or handling difficult and frightening information than their parents and teachers think they are. Perhaps, as Jackson said, children are not as innocent as we construct them to be (7). The *Harry Potter* series seems to indicate that our ideas about children are limited compared to the actual abilities of young people.

Our view of children as innocent and in need of protection may also be placing them in a situation of vulnerability, constantly under the adult gaze, which may result in the eroticization of children. In a way, our own obsession with preserving innocence in children could be creating a perception of the child that is harmful, stifling, or even pedophilic (Kincaid 303-306). As demonstrated by Voldemort’s attacks on children, despite how many adults deny that he would do so, protecting children by limiting their freedom and knowledge can put them in danger by making them more vulnerable in their unknowing innocence.

Harry is an idolized child, legendary in his culture from his infancy and under constant public watch, attention, and scrutiny from the time he re-enters the wizarding world. He is consistently romanticized because of his defeat of Voldemort, an event he cannot even remember. People expect him to do great things and they often give him sole credit for his
successes, even though he urgently emphasizes the role his friends and teachers play in his battles. For this reason, his fame often becomes a source of conflict between Harry and his friends, primarily Ron, and of internal conflict as he struggles under the pressure of so much publicity, wishing to just be normal (i.e.; GF 289-90).

Despite his famous infanthood and the emotional baggage of his past, Harry is in many ways a normal child. He goes to school and his performance in the classroom is, for the most part, average. He is physically awkward, gangly, with wild hair and glasses. This humanity, as well as the education of Harry into the hero he becomes, is an integral part of the appeal of the series (Pharr 66). Mary Pharr states that Potter readers “live with a daily, media-driven awareness of the interconnectedness of our world, of its vulnerability as a whole to individual acts of violence and mayhem” (54). Thus, the appeal of this innocent hero may lie in the triumph of his innocence throughout his bildungsroman. While Harry matures into a more complex view of good and evil and of the interaction between himself and other people, his perspective still forefronts the attitude of the innocent that doing what is right is the first and most natural choice. He remains others-centered to the end and never wavers under the threat and temptation Voldemort poses. Harry’s education plays a crucial role in his development into a complex man with a pretty clear moral vision. Harry from Sorcerer’s Stone is only able to become the hero of The Deathly Hallows by going through his education at Hogwarts under the tutelage of many patient and giving teachers. He is taught by intelligent witches and wizards who also fight to guard his childhood. In this process, his openness and vulnerability are strengths that make him loveable and teachable. Parents can breathe a sigh of relief; adults are crucial to the children’s victory, as it is the mentoring of Harry’s teachers and guardians, such as Sirius Black and Dumbledore, that enables him to succeed in the end.
The importance of Harry’s education also allows for the depiction of a major anxiety for contemporary adolescents. In the hyper-competitive atmosphere of the classroom today, many children are instilled with a fear of failure. This fear is heightened by the Gothic in *Harry Potter*, as Hogwarts failure can ultimately lead to physical harm or fatality (Pharr 58). Indeed, Harry is faced with the choice to “grow up or fail” (Pharr 58). When Harry’s name is entered into the Tri-Wizard Tournament and he is required to compete in the potentially lethal competition, despite the age restriction put on it (*GOF* 275), he faces the tournament with a sense of dread and an immense fear of failure that becomes stifling:

The first task was drawing steadily nearer; he felt as though it were crouching ahead of him like some horrific monster, barring his path. He had never suffered nerves like these...Harry was finding it hard to think about the future at all; he felt as though his whole life had been leading up to, and would finish with, the first task...(*GOF* 313)

The narrator’s description of Harry’s emotions sounds much like a student overwhelmed with competition over SAT scores and college application requirements. The stress of the competition is daunting, but Harry also has to cope with pressure and bullying from his peers and the fear of failing publicly: “He could almost hear Fleur Delacour saying ‘I knew it...’e is too young, ‘e is only a little boy” (*GOF* 488). For Harry, failure does not only threaten bodily harm, it also comes with public humiliation. His anxiety is a fantastic form of teenagers’ real anxiety over the pressures to succeed in school, pressures that many fear push students to grow up too quickly.

Amidst the fear of failure and the pressure to succeed and grow up, the concern of adults is helpful. Where Harry actively fought against his guardians’ desire to keep him from fighting Voldemort with the Order of the Phoenix, he often leans on their teaching and guidance, and is only able to succeed because of them. Dumbledore frequently provides Harry with the information he needs to survive his next challenge, whether through overt or secret means. Most
notably, in *Half Blood Prince*, Dumbledore takes Harry into private lessons to impart to him the majority of the information needed to defeat Voldemort, leaving some to be figured out by the young wizard himself, providing him with not only a challenge to grow, but also with heightened ownership in the battle. The transition from leaning on Dumbledore to leaning on his own resources is critical for Harry's final transition from childhood to adulthood: "Dumbledore is more than a mentor in magic...he is also an element of the monomyth; he is the hero's secret strength. But Dumbledore cannot protect Harry the boy forever; when his training is finished, Harry the man must rely on his own strength" (Pharr 61).

Dumbledore also gives Harry the affirmation that provides him with security in his maturing identity and motivation to continue in spite of the odds. After the death of Cedric Diggory, Harry is emotionally vulnerable and afraid that his actions contributed to Cedric’s murder. Dumbledore, however, senses Harry's anxiety and tries to put him at rest, telling him, “You have shown bravery equal to those who died fighting Voldemort at the height of his powers. You have shouldered a grown wizard's burden and found yourself equal to it—and you have now given us all we have a right to expect" (*GOF* 699). Dumbledore assures Harry that his guardians are proud of him, that he has done all he could do, and also supplies a hint that Harry will be further expected to mature and perform.

Harry is not a pre-packaged hero. He is far from perfect and lacking in many of the tools he needs to win his battle. He needs other people—Hermione, Ron, as well as his teachers and guardians—to guide him on the way to becoming the hero he was born to be. He has the responsibility to pursue his destiny. Fighting Voldemort was consistently his choice and he is willing to do battle: “To turn that willingness into action, he has to find the right education, and in the extended environment of Hogwarts and its environs, Harry has the time and space, the
mentors, and the equipment to make the transition” (Pharr 65). In this way, adults are crucial, not primarily as guardians, but as guides.

The students model Dumbledore’s Army (DA) on The Order of the Phoenix, meeting secretly and working against both Umbridge and the corruption of the Ministry, just as their parents meet secretly to fight Voldemort. It is noteworthy, too, that the original Order of the Phoenix was not much older than Dumbledore’s Army’s founding members. Harry and Hermione are 15 when they start the DA, while Harry’s parents were fresh out of Hogwarts—17 or 18 years old—when they started fighting, and only 20 years old when they were murdered. The admiration for their parents’ efforts is thus an inspiration and a motivation for the children of Hogwarts to start their rebellion, even if their parents are not pleased with them doing so.

The struggle over childhood in *Harry Potter* is integral to the other Gothic conflicts in the series, from the doubling relationship between Voldemort and Harry to the conflicts over power within the school. The very restrictions adults put on children in order to protect them often end up either endangering them or causing them to break other rules. For example, the rule against underage magic frequently either puts Harry in danger, unable to protect himself, or leaves him open to detection by the Death Eaters who have infiltrated the Ministry of Magic. From limitations on movement to guards put on certain knowledge, Harry and friends have to creatively flout adult obstacles to save themselves or their friends. In a peaceful world, they would have no need to fly on thestrals to the Ministry of Magic or sneak into the Restricted Section of the library, but as darkness creeps into the children’s world they have to cope with it, even if it means going against the wishes of their guardians. It makes one wonder about the darkness that seeps into real children’s lives through television, internet, school bullies, or worse. And, as *Harry Potter* points out, adults may not be able to protect children from everything, or,
in their attempts to do so, they may produce pampered insensitive Dudley Dursleys. Even in the fear of Gothic fiction, however, there can be hope: “Gothic fictions keep reminding us that we are haunted beings, plagued by frightening forces both inside our psyches and in the world out there where we play out our social selves. And our haunted condition need not render us helpless, running into the dark forests of the night or down dark highways.” (McGillis 231). In *Harry Potter*, the resilience of childhood offers that hope.

The hope may be that Harry and his friends present a new, changing ideal of children and adults. In *Harry Potter*, children are still innocent, but they are also mischievous, capable, and determined. They are willing and ready to face challenges. They are ambitious and want to succeed in the world. The ideal adults of the series, Dumbledore, Hagrid, and a matured Harry, represent grown-ups who can be both strong and gentle. They have the knowledge, skills, and experience to be leaders in society, but are not willing to sacrifice others to do so. Like children, they are vulnerable enough to be emotionally available, creating strong bonds with others.

The death of Fred Weasley during the Battle of Hogwarts encapsulates all the tension over childhood in the series. The Weasley twins are the embodiment of childhood, full of sympathy for Harry, teasing toward their family, and pranks for everyone else. They solve problems creatively with their magical innovations, which show skill and ingenuity. Fred and George seem destined for perennial childhood, but they are forced out of the realm of youth to fight Voldemort. Still, however, the innocence of their humor finds its way into the darkest hour, as George wakes up from losing his ear claiming he feels, “Saintlike...You see...I’m holy. Holey, Fred, geddit?” (*DH* 74). Fred fights like a man, but dies with the innocence of a child, “the ghost of his last laugh still etched upon his face” (*DH* 637). Fred’s sudden, premature death is haunting because it depicts the culmination of the worst fears of the series—that childhood
innocence will be lost too soon in a world full of grown-up anxiety and violence. As Fred’s laugh lingers, however, the vulnerability and innocence of children grow their way into a new adulthood to triumph in the series’ end.
Works Cited


