

THE LAKE AND THE SHED:  
A TRADITIONALIST READING OF J. K. ROWLING'S WORK

by

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#### Statement 1:

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography of the works cited within the thesis is appended.

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### Summary (Abstract)

Key figures of Western literature who have portrayed the soul's struggle to perfection in spirit in allegorical depiction and exteriorized characters include Plato, Dante Alighieri, William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, the Metaphysical Poets, William Blake, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the Oxford Inklings. This anagogical artistry or psychomachia is central as well to J. K. Rowling's novels and screenplays and grasping it is essential to an assessment of her achievements as a writer.

In this thesis, I position Rowling as a covert and hermetic artist whose aim is the defamiliarization, even the transformation of her readers from a profane worldview to some awareness of the sacred within and around them. In doing so, I contribute the first in-depth discussion of Rowling's neo-mythological and literary alchemy, going beyond the author's explicit asides with respect to her intentions and artistry that, to date, have not been more than acknowledged by Rowling scholars; my argument references the uncollected Rowling interview material of the last twenty-five years as well as her published fiction and public statements.

The thesis is structured in two parts. The first includes reviews of Rowling's biography and bibliography of favorite writers respectively to clarify her intention as a writer; the second part is readings of her fiction, with special focus on *Deathly Hallows* (2007), *Troubled Blood* (2020) and *The Christmas Pig* (2021) as psychomachian allegories as such and then as alchemical dramas in which the soul's transformation is depicted in hermetic symbolism and sequences. The thesis concludes with suggestions for further studies consequent to Rowling's success as a covert writer of psycho-spiritual allegory especially with respect to her chiasmic structural artistry.

### Acknowledgements

I have been in the uncomfortable position of writing an academic dissertation on a subject about which I am already considered an expert because of my previously published work. I am grateful to my thesis advisers, Julian Preece and Matthew Hollrah, for their guidance in the writing of this thesis. I have attempted to augment the scholarship already at hand, remarkable in quantity if not quality for any writer but especially for a contemporary author, by addressing the inevitable blind-spots of the age within it, and this outside-the-box approach would not have been possible or credible without the support and corrections of Drs. Preece and Hollrah. All errors in perspective, points of fact, and of over-reach, of course, remain my own.

Many of the ideas and arguments which follow were first floated and tried by fire in the critical crucible of independent scholars who read and write the entries at [HogwartsProfessor.com](http://HogwartsProfessor.com), my weblog. I am grateful especially to the regular ‘faculty’ there – Elizabeth Baird-Hardy, Louise Freeman, Nick Jeffery, and Evan Willis – as well as to Beatrice Groves and Patricio Tarantino for their feedback, fellowship, and frequent notes of encouragement when my spirits flagged during the writing of what follows.

My wife Mary has been my best friend and constant support for thirty-five years. The mother of our seven children, the first sounding board of every thought I have, polyglut personal secretary, true editor of my published books and essay anthologies, private chef and de facto nurse, the debts this thesis owes to my spouse are of such depth and number that they defy description or enumeration. Whatever of value is to be gained from the subsequent paper, though, can and should be attributed to her support and influence for which loving shadow that is with me everywhere I am grateful beyond words.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Joanne Rowling Murray, who publishes under the names J. K. Rowling and Robert Galbraith (hereafter “Rowling”), is the most famous and the best-selling author of our times. Her seven *Harry Potter* novels, the various ancillary Wizarding World textbooks, screenplays, and play script, the stand-alone books *Casual Vacancy*, *The Ickabog*, and *The Christmas Pig*, and the ongoing murder mystery series featuring detective Cormoran Strike have made her work a multi-media phenomenon with a global fandom that includes a mandarin class of pundits and academics devoted to analyzing and anticipating her writing. The advent of social media and international internet access concurrently with her publication of the seven-part Hogwarts Saga has meant that Rowling and her stories are the subject of more critical attention, amateur and professional, than any living author ever.

This flood of interpretative energy, however, has led to no consensus or even a vague agreement about either the quality of her writing, her artistry and accomplishment, or the meaning and message, if any, of her novels, screenplays, and co-authored play script. Part of this confusion is caused by Rowling’s celebrity status as a writer of children’s books and of fantasy, all of which are dismissed by many non-specialists as not being, in the words of William Safire, “books for adults” (Safire). Her controversial assertions in 2020, too, that transgender women should not be allowed in what have been ‘safe spaces’ reserved for women, has simultaneously overwhelmed and obscured the discussion of her merits as a writer. Her recent almost radioactive notoriety as well as her continued super star status without equal among best-selling authors today raises the question of how she will be remembered; will it be as a writer who was popular in her day whose success forestalled appreciation by serious readers of her literary achievements or as a celebrity author in sync with the *Zeitgeist* who will be forgotten in a generation? Is she a Shakespeare or Dickens the contemporary critics neglected but whom later

students laud as ‘Greats,’ or a Wilkie Collins or Sinclair Lewis, a writer celebrated in their time but now read only by historians and English students covering a literary ‘period’ or ‘age’?

The objective of this thesis is to anticipate the judgment of history, an axiological reading, first by identifying as much as possible Rowling’s personal beliefs and intentions as a writer, and then, having chosen a critical perspective fit for judging how well the results of her efforts match her mind and aims, to gauge her success or failure. This requires explanation of both how Rowling’s beliefs and intentions are best discerned (because she has never explicitly stated either) as well as the process of deduction employed to choose the critical perspective most appropriate for reading her work in light of her core ideas and her purposes in writing. The consequent thesis chapters attempt an assessment of Rowling’s merits that is independent of either her popularity or her having been blacklisted by applying that perspective and corresponding tools to her work to access its artistry and meaning.

In brief, per Rowling’s statements about her writing process and advice to new writers, a close reading of her biography and bibliography reveal that her intention is to write transformative stories that depict allegorically and hermetically the soul’s journey to perfection in spirit and produce a cathartic experience in her readers, a subversive or defamiliarizing effect. A Traditionalist perspective is deployed to interpret her work.

The critical work here, though, begins with the understanding of writing as intentional artistry and the consequent need for identification of Rowling’s intentions.

## **Intention**

The obvious, logical, and perhaps fairest place to begin assessing a writer’s success or failure, as well as choosing the most appropriate critical approach to an author’s work, is, if available, what the writer

herself claims was her ambition in writing and then choosing the perspective most fit to gauging whether she succeeded or failed in that effort. This is in concordance with A. K. Coomaraswamy's dictum that "The only possible literary criticism of an already existing or extant work is one in terms of the ratio of intention and result:"

"The artist's intention is (*artifex intendit*) to give his work the best possible arrangement, not indefinitely, but with respect to a given end – if the agent were not determinate to some given effect, it would not do one thing rather than another" (*Summa Theologia*, I.91.3 and II-I.1.2) To say that the author does not know what it is he wants to do "until he has finally succeeded in doing what he wants to do" (W. F. Tomlin in *Purpose*, XI, 1939, p. 46) is an *ahetuvada* [assertion that all inferred knowledge is conditional and to be doubted] that would stultify all rational effort and that could only be justified by a purely mechanical theory of inspiration or automatism that excludes the possibility of intelligent co-operation on the author's part. So far from this, it is, as Aristotle says, the end (*telos*) that in all making determines the procedure (*Physics*, II.2.194ab; II.9.22a). (Coomaraswamy 1947 [1977], 274)

Ray Livingston explained the common-sense of this traditional thinking:

After completion of his work, the artist will judge it according to its success in embodying what he intends; the critic will likewise judge according to the same principle. If a poet has intended to write a lyric poem about the Edenic delight in a garden – as Andrew Marvell did – he will examine his completed work to determine his success in the lyrical evocation of this experience. The critic in his role as judge of artistic accomplishment can do no other. (Livingston, 107-108)

John Updike asserted much the same thing, albeit on the basis of simple fairness and objectivity. His first principle in assessing the worth of any writer's work in a book review was "Try to understand what the author wished to do, and do not blame him for not achieving what he did not attempt" (Updike xvi).

The first obstacle which confronts a Rowling reader accepting Updike and Coomaraswamy's premise is that the author has, with the exception of an important scene in *Deathly Hallows* and about *Casual Vacancy*, never explicitly stated what her intention as a writer is. Rowling has suggested her intention in writing *Casual Vacancy* was to write a novel akin to those of Thomas Hardy or George Elliot; "I love nineteenth century novels that centre on a town or village. This is my attempt to do a modern version" (Neff) and "I consciously wanted this book to be a modern take on that kind of 19th century novel



where you do go into a small society and you really analyze and anatomize that tiny society so that's great that people would say, you know, that they would recognize that I'm trying to write in that tradition" (Rose). She also explained what her didactic aim was in the dialogue between Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore at the supernatural King's Cross Station in *Deathly Hallows* (Cruz). This key passage will be discussed in chapter five, but, these two exceptions aside, Rowling has not shared what her goals as a writer are with respect to writing *per se*.

The closest she has come to an outright declaration of her intention *qua* artist was to admit that she writes "the kind of book I enjoy reading myself" (Amazon staff, see also Thogeson)<sup>1</sup> and that "the kind of book I want to write" is one in which the author "really knows" who her characters are, who has "got it all worked out" (BBC 2018).<sup>2</sup> Rowling has, however, spoken at some length about her inspiration-to-composition writing process and how those who want to become writers should begin. These interview comments and written statements point to her life experiences and consequent core beliefs as well as her favorite authors as the genesis points of her writing from which her intentions may be teased out.

### **The Lake and the Shed: Biography and Bibliography**

In 2019 Rowling hinted at what her intention as a writer was at her setting out or what it has become through the years when she discussed at some length in a BBC interview how it is she writes, from the source of her inspiration to her method of transforming those received ideas into a completed story.

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<sup>1</sup> Amazon.co.uk: What ingredients do you think all the Harry Potter books need? Rowling: I never really think in terms of ingredients, but I suppose if I had to name some I'd say humor, strong characters, and a watertight plot. Those things would add up to the kind of book I enjoy reading myself. Oh, I forgot scariness--well, I never set out to make people scared, but it does seem to creep in along the way.

<sup>2</sup> "It's a question of really knowing who [your characters] are and using that. I enjoy reading books of any kind, not just detective fiction[, w]here I feel the author really knows[; then] I feel like I'm in safe hands. They know everything – I don't need to worry, they've got it all worked out. I like that feeling when I read a book. That's the kind of book I want to write."

In an appearance on the 2019 BBC4 ‘Museum of Curiosity’ Christmas program recorded on 8 June of that year, Rowling discussed her creative process for the first time. She described it as a combination of inspiration and perspiration,<sup>3</sup> a traveling back and forth between her personal “lake and shed.”

I feel as though I go through a lot of trees which are my day to day concerns, what we all deal with all the time, and those I see as trees inside my head and then I get to a place which is my work place where there is a lake and there’s a shed. And this is my process.

I feel as though the inspiration is the thing that lives in the lake that’s very mysterious, that I never see. But it hands me stuff. And then I have to take this unformed stuff – sometimes it can be reasonably formed, sometimes it’s very blobby like molten glass or something, and then I have to take it into the shed and there I have to work on it.

And because I’ve had this metaphor in my head for many many years, when I read something that I’ve written I have a sort of shorthand that I say to myself, “too much lake, not enough shed.” When I go back over something – I should have spent longer in the shed.

And then there are some bits you think, “Oh that’s too sheddy. I’m not sure you added a lot out of the lake that day.” And in a dream world, obviously, the lake gives you something good, but then you work on it properly in the shed and you turn out the finished product. And I even apply this to other writers. I’ll read something and I’ll think “This is pure shed.” (Lloyd)

She went on to explain, in answer to a question about her ability to force inspiration, what she thinks the metaphorical “lake” which provides her inspirations is in reality:

What I find fascinating about inspiration and I love hearing other creative people talk about their process... I’m always fascinated by it. I think that people who ask the question “Where do you get your inspiration from?” often don’t understand that it’s a process. So although I’m talking about the thing that lives in the lake as that’s where I get it from, I know the thing that lives in the lake is me. It’s just a part of me that deep down is subconscious, it’s my unconscious that’s processing things.... (Lloyd)<sup>4</sup>

The ‘Lake’ in Rowling’s metaphor for her two-step process represents the inspiration she experiences seemingly from ‘without,’ which is to say that “it,” i.e., ‘something other than me,’ seems to “hand me

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<sup>3</sup> “Moments of pure inspiration are glorious, but most of a writer’s life is, to adapt the old cliché, about perspiration rather than inspiration. Sometimes you have to write even when the muse isn’t cooperating” (Rowling 2019a). The cliché invoked here is Edison’s observation that “genius” is “1% inspiration, 99% perspiration.”

<sup>4</sup> Rowling is aware that her writing is not intentional at its point of origin; “unconscious” certainly means, if nothing else, “not conscious or deliberate.” It could be inspiration from her muse as she said to Cruz (2008) she hoped it was or it could be her subconscious speaking up from hidden depth, what she described to Grossman in 2005 as writing “pain to brain.” As self-aware as Rowling may be consequent to her Cognitive Behavior experience and self-reflective as she struggles to be, she seems conscious of how much her intention, derived as it is from “stuff” out of the Lake, remains unconscious.

stuff,” but that she understands as actually being within her, her “subconscious” or “unconscious” mind “processing things” in the form of story images and ideas. The ‘Shed,’ in contrast, is the metaphorical place in Rowling’s process where she works as an intentional artisan to give shape or form to the “unformed stuff” akin to “molten glass” she has received from her Lake. She cannot force the Lake to produce its gifts and too much craft in the Shed can ruin the gift; “in a dream world, obviously, the lake gives you something good, but then you work on it properly in the shed and you turn out the finished product.”<sup>5</sup>

Though not an explicit statement of her intention, Rowling’s description of her Lake and Shed process does suggest pointedly the two approaches that will reveal it, namely, (1) a close reading of her biography to access as much as possible the “things” her “unconscious mind” is “processing,” i.e., her psychological issues, personal interests, and core beliefs that are the substance of her Lake inspiration and no small part of her Shed perspiration, as well as (2) a review of her favorite authors, her bibliography, to learn the tools she chose to use in her Shed, at first as a literary mime and then in a style she made her own. Sifting through the findings of these two approaches, alone and in combination, should yield the closest approximation of a direct statement of her intentions as a writer critical readers can expect to find.

The thesis begins, consequently, with the search for and delineation of Rowling’s intention in a close reading of her biography and bibliography, her life story and the stories she has said are the most

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<sup>5</sup> Rowling had spelled out this two-step process of inspiration and hard work in her 2012 conversation with Charlie Rose during which she said the ideas for Harry Potter, Casual Vacancy “and some other things that I am writing fell into my head.” “[W]here they came from, you know, you can tell yourself ok it came from somewhere in my subconscious but it feels like someone dropped it into your head. And that is the wonderful thing. A girl asked me at the launch of the Casual Vacancy in London; she said to me ‘Do you write only when you’re inspired?’ I said no. Because I would have [only] written a page and a half....[S]ome people don’t want to hear that about writing. You are not sitting there taking dictation from an angel.... You’ve got to work. It’s about structure. It’s about discipline. It’s all these deadly things that your schoolteacher told you, you needed, you need it” (Rose).

important to her. Her intention, in turn, should suggest the most appropriate critical lens through which to read her work.

Rowling's biography, the Lake of her inspiration, is the subject of chapter three. Here the seven crises of Rowling's psychological life, her experience of Cognitive Behavior Therapy and fascination with psychology, her defining Johannine belief in an immortal soul and her Petrine doubts with respect to religious belief and institutions, her Estecean idea of imagination,<sup>6</sup> as well as her lifelong interest in astrology, psychology, and the hermetic arts are explored in pursuit of a better idea of the more unconscious and archetypal aspects of her artistic intention.

Exploration of her Shed of literary influences in chapter four reveals the common denominators of Rowling's favorite writers from Austen to Wodehouse. As might be expected, there is an alignment between the "stuff" to be found in the author's unconscious Lake and the tools and concerns of her admitted influences. Both Shed and Lake suggest the appropriateness of Traditionalist tools in understanding Rowling's work in light of her consistent use of hermetic devices, Christian symbolism, and chiasmic parallelism as her story scaffolding.

The investigation of the Lake's depths and the Shed's toolbox having revealed by deductive speculation one intention of and the critical lens most fit for reading Rowling's work, the second part of the thesis deploys that lens. It begins in chapter five with the various allegories of soul seeking perfection Rowling employs in her *Potter* and post-*Potter* writing and reveals in chapter six the connection between these psychomachian stories and the subliminal hermetic symbolism, colors, and sequences with which she writes them.

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined the neologism 'Estecean' from his initials to describe his signature ideas and beliefs, a word used in this thesis rather than the relatively ponderous 'Coleridgean.'

The axiological conclusion drawn from these investigations of Rowling's biography and bibliography and use of a traditional set of tools to unlock her work is that her conscious and unconscious intention is to write transformative fiction which delivers her core beliefs covertly and, weighing the "ratio of intention to result" per Coomaraswamy, that she has successfully realized this aim. The defining merit of Rowling's *Potter* and post-*Potter* publications, from this view, are her success in writing subliminal even sublime allegories of the soul's perfection in spirit with corresponding symbols and structure, anagogical artistry. This craftsmanship causes the cathartic experience of a Medieval Morality Play or of ancient myth and Greek drama for postmodern readers via the exteriorization of inner truths as reorienting reminders or shocks to the profane postmodern mind of the human spiritual end or *telos*. Mircea Eliade's idea that story in a profane age serves a "mythological" or "religious" function even, perhaps especially for non-believers (Eliade 1959, 205) is invoked as a possible explanation of Rowling's popularity consequent to her success as a writer of transformative allegory.

As a few of the key terms to be used in the thesis are not currently in common use, providing some working definitions is in order before the longer discussions about them appear in subsequent chapters:

**Anagogical** from the Greek word for 'lift up' is a term used to describe the fourth level of reading in the Quadriga or *Pardes* interpretive model, to be explored at length in chapter five. This layered method of scriptural exegesis, per Dante's letter to Cangrande, is used to interpret palimpsest texts with otherworldly and transformative content (Granger 2010a, 14-19). The fourth layer of reading, the anagogical, represents the epistemological category of wisdom which differs from the knowing to be had via the first three layers: the surface story corresponding to sense data, the moral level paralleling opinion, and logical reasoning and scientific knowledge reflected in the allegorical interpretation. This knowing is much less something a human person *has* as information to know and recall than one that a

person *has become*, an understanding that transcends individual rationality and circumstances to create the greatest possible noetic perspective. A story with anagogical meaning provides something of a transformative experience to the reader who identifies with the action and players of the drama sufficiently to share in their *katharsis* or spiritual purification. The close reader of Dante's *Commedia*, the poet hoped, would share in or have some experience of his repentance or *metanoia* in Hell, cleansing in Purgatory, and beatific vision in Paradise.

This layered reading with the anagogical as its goal or greatest possible achievement is not a historical artifact restricted to grasping Dante, however. No less an author than Flannery O'Connor in her essay 'The Nature and Aim of Fiction' wrote the "kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision" a vision that she describes as one "able to see the different levels of reality." "I think it is this enlarged view of the human scene," she concludes, "that the fiction writer has to cultivate if he is ever going to write stories that have any chance of becoming a permanent part of our literature" (O'Connor, 72-73). Rowling's assertion in her Harvard commencement address about the "transformative" aspects of the imagination as well as the prevalent Christian symbolism of her work, to include a symbol the characters interpret at four levels (Granger 2008a, 205-240), point to the importance of exploring this level of meaning in her work.

**'Archetypal' and 'iconological'** are not synonymous with 'anagogical' but point as well to a transpersonal and spiritual dimension transcending ego existence. 'Iconological' is the word Northrup Frye used in *Anatomy of Criticism* to describe the "tradition which comes down through Classical and Biblical scholarship into Dante and Spenser" (Frye 1958, 10) but which he thought ended with Ruskin. As in Christian iconography, the iconological interpretation of a text is the identification of the

supernatural referent or archetype portrayed in the work which depiction conveys formal contact between reader and the represented reality, a signature Traditionalist view. Rowling, as will be discussed, uses the word ‘archetype’ both in its Platonic and Jungian senses, which as those definitions contradict one another (the first is superlunary, eternal, and creative, the second subconscious and distinctly psychological rather than spiritual) set the terms for the “debate” implicit in much of her work.

**Traditionalism** is a metaphysical school of thought founded in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by two Sufi Sheihks and a Hindu primarily concerned with the elucidation of the truths and theocentric perspective underlying the world’s orthodox revealed traditions. Much of the Traditionalists’ work, especially that of A. K. Coomaraswamy and his admirers, is dedicated to a celebration and exegesis of the meaning of sacred art, to include the polyvalent symbolism of literature. The briefest possible survey of the tenets of this school is included at the end of chapter four.

**Psychomachia** or “soul-battle” is the Platonic-Christian allegorical tradition of depicting the virtues and vices in conflict, often actual combat, that “developed” into an exteriorization in separate characters of the “interior struggle among the three faculties of the human soul” (Hankins), what today would be called ‘body, mind, and spirit,’ but traditionally are the passions, the will, and the heart. The Traditionalist argument of chapter five is how Rowling has used the Platonic soul triptych in her *Harry Potter* novels, is using a soul-spirit allegory à la Shakespeare and Spenser in the *Strike* mysteries, and used, in addition to a vote among the various embodied human cognitive faculties, a relatively “clinical” psychological trope of transference between children and their toys in *Christmas Pig*. Rowling’s core beliefs about the soul and imagination, the engines of her intention as a writer, are the

substance of her psychomachian allegories and the cathartic, transformative experiences they create in her readers.

**‘Literary Alchemy’** is a term I coined in 2002<sup>7</sup> to describe the use of metallurgical alchemy’s symbols, colors, and sequences by English ‘Greats,’ from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Joyce and Tolkien, to depict the transformation in the protagonist from lead to gold, which is to say, from ego-focused darkness of soul to illumination or enlightenment. Chapter six discusses the relevant scholarship and Rowling’s creative re-invention and deployment of this hermetic tradition in English letters. It is the argument of that chapter that this is Rowling’s subliminal backdrop to the psychomachian allegory in simultaneous play.

As these definitions suggest, my personal and critical “positionality” or worldview is traditional rather than conventional. With respect to Rowling, using the “insider-outsider” parameters of Coughlin and Miller (Coughlin), I am perhaps uniquely both “insider” and “outsider,” the latter in never having communicated with the author directly and having grown up in a different country, the former in having several shared elements in common with her upbringing and worldview. Most notably, my being raised in the Anglican Christian church, leaving it, and returning to a relatively esoteric faith as an adult (when I took the name ‘John’ at baptism into the Orthodox Church), having a classical education to include knowledge of *chiasmus* and mythology as well as a working knowledge of astrology and alchemy, and estrangement from my biological father are shared qualities. My formation as a thinking person was led by Straussian<sup>8</sup> professors and graduate student mentors at the University of Chicago, all of whom were

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<sup>7</sup> I have since learned on the ‘Literary Alchemy’ Wikipedia page (!) that the term was used prior to my coinage and with a different meaning than I gave it, though mine is the definition currently in use.

<sup>8</sup> Leo Strauss was a political philosopher whose most famous and influential work, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Strauss), argued that the greatest writers since the death of Socrates have concealed their true arguments beneath the surface meaning of their texts in order to avoid persecution by the prevailing regime. The ‘Straussian’ school of esoteric writing, consequently, is one predicated on reading a work in such a way that its hidden content is revealed (cf. Melzer). This school, as well as the ‘Ideas and Methods’ New Criticism faction of ‘close reading’ led by Richard McKeon and his students, were



profoundly skeptical with the tenets and sureties of postmodernity and whose approach to texts was uniformly an effort to reveal the anagogical and politically dangerous messages to be found ‘between the lines.’

My ability to see the Christian content in *Harry Potter* when others were sure those books were a ‘gateway to the occult,’ to grasp the hermetic artistry of a series that had somehow been overlooked despite the first book title’s including a reference to a Philosopher’s Stone, and my discovery of Rowling’s chiastic story scaffolding are due to my “insider” standing, my sharing a similar optometric prescription with the author. My focus on cryptonyms, inter- and intratextuality, and the anagogical meaning of the author’s embedded symbolism far beneath the surface story is a consequence of a youth devoted to searching for what writers were *really* saying, the “outsider” laboring to get “inside” a text.

My choice not to use more conventional and contemporary schools of criticism and specifically those used in exegesis of fantasy fiction is due first to Rowling’s insistence that she is *not* a fantasy writer or especially enamored of the genre. As she told Lev Grossman in 2005 in answer to the question, “Do you think of yourself as a fantasy writer?”:

Unlikely though this sounds, philosopher’s stone had been published, and it was a while after it had been published before it occurred to me that I had written a fantasy. that’s the honest truth. you know, the unicorns were in there, there was the castle, god knows, did we have centaurs at that point? I don’t know. we certainly had a lot of stuff that you’d think would have struck me as fantastical. but I really had not thought that that’s what I was doing.... I’m not a huge fan of fantasy. That’s not to say that I haven’t read and enjoyed fantasy. [but] obviously it was not my very favorite thing to read. ...I don’t read fantasy generally.... but [other than the *Narnia* books and *Lord of the Rings*] I don’t think I’ve read anything else that would be classified as a fantasy. (Grossman 2017; formatting and spelling from original notes)

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the dominant forces across all department lines at the University of Chicago during the years of my undergraduate study there.

She thinks of herself primarily as a writer of detective novels and murder mysteries. “I love crime fiction, I’ve always loved it, I read a lot of it. And I think that the *Harry Potter* books are really whodunnits in disguise. I think you’ve got six whodunnits and one why-was-it” (McDermid).

More important, though, is Coomaraswamy’s dictum after Goethe that the critic “must go” to where the author lives if her work is to be understood.<sup>9</sup> Literary criticism post Ruskin, again per Frye, is a series of ever more pronounced departures from the “iconological” perspective and worldview of “Classical and Biblical scholarship into Dante and Spenser,” i.e., the Traditionalist understanding, for the more “scientific” and “analytical” schools, of which the Formalists and their critical progeny, contemporary criticism and theory, even Frye to some degree<sup>10</sup> are exemplars. Rowling’s personal faith and core beliefs about the soul, the symbolism of her novels, her alchemical and astrological artistry, and her chiasmic structures require a more Platonic and archetypal perspective, one akin to that of Nabokov and Lewis, two of the author’s favorite writers, both of whom were formalists with pronounced cathartic and spiritual intention in their writing.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “If as Dante says, he who would portray a figure cannot do so unless he *be* it, or as we might express it, unless he *lives* it... it is no less certain that he who would... appreciate and understand an already completed work, can only do it subject to the same condition, and this means that he must conform his intellect to that of the artist so as to think with his thoughts and to see with his eyes. Acts of self-renunciation are required of all those who aspire to ‘culture,’ that is, to be other than provincials. It is in the sense that [Goethe said] *Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muss im Dichter’s Lande gehen*.” Livingston when commenting on this passage from Coomaraswamy that he quoted in full wrote, “An avowed materialist or atheist cannot *understand* Romanesque or Gothic art. Lacking the gift of belief which would predispose him to be amenable to the shaping influence of these Christian works, he could only view them in a manner conditioned by his own prepossessions, which by their very nature render him relatively impervious to religious theses that are at best difficult enough of comprehension” (Livingston 112-113).

<sup>10</sup> Frye’s aim in *Anatomy of Criticism* is certainly to offer a science of sorts of literary criticism (Frye 1957, 11) and he argued elsewhere for a distinct approach to reading poetry and prose that was not an appendage of history or psychology (cf. Frye 1975, 201) but his discussion of the Romance and naturalism spectrum in literature in *Anatomy* (49, 136-137), mythology (64), Aristotelian mimesis versus Platonic recollection (82-84, 113, 154), even on ghosts (50) marks his perspective as traditional rather than empirical, theological as much as it is reductionist (see Granger 2010a, 92-94).

<sup>11</sup> Lewis is well known as a Christian apologist and evangelist but Nabokov, too, though famous as an aesthete, was a writer of whom a preeminent scholar has written that the “basis of his art” was an “aesthetic based in his intuition of a transcendent realm.” “Vera Nabokov calls ‘potustoronnost’ Nabokov’s ‘main theme,’ and stresses that although it ‘saturates everything he wrote,’ it does not seem to have been noted by anyone” (Alexandrov 1991, 3-4). *Potustoronnost* is a Russian word meaning ‘the beyond’ or ‘the otherworld,’ hence Alexandrov’s book on the subject, *Nabokov’s Otherworld*. Neither author was a Traditionalist per se, but Martin Lings was a student of Lewis’ at Cambridge and the two remained lifelong friends. Lewis’ *Discarded Image* (1964), his introduction to the Medieval and Renaissance worldview, and *The Abolition of Man* (1974), his most trenchant critique of modernity, could serve as excellent introductions to the Traditionalist school.

The axiological aim of the thesis, then, is first to identify Rowling's intention in order then to evaluate properly her success as a writer by measuring her work as either accomplishing or failing to achieve that aim. It begins, as noted, with two chapters that survey or dredge her Lake and Shed, which is to say the key interests, core beliefs, and formative crises in her biography and the common qualities of favorite writers in her bibliography. The conclusions of those chapters are that she writes "transformative and revelatory" works of imagination that simultaneously undermine conventional belief in authority and foster "how the light of God shines from every soul" (Wagner, D.), and that the most apt tool for gauging her work in light of this aim is a traditional perspective on art and literature, one holding that the end or *telos* of story is defamiliarizing or awakening the reader to greater realities than the mundane and visible.

The subsequent chapters of the thesis, one on psychomachia and the other about her alchemical artistry, read Rowling through this traditional or relatively telescopic lens, as opposed to the microscopic or analytical perspective, and judge her result against her intention. This examination suggests she is a success: the work is truly defamiliarizing and cathartic and the work is subversive with respect to conventions of genre, authority, and the reader's psychological status quo. With respect to the more specific defamiliarizing goals Rowling adopted from her favorite writers, her esoteric or hermetic artistry has a simultaneously subliminal or covert and an avalanche effect on her readers. The symbolism, structure, and mythological templates all work together to foster noetic encounter with *logos* light and love, an iconographic experience of referent center or heart and the Divine Mother.

I am obliged before beginning to make two notes about the texts referenced most frequently in the thesis.

All page citations with respect to Rowling's works are to the hardcover first editions published in the United States. Rather than repeat the full titles of each book, e.g., *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, I have chosen to use recognizable abbreviations, *Half-Blood Prince* or *Prince*, that are commonplaces in even academic critical literature. Capitalizations and spelling of Rowling's characters and spells are left as they are in text; 'Dementors,' for example, and the death curse 'Avadra Kadavra' are always capitalized. 'Harry Potter' is not italicized when the character is being discussed; it is italicized in reference to the book series. 'Cormoran Strike,' because his name is not mentioned in any of the titles in the series of murder mysteries of which he is the primary protagonist is not italicized even when referring to the Strike novels. Discussion has largely been restricted to those books Rowling 'counts' as her own (Rowling 2021e) that were in print at the time of this writing: the seven *Harry Potter* novels, the three Wizarding World ancillary texts and textbooks, the first five Cormoran Strike mysteries, *Casual Vacancy*, *The Ickabog*, and *The Christmas Pig*; her collaborative efforts as a screenwriter and playwright are used sparingly to illustrate points because of a relative lack of confidence that this is her work.

After Rowling, the author most often referred to in this thesis' citations is myself, which calls for explanation. In brief, I have been writing about Rowling's work since 2002 and I have been a leader of that simultaneously niche and crowded critical community since that time, whence Lev Grossman labeling me 'The Dean of *Harry Potter* Scholars' in 2009. All pretense of modesty aside, my work in revealing the Christian content of *Harry Potter*, Rowling's hermetic artistry across all her work, and her near obsessive 'ring writing' have become touchstones and starting points for students and serious readers of her novels. The work I have done and that of others along these lines serve, too, as starting points for what follows. The work done in this thesis, however, especially with respect to the influences to be found in Rowling's biography and bibliography and to the psychomachia and alchemy in her post

*Potter* writing, is original, but these new dimensions necessarily build on what I have written about the author's books and screenplays over the last twenty years.

The thesis proper begins with a review of the relevant critical literature with special emphasis on spiritual or archetypal interpretations of Rowling's work.

## Chapter 2: Critical Literature Review

### **I. Introduction**

The thesis is a reading of Rowling's work to date through a traditionalist lens to examine the defamiliarizing spiritual allegory elements in her stories, specifically the artistry and meaning of Rowling's Wizarding World novels and screenplays and her non-magical stories, with special attention paid to *Deathly Hallows*, the finale of the Hogwarts series, the Cormoran Strike mystery *Troubled Blood*, her longest work to date, and *Christmas Pig*. This approach was chosen consequent to a review of Rowling's biography and bibliography, the sources of her Lake inspiration and the tools of her Shed perspiration, the aim being to gauge her success or failure in light of her intentions. The following review of the critical literature, consequently, surveys previous attempts to access the quality of Rowling's work with a special focus on those using biographical, intertextual, allegorical, and hermetic perspectives, the specific concerns of the thesis in hand.

*Harry Potter* critical literature after a two-decade period of cascading growth has plateaued after the controversy in 2020 about Rowling's criticism of transgender activism. As the readers who cut their literary teeth on Rowling's work during the years of Potter-mania surrounding the almost biannual releases of the seven novels (1997-2007) came to maturity and became English professors, there had been a corresponding surge in academic treatments in addition to the many tie-in ancillary books written for the general public. In 2017, my first researches in online and published bibliographies as well as in work for which *Harry Potter* or Rowling are only subjects within a larger discussion (e.g., of heroines, fan-fiction, film adaptation, etc.) found more than thirty critical anthologies, fifty-four monographs, ninety-five graduate level theses, one hundred seventy-five journal articles, and ninety-eight chapters in books on related subjects, all to do with the series as literature.

This work is wide-ranging, certainly, but thin. One bibliography published in 2015, for example, has as many pages devoted to publications about *Harry Potter* ‘in the classroom,’ ‘in translation,’ ‘science, medicine, and psychology,’ ‘philosophy and law,’ ‘religion,’ and ‘other fields,’ as it does for ‘literature,’ a combined sixty pages with over eight hundred entries (Langworthy). It seems likely that Rowling’s novels have simultaneously received more critical attention than any contemporary writer, even more than any poet, playwright, or novelist has ever received during their lifetime, and yet still have been critically neglected. In this pile, there are significant attempts at conventional readings of her artistry and various efforts to decipher the meaning of her esoteric structure and style, very little of which is grounded in Rowling’s biography or bibliography.

The two largest categories of critical literature on the *Harry Potter* series have been on the religious or moral content of the books and their political messaging, the former because of a controversy about the appropriateness of children’s books featuring a sympathetic treatment of witchcraft and the latter due to discussions of politics and power being the predominate concern of the age. I have neglected both categories for review here because (a) Rowling’s cartoonish reduction of Wizarding World politics to a parody re-telling of World War II battles between fascist “pure bloods” and a democratic rainbow coalition, while undeniable, is borderline irrelevant in an anagogical reading, and (b) the litmus strip testing of the work’s spiritual and moral values via critique has been made to advance a cultural and ideological agenda rather than to establish a greater understanding of the books themselves and their global popularity.

The ideas explored in the critical literature, in other words, on these subjects are predominantly interpretations and critiques of the stories’ moral and political allegory, i.e., Dumbledore’s telegraphed messages in annual denouement a la Aesop’s Fables (importance of choice, love of departed, etc.) and the battle against Lord Voldemort as resistance to autocracy or Nazism. The emphasis on this aspect of

the series has led to a neglect in the literature of its spiritual or anagogical material, the relatively subtle and sublime elements that estrange the reader from his or her mundane and conventional thinking. There is little discussion, for example, of the *Deathly Hallows* epigraphs and three other passages in the finale Rowling has said are key to its meaning, of texts within texts, of interior-exterior realities in every human person, and the relative importance of traditional spiritual symbolism beyond the Christian menagerie (e.g., of psychomachia, alchemy, or chiasmus as in this thesis). Nor has there been discussion of the Romantic reaction to empiricism and the Industrial Revolution in the several genres Rowling combines in *Potter* and the consequent potential relevance of iconological critical tools to access the melange and its unprecedented popularity.

## II. Biography

Despite Rowling's singular status as celebrity writer, even her notoriety, there has been no published attempt at a critical biography to date. While certain facts of her life are well known, something like commonplaces in the public mind (such as her Cinderella rise from poverty, her life as a single mother on the dole, her abusive first husband and estrangement from her father), no sustained look at her work in light of her experiences and core beliefs has been attempted. Philip Nel wrote an excellent introduction to the subject with the materials available then in his *J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Novels: A Reader's Guide* (2001) and Beatrice Groves began each chapter of her *Literary Allusion in Harry Potter* (2017) with a review of the relevant comments Rowling had made and authors she admired with respect to that chapter's subject, but no sustained psycho-biographical reading has been done, though that approach is one the author invited in her Lake and Shed interview with Lloyd. The biographies that are available (cf. Kirk, Shapiro, Smith, S.) are valuable collations of the information available to the public but because Rowling's close friends, following her lead, are close-mouthed about her personal history and family, they are necessarily thin on her unconscious material and its reflection in her work.



### III. Bibliography

Much more is known about Rowling's favorite authors than about her private life, and there is a corresponding larger pile of work about her intertextual references and literary influences. With few exceptions, however, the utility of this criticism in evaluating Rowling's success or failure with respect to her intention is limited at best.

Vladimir Nabokov summarized the value of literary criticism with characteristic disdain: "The purpose of a critique is to say something about a book the critic has or has not read. Criticism can be instructive in the sense that it gives readers, including the author of the book, some information about the critic's intelligence, or honesty, or both" (Gold and Plimpton, 198). Given the prevalence of "intertextual" criticism à la Kristeva, Iser, or Eco today, it should not surprise that literary criticism today consists in no small part in games of what Samuel Beckett called "spot the style" or "spot the source" as Wendy Doniger wrote (cited by Caselli, 183). *Harry Potter* criticism, unfortunately, is no exception. Either the "information about the [critic's] intelligence" turns on the styles and sources spotted, the "influences" from which the Hogwarts novels derive in some fashion, or they are examined as artifacts fallen from heaven or born whole out of Zeus' forehead. Neither one nor the other, not even the few explicit intertextual critiques allow for influence that is consciously adapted rather than an irresistible force imprinted on the derivative secondary material.

The books and articles tracking influence, conscious or unconscious, in Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels appear as surveys and spot pieces. Pepperdine University Professor James Thomas' *Repotting Harry Potter* (2008) and *Rowling Revisited* (2010) are surveys written from within the books, spotting an echo of a story, poem, or play with which this man of broad reading is familiar and explaining the possible reference book by book through the series and the ancillary texts (*Beedle the Bard*, *Fantastic Beasts*, and *Quidditch through the Ages*). Other authors of longer books inevitably include paragraphs in which

they list the favorite (or not so favorite) texts from which they believe Rowling must have drawn (e.g., Manlove 59-61).

Monograph writers, in contrast, and contributors to anthologies cue in on the ideas and styles derived from specific authors. From Dante (Schaubert 2011, Granger 2008a, 131-150), Spencer (Baird-Hardy 2011, Wolosky), and George MacDonald (Pazdziora 2011), to Tolkien (Sturgis 2009), Aeschylus (Mills, Granger 2008b), and the multiple authors, legendary and well-known, for the name ‘Hermione’ (Dresang) “source spotting” in Potter criticism at its best patronizes the author as a rag-picker sewing a patchwork from previous ‘Greats.’ A great exception to this rule of neglecting Rowling’s active play with her influences is Groves’ *Literary Allusion in Harry Potter* (2017) and this author’s consequent work online which will be frequently referenced in the thesis.

In ‘Reading Intertextuality: The Natural and Legitimate Intertextuality in *Harry Potter*,’ Daniela Caselli argues that it is a false dichotomy to insist that a work is either derivative or original and that the real issue at stake in the distinction is an author’s author-ity and a text’s subsequent value. Her aim, simultaneously “to critique the silent assumption that originality and innocence are naturally linked and to observe how the naturalness of Harry Potter perfectly fits with its legitimacy,” ends with the disappointing, if true, conclusion that the books are both “the spontaneous child and the child of civilization” (Caselli, 184).

This truth may seem more truism than insight except for the note Caselli makes with an extended quotation from Peter Hunt’s *Children’s Literature* (Hunt, 123):

To say that the Harry Potter books are built from the furniture of a mind that has absorbed a good cross-section of children’s reading (for the purpose of being a child, rather than the writing of children’s books) is not to say that the books are derivative (or, fashionably, intertextually rich). Rather (and it would be rather insulting to the obvious intelligence of Rowling to suggest that it is accidental), she has produced an eccentric blend of the comfortably predictable and the unsettlingly unexpected. Individually, the incidents and characters – the quidditch (sic) games,

the mysterious messages, the suspicious behaviors of the masters, the gang of bullies – have, in other guises, served many a well-selling author; combined with the twenty-first century preoccupations, such as surveillance and the ambiguity of evil, they become new again. (Caselli, 181)

Pat Pinsent strikes this note on the effect of defamiliarization in literature more clearly in the conclusion of ‘The Education of a Wizard: Harry Potter and His Predecessors:’

Altrick and Fenstermaker suggest that the significance of intertextuality lies not so much in identifying sources in the works of earlier writers as in detecting how “the original meaning changed as it resonated in the work of a later one, where it appeared in a new context and with some – perhaps major – difference of purpose and effect” [Altrick and Fenstermaker, *The Art of Literary research*, 109]. I would suggest that Rowling’s use of similar elements, whether or not she has, accidentally or deliberately, adapted them from other writers in a similar tradition, reveals how different their effects can be. (Pinsent, 49)

As disappointing as Caselli’s conclusion is about the intertextual quality of Rowling’s work and her *nolo contendere* on the question of influence, she alone among the spotters of sources and style points to the silence in the critical literature on the subject of structure:

[I]ntertextuality, at least in the form of general relations with tradition and myth, negotiates the relationship between archeology and genealogy. This is why, I would argue, in the criticism looking at sources in Harry Potter, we always find references to myths, fairy tales, and archetypes, rather than specific discussions on language and structure. (Caselli, 177)

Some work has been done, however, on the subject of Rowling as literary parodist, which reflects that her three favorite writers, Austen, Colette, and Nabokov, are noted parodists.

Nabokov was once asked, “What writers and persons and places have influenced you most?”:

In my boyhood I was an extraordinarily avid reader. By the age of 14 or 15 I had read or re-read all Tolstoy in Russian, all Shakespeare in English, and all Flaubert in French-- besides hundreds of other books. Today I can always tell when a sentence I compose happens to resemble in cut and intonation that of any of the writers I loved or detested half a century ago; but I do not believe that any particular writer has had any definite influence upon me. (Nabokov 1990, 46)

In other words, “no influences of which I am the unwitting or unconscious *object*.” This is not to say that Nabokov imagined himself above the weave of all stories; there are more than sixty fairly straight-

forward references to other writers and works in *Lolita* alone (Proffer, 21-23). *Lolita* also includes multiple references to parody and the mirroring involved with pastiche or mockery (cf. Appel, 121).

Peter Steiner in *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* explains:

For ‘Sklovskij [Shklovsky], parody was above all else a means of de-familiarizing automated literary forms through the laying bare of automatized devices and the displacement and violation of customary literary norms, and its aim was to provide us with a new perception of literary form. “The appearance of *Tristram Shandy*,” [Shklovsky] argued, “was motivated by the petrification of the devices of the traditional *roman d’aventure*. All of its techniques had become totally automatized. Parody was the only way to rejuvenate them.” (Steiner, 119)<sup>12</sup>

Shklovsky believed that “Not only parody, but also in general any work of art is created as a parallel and a contradiction to some kind of model” (quoted in Hutcheon 2000, 29). Writing, in other words, as “parallel and contradiction” both conforms to and rejects models as a kind of “knight’s move” in order to de-familiarize and startle the attentive reader. Parody is less mockery than pastiche or just discussion.<sup>13</sup>

All three of Rowling’s favorite writers, Austen, Colette, and Nabokov, were parodists of this type and Rowling, according to Nabokovian formula – “Satire is a lesson, parody is a game” – is more parodist than satirist. Rowling’s parody is a postmodern acknowledgment of referent source while holding tradition at critical arm’s length, not necessarily as mockery. As Linda Hutcheon writes in ‘Harry Potter and the Novice’s Confession,’

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<sup>12</sup>See Shklovsky ‘Novel as Parody’ (Shklovsky 1998), “laying bare the device.” “Nearly all periods of artistic innovation have had a strong parodic impulse, advancing generic change. As the Russian formalist Boris Eichenbaum once put it: ‘In the evolution of each genre, there are times when its use for entirely serious or elevated objectives degenerates and produces a comic or parodic form.... And thus is produced the regeneration of the genre: it finds new possibilities and new forms’” (Bradbury, 53).

<sup>13</sup>“According to Linda Hutcheon, parody does not necessarily need to be a way of ridiculing earlier works, but rather that ‘parody is one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse.’ Thus, parody is intimately linked with intertextuality” (Falk). “*Lolita*, Nabokov’s masterpiece, wouldn’t have been in our hands unless we had had the parody ‘coined’ by Poe. The definition that Nabokov gives to parody is different from its general definition. For Nabokov, parody is not used to mock at a literary work, writer or literary model. On the contrary, parody for Nabokov is a tribute to his favourite writers. Nabokov’s parodies on Poe are literary tributes, as Nabokov, just like Poe, believed that parody and poetry cannot live without each other. Poetry for Poe was ‘the rhythmical creation of beauty’ and for both writers it is considered as mystic expression beyond reasoning” (Abazaj).

J. K. Rowling is herself, of course, a mighty adapter—of everything from the Dungeons and Dragons games to Wagner’s music drama, *Siegfried*. Add in other ingredients like “Cinderella,” the Victorian boarding school novel, Enid Blyton, folktales about magic mirrors ..., and even the orphan Bildungsroman like *Great Expectations* or *Jane Eyre*, stir, and you have a recipe for that successful adaptive concoction we know as Harry Potter. (Hutcheon 2008, 175)

Appreciation of Rowling as a parodist -- mocking, fawning, or creatively adaptive – is, however, much less prevalent than the view that she is a conformist to genre conventions. With few exceptions, the critical literature on *Harry Potter* and Rowling’s relationship with story-type norms does not extend to the possibility of parody. Even Anne Hiebert Alton in her critique of Rowling’s playfulness in combining schoolboy, fantasy, detective and other genres in ‘Playing the Genre Game: Generic Fusions of the Harry Potter Series’ (Alton, 199-224) never uses the word ‘parody’ in her explanation of Rowling’s departures from and adaptation of norms.<sup>14</sup> Rowling’s study of her favorite authors for ‘what works’ and her imitation of those facets of their writing, consequently, is a substantial lacuna in the critical literature, though that practice is what Rowling has recommended to aspiring writers for more than twenty years.

#### IV. Psychomachia

Both before and after Rowling’s admitting that the Christian symbolism in the *Potter* series was “obvious” (Adler) and that she had intentionally given her hero in those books “messianic traits” (deRek), exegetes labored to chart the point-to-point allegorical meaning and the referents of the symbols deployed in the septology. This was a minority view, certainly, during the *Potter* Panic years prior to the publication of *Deathly Hallows*, but, as Rowling predicted in her conversation with Amini, the finale and its relatively transparent resurrection tropes have now made this reading a commonplace.

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<sup>14</sup>See, though, Suman Gupta, *Re-reading Harry Potter*: “Certain general observations might become available: for example, that fairy tales, myths, folklore are alluded to in this way to encode modern values while retaining the traditional effect; or that this is a way of assuming and/or subverting the conventional authority of the story-teller. But such observations, general as they are, are not the province of research into original sources. They do not allude backwards to the past, but sideways from the magic world to our world” (Gupta, 96-97, quoted in Caselli, 170).

*Hallows* unleashed something like a flood of allegory cheat-sheets from the Christian community (for example, Barnhart, Bell, Bridger, Granger 2008, Neal 2008, Prinzi, Trevathen, Villaluz). The thesis neglects this well covered ground as well as the relatively obvious historical reading of *Harry Potter* as a re-telling of Britain's victory over Nazi Germany in WWII to focus on the psychomachia or the soul's inner qualities exteriorized in Rowling's first series and later work.

This defamiliarizing-focused reading, which is to say a relatively spiritual or anagogical interpretation, of Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Cormoran Strike series as well as of the *Fantastic Beasts* film franchise and her two children's tales, *The Ickabog* and *The Christmas Pig*, is a natural extension of the idea that Rowling populates her Hogwarts stories with magical items and creatures that "exteriorize" psychological phenomena (Kullman, 164; Cited by Klauss, 26 and Groves 2017, 112). Characters themselves, in the traditional reading, can be icons of faculties of the soul or virtues and voices in a drama akin to a Medieval Morality Play or Everyman Drama.

The only writer besides the three noted to explore this idea in any depth is Shira Wolosky, whose *The Riddles of Harry Potter: Secret Passages and Interpretive Quests* (2012) is the best formalist reading of *Harry Potter* that uses none of that critical school's touchstone tools or jargon. Where other critics talk about Rowling's foreshadowing in terms of 'Chekov's Gun,' that is, of set-ups requiring pay-offs and point-to-point foreshadowing, Wolosky is careful to note that Rowling's pay-offs are not just the ending of a murder mystery, the reveal of how best to understand the evidence readers have been given, but a complete reversal of orientation, a defamiliarizing change in understanding. In the chapter on 'Double Meanings,' she points explicitly to the psychomachia of the *Potter* books:

In terms of psychological exploration, allegory is a central literary tradition that *Harry Potter* draws upon. Allegory has an extraordinary power to explore our inner world and stimulate our imagination by embodying our inner feelings and states of mind in images that are outside of us. Psychological allegory is the projection of an inward feeling or idea in an outward form. That is, it represents an inner feeling or idea in the form of an external action, image or person, as a

mode of personification. Allegory can take shape as a symbolic object, narrative, dramatic scene or battle that in fact represents an inner conflict or “psychomachia.” A character encounters and interacts with someone or something outside him or herself, which also, however, represents an aspect inside him or herself. This can happen as a single event, or it can be extended into a whole narrative sequence. Rowling uses both methods. (Wolosky 2012, 24)

Her consequent discussion of “psychological allegories” (24-27), what Thomas Kullmann described as psychological “exteriorization,” echoes the points of correspondence noted by both Kullmann and Klaus, for example, the Boggart, the Dementors, and the Pensieve. Wolosky, however, does not think of psychomachia in terms of the soul but as “inner feelings” and mental or emotional states, which is to say her psychological parameters exclude a spiritual or ego-transcendent dimension. As such, it is of limited use in explaining the power of an author’s work whose core belief is in an immortal soul and whose spiritual formation and current status is Christian. Wolosky with Elizabeth Baird- Hardy was prescient to note the influence of Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* years before that work was the backdrop and template of *Troubled Blood* (Baird-Hardy 2011, Wolosky, 202) but, as with Grimes in her discussion of Potter’s struggles as “archetypal hero” à la Hercules and his labors (Grimes), she does not see characters themselves as iconological figures or representations of the soul’s faculties per Plato and Dostoevsky or of the soul and spirit in relation as in *Faerie Queen*’s Red Crosse Knight and Una or Shakespeare’s mature dramas. Her referents are all interior without noting the traditional touchstone that the kingdom of heaven is within, which is to say, that the heart has its origin in the metaphysical realm rather than exclusively individual ego concerns. Wolosky’s “psychological allegories” are never spiritual or anagogical, which is to say, they never touch on the artistry’s greater depth.

Though *Riddles of Harry Potter* surpasses all other academic criticism on the subject in Wolosky’s command of the material, it still fails as do the others in this regard. Wolosky sees and relates the “riddles of *Harry Potter*” especially with respect to its allegorical exteriorizations. Because she does not, however, as Shklovsky urged, “lay bare the bones” of the novelist’s architectonic patterns, forms,

and anagogical symbol sets, she misses the profoundly defamiliarizing forest for the signature Rowling reversal ‘twist’ trees and relatively superficial psychological meanings of “inner feelings.”

Hans Andrea’s drawing of parallels between *Harry Potter* and *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*, in contrast, discussed in the alchemical section that follows, is explicitly about a character journey towards apotheosis. This is less true of the essays in *The Alchemical Harry Potter* that present that series as an extended psychological allegory, a ‘Soul’s Journey,’ Hero’s Journey, or Quest; in various degrees they are more about psychological integration via Jung rather than the soul’s union with the spirit per se. Only Groves in ‘The Temptation in the Desert and the Harrowing of Hell: *Harry Potter*, Mystery Plays and Milton’ (Groves 2017, 60-80) explores Rowling’s psychomachian artistry both as a substantive Christian allegory and as an Everyman drama of the soul’s journey to perfection *in imitatio Christi*.

## V. Literary Alchemy

Rowling has admitted that alchemy “sets the magical parameters of (her *Harry Potter*) work” (Simpson) and has written about her use of hermetic colors in these books on her Pottermore website (Rowling 2013a). The first book in the series is a search for a Philosopher’s Stone, multiple and central characters have names bound up in their alchemical associations, and Rowling organizes each book and the series as a whole along the lines of the transformational sequence of the metallurgical Great Work (see Kendall 2006, Sprague 2011, Thacker). The tradition in English letters to which Rowling conforms is described and defined in Charles Nicholl’s *The Chemical Theatre* (1980), Stanton Linden’s *Darke Hieroglyphicks* (1996), and Lyndy Abraham’s *Marvell and Alchemy* (1990) as well as her *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (2001).



Though Nabokov and Lewis, as well as Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Dickens, all authors Rowling has read closely, also wrote in this tradition (see Linden, Abraham 1990), there has been significant resistance to her testimony, the evidence in the texts, and to explanations of that evidence. Alan Jacobs dismissed it out of hand in a *First Things* article, ‘The Code Breakers’ (2006). Colin Manlove demonstrated a stunning miscomprehension of the evidence and misunderstanding of arguments and of alchemy, literary and metallurgical, in his *Order of Harry Potter* discussion (31-42). Alexandra Lambert in *Heritage of Hermes: Alchemy in Contemporary British Literature* dismissed Rowling’s alchemy as “conventional” and “superficial” (184) and said the *Harry Potter* author’s treatment of Nicolas Flamel was “disappointing” in *Philosopher’s Stone* “because... Rowling entirely neglects [Flamel’s wife] Perenelle’s work” (185). In her conclusion, she completed her rejection of *Harry Potter*’s hermetic artistry with the one-line “Rowling employs alchemical imagery and lore without evoking its esoteric meaning” (212).<sup>15</sup>

In contrast with these deniers and dismissers, there have been critics who have written with insight about the alchemy of the series.<sup>16</sup> Evan Willis has explained the source of Rowling’s hermetic artistry in the mythology studies of her youth and university years especially with respect to the Orestes plays of Aeschylus and Euripides (2018). Two book length treatments on the subject were published in the pandemic years, 2020 and 2021.

The first was *The Alchemy of J. K. Rowling in the Light of the Alchemical Wedding of Christian Rosycross* (2020) by Hans Andrea. ‘Andrea,’ a pseudonym for Jan Riewers inspired by *The Alchemical Wedding*, is a Dutch writer who since 2004 has been posting alchemy-based ideas at

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<sup>15</sup>It should be noted that Lambert also misses entirely the alchemical structure and substance of Angela Carter’s *The Passion of the New Eve* about which she writes, “An alchemist-character appears in Angela Carter’s *The Passion of the New Eve* (1977) though without taking a central role” (Lambert, 66). See Cooke (2005) for Carter’s alchemical story scaffolding in *New Eve* which Lambert overlooked.

<sup>16</sup>Thacker, Trevvarthen, Dupree, Sweeney, Sprague 2011, Deans.

HarryPotterForSeekers.com. While it is easy to dismiss Riewers as anything but scholarly (he has argued seriously in past years that the advent of *Harry Potter* was akin to a religious revelation), this collection of his posts about the multitude of parallels between the Hogwarts Saga, *The Chemical Wedding*, and the stages of alchemy does represent Rowling's first series as a prolonged and detailed allegory of psychological purification and transformation into spirit.

The second pandemic publication on literary alchemy, in contrast, is an academic piece. An anthology of essays dedicated to the subject published in January 2021, *The Alchemical Harry Potter: Essays on Transfiguration in J. K. Rowling's Novels* (Mamary) is the most important collection of work on the topic to date. Five of the essays in it explore Rowling's hermetic artistry as a symbolic depiction of a seeker's transformation in the seven steps of 'The Great Work' (Parker-Perkola, Skipper and Fulton, Sipal, Purdom, and Swanstrom) which approach is in sympathy with traditional ideas of psychospiritual allegory.<sup>17</sup> Two of the essays are explicitly Jungian (Parker-Perkola, Skipper and Fulton) and only one beside my contribution even references Perennialist Titus Burckhardt's landmark contra-Jungian explanation of metallurgical alchemy (Swanstrom). Each contributed in its way to the discussion in the thesis which follows of Rowling's literary alchemy and her works as extra-liturgical art and psychological exteriorization.

## VI. Conclusions

The thousands of articles, academic critiques, and book length explorations of Rowling's work, largely about her *Harry Potter* novels, have included Formalist readings, allegorical interpretations, and decoding of her intertextual references and intratextual play. None have approached these books,

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<sup>17</sup> S. P. Sipal's offers a compelling argument that each of the seven *Harry Potter* books represents in sequence the steps of the work, an analysis others (see Sweeney for example) have attempted to make and succeeded only in 'forcing the pieces.' Sipal's essay uses alchemical source texts from New Age writers and online "archives" rather than Jungian interpretations or a Traditionalist approach which, while somewhat novel and refreshing, necessarily calls into question the foundation on which she makes claims beyond the seven stages (e.g., the Eye of Horus).

however, in light of Rowling's life-long interests, her core beliefs, and the common elements of her favorite writers whom she most likely used as templates for her own writing. While there have been psychological readings, with the exception of Groves, their psychomachia is of exteriorized "feelings" rather than spiritual referents or of soul faculties and the soul and spirit themselves. None of the alchemical readings have attempted to explain these defining stylistic and structural concerns in light of Rowling's anagogical intentions and craftsmanship. The thesis which follows, consequently, whatever its other failings, is not recycling ideas or approaches others have deployed to come to terms with Rowling and instead gauges her success or failure in light of her intentions. That reading begins with a look beneath the surface of Rowling's Lake for an understanding of the biographical inspiration underlying her labors in the Shed.

Rowling's two-fold approach to writing, Lake inspiration and Shed perspiration, suggests a similar path to teasing out her intentions as a writer, namely, biography and bibliography. A close examination of what is known of her life and core beliefs and interests should reveal the issues or substance of her Lake inspiration, which is to say, what her subconscious muse brings to her attention for examination and reworking in the Shed. A review of her favorite writers to discern their common qualities and signature elements might be expected to reveal or confirm those techniques she adopted and adapted for use in her own work. The first two chapters of the thesis proper, then, are readings of Rowling's biography and bibliography in search for her intention and the best critical tools to assess her success or failure in achieving them.

### **Chapter 3: Rowling's 'Lake' Biographical Inspiration**

#### **I. Introduction**

'Has Rowling succeeded in what she set out to do?' is, at least per Coomaraswamy and Upton, the central question a literary critic of her work must answer. The first task in this effort is to gain a clear idea of what Rowling's goals as a writer are, a discovery that will suggest the proper approach to understanding and evaluating her work's "ratio of intention to result." She has not explicitly stated her aims but she has pointed at them obliquely, as explained in the introduction, in her discussion of her writing process or methods and, as will be explained in the next chapter, in her advice to aspiring authors. She described her procedure of writing, inspiration to composition, with the metaphor of a Lake and Shed; the muse above or her subconscious mind below that lives in the Lake provides her with story ideas from which she crafts novels and screenplays in her Shed. The techniques deployed in that workshop, assuming she advises writers to use what worked for her, are those she learned from her favorite authors and imitated herself.

At the same time, Rowling shows some discomfort with psychologically inspired or driven story however much her seven known life crises and core beliefs and interests inform her work.

#### **II. The "Things" in Rowling's Lake**

Lev Grossman suggested to Rowling in 2005 that she seemed to be "subverting" the fantasy genre in her *Harry Potter* novels. She at first dismissed this assertion as a ridiculous misunderstanding of her situation and capabilities as an unpublished writer. She told him that what she was doing in the first planning of the Hogwarts saga at least was writing "pain to brain," which is to say, from her unresolved psychological conflicts to the page as a kind of projection therapy (Grossman 2017). She seemed to have confirmed that wish fulfillment of sorts was a driver in her writing at the start in her 2008 interview with Juan Cruz for *El Pais* when, again saying that her "subconscious" was partly responsible

for her work, that “I didn’t write what I wanted, but what I needed to write at that moment” (Cruz).

These notes when read with her 2019 BBC4 explanation of the Lake inspiration part of her writing process are more evidence that Rowling understands that no small part of her imaginative work is outside her creative control as it springs from her subconscious individual condition and needs.

It is important to note, however, that in the Grossman<sup>18</sup> and Cruz interviews mentioned, as well as others, Rowling asserts with some vehemence that, though she must acknowledge her subconscious as one spring feeding her metaphorical Lake, that she is not a ‘Mary Sue’ writer, the sort of author who pathetically channels her own inner issues and demons into stories. She called this “dream writing” in her discussion with Cruz and dismissed it: “I think that once you realize you're writing to make a dream come true, if it’s only that, then for me writing loses its worth. Writing out your fantasy in a story is not the same as creating a world” (Cruz).<sup>19</sup>

She is relatively self-aware and self-critical on this point. Rowling told Emma Watson in 2014, for example, that she had “conceived” the Hermione Granger relationship with Ron Weasley as an exercise in “wish-fulfillment” which undermined their “credibility” as a couple:

I wrote the Hermione/Ron relationship as a form of wish fulfillment. That's how it was conceived, really. For reasons that have very little to do with literature and far more to do with me clinging to the plot as I first imagined it, Hermione with Ron.... I know, I'm sorry, I can hear the rage and fury it might cause some fans, but if I'm absolutely honest, distance has given me perspective on that. It was a choice I made for very personal reasons, not for reasons of credibility. (Watson)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> She told Grossman, for example, not much later in their 2005 conversation that she had been intentionally “subverting the genre” in her Potter novels (Grossman 2017).

<sup>19</sup> P. Tal vez la escritura sea una especie de Piedra de la Resurrección. R. Sí, claro. Pero creo que uno se da cuenta de eso cuando está escribiendo para realizar su sueño. Si sólo es así, la escritura para mi pierde valor. Describir tu fantasía no es lo mismo que crear un mundo. This was originally translated back into English as Q: Maybe writing is some kind of Resurrection Stone. A: Yes, of course, but I think you realize that once you’re writing to make a dream come true. If it’s just like that then, for me, writing loses its worth. Describing your fantasy is not the same as creating a world (Cruz).

<sup>20</sup> The best guess for Rowling’s inspiration with respect to swotty Hermione’s love for the relatively clueless if good-hearted Ron is the author’s own childhood and continuing friendship with Sean Harris, OBE, whose family – Harris is the oldest of twelve children – was the model of the Weasley clan (Jeffery 2020, Granger 2022b).

This is notable because the names and character traits of Ron and Hermione are among Rowling's more obvious hermetic turns as will be discussed in the thesis chapter on literary alchemy. Rowling wanted, despite that remarkably deliberate artistry to emphasize that she had come to realize that, before its reworking in the Shed, as "conceived" this pairing sprang from her unconscious desires and was somehow problematic because of this "wish-fulfillment" origin.

Rowling in contrast expressed her idea of the sort of inspiration that is "subconscious" that she admired and embraced in her 2022 BBC interview with Stephen Fry for a *Fantastic Beasts* promotional piece. In it, she admitted, "I am very interested in story, inevitably. I am not just interested in writing stories but I am interested in why we write stories." Because "we are the only animal" that tells stories, she believes that human motivation in story writing reveals something "about what it means to be human," a capacity that "lives in the back of our minds in our subconscious." This is not the subconscious individual psychological desires and needs of wish-fulfillment writing, though, but the "archetypes" prevalent "throughout different cultures" in their "myth and folklore" that produce such nigh on universal creatures as the firebird and mermaid (Fry 2022).

She did not claim there that she was writing archetypal story, though she has previously discussed her borrowing from and reworking of mythological and folk story tropes ("I've taken *horrible* liberties with folklore and mythology," Fry 2005). In the same 2022 conversation, however, she discussed two of her imaginative 'beast' creations, the Lethifold and Niffler, as having been modeled on natural world animals. She described the Lethifold as the intentional representation of "my worst nightmare:" "There I went for something that would scare the bejesus out of me." It turns out that the author's worst nightmare is being eaten by a manta-ray-like creature that eats its human victims alive as they sleep, which is to say, while they are living in the dream state of the subconscious (Rowling 2001, 49-52).

This can be read as another statement of Rowling's desire not to be either a writer or person unaware of and consequently prisoner to their unconscious mind, one leading the unexamined life. That she brought up this creature of the more than ninety cataloged in her *Fantastic Beasts* textbook, one who unlike the Niffler does not appear in either the *Potter* novels or the *Beasts* screenplays, in a conversation including her assertion that archetypal or super-conscious inspired myth reveals "why we write stories" and something she is "very interested in," even "what it means to be human," is equally suggestive (Fry 2022).

Rowling tried in her 2008 Cruz interview, in fact, to distance herself from the idea of writing subconscious-driven fiction, preferring to talk about her "muse" more than her need "to escape:"

Let me tell you one thing. Simply the fact of writing the first book saved my life. I'm always told that the world I created is unreal; it was that which allowed me to escape. Yes, it's true; it's unreal up to a point. But not because my world was magical but because all writers evade themselves. Additionally, I did not write only to escape but because I searched to understand ideas which concerned me. Ideas such as love, loss, separation, death... and all that is reflected in the first book.<sup>21</sup>

Q: Could you describe what that something was?

There are so many answers to that question. I could say: "It was me, it was my subconscious." Yes, it was my subconscious, so what I've written comes from everything that I've done and all the people I've known because everything and everyone are somewhere in my head. Or I could say it was the muse, and I like to think it was the muse, because that means the writer is not aware of the origin of what they're writing, or at least is not fully aware of it, and I know it's a cliched word about the *Harry Potter* books, but they're magical. (Cruz)

Rowling's most well-known statement of her beliefs about "what it means to be human" was her 2008 Harvard Commencement speech, in which she advised the graduating class not to fear failure and to "imagine better." Her definition of imagination was intentionally broad:

I have learned to value imagination in a much broader sense [than its conventional meaning]. Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation. In its arguably most transformative and revelatory

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<sup>21</sup> In 2020 Rowling identified "change, loss, and absence" as the "major themes" of *Troubled Blood*, a remarkable consistency across her work (Rowling 2020c).

capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathise with humans whose experiences we have never shared. (Rowling 2008a)

Her advice, more a plea really, to her audience was that they deliberately choose to “think themselves into other people’s places:”

If you choose to use your status and influence to raise your voice on behalf of those who have no voice; if you choose to identify not only with the powerful, but with the powerless; if you retain the ability to imagine yourself into the lives of those who do not have your advantages, then it will not only be your proud families who celebrate your existence, but thousands and millions of people whose reality you have helped change. We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better. (Rowling 2008a)

Rowling’s definition of imagination as in essence the human capacity for empathy owes more to Coleridge than to the findings of neuro-scientists, as will be explained below. Imagination being the faculty through which writers create stories, Rowling’s understanding of it serves almost as her answer to the question she posed to Fry in 2022, namely, “Why do human beings write stories?” which indirectly answers the question why *she* writes her stories. She says imagination has “transformative and revelatory” capacities and these two words are perhaps the surest markers of her intentions as a self-conscious author. Here, though, it need only be noted that Rowling has asserted, as she did in talking about trans-cultural “archetypes” to Fry in 2022, that story telling at its best is not about individual projection of subconscious issues, ‘fancy’ or ‘fantasy,’ but a deliberate exercise of a trans-personal faculty, the imagination.

Rowling’s description in 2019 of her writing process as part Lake inspiration and part Shed perspiration is metaphor rather than a strict delineation without crossover or exchange in the writer’s mind between conception and production of a story. Similarly, what she describes as the “things” her “unconscious” and “subconscious” mind “processes” is not restricted to her personal psychological issues seeking



resolution but includes something other or beyond herself, the agency or ‘Lady’ in her Lake.<sup>22</sup> This per Rowling is her “muse,” the “magical” “origin” of what writers create, of which beginning “they are not fully aware” (Cruz). This per Estecean *logos* epistemology and Traditionalist interpreters of mythology is the realm of an archetypal and universal *super*-conscious or muse that is as “unconscious” or outside individual awareness as is the subconscious individual mind.

The best illustrations of this extrapolation of the universal from personal history in Rowling’s work are her stand-alone and least successful novel, *Casual Vacancy*, and her 2021 *Christmas Pig* Christmas story. Though published after the *Harry Potter* novels, *Vacancy* has all the hallmarks of a writer’s first work with respect to psychological projection and “fantasy conquests” (Anderson, 47).<sup>23</sup> *Vacancy* is transparently autobiographical in geography, set as it is in a village neighboring a town mirroring those of her West Country youth, something Rowling has acknowledged.<sup>24</sup> The characters, especially the Simon Price family, are caricatures of Rowling’s own life experiences. There is a young woman unhappy about her mother’s relocating them from London to the village, a professional woman married to a doctor struggling with faith issues, and a woman trying desperately to convince a man to marry her

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<sup>22</sup> Rowling, it must be noted, has never referred publicly to whatever lives in her ‘Lake’ with the Malory-esque ‘Lady’ epithet.

<sup>23</sup> “It is a general truism that the first artistic creation of an artist or writer is usually most revealing of his personality, for it is hoped that the artist’s work will also be psychotherapeutic work and contribute to resolving original conflicts and problems.... If the creative work of the artist or author is psychotherapeutic (as one hopes it will be and does sometimes seem to occur), then subsequent work will become more and more removed from the original struggles and conflicts.... The creative artist may reveal aspects of his life throughout his works, but it is hoped that the artistic work will be therapeutic and maturational for the artist. When this is so, the first work of the artist is usually most revealing of his personality, and the problems or conflicts most transparent” (Anderson, xxx). I suspect for this reason that Rowling revisited the book she had been writing when the Hogwarts Saga idea occurred to her, a book called *A Private Idea* she claimed in 2021 that she never finished (Rowling 2021c), and reimagined as *Casual Vacancy* for publication after *Deathly Hallows*. She was already at work writing her ‘Robert Galbraith’ mystery series at that time for which she claims to have adopted another pseudonym in order to see if readers would discover her books without the Rowling name on the cover. Publishing her original and put-aside work under the Rowling name and seeing it reach best-seller status seems consistent with her concerns about her legitimacy post *Potter*, not to mention her disappointment about being outed as ‘Galbraith.’

<sup>24</sup> “Ms Rowling has admitted that the book is ‘very much me vividly remembering what it was like to be a teenager’ and that much of it is inspired by her experiences at the local comprehensive. It was not a happy time. ‘You couldn’t give me anything to make me go back to being a teenager,’ she told the Guardian. ‘Never. No, I hated it’” (Hardman).

at the cost of her identity and vocation, all sharply defined shadows of Rowling's past and present.<sup>25</sup>

The subconscious mind at work here was clearly Rowling's, serving up "pain to brain" again as inspiration (Granger 2012).

There is super-conscious work here, though, as well. *Vacancy* has a seven-part alchemical structure mirroring the seven days after Barry Fairbrother's death and the copulation scene over Fairbrother's grave and the boys who talk in a cave in an *ouroboros* position are also hermetic tropes (Granger 2012a). At least three parables of Christ are embedded in the novel as well; the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Rich Barnkeeper all make significant appearances (Neff, Weisanen). Though Rowling deliberately chose to represent the Padford Anglican Church as "empty" and spiritually barren while the two Sikh doctors and parents have an authentic and rich devotional life, the Sikh *guru* invoked is one who rose from the dead after three days (cf. Groves 2017a). Rowling herself told one reporter that *Vacancy* was "all about how the light of God shines from every soul" (Wagner, D.).<sup>26</sup> As with the "subconscious" inspirations, these may have been Shed additions rather than Lake inspirations; all are sufficiently covert, though, that it is credible that the story's universal archetypes and its individual issues were all from Rowling's "unconscious" mind, gifts from the muse in the Lake, both above and below her cognition at first.

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<sup>25</sup> Rowling has only admitted in this regard that "no one in this book has a living model but at the same time I have known people like everyone in this book" (Rose).

<sup>26</sup> It must be noted that Rowling's "light of God message, though the phrase is used three times in the novel, was not picked up as a rule by reviewers and readers, who found the novel's gritty violence and depiction of desperate lives "boring" (Acuna) and vulgar – she uses the word 'fuck,' for example, one hundred and forty times – rather than spiritually enlightening or even edifying. She told Charlie Rose in 2012 more about what she meant by "the light of God: "A Sikh hero is quoted in this book, as you know there's a Sikh family is important ... and the Sikh hero, he said, and it's just the most beautiful thing, and he treated foe and friend alike on the battlefield. And when asked why he was giving aid to any wounded soldier, not just his side, he replied, 'I can't differentiate between them. the light of God shines from every soul.' Now that to me is the most beautiful, poetic way of expressing a common humanity" (Rose). It also resonates with a Traditionalist's esoteric ecumenism.

Similarly, in *Christmas Pig*, there is a conjunction or blending of the personal and the archetypal.

Rowling has admitted in interviews to promote her story of a young boy's adventures to rescue his plush-toy pig that it is based on her son David's toy pigs (and her sewing buttons on one pig's face for eyes when the originals came off<sup>27</sup>) (Rowling 2021c), that one of her prize possessions is the plush-toy turtle made for her by her mother,<sup>28</sup> and that a key scene in the story, the 'saving' of a blue bunny doll *ex machina* by a little girl named Jeanne is the insertion into the story of her daughter Mackenzie Jean's finding and keeping that exact doll in a garden as related in *Pig*.<sup>29</sup> The inciting incident of the story is a fight between the boy's mother and father which results in their divorce, the father living overseas from his child, and the mother marrying a doctor who also had been married and divorced, all in parallel with Rowling's life history and the experience of her daughter Jessica Arantes. The bullying older step-sister in *Pig* is exactly the difference in age with Jack that Jessica was to her younger half-brother David in 2012, the year Rowling says the story was conceived.

Those personal parallels having been noted, it is hard to read this story as anything other than a Christian allegory à la Dante or Bunyan. *The Christmas Pig* has a profoundly and relatively transparent Christian message; much as Christ the creative Logos entered the world He creates to save fallen souls, so the boy-hero of *Pig* enters the Land of the Lost, a world of fallen, manufactured things, and, in the

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<sup>27</sup> She tweeted in 2021 a photograph of the original pig, post-operation, with its eyes still bandaged. It seems probable that 'The Blind Pig' speakeasy in the first *Fantastic Beasts* film was named for this toy and that *Christmas Pig's* toys, 'DP' and 'CP' are also teasing references to the Blind Pig or 'BP' (Granger 2021g).

<sup>28</sup> "I own a cuddly tortoise sewn by my mother, which she gave me when I was 7. It has a floral shell, a red underbelly and black felt eyes. Even though I'm notoriously prone to losing things, I've managed to keep hold of that tortoise through sundry house moves and even changes of country. My mother died over 30 years ago, so I've now lived more of my life without her than with her. I find more comfort in that tortoise than I do in photographs of her, which are now so faded and dated, and emphasize how long she's been gone. What consoles me is the permanence of the object she made — its unchanging nature, its stolid three-dimensional reality. I'd give up many of my possessions to keep that tortoise, the few exceptions being things that have their own allusive power, like my wedding ring" (Rowling 2021d).

<sup>29</sup> "The Blue Bunny was also inspired by a real life incident in my family. My youngest daughter [Mackenzie Jean], she found a muddy little blue bunny in the flower bed that had obviously been there for years. And just like the mother in the story, I said, 'It will break the washing machine if we put that bunny in the washing machine.' She really begged me to keep it and she still has that blue bunny which must have been dropped by a child in the garden a long time ago but we managed to clean Blue Bunny up pretty well. So that was also inspired by something that happened in my family" (Rowling 2021b).

satanic Loser's Lair, saves them from death by his selfless love and his call for the lost to believe and hope. His mother's love, projected into the "transitional object" of Jack's toy pigs, becomes his own salvific, sacrificial love akin to Christ's (Granger 2021h). Rowling's Muse in the Lake, her unconscious core beliefs, with the author's deliberate work in the Shed created this story in alignment with her Christian faith, baptizing both the pleasant and painful experiences of her life as child, wife, and mother into a story meaningful for all her readers. It is reasonable to conclude that her intentions as a writer are more firmly fixed in her core beliefs, consequently, than in only those life experiences she has transformed into story in light of those ideas.

To understand Rowling's intention as a writer, then, with respect to her Lake inspiration requires more than an awareness of the various psychological crises of her life, as important as that background may be as the subliminal occasion for her artistry. The biographical component of the research necessary to identify the kind of story she aims to write, in other words, should focus on her key interests and core beliefs, especially those of an archetypal or religious nature, in light of which she has elevated the personal facts of her life into tales with universal meaning. Her comment to Cruz in 2008, "I did not write only to escape but because I searched to understand ideas which concerned me," is in this respect perhaps best read as a statement of her intention as a writer, namely, to explore and share in story her core beliefs. Rowling's awareness of the difference between psychologically driven writing and intentional imaginative work and that intention as such is by definition a conscious choice or decision means that the thesis that follows, one whose goal is to gauge Rowling's product in light of her aim in writing, focuses on her Shed decisions, first, deliberate as her work there must be, and on the super-conscious or Muse elements of her Lake inspiration, which is to say, her core beliefs and interests much more than the psychological issues that fostered those choices. The seven psychological crises of

Rowling's life are critically important and obviously relevant to understanding her work, but more in how she has turned each to service of her conscious intentions.

### A. The Seven Crises

Six of the seven crises of Rowling's life are public knowledge or easily identified from published biographical information. These seven crises in roughly chronological order are (1) the death of her mother, Anne Rowling, (2) the break in the relationship of the two Rowling sisters with their father Peter, (3) her marriage in Portugal and experience of abuse from her first husband Jorge Arantes, (4) their subsequent divorce, her life as a single-mother struggling with mental health issues, and the relief she found in Cognitive Behavior Therapy, (5) the Potter-panic near-hysteria about the supposed occult quality of her Hogwarts books, (6) her re-marriage and new blended family, and (7) her 'cancellation' as TERF and transphobe because of her defense of biological women's reserved spaces. Of those, only the sixth must be inferred from Rowling's work, specifically, from *Casual Vacancy*, the Cormoran Strike novels, and *The Christmas Pig*, rather than from her public statements and interviews, none of which reveal anything about her second husband or their children whose privacy she zealously protects.

To summarize the discussion of these crises and their influence on Rowling, she had a loving mother and abusive father and first husband, the death of the first and the effect of the latter two left her a single-mother in Edinburgh with clinical depression and suicidal thoughts. She recovered from this condition via Cognitive Behavior Therapy (or 'CBT') and her "intensely spiritual life" (deRek).<sup>30</sup> This faith was tested by the storm of criticism from religious groups about her *Harry Potter* novels, which assault seems to have only confirmed her disregard for institutional authorities. Life as both an

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<sup>30</sup> She told a Canadian reporter, however, in 2000, that her Christian faith per se and life in the church was not a help to her at the time of her mother's death. Q: And in your own life, would the church and that kind of spirituality help you deal with the loss of your mum? JK: No, actually it didn't at the time. No. (Shakes her head) (Solomon).

international celebrity and new wife-and-mother, not to mention her previous experiences of abuse and violence from men, almost certainly prompted her reflection on biological sex, gender roles, and individual vocation, which reflections and her convictions as a feminist resulted in her public conflict with transgender activists. Shadows of all these events are evident in her work, most importantly the ‘Divine Mother,’ ‘Bad Dad,’ Peter-John,’ and ‘Externalization of the Soul,’ her four archetypal “through lines,” all of which will be explored below.

Before that, however, and apart from her life crises, Rowling has key interests she has had since she was a child and core beliefs at which she has arrived that are conscious choices. Rowling told “aspiring writers” in 2005 that they should “write what you know: your own interests, feelings, beliefs, friends, family and even pets will be your raw materials when you start writing” (BBC 2005) and it is fair to assume she does the same. The key interests she has from before her great success with *Harry Potter* are mythology, the occult arts, psychology, and Christianity; her core beliefs are about the immortality of the soul and the power of imagination.

## **B. Mythology**

Mythology has been a pre-occupation of Rowling’s since childhood. One of her English teachers at Wyedean Comprehensive, Steve Eddy, was an expert in mythology of sufficient distinction that the *Teach Yourself* series of books invited him to write an introduction to the subject, *Understanding Greek Mythology: The Myths and Their Meaning* (Eddy). As Rowling explained in her Harvard Commencement address, her University of Exeter years were spent studying not only French but also ‘Greek and Roman Studies’ not to be confused with ‘Classical Languages’ (Rowling has said that what

Latin she has was “self-taught”<sup>31</sup>).<sup>32</sup> Rowling’s study was largely about Greek mythology as she explained in her 1998 essay for an Exeter alumni magazine, “‘What was the Name of that Nymph Again?’ or Greek and Roman Studies Recalled.’ In the same piece she wrote that her interest in the subject did not fade after her graduation; she boasted that she had more mythology books on her shelf “post Exeter” than when she was a student.<sup>33</sup>

This fascination with the mythological shows in her stories, many of which are built on mythic scaffolding. *Harry Potter* is a deliberate re-telling of the Orestes myth (Granger 2009, 143-166; Groves 2017, 5), Cormoran Strike the myths of Castor and Pollux, Leda and the Swan, (Gray) as well as Amor and Psyche (Granger 2021, 2021a), and Newt Scamander’s story reflects in several elements the tragedy of Theseus and Hippolyta (Granger 2016). Maria Tatar rightly described the “depth” of *Harry Potter* as “mythological” as opposed to “psychological” (Parker).

### C. Astrology

Rowling is not only literate in myths and folklore but also adept in more than one occult art, a fact that was kept well under wraps during the years of the Potter Panic. Rowling while in school was an amateur astrologer and tarot card and palm reader. She is said to have delighted her friends with comic readings of their character and futures via palmistry and card spreads (Smith, S. 2001, 62). Rowling’s

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<sup>31</sup> *Question: Ms. Rowling, for being fictional books, the Harry Potter books have a great grasp of the Latin language. I have noticed that many, if not most, of the names and incantations are of Latin heritage. How much research does it take to give these books their Latin heritage?* J.K. Rowling responds: My Latin, such as it is, is self-taught. I enjoy feeling that wizards would continue to use this dead language in their everyday life (Scholastic.com 2000).

<sup>32</sup> “In her first year she signed up for French and Classics but an attitude to academia best described as minimum work, maximum fun led to her abandoning Classics after she failed to register properly for an exam” (Newsroom). Rowling completed two of the three years of the Classical Studies program before taking her third year overseas, a common-place for UK modern language students.

<sup>33</sup> “Perhaps, in the deepest and truest sense, I still don’t really know what Greeks and Romans are, but I’ve never entirely given up hope of lifting a little more fog. A shelf next to me as I tap out these words is dotted with books on Greek mythology, all of which were purchased post-Exeter. And I’m confident I know more than Dr. Y would have credited when I left his office for the last time: enough to inform a pair of bemused four year olds with whom I watched Disney’s latest offering that Heracles *definitely* didn’t own Pegasus. That was *Bellerophon*, as any fule kno” (Rowling 1998a).

comprehensive teacher mentioned above, Steve Eddy, left teaching at Wyedean Comprehensive to become a professional astrologer. Rowling in her one-year sojourn in Paris while a student at the University of Exeter became friends with an American ex-patriot couple, William Leone and Lynne Corbet, a.k.a. ‘Starsky and Cox,’ who are now famous as celebrity astrologers, a friendship Rowling has kept up through the years (Heyman, Jeffery 2021b).<sup>34</sup>

Her amateur astrological practice was serious enough that in 1994 when she was drafting *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* she cast three horoscopes of a mother and father with newborn child she befriended, which natal charts include lengthy interpretations that are simultaneously humorous and accurate with respect to the math and planetary influences described (Tarantino). Rowling’s sole tattoo is just above the wrist of her writing hand; in her own script, it reads ‘*Solve et Coagula*,’ the alchemical formula meaning “dissolve and recondense” (Jeffrey 2019, Granger 2019e). All of her fictional characters whose birthdays are known behave in conformity to their astrological star-signs (Granger 2021d), tarot card imagery is implicitly and explicitly deployed in her *Harry Potter* and *Cormoran Strike* books, and the symbols and sequences of literary alchemy inform everything she has written to date. Her longest book, 2020’s *Troubled Blood*, has as its primary embedded text a ‘True Book;’ the astrological chart and tarot card images in this notebook are the subject of the detectives’ study throughout their investigation and reflect both the author’s lifetime study of occult arts and her relationship with them.

It is necessary to note, though, that Rowling has been careful to deny “belief” in magic or astrology in every discussion of these subjects she has had publicly (Barnes and Noble, Leaky Cauldron, Rogers,

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<sup>34</sup> Rowling thanks the two by name on the acknowledgments page of *Troubled Blood*, the fifth *Cormoran Strike* novel and one which features an astrological chart for the time of the missing person’s disappearance, “for inspiration and for checking my calculations” (Jeffery 2020).



Cowell).<sup>35</sup> The occult arts, consequently, cannot be described as belonging to her “core beliefs,” but remain a significant part of her mental make-up and literary tool kit. She has, however, been quoted as saying “I believe in God, not magic” (Nelson)<sup>36</sup> which raises the subject of her religious faith.

#### D. Christianity

Perhaps the surest road to understanding the meaning of an artist’s imaginative creations is her religious beliefs. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “To construct plausible and moving ‘other worlds,’ you must draw upon the only real ‘other world’ we know, that of the spirit” (Lewis 2002, 12). Rowling is eager to distance herself from the faith of her Christian critics, whom she consistently refers to as “fundamentalists,”<sup>37</sup> and maintains that she is not advocating or evangelizing for her faith.<sup>38</sup> That being noted, Rowling admits to faith in Christ,<sup>39</sup> albeit with the peculiar reticence of the British, at least relative to Americans, to discuss these beliefs or in being perceived by others as promoting them.

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<sup>35</sup> “I have always been interested in it, although I don’t really believe in magic” (Barnes and Noble). “I did a lot of research into astrology for [the Trelawney] character. I found it all highly amusing, but I don’t believe in it (Leaky Cauldron). “[I don’t believe in magic] in that sense. I find [magic] fascinating and I find it fun and I could read your cards for you now and I would hope we would both find it amusing but I wouldn’t want either of us to walk away believing in it.” [Grim face of determination] (Rogers). “Do you believe in magic?” The question came in a chorus from pupils at the Korean International School in Hong Kong. “I’m sorry to say this, but I don’t believe in magic in the way it appears” (Cowell).

<sup>36</sup> This is almost certainly an invention that combines Rowling’s comments “I do believe in God” and “Magic in the sense in which it happens in my books, no, I don’t believe. I don’t believe in that. No. No” in a CBC News World interview in 2000 (see Solomon; Behold a Phoenix).

<sup>37</sup> “Fundamentalism is, ‘I will not open my mind to look on your side of the argument at all. I won’t read it, I won’t look at it, I’m too frightened’. And that, to me, is fundamentalism, and that’s what’s dangerous about it, whether it be politically extreme, religiously extreme... In fact fundamentalists across all the major religions, if you put them in a room they’d have bags in common!” (Amini); “The past ten years there have always been fundamentalists who’ve had problems with my books. The fact that they feature magic and witchcraft is already enough, they despise them. I want nothing to do with fundamentalism, of any sort; it scares me” (Leaky Cauldron); “I go to church myself,” she declared. “I don’t take any responsibility for the lunatic fringes of my own religion” (Adler). Rowling’s use of the word “fundamentalist” with respect to Christians (for example, “To be honest, the Christian fundamentalist thing was bad” [Amini]) as “lunatic fringe,” is in keeping with the vernacular understanding of “fundamentalism,” that is, “Puritanical religious beliefs I despise,” rather than its proper definition with respect to Christianity as a specific early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American sect with beliefs about Bible inerrancy (see Mattingly for the use and misuse of the term).

<sup>38</sup> As in, “I am not pushing a specifically Christian agenda” (Amini).

<sup>39</sup> An exchange with Wyman in 2000: Is she a Christian? “Yes, I am,” she says. “Which seems to offend the religious right far worse than if I said I thought there was no God. Every time I’ve been asked if I believe in God, I’ve said yes, because I do, but no one ever really has gone any more deeply into it than that, and I have to say that does suit me, because if I talk too freely about that I think the intelligent reader, whether 10 or 60, will be able to guess what’s coming in the books” (Wyman).

Her description of her family's life in the church, for example, shows her as a seeker rather than a regular church-goer:

I was officially raised in the Church of England, but I was actually more of a freak in my family. We didn't talk about religion in our home. My father didn't believe in anything, neither did my sister. My mother would incidentally visit the church, but mostly during Christmas. And I was immensely curious. From when I was 13, 14, I went to church alone. I found it very interesting what was being said there, and I believed in it. When I went to university, I became more critical. I got more annoyed with the smugness of religious people and I went to church less and less. Now I'm at the point where I started: yes, I believe. And yes, I go to the church. A protestant church here in Edinburgh. (Leaky Cauldron)<sup>40</sup>

How often? "Mmm hmm. Well I go more than to weddings and christenings. Yes, I do" (Solomon; Fraser, L., 30-31). Rowling has repeatedly said she believes in God but frequently with significant hesitation and qualifiers. She told James Runcie, son of a former Archbishop of Canterbury, in their ITV documentary in answer to his point-blank "Do you believe in God?" "Yes. I do struggle with it; I wouldn't pretend that I'm not doubt-ridden about a lot of things and that would be one of them but I'd say yes."

Her reluctant "Yes; I think I do" to his follow-up about her belief in an afterlife was similarly unenthusiastic and without confidence (Runcie). She likes to cite Graham Greene when she talks about her faith; as she told *The Tatler* in 2006: "She is a Christian (Episcopalian) and, 'like Graham Greene, my faith is sometimes about if my faith will return. It's important to me'" (Greig).<sup>41</sup> She has been

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<sup>40</sup> Rowling was married in the liberal Anglican Church of Scotland in 2000 but the *Washington Post* reported in 1999 that Rowling for a time after her move from Porto to Edinburgh attended a Church of Scotland parish: "In Edinburgh, mother and daughter belonged to a Church of Scotland congregation. Jessica was christened there. At church Rowling met an older woman named Susan, 'who's coming on to 70' and never married. 'We were not 'dead certs' for friendship,' Rowling added. "Susan really helped me," Rowling recalled. The elderly woman would take care of Jessica for an afternoon and encourage Rowling to get out a little, kick up her heels, see an art show, do some window shopping. Instead, Rowling would find an empty table at a coffee shop and work on *Harry Potter*" (Weeks).

<sup>41</sup> "The truth is that, like Graham Greene, my faith is sometimes that my faith will return. It's something I struggle with a lot," Rowling admitted. "On any given moment if you asked me [if] I believe in life after death, I think if you polled me regularly through the week, I think I would come down on the side of yes — that I do believe in life after death. [But] it's something that I wrestle with a lot. It preoccupies me a lot, and I think that's very obvious within the books." Greene, it should be noted, said that his faith was function of his ability "to doubt my disbelief" consequent to "a very slight mystical

careful in interviews with *TIME* magazine's Lev Grossman,<sup>42</sup> Adeel Amini,<sup>43</sup> and *The New York Times*<sup>44</sup> to distance herself, albeit without denying her own faith, from conventional Christian authority, from critics who discuss the Christian content of her work, and from church sects in general. As she told Evan Solomon in 2000, she has “problems with conventional organized religion,” but church is “a place I would go to in a time of trouble. It probably is a place I would go to in a time of trouble. I wouldn't expect it to provide all the answers, ‘cause I would expect to find some of those within me.” Her “problems” specifically are with “aspects” of what Solomon described as the church's “institutional side,” “the rules” (Solomon).

Note, though, her comment to student Adeel Amini soon after the publication of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*:

There was a Christian commentator who said, which I thought was very interesting, that Harry Potter had been the Christian church's biggest missed opportunity. And I thought, there's someone who actually has their eyes open.... I think he said it before the publication of the seventh book, and with the publication of the seventh book I think that clarified a lot of people's view on where I was standing. (Amini)<sup>45</sup>

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experience” he had in meeting Padre Pio. When pressed about his religious convictions, he said, “I think ... It's a mystery... There is a mystery. There is something inexplicable in life. And it's important because people are not going to believe in all the explanations given by science or even the Churches ... It's a mystery which can't be destroyed...” (Cornwell, quoted in Dreher 2022).

<sup>42</sup> Grossman, L. (2005); “Unlike [C. S.] Lewis, whose books are drenched in theology, Rowling refuses to view herself as a moral educator to the millions of children who read her books. ‘I don't think that it's at all healthy for the work for me to think in those terms. So I don't,’ she says. ‘I never think in terms of What am I going to teach them? Or, What would it be good for them to find out here?’”

<sup>43</sup> Amini, A. (2018); “But I should emphasise that I am not pushing a specifically Christian agenda, and indeed till the very last moment in book seven, one can interpret what happens to Harry after he presents himself with death as him going into an unconscious state in which his subconscious reveals to him what he already knew.”

<sup>44</sup> Q: There's a whole publishing sub-industry of books about Harry Potter. Have you read any of them, or any of the scholarly articles devoted to the books? Rowling: No, except for two pages of a book claiming to reveal the Christian subtext. It convinced me that I ought not to read any others (Rowling 2012b).

<sup>45</sup> The “Christian commentator” quoted in a *TIME* magazine article without attribution to whom Rowling refers here was Connie Neal, an American evangelical Christian who had supported Rowling against the author's critics in that community at great personal cost. Ironically Neal is a likely candidate, as the author of three popular books on the “Christian subtext” of *Harry Potter*, for Rowling's disdainful comments about such writing (in which she said that reading a few pages of criticism by a Christian writer put her off all such interpretation of her work (Rowling 2012b).

As she said in 2007, the religious symbolism and Christian parallels in the books are, at least to her, “obvious” and, about the bible verses included as gravestone epitaphs in *Deathly Hallows*, the series finale, “I think those two particular quotations [Harry] finds on the tombstones at Godric's Hollow, they sum up — they almost epitomize the whole series” (Adler). Recalling Lewis’ observation that imaginary worlds necessarily reflect their author’s spiritual understanding, any methodological choice for interpreting Rowling’s work, however great her misgivings about her faith and tenuous her practice and testimony, should by rights be, if not explicitly Christian, then at least traditional, which is to say theocentric, rather than atheistic or agnostic, hermeneutically iconological more than reductionist or iconoclastic.

“Spiritual, not religious” remains an apt description of Rowling’s inner life, though the cliché might be modified to “not *especially* religious” given her occasional church attendance. It would be wrong, however, to overlook that Rowling of her own volition and apart from her family spent her adolescent years as a regular congregant at St. Luke’s parish in Tutshill.<sup>46</sup> Her spiritual formation, such as it was, is Christian, she has returned to the church as an adult, and her written works, whatever the “fundamentalists” have said about the Hogwarts novels being gateways to the occult,<sup>47</sup> are suffused with Christian symbolism, embedded parable parallels, and the theme of resurrection (Granger 2008). Rowling’s discomfort with institutional authority includes the church; her faith is more interior than exterior, then, but it is a significant part of her conscious mind and intention as a writer, not to mention the starting point of her core beliefs.

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<sup>46</sup> The Rowlings lived in ‘Church Cottage,’ which had been St. Luke’s parish house at one time and is located next door to the church itself. Proximity must have played some part in young Rowling’s church attendance.

<sup>47</sup> This objection is ironic on several levels, most importantly the remarkable Christian content of the Hogwarts novels but also because of Rowling’s skills with astrology and tarot, real occult arts, of which her Christian critics and defenders were and remain largely unaware.

### E. Core Beliefs: An Immortal Soul

From what is known about Rowling's experience of her mother's long-term physical degeneration from MS and early death, it is little surprise that what she described as the "depth charge" exploding in her life (BBC 2001) shaped her thinking. Specifically, as Rowling said in her 2012 interview with *The New Yorker*, she is "obsessed" with "mortality and morality" (Parker, Rose).<sup>48</sup> The *Daily Mail* reported in the same year that Rowling also told a day of publication gathering she was "obsessed by death" and writing about it helped her with her fears:

Her new book *The Casual Vacancy* starts with a character dying and the Harry Potter author says that writing about mortality 'has made me much less afraid of it'.

Speaking last night, on the day her book was released, she answered questions from 900 assembled fans at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Ms. Rowling admitted 'people did die a lot in my teens' and her obsession was cemented when her mother died when she was 25.

'Death obsesses me. I can't understand why it doesn't obsess everybody,' she said. (Bracchi)

These are echoes of her previous statements:

My books are largely about death. They open with the death of Harry's parents. There is Voldemort's obsession with conquering death and his quest for immortality at any price, the goal of anyone with magic. I so understand why Voldemort wants to conquer death. We're all frightened of it". (Grieg)

In many ways, all of my characters are defined by their attitude to death and the possibility of death". (Vieira)

Her thoughts about life and death, then, how human beings should live their lives and what happens to the human person at death, are consequences in large part of the Lake inner-work and conscious therapy

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<sup>48</sup> "I think there is a through-line [connecting *Harry Potter* and *Casual Vacancy*]," Rowling said. "Mortality, morality, the two things that I obsess about" (Parker). In the same press tour, she elaborated on this with Charlie Rose: J. K. Rowling: [W]hat obsesses me -- morality, mortality, that was -- Charlie Rose: Those two things most of all. J.K. Rowling: Absolutely. Charlie Rose: [They] run through everything you do. J.K. Rowling: Exactly they run through *Harry Potter* completely... They run through [*Casual Vacancy*] -- I probably will never be able to write -- Charlie Rose: Mortality and morality. J.K. Rowling: A very, very close friend of mine. I finished the book and the first thing he said to me was how many people die. He knows me so well (Rose).

she has done *post mortem matris*. This is, as she told Parker, the “through-line” of her work, *Potter* and *post Potter*.

Rowling defines her positions about ultimate questions as not “terribly clear or structured” but “intensely spiritual” and with a surety of sorts on the issue of life after death:

Q: Do you see death as the end of everything?

A: No. I lead an intensely spiritual life, and even though I don’t have a terribly clear and structured idea about it, I do believe that after you die some part of you stays alive some way or other. I belief (sic) in something as the indestructible soul. But for that subject we should reserve about six hours: It’s something I struggle with a lot. (deRek)

The “struggle” seems a key feature of her beliefs.<sup>49</sup>

Q: Solitude, death. We speak of dark things. At its best, literature comes from that.

A: Well, I think it was Tolkien who said that all the important books are about death. And there’s some truth in that because death is our destiny and we should face up to it. All that we have done in life had the intention of avoiding death.

Q: You said that you saw your soul as something undeniable.

A: Yes, that’s true. But I also have said that I have many doubts regarding religion. I feel very attracted by religion, but at the same time I feel a lot of uncertainty. I live in a state of spiritual flux. I believe in a permanent soul. And that is reflected in the last book....

Q: Our souls floating around, looking for what?

A: That’s the big question, but I hope we don’t have to come back! I don’t want to come back! (Cruz)

Her experience in the ‘*Potter Panic*’ attacks on the Hogwarts novels by “fundamentalist” Christian groups almost certainly fostered her already nascent “doubts about religion.” As tenuous as her religious faith and church attendance may be, however, it must be noted that Rowling speaks with much

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<sup>49</sup> Rowling: [Life after death] pre-occupies me a lot and I think that’s very obvious within the books. El Pais: Talk a bit about death. In the sixth and seventh Harry Potter books, death appears not just as a word or thought but as a possibility, something obvious and a reality. Rowling: That was always the plan, that death should appear in that way. Since he was young until Chapter 34 of the seventh book, Harry is required to be a better man in that he is obligated to accept the inevitability of his own death. The plan of the books was that he should have contact with death and with the experience of death (Cruz).

greater certitude about the existence of the human soul. Despite her “doubts about religion” and consequent “spiritual flux,” she describes the soul as “permanent” and “indestructible” (deRek). The single most important belief Rowling has despite or because of the trauma she experienced in her admitted crises is in the invisible, immaterial, and interior human aspect she calls the soul and how choices made by each individual person determine their soul’s character now and its existence in an after-life.

The centrality of Rowling’s belief in the immortal soul and afterlife shows itself in her work, most obviously in the comic spirits that populate the background of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. In addition to Harry Potter’s conversations with Nearly Headless Nick about the after-life after the death of Sirius Black in *Phoenix* (859-862) and with the Ravenclaw House ghost, the Gray Lady, during the Battle of Hogwarts (614-618), Harry communicates with the surviving souls of his parents, godfather, and favorite teacher in *Deathly Hallows* via the Resurrection Stone Hallow during his sacrificial walk into the Forbidden Forest (698-703). Rowling has been direct in her statement about the importance of that particular scene: “Everything, everything I have written, was thought of for that precise moment when Harry goes into the forest. That is the chapter that I had planned for seventeen years. That moment is the heart of all of the books. And for me it is the last truth of the story” (Cruz). *Casual Vacancy* begins with the death of a beloved teacher and city council member; the remainder of the novel can be read as an extended ghost story as various characters channel his messages under the pseudonym, ‘The Ghost of Barry Fairbrother.’ Ghosts of the murdered haunt *Troubled Blood* and the Strike novels in general as much as the House Ghosts are a presence at Hogwarts (Cf. Freeman 2021a, 2021b and Granger 2021e). Souls who have survived death haunt Rowling’s work as subliminally and pervasively as they do the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, one of her favorite writers [cf. W. W. Rowe’s *Nabokov’s Spectral Dimension* for a book length discussion of that author’s ghosts and Brian Boyd’s

*Nabokov's Pale Fire*, (129-148) for his explanation of how John Shade's late daughter Hazel haunts both the poet's 'Pale Fire' and the action of the novel].

A methodical approach reflecting Rowling's interior beliefs, her inner Lake rather than the craft of her Shed, should, then, in addition to being theocentric and iconological rather than agnostic and skeptical, have the tools and perspective that facilitate discussion of the human soul, life after death, and the importance of virtue, Rowling's twin "mortality and morality" obsessions.

### **F. Core Beliefs: Imagination**

Rowling's only explicit public statement of her beliefs about the meaning of life outside of what can be drawn from her stray interview comments as noted above was her speech at Harvard University in 2008. She received an invitation that year to receive an honorary PhD and to give the Keynote Address at their commencement. She spoke then about 'The Fringe Benefits of Failure, and the Importance of Imagination,' the first part being in essence a cry to be bold and not give up and the second a revelation of what she thinks "imagination" is and how important it is to a fulfilling life: "In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathise with humans whose experiences we have never shared."

One of the many things I learned at the end of that Classics corridor down which I ventured at the age of 18, in search of something I could not then define, was this, written by the Greek author Plutarch: What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.<sup>50</sup>

That is an astonishing statement and yet proven a thousand times every day of our lives. It expresses, in part, our inescapable connection with the outside world, the fact that we touch other people's lives simply by existing....

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<sup>50</sup> Rowling found this quotation not at Exeter but at Cybernation.com, an online quotations site, which she misread (Granger 2020a). Otto Rank, the Freudian psychologist, said what in her Harvard speech she cited Plutarch as having written. Though almost certainly a careless (and comic) gaffe, especially on the stage of scholarship from which and to which she was speaking as a Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, the opposition of modern psychology and traditional thought, what Rowling thought Plutarch meant versus what Rank the Freudian did by these same words, is meaningful (cf. Ware 1998, xxxviii, on "outward action," "inner attitude," and *metanoia*).



She concluded that “We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better” (Rowling 2008a).

Rowling equates imagination’s “most transformative and revelatory capacity” with empathy and urges her privileged Harvard audience to do the interior imaginative work of soul to affect outer reality. The “power to imagine better,” “to imagine yourselves into the lives of others,” she thinks is essential to our individual realization and our hope for a better world.<sup>51</sup>

Rowling’s idea of imagination as empathy that she shared in her 2008 Harvard Commencement address seems a novel and expansive, even original definition of imagination. It is not. As noted above, it is a restatement of Coleridge’s esoteric understanding of the primary imagination as *Logos*: “The PRIMARY Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite ‘I AM’” (Coleridge, 363). This is a transpersonal or ahypostatic faculty, in other words, one not unique to the individual soul, but in all persons and continuous with the *Logos* that brings all things into existence each moment. Whence its being the “prime agent of human perception;” Coleridge held that all knowledge was “the coincidence of subject and object,” *logos*-within recognizing the *logos* in the Other.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Rowling’s professed “hatred” of bigotry and belief that it is the chief evil today is perhaps best understood in the context of her understanding of imagination as the human capacity for empathy with what is ‘other.’ Q: *Why did you want to explore these themes?* JKR: Because bigotry is probably the thing I detest most. All forms of intolerance, the whole idea of “that which is different from me is necessary evil.” I really like to explore the idea that difference is equal and good (Jensen). “The Potter books in general are a prolonged argument for tolerance, a prolonged plea for an end to bigotry” (Vineyard).

<sup>52</sup> Coleridge’s definition of the Primary Imagination in his *Biographia Literaria* informs the entire English High Fantasy tradition and Rowling echoed it in her comments about imagination at Harvard. The *Logos*, that is, the Word or “I AM” that is the creative principle in the Godhead is present in every person (John 1:13) and as the human capacity of imagining. It being common to all people, this *logos*-within per Estecean epistemology is both a capacity for any and all human knowledge (“the coincidence of subject and object” (Coleridge, 366) and the existential commonality making love and empathy possible across the self-other divide (Perkins 21-22, Guite 287-88).

It would be difficult to overstate the place of imagination in Rowling's thinking. It is, she says, the human faculty not only in which she is inspired and by which she writes her books, her Lake and Shed, but also where she meets her readers. She describes this meeting as a "miracle" and as "magic." "This is the miracle of literature to which no other medium can compare — that the writer and the reader's imaginations must join together to make the story, so that there are as many different Harrys, Hagrids, and Forbidden Forests as there are co-creators, each one personal to the reader" (Rowling 2010). "No film, no television programme, no computer or video game can ever duplicate the magic that occurs when the reader's imagination meets the author's to create a unique, private kingdom" (Rowling 2003).

This interior "creative" capacity, though, as Rowling made clear in her Harvard Commencement talk in 2008, is more than the human means to share stories. While not denigrating imagination's visionary aspect, "the fount of all innovation and invention," what she most celebrates this capacity for is that it enables us to empathize with other human beings. "In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, [imagination] is the power that enables us to empathise with humans whose experiences we have never shared."

Rowling does not claim that her stories achieve significant exterior or measurable social or political change akin to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but what interior effect they have, fostering this faculty of "compassion," while "the best you can hope for is a tiny incremental shift in thinking," is no small thing. "One shouldn't undersell it" (Wagner, E.).

Rowling does not "undersell" it but, as was evident in the Harvard talk, thinks this interior "incremental shift" is the fulcrum by which social change is possible. She urged her audience of elite students and faculty to help those less privileged than themselves, "to change the world," change, she argued,

possible not with Hogwarts magic but through imagination. “[I]f you retain the ability to imagine yourself into the lives of those who do not have your advantages, ... we do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better” (Rowling 2008a).

As noted above, this definition of imagination is in essence Coleridge’s. Rowling cited Plutarch for her argument that interior change necessarily precedes exterior, a comic misattribution, but her ideas of imagination as a creative force, our “most transformative and revelatory capacity,” and as the origin of our ability “to empathise with humans whose experiences we have never shared” are Estecean both with respect to the specifics of her understanding and the importance she places on the right use of this human faculty for the quality of our lives.

Coleridge believed, after the esoteric teachings of Christianity, that is, its perennial wisdom, and his own epistemological reflections contra Hume, Locke, and Kant, that it is the *logos*-light within each person that allows one person to love another as oneself, because that Other is also *logos* illumined and *logos* created in essence. The Estecean signatures of selflessness especially as represented in the Ancient Mariner’s repentance as self-sacrificial death, rue or remorse, and the decisive quality of conscience all derive from *Logosophia* and the human cardiac intelligence transcending cranial calculation of individual advantage.

The engine of imagination as empathy is, as Coleridge explained, only comprehensible when the interior power is understood as the ‘Creative I AM’ or personal *Logos*-within that recognizes itself in the *logos* or shared inner essence of the Other. As the *Logos* creates everything material and immaterial into existence each moment, so readers and writers “create” and “co-create” in story, and in their

exercise of the *logos*-within that is imagination, they foster their capacity for “empathy” and “compassion” for others (see Vezzali). The defining quality of ‘good’ in imaginative fiction after Coleridge, the before and after picture of the hero or heroine’s story arc, is in the acquired ability to identify with *alter*, the Other, via a transcendence of self. Evil, in correspondence, is the inability to interpenetrate or empathize with man or the world, a failure caused by an unwillingness to change or by blind narcissism.

The critical events of *Rime of Ancient Mariner* exemplify this understanding. As Abrams noted (1973, 273), the ballad is a story of an interrupted wedding, the sacrament of communion with another in love. The Mariner teaches the Wedding Guest the esoteric meaning of marriage, ritual interpenetration of self and other, through his tale of how his “weary” eyes became single, “bright,” and “glittering.” Malcolm Guite qua Christian environmentalist describes this transformed vision as a change from an “instrumental” view of nature to a “sacramental” one (Guite, 178). Less topical but more in line with Coleridge’s thinking is seeing it as a conversion from sight that is restricted to physical perception to metaphysical understanding and selflessness.

Rowling echoed Coleridge point to point on imagination in her Harvard address, albeit without his explicit metaphysical language of *logos* cosmology and epistemology. Her Potter and Strike novels reflect these relatively esoteric Christian ideas of imagination, love, and responsibility which ideas are also the core and cause of her “obsession” with “morality.”

To get at the connection between imagination and Rowling’s “morality” obsession, an effort to find Rowling’s relatively direct reference in her works to imagination per se is appropriate. The worst of

Muggle and Wizards in her Wizarding World stories, for example, the Dursleys and Lord Voldemort, are as empathy-deprived and unloving as they are because they disregard their imaginative faculty.

Mr. Dursley, the reader learns in the first chapter of the first book, doesn't care for it at all. After an unexpected hug from a wizard on the street, "He hurried to his car and set off home, hoping he was imagining things, which he had never hoped before, because he didn't approve of imagination" (*Stone* 5). Similarly, in Harry's Wizengamot trial in *Order of the Phoenix*, Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic, reveals the government position of imagination in his dismissal of Harry's story about being attacked by dementors in Little Whinging. "'I would remind everybody that the behavior of these dementors, if indeed they are not figments of this boy's imagination, is not the subject of this hearing!' said Fudge" (147). Dumbledore summarizes the Dark Lord's failings in *Deathly Hallows*' otherworldly King's Cross: "Of house-elves and children's tales of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort 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" (709-710).

The "children's tales" specifically to which the late Headmaster referred there are *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, and in it, 'The Tale of the Three Brothers,' in which the story of the Deathly Hallows is told. Dumbledore clearly means more here than that the Dark Lord's failure to read one book attentively kept him from the information he needed to learn about the three Hallows. The "power beyond his own (magic), a power beyond the reach of any magic" that love, loyalty, and innocence "all have" is transpersonal identification with an Other, a story description of Coleridge's Primary Imagination and his ideas of the logos-within.

The same is true of characters described as lacking imagination in the Strike mysteries. In DI Richard Anstis, it is a matter of mental acuity rather than malice ("Anstis had neither the wit nor

the imagination,” *Silkworm* 369). In Roy Phipps, poor imagination means an incapacity to re-decorate or to disconnect from the past (*Troubled Blood* 421). True Dursley-esque failings in this regard are found in Robin Ellacott’s husband, Matt Cunliffe, whom his wife realizes “had very little imagination” and the author notes “was not usually imaginative” (*Silkworm* 268, 139), an incapacity that makes discernment, change, and selflessness very difficult for him (cf., *Troubled Blood* 812).

What connects imagination and morality, the judgment and teaching of what is good and evil? Cunliffe is pathetic, even pitiable, in not having an imagination; he gets his just desserts in losing his “exceptional” wife. Does Voldemort’s atrophied ability to imagine mean he is guiltless? In one respect, at least, Rowling pardons Voldemort for his crimes; the Dark Lord had an unhappy childhood. “He was conceived by force and under the influence of a silly infatuation, while Harry was conceived in love; I think the conditions under which you were born form an important fundament of your existence.” So much as he retained a capacity for choice, however, he retains a degree of agency and responsibility. “But Voldemort chose evil. I’ve been trying to point that out in the books; I gave him choices” (deRek).

Rowling clearly puts a great deal of stock in choices as the measure of any person’s worth. Perhaps the most quoted words of Albus Dumbledore by his admirers in *Harry Potter* fandom are the Aesopian moral the Headmaster draws at the end of *Chamber of Secrets*’ adventures: “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (333).

Choices are not value neutral, of course; it is not decisiveness that is Rowling’s core virtue. What makes a choice – and the person making it – good rather than evil in her moral universe is where that decision of one option over another lies on the spectrum of altruism with its poles of absolute empathy and compassion on one end and, on the other, of utter narcissism and sociopathy. Rowling’s texts have

specific markers, character choices and behaviors, that signal being on either side of this selfless-selfish spectrum, with *logos* light and love, the end of *logos* imagination, defining the good and heroic pole.

The first is the simple practice of courtesies,<sup>53</sup> most important of which is the kindness of being prompt and attentive in making apologies. Though the word “sorry” is used many times in a sarcastic fashion and even in Uriah Heep style (cf. John Bristow’s obsequious apologies throughout *Cuckoo’s Calling*), it is a default behavior expected of white hats and never said sincerely by the black hats. “Sorry” is said in the Hogwarts Saga just short of 330 times, 90 of which are in the finale, *Deathly Hallows*. The Strike books are well ahead of this pace with 434 “sorry”s in five books with almost 150 in *Troubled Blood*, an average of one apologetic note every six pages. Strike’s calling Robin Ellacott to apologize for his unthoughtful behaviors at a Valentine’s Day Dinner Party in *Blood* is a turning point in their story, perhaps in his life; as Strike had been trained by the mercurial Charlotte, it was best to wait out a row rather than apologize: “While Strike wasn’t in principle opposed to offering an unsolicited apology in the event that he felt himself to have been in the wrong, in practice his apologies tended to be delivered late, and only when it became clear that resolution would come no other way” (500).

He decided, however, to call Robin after receiving texts from Charlotte at Symonds House, that “he had to make things right before he set off for Cornwall and Joan” in near hurricane conditions. He apologized to her for talking about rape over dinner with near strangers, he said he was sorry for “being rude to your brother and your friends,” and “If I’ve taken you for granted,” he allowed, “I’m sorry. You’re the best I’ve got” (512). This is a turning point in the case as well as in their relationship because, immediately after they hang up, Robin, “savoring the sudden feeling of lightness that had filled her” at their reconciliation, found *ex machina* the location of Paul Stachwell, a suspect who had

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<sup>53</sup> Or “manners,” what Dumbledore thinks is of such importance that he is still teaching them by word and example to the Death Eaters gathered to kill him on the Astronomy Tower in *Half-Blood Prince* (593).

up to the time of this great shift in Strike eluded the Agency.<sup>54</sup> Jack Jones' apology to the Christmas Pig in *Mislaid* (65) is the turning point in their relationship.

An approach to understanding Rowling's work, therefore, as with her Christian beliefs and her ideas of the eternal soul, "mortality and morality," should reflect this pre-modern, even anti-modern Estecean idea of the imagination.

### **G. Psychology**

The key interest in Rowling's life that is in the end perhaps the single most important one with respect to the expression these core beliefs find in her writing is her fascination with and study of psychology. It springs almost certainly from her reading but also from her recovery from clinical depression via Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) on her return to the UK from Portugal in 1993. Rowling's life as a writer about the soul, its interior and invisible aspects exteriorized and its "transformative and revelatory" experience displayed in her story alembic for the reader's imaginative encounter and catharsis, began there.

Rowling told her Harvard audience that she had "failed on an epic scale:"

I think it fair to say that by any conventional measure, a mere seven years after my graduation day, I had failed on an epic scale. An exceptionally short-lived marriage had imploded, and I was jobless, a lone parent, and as poor as it is possible to be in modern Britain, without being homeless. The fears that my parents had had for me, and that I had had for myself, had both come to pass, and by every usual standard, I was the biggest failure I knew. (Rowling 2008a)

She told a student reporter in 2008 that she was in fact having suicidal thoughts at that juncture:

"I went back [to my apartment having been dismissed by my NHS GP], and we're talking suicidal thoughts here, we're not talking 'I'm a little bit miserable,'" Rowling laughs nervously, as if to mask the gravity of her psychological state at the time. "But two weeks later I had a

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<sup>54</sup> Strike makes a similar find consequent being more thoughtful with Pat Chauncey, the cranky older woman who is the Agency's office manager. Robin had yelled at him in her litany of accusations during their Valentines Day street confrontation that "I remember to say *please* and *thank you* to the secretary, when you don't give a toss" (496). Strike took this criticism to heart, making an effort to be polite to Pat, which, because of an insight he has consequent to letting her play the radio in the office, leads to his discovery of Steve Douthwaite in Skegness, the best concealed of all the case's suspects.



phone call in my flat from my regular GP who had looked back over the notes of what had happened while she'd been away, and had been alarmed to see that I'd been sent away. She called me back in, and I got counselling through her. So I tell the story but I'm not slighting the medical profession – especially as I'm now married to a GP,” she says with more than a tinge of mischief. “But she absolutely saved me because I don't think I would have had the guts to go and do it twice. Having been dismissed once, I'd given it my best shot and I went back and I felt worse than ever, but she called me back and I went for counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Counselling.” (Amini)

She describes the work she did with her counselor as intense:

“I think it was absolutely invaluable. Well it worked for me so obviously I'm very 'pro' it. You have to do a lot of work yourself, you know. Realistically, you have to do a lot of work, you have to be prepared to do what you're asked to do and persevere. I think I was in counselling for nine months, I probably could have done longer.”...“I went through a really rough time, and I'm quite proud of the fact that I got out of that. It's a lot of work, it's not a passive thing, counselling, you've got to work with that person...” (Amini; see also Associated Press)

It would be difficult to overstate the centrality of this transformation in Rowling's life and the means she used to achieve it with respect to its effects on her life as a person and as an artist. She had always wanted to be a writer; subsequent to her resurrection via Cognitive Behavior counseling from her nadir suicidal thoughts in Edinburgh, however, Rowling thought of becoming a psychologist if she was unsuccessful as a writer. The series of books she was planning at this time, the *Potter* septology, becomes thereafter something of a psychological morality play.

Rowling dated her secondary vocation as a psychologist to her time as a teacher in Edinburgh after her return from Porto, that is, the period in which she underwent CBT counseling. When pressed by Val McDermid at the Harrogate International Festival in 2014 about what she would have done if writing had not worked out as a career, Rowling responded that she would have tried to become a psychologist:

V: If it hadn't worked out the way it has. If you'd sat there and written the book in the café and nobody ever published it, what would you have done with your life, what would you have liked to have been?

JK: There are two answers. If I could have done anything, I would have been really interested in doing, I would have been a psychologist. Because that's the only thing that's ever really pulled me in any way from all this. But at the time I was teaching, and I was very broke, and I

had a daughter and I think I would have kept teaching until we were stable enough that we were stable enough that I could change. (McDermid)<sup>55</sup>

This 2014 comment is especially interesting because, until her 2008 discussion of her experience of acute depression, she had never mentioned her CBT counseling or an interest in psychology as a back-up profession. Before surveying her work to note the more obvious markers of Rowling's integrating this experience in story as the Lake muse inspired her, a brief introduction to CBT is in order.

Albert Ellis, the pioneer of cognitive behavior counseling, summarized the problem of psychological impasse and the way to treat it with the acronym A-B-C-D-E. An *activating* "inner or external" event triggers the human agent's *belief systems* that cause "a range of emotional and behavioral *consequences*," specific to the unique beliefs of each person. When these consequences are inappropriate or debilitating, the irrational beliefs must be examined consciously in order to *dispute* and replace them with more *effective* rational beliefs. "To modify patients' irrational beliefs, the therapist actively tries to encourage and persuade them to rethink their assumptions and personal philosophy. REBT therapists may assign 'homework' designed to falsify clients' maladaptive beliefs" (Lilienfeld, 687-688).<sup>56</sup>

The first principle of cognitive behavior therapy is conscious awareness – cognition – of the interior narratives or beliefs that drive responses to events – behaviors. The human conscious faculty to take control of unconscious and incongruous reactions to stimuli by deliberate choice and substitution of rational beliefs is fostered by conversation with and exercises assigned by a CBT therapist. It is

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<sup>55</sup> Rowling's interest in psychology has both biographical and bibliographic roots beyond whatever interest she may have had natively; her recovery from chronic depression using CBT and her interest in detective fiction by P. D. James and Ruth Rendell, both of whom were noted for their elevating the genre by inserting psychological studies in their mysteries.

<sup>56</sup> Ellis' REBT approach was precursor to Aaron Beck's cognitive behavioral therapy methods which also "emphasizes identifying and modifying distorted thoughts and long-held negative beliefs" though it "places somewhat greater weight on behavioral procedures than does Ellis' REBT." "The ABCs Ellis identified lie at the heart of most, if not all, cognitive-behavior therapies." According to Lilienfeld, "Beck's approach" is "helpful for people with depression" (Lilienfeld, 688).

thoughts in general and beliefs specifically, in other words, that for better or worse make human beings what they are. Human freedom, from this perspective, is creating the greatest possible conscious space between stimulus and response in order to make the best behavioral choice; psychological slavery, in correspondence, is the unexamined life led in thrall to unconscious thoughts and beliefs.

Madame Pomfrey told Ron Weasley at the end of *Order of the Phoenix* in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing, to which he had been sent for treatment after carelessly handling the tentacles from brains in the Department of Mysteries (797-798), that “thoughts could leave deeper scarring than almost everything else” but they could be treated successfully (847). As mentioned, Rowling described the Lethifold in *Fantastic Beasts*, a monster that envelops and devours its human victim as he or she sleeps, that is, in their unconscious dream state, as her “worst nightmare” (Fry 2022). Her determination post CBT recovery from depression is at one level at least to live as conscious and deliberate a life as possible, examining and replacing old beliefs and thoughts with better ones, healing the “deeper scarring” of destructive thoughts and beliefs. The alchemical motto tattooed to her writing hand wrist, *Solve et Coagula*, “dissolve and recondense,” expresses that process succinctly. As an artist, her elevation of her own psychological experiences and issues into archetypal images and themes is a like operation.

Rowling admitted that she incorporated her depression and recovery experiences into the *Potter* novels in the form of the Dementors, floating, cloaked wraiths who via their “kiss” “suck the souls” out of the bodies of their victims. Just their presence causes despair and the departure of all hope and happiness of anyone nearby, Muggle or magical. Rowling discussed them in a 2000 interview.

People talk about the Harry Potter books as wizard wheezes but they have a pronounced dark side as well. The Dementors, for instance, are prison guards who track people by sensing their emotions. They disable their victims by sucking out all positive thoughts and with a kiss they can take a soul while leaving the body alive.

I do not think that these are just characters. I think they are a description of depression. "Yes. That is exactly what they are," [Rowling] says. "It was entirely conscious. And entirely from my own experience. Depression is the most unpleasant thing I have ever experienced."

What does she mean?

"It is that absence of being able to envisage that you will ever be cheerful again. The absence of hope. That very deadened feeling, which is so very different from feeling sad. Sad hurts but it's a healthy feeling. It's a necessary thing to feel. Depression is very different." (Treneman)

Louise Freeman noted that Rowling's "entirely conscious" story depiction of her clinical depression in the Dementors was not casual or off-hand but in detailed correspondence with the symptoms of this pervasive mental illness as described in diagnosis texts in the field:

The two major effects of depression, intense despair and the inability to feel happiness, correspond to the first two symptoms listed in the American Psychiatric Association's official guide, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual [DSM-IV]. But, the dementors also induce the rest of the nine symptoms. Harry is often confused or unable to concentrate when confronted with dementors, and Sirius tells us that Azkaban prisoners stop eating, have sleep disturbances and "go quiet after a while," representing the symptoms of loss of appetite, insomnia and psychomotor retardation.

Dementors sap the prisoners' mental and physical energy, so that they lose the will to escape. As Lupin tells Harry, "They don't need walls or water to keep the prisoners in, not when they're trapped inside their own heads." Harry guiltily relives his parents' deaths under dementor influence and, during the Battle of Hogwarts, comes close to a type of suicide. (Freeman 2016)<sup>57</sup>

The spell that protects witches and wizards from Dementor attacks is the Patronus Charm, incantation 'Expecto Patronum!', which produces a creature of white light reflecting the love or inner essence of the wizard casting it. To create the "corporeal Patronus," literally 'little father,' or 'patron and protector,' requires the magical person to imagine vividly a thought or experience of great happiness.

Freeman noted the parallel here with Cognitive Behavior therapy:

Cognitive behavioral therapy teaches patients to recognize depressive thoughts and replace them with positive ones, often reminders of good things, happy memories or past successes. Harry's Patronus summoning memories often take the form of victories (like riding a broomstick), escapes (like Umbridge being sacked) or of his friends Ron and Hermione. Luna actually plays

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<sup>57</sup> Freeman's 2015 paper 'Harry Potter and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Muggle Disorders in the Wizarding World' includes a table 'Dementor effects that parallel symptoms of major depression' in which the fictional correspondences with the nine symptoms of depression in DSM-IV are detailed. See also Freeman 2012.

the role of a Cognitive Behavioral therapist as she comes to his aid [during the Battle of Hogwarts in *Deathly Hallows*]. (Freeman 2016)

Harry was taught the Patronus Charm in his third year at Hogwarts in private lessons with Professor Remus Lupin that resemble CBT counseling. He received these tutorials though young for mastering such “advanced magic” because his reaction to the presence of the soul-sucking wraiths was more pronounced than normal. Freeman has explained the detailed correspondence here with psychologist’s clinical understanding of depression:

[Harry] was more vulnerable to [dementor] effects than many of his peers, just as children in the Muggle world who have experienced parental loss or mistreatment are more vulnerable to depression.... However, the visualizations Harry uses to summon his Patronus fall into two categories that correspond to factors known to reduce or moderate the chances of developing depression: past successes or escapes from adversity and social support. (Freeman 2015)

Harry enthusiastically participated in his tutorials with Lupin and practiced CBT like exercises outside of these lessons in “disputing” his irrational or destructive beliefs with more rational and “effective” ones (see, for example, *Prisoner* 243). He received tutorials again in the fifth book of the series, *Order of the Phoenix*, with his nemesis, Severus Snape, lessons this time in Occlumency, the ability to shield the mind from Legilimens, wizards skilled in reading minds. The homologue in the real world to this magical ability is *nepsis* or spiritual watchfulness over unwanted and sinful thoughts but it has obvious correspondences with CBT counseling as well. Snape led Harry in exercises in which he must guard his mind from attack and assigned him homework practices between lessons. Harry’s antipathy to his borderline sadistic counselor, however, meant he was unable “to work with that person,” as Rowling told Amini a CBT patient must (Amini).

A licensed behavior analyst working with special needs children and a professor of psychology herself, Freeman’s most important contribution on the subject of Rowling’s psychological story “homologues” is not the CBT parallels with the Dementors and the Patronus Charm but in the author’s fidelity to professional understanding in other aspects of her story not as clearly drawn from her biography.

Freeman detailed, for example, how Alastor Moody's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms as well as Harry's are 'spot-on' with DSM-IV diagnostic points as are Winky the house-elf's manifestation of Stockholm syndrome and the Longbottoms as Alzheimer Disease patients (Freeman 2015, 180-186 and Table 3, 186-193, 174-180). Freeman has discussed this same accuracy in psychological depiction in Rowling's post *Potter* work as well. The Obscurus in the *Fantastic Beasts* franchise is the mirror reflection of the Patronus (Freeman 2016b). Robin Ellacott's self-reflections in *Lethal White* about her feelings for Cormoran Strike are psychology textbook to the letter for understanding "misattribution of arousal" (Freeman 2019). Freeman even has argued cogently the specific psychologist Rowling has studied closely is V. S. Ramachandran because of the correspondences between this researcher's discoveries and the "shadow limb" experiences of Strike as an amputee (Freeman 2022a) and body image integrity disorder (BIID) or apotemnophilia that plays a large role in *Career of Evil* (Freeman 2016a).<sup>58</sup> Freeman has demonstrated that Rowling is a serious student of psychology who carefully and accurately depicts psychological conditions and ideas in her stories.

Robin Ellacott's life story parallels Rowling's biography in significant ways, which marks the character as something of an embedded author in the detective series. Rowling has admitted that she once had a job as a temporary secretary on Denmark Street in London, the position Robin has in the Strike series' first book, the reason for meeting and working for the Strike Detective Agency. Though Robin is half a foot taller than the author, there are notable physical similarities and shared mental interests. The most notable among the latter is a fascination with psychology. Ellacott was studying for a degree in this subject before she was raped while at University and dropped out. She contributes psychological

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<sup>58</sup> Rowling admitted in a 2016 tweet, too, that she was familiar with Capgras Syndrome, another Ramachandran subject Freeman had noted, from researches the author had done for a Strike novel she decided not to use (Groves 2018a).

insights and explanations so often in the series that Strike,<sup>59</sup> who appreciates his partner's acumen and asks for her to share this perspective,<sup>60</sup> has commented that her decision to become a detective rather than a practicing psychologist was "psychology's loss" and "private detection's gain" (*Career* 207).

After three novels, though, Robin Ellacott was struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She by this time, in addition to the rape and attempted murder she survived as a student, had been strangled by a murder suspect (*Silkworm* 448), knifed by the Shacklewell Ripper, and beaten by a child abuser (*Career* 416, 438-439). She was suffering recurrent panic attacks and pursued therapy at the 'Villiers Trust Clinic.' The parallels with Rowling's experience with CBT counseling as she described it to Amini include hesitation in seeking help, frustration with the NHS physician's response to her needs<sup>61</sup> (Robin pays for a private therapist rather than wait for free treatment), writing a "little speech" to share with the doctor (Robin's is for the psychologist when she ends therapy), terminating the course of treatment before it was finished (Robin ends hers after only five meetings), and benefiting greatly from the CBT exercises which she continues to practice thereafter, though not with the consistency she wants (*White* 45-47, 541, 550).<sup>62</sup>

If Robin is understood as a stand-in for Rowling in these books, though, especially with respect to her interest in and knowledge of psychology, then the author differs in significant ways from the conventional or orthodox perspectives of the scientific discipline. Robin, like Rowling, for example, is

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<sup>59</sup> She explains the Johari Window to Strike in *Cuckoo* (298), the behavior of a transgender woman's attempt to murder Strike in *Silkworm* (330, her desire for her imagined new mother's love), a son's hatred of a negligent father that motivated the killer in *Lethal White* (368), and "self-categorization theory" in *Troubled Blood* (60-61). Robin perceives the only way to get Holly Brockbank to speak to them in *Career*, an idea that prompted his expression of admiration for her psychological understanding (207).

<sup>60</sup> e.g., "What does the psychologist make of Raphael denigrating his dead father?" (*White* 368).

<sup>61</sup> Though Rowling is married to a GP and she supported the NHS throughout the UK's Covid response in 2020 by public statements in favor of the lockdowns, her misgivings about its failings run throughout *Lethal White* (Granger 2018, 2018a).

<sup>62</sup> To complete the Rowling life parallels, Robin tells Strike that "people coming up unexpectedly behind me – that's a major trigger [for a panic attack]... People behind me, when I don't know they're there" (*White* 549). Strike's response, "Don't think we need Freud to explain that one," might be the reader's if he or she is familiar with Rowling's experience in Porto and problems to this day with being surprised from behind (Rowling 2020a).

not only *not* dismissive of astrology as Cormoran Strike is, she is conversant in the language of its symbols.<sup>63</sup> In *Troubled Blood* Robin cites Jung's idea that astrology "was man's first attempt at psychology" and admires its "symmetry" and "order" as a "kind of poetry" (396-397). She buys a deck of tarot cards and a guide to their use supposedly to interpret Talbot's 'True Book' card spreads (an interpretation she never does) but she does three-card readings twice in hopes of gaining some insight about her relationship with Strike (539-540, 923-924). A standard introductory textbook for psychology, however, dismisses both astrology and tarot card reading as examples of the "P. T. Barnum Effect," "the tendency of people to accept high base rate descriptions – descriptions that apply to almost everyone." Citing studies that demonstrate, "despite their widespread use, there's no evidence for [the validity of astrology or tarot cards]," the psychological authorities declare "there's no longer any need to continue to study astrology or other thoroughly discredited belief systems" (Lilienfeld 615, 36).

This is the position of the skeptical Cormoran Strike who tells Robin he is "Team Rational," that there is no reason for astrology "now that we've got actual psychology," and that "it's not fucking *real*," "it means nothing," and "it's all bollocks" (*Troubled Blood* 397, 242). One is reminded of the risibly pathetic Professor Trelawney at Hogwarts who teaches Divinations or the occult arts, which include astrology and cartomancy. She is the laughing stock of the school as a ridiculous fraud whose "readings" as a rule show exactly what she is thinking rather than any insight about the future. Trelawney's predictions, though, especially her reading of tarot cards when drunk,<sup>64</sup> are as a rule dependable markers of future events; the Divination teacher, too, *was* the vehicle of the Prophecy that is

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<sup>63</sup> Robin is the first to see that Talbot's 'True Book' includes glyphs for Star Signs and admits that she "used to have a key ring" with her sign's symbol, Libra's scales. (240).

<sup>64</sup> Most notably in *Half-Blood Prince*, when she tries to convince Dumbledore that there is "Calamity. Disaster. Coming nearer all the time" because "Again and again, no matter how I lay them out – " And she pulled a card dramatically from underneath her shawls. "-- the lightning struck tower," she whispered (543). Harry and the Headmaster discount her reading of the cards – she is drunk on cooking sherry – but that night Dumbledore is murdered by Severus Snape and knocked off the top of the school's Astronomy Tower, in a chapter Rowling titles 'The Lightning Struck Tower' to drive home the point.



the central narrative text, the inciting incident of the series. Similarly, Strike the skeptic has the epiphany that solves the missing person case in *Troubled Blood* only after giving up all his rational and systemic approaches to the problem. His meditating on the tarot cards Talbot had pictured on his last True Book page of his attempt to find Margot Bamborough reveals the murderer to him at last (775).

Robin's less than clinical approach to astrology and cartomancy, then, probably reflects the author's relationship with psychology, i.e., an attentive student of research and findings in the field which she accurately represents in her stories and her characters' discussions but someone who is as skeptical as she is accepting of the rationalism of the science and its restricted idea of *psyche* or soul to mind and neurochemistry. The fictional Patronus cure or treatment for Dementors may parallel CBT techniques for combating depression but the spell itself, "*Expecto Patronum!*", uses the Latin word *expecto* from the conclusion of the Nicene Creed ("I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come"). It produces a symbolic exteriorization in animal form of the witch's or wizard's inner character, even their soul. Harry's Patronus, appropriately enough given the meaning of that word in Latin, is the white stag form that his father assumed as an animagus, a traditional image of Christ (Ford 440, Cirlot 308-309). The word 'Dementor' comes from the Latin words for "out of your mind" but what this terrifying beast of Rowling's invention feeds on is always referred to as the victim's soul. Rowling's depiction of depression, then, with these monsters has at least as much a spiritual meaning as it does the clinically psychological.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The treatment or folk remedy in the Wizarding World for anyone having been exposed to the hope and happiness destroying presence of a Dementor is chocolate. Freeman describes at some length the salutary chemical effects of "the methylxanthine stimulants caffeine and theobromine" to be found in chocolate and the research that has been done by psychologists to test its effectiveness in treating depression and to explain why people choose to use it this way (Freeman 2015, 164-166). Rowling hints in the name given a Chocolate Labrador retriever in the Strike series, 'Rowntree,' that, again, the answer may be more spiritual than mental or chemical; the Quaker confectioners who founded Rowntree's, Cadbury's, and Fry's, created their businesses as means to the ends of living and sharing the "inner light" *logos*-within gospel of their sect, one Rowling acknowledged in the William Penn epigraph to *Deathly Hallows* as well by the "inner light" *Patronus* exteriorizations of her witches and wizards (cf. Granger 2008b, 2012b). Rowling's magical folk went into hiding in 1692 and have an association with the Society of Friends because of the suppression of Radical Reformation cults at this time and their disappearance into the Quaker fold. Rowling refers to chocolate throughout *Troubled Blood* in the form

As noted above, it would be hard to over-estimate the importance of Rowling's experience of clinical depression as a single mother on her return to the UK from Portugal and her recovery from it using CBT therapy. It fostered or created the author's interest in psychology which she represents symbolically or unvarnished in the trials of her characters, most notably, Harry Potter with the Dementors and Robin Ellacott with PTSD. It would be hard to over-estimate it – and yet it is also tempting to do just that, to think of Rowling as a psychological novelist akin to P. D. James or Ruth Rendell, two of her favorite mystery writers. Rowling's core beliefs about the soul, her study of mythology and the occult arts, and her childhood and adolescent exposure to Anglican church life and sermons are spiritual rather than psychological and a check on her fascination with the academic discipline and clinical practice of psychology which consider "metaphysical claims" as non-falsifiable and therefore not proper subjects of psychological study (Lilienfeld 44-45). Rowling's description of a child's attachment to a toy as a "transitional object" in an interview about *The Christmas Pig* revealed her familiarity with psychological jargon and thinking; her choice to describe that language as "quite a clinical way of looking at it" in a pejorative sense and to say "I see [toys] as invested with a certain kind of magic" instead (Rowling 2021c) illustrates her serious study of and independence from a psychological perspective sans spirit.

### **III. Lake Touchstones in Rowling's Work**

#### **A. Beyond Psychology**

Rowling's multiple exteriorizations of interior psychological conditions in her Wizarding World stories, though, reflect in some degree her experience of cognitive behavior therapy and her incorporating it into these stories. CBT is in essence the identification of inappropriate beliefs that cause poor responses

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of gifts on birthdays, at Christmas, and especially at Easter because of the food's supposed spiritual qualities (cf. Granger 2021b).

to activating events or persons, and, having become aware of these beliefs, choosing to take on more effective ones to replace them or to adopt behaviors that diminish their power. Fighting a Boggart that takes the form of a phobia with the *Riddikulus!* Charm, defeating a Patronus that draws out all the hope and happiness of a soul with vividly happy thoughts and *Expecto Patronum!*, seeing one's heart's desire in the Mirror of Erised, entering a memory in the Pensieve, or experiencing the shame of an exploding Howler from parents in the Great Hall, all are allegorical depictions of the mind's faculties and condition as visible or audible facts to be confronted. All are means, as well, in their visibility as means to self-transformation via a choice to accept or change the inner reality represented outwardly, a process akin to the changes possible in CBT counseling.

The temptation would be to overlook consequent to this understanding of Rowling's psychological artistry her greater soul depictions in the Harry-Ron-Hermione triptych in the *Potter* books, Robin and Cormoran as soul and spirit in the Strike series, *Christmas Pig's* Jack Jones and CP as representations to the other of a mother's selfless love, and the *Fantastic Beasts* anima-animus agony of Credence Barebones, orphan Obscurus and Obscurial. Rowling in these depictions is after larger game than psychological fiction or overt moralizing allegory per *Pilgrim's Progress*; her aim seems to be creating a transformative allegorical experience for her readers of the soul's journey to perfection in spirit à la Dante and Shakespeare. This in keeping with her core beliefs about the soul, God, Christ, ghosts, and story as mythology, all of which are outside profane psychological study because of their "non-falsifiability."

Rowling's varied works, then, if they are best read, as argued in the thesis, as psychological allegories, are not Freudian or CBT transparencies as such, but postmodern mythology of the soul's journey to deification, traditional 'psychomachia.' In this light, it would be an exercise in self-blinding for a literary critic to ignore the consequences of her experiences in Edinburgh as a single mother in a dark

tunnel and the psychological means by which she managed to come back to life. Her re-inventions in story of her mother's death and her experiences as the child of an abusive father as well as her reflections on the meaning of her father's and her own names as archetypal touchstones in her work testifies to the critical importance of these life events and her ability qua psychologist to externalize and recreate them with symbolic weight and meaning.

### **B. The Divine Mother**

Rowling has publicly spoken about the connection between her mother's death and her "obsession" with "mortality." A less obvious and as important connection is the remarkable power of a mother's love she assigns characters in her work, especially those who have been betrayed by a spouse or dear friend.<sup>66</sup>

In *Harry Potter*, Lily Evans Potter was betrayed by her family's Secret Keeper, Peter Pettigrew. She tried to protect her infant son from the murderous Lord Voldemort and chose to die rather than stand aside as the Dark Lord commanded. Her sacrificial death provided Harry with a mysterious protection from Voldemort's death curse, which rebounded from the boy and hit the killer of his parents, a blow that would have killed the murderer except for his Horcrux safety net. This magical safe-guard saves Harry again in *Philosopher's Stone* when Quirrell and Voldemort try to kill Harry in the climactic confrontation before the Mirror of Erised. As Dumbledore explained afterwards in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing:

Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good. (299)

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<sup>66</sup> As discussed below, it has been reported that Rowling's break with her father was at least in part due to her belief that he had been romantically involved with the woman he married after Anne Rowling's death while his first wife was still alive, an accusation Peter Rowling has repeatedly denied.

Though the Dark Lord overcomes this obstacle in *Goblet of Fire* by using Harry's blood in the ceremony through which he is reincarnated, the Boy Who Lived is saved again by a mother's love in the finale, *Deathly Hallows*, when Draco Malfoy's mother Narcissa risked her life by falsely pronouncing the boy dead which deceived Voldemort. Rowling has said this reprise of a mother's protective love at the series' beginning and end was a "quite conscious echo."<sup>67</sup>

The Dark Lord, born Tom Riddle, Jr., never knew the love of his mother, Merope Gaunt, who died in childbirth at the orphanage where He Who Must Not Be Named grew up. His psycho-pathology, Dumbledore suggested to Harry in *Half-Blood Prince* just before a Pensieve visit to that orphanage, was largely consequent to the absence of a mother's love in his life. The strong contrast with Lily's love and sacrificial death's effect on her son is explicit (262).

The mothers of *Casual Vacancy* are as protective of their children but their love is notably less successful than Lily Potter's was for Harry. It is the tragically neglected teen-aged women, Krystal Weedon and Suhkvinder Jawanda, whose mothers are oblivious to their daughters' suffering, that act *in loco matris* to try and save the very young Robbie at risk of their own lives and well-being.<sup>68</sup> Colin's adopted mother, a school counselor whose husband is paralyzed by paranoia and self-doubt, is as long-suffering as was Anne Rowling and in the end is able to help her son 'Fats' to an epiphany of sorts with respect to his role in Krystal's death. The Christ figure of the story, though, as her name suggests, is the

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<sup>67</sup> "I think one could argue that Draco who is ultimately revealed not to be an evil character – Draco got his goodness from his mother. And ultimately I want – there's an echo of what Lily did – quite conscious echo of what Lily did right at the start of the story at the very end of the story. At the start of the story Lily dies to keep her son alive. At the end of the story, Harry lies, pretending to be dead on the ground and it's a mother who saves him again because she's trying to get to her own son. So that was my, you know, that was closing a circle. He was saved there by Lily and he's saved there by Narcissa" (Sims). It should be noted, too, that Barty Crouch, Jr., the patricidal killer of the series' central novel *Goblet of Fire*, had been saved from the living death of Azkaban by the sacrificial death of his mother.

<sup>68</sup> The character who is the presumed image of Anne Rowling in *Vacancy*, the wife of the abusive Simon Price, perhaps true to life, is well-meaning but unequal to the challenge of standing-up to her husband to protect her two children. The Sikh wife of a doctor in the story, a doctor herself and perhaps Rowling's self-portrait (Granger 2012), fares little better in the end with respect to understanding her only daughter, who suffers from neglect consequent to her mother's success, pride, weak religious faith, and preoccupation with "larger issues," predominantly political in nature.

troubled Krystal, who, having been betrayed – and raped – by her mother’s drug dealer and sometime lover, a father equivalent, sacrifices herself first in sex with a boy she does not love and then in suicide, out of her love for her baby brother for whom she is the *de facto* mother.

The Cormoran Strike series, a work in progress at this writing, has as its backdrop mystery the seeming suicide of Strike’s mother, Leda, when he was a young student at Oxford, the death that propelled him to leave school for his vocation as an “avenger,” first with the British Army ‘red caps’ and then, after losing a leg to an IED in Afghanistan, as a private investigator in London. The series is written in parallel with the *Potter* novels and the first and fourth Strike books have murders that were staged as suicides suggesting the seventh, the finale if parallels hold, will be an explanation of Leda’s mysterious demise (cf. Granger 2022a).<sup>69</sup> Her spirit, if not as visible as Lily Potter<sup>70</sup> or the House ghosts are at Hogwarts as explained above, haunts her oldest son throughout the books.

The *Fantastic Beasts* film series is also a work in progress but it, too, turns on the identity and fragile psychology of an orphan, Credence Barebones, who grows up in an orphanage with an abusive surrogate mother. He murders her in the first film with his Obscurial abilities, the sublimated rage that he is able to exteriorize as something of a magical super-power, and is manipulated by this series’ Dark Lord, Gellert Grindelwald, in the second film to believe he is a lost member of the Dumbledore family. It seems inevitable that Albus Dumbledore’s mother Kendra’s sacrificial life and death to protect her Obscurus daughter Ariana will play an important part in Credence’s story.

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<sup>69</sup> Leda had an infant child at the time with her psychotic husband; speculation about her death turns in part on whether her death was somehow a sacrificial act of love to protect the young child from the dangerously unstable father.

<sup>70</sup> A relatively animate form of Harry’s mother appears to him in the Mirror of Erised and magical photographs in *Philosopher’s Stone*, via the Reverse Echo wand-effect in *Goblet of Fire*’s fight between Harry and Voldemort, and in *Deathly Hallows*’ walk into Forbidden Forest when she comforts him after being invoked by the Resurrection Stone.

*The Ickabog*'s monster dies to give birth to her offspring. It is the attitude of the mother at this death which shapes the destiny of her progeny. Having been won over by the heroic children in the tale but murdered in cold blood by a deluded adult, the Ickabog at her death has twins, a pair of siblings that reflect her two minds about human beings, the one embracing relations, the other a killer akin to its mother's assassin. The twin parallel with Harry Potter and Voldemort's formation by their experience of their respective mother's love and attitude at death is almost perfect.

The plot of Rowling's Christmas story, *The Christmas Pig*, turns on the child-hero's attachment to a plush-toy pig that Rowling has said is her exploration of that relationship:

Psychologists call these treasured toys 'transitional objects,' which can soothe children and act as a comforting stand-in for a parent when needed.

That's quite a clinical way of looking at it, though.

I see them as invested with a certain kind of magic. They may come to us formed, but we remake them in our own image, investing them with characteristics of our own and idealised personalities.

We look after them and they look after us. That special bond is what I set out to explore in *The Christmas Pig*. (Rowling 2021c)

A "transitional object" is a means by which a child adjusts to the world independent of its mother's being and embrace. It acts as a transference mechanism, in clinical language, in which the toy acts as a surrogate for intimacy and nursing with the mother. Rowling makes this explicit in her story by describing how Jack when an infant "fell asleep every night sucking Dur Pig's ear" (1). Rowling has spoken repeatedly about how *Christmas Pig* is based on her son David's plush toy pigs, but it has a connection to her late mother as well and her own mother-surrogate toy (Rowling 2021c, see note 28 above).

As in *Harry Potter*, the bond of a child with a mother's love in *The Christmas Pig* is "invested with a certain kind of magic," a protective, even salvific magic that, as Jack makes its his own identity rather

than a “transitional object” crutch to get him through the changes of his parents’ divorce, saves him from the Loser and liberates everyone subject to his power in the Loser’s Lair. It is sacrificial or mother-love that saves Jack and CP from Crusher and that ‘finds’ the Blue Bunny, that is the essence of a child’s love for “transitional object” toys, what in the end is the hope that redeems and recreates all the Things in the Loser’s Lair and returns Pajama Boy, CP, and Broken Angel to the base of the Christmas tree Up There where Jack’s Mum ‘finds’ him (cf. Granger 2021h).

Anne Volant Rowling’s death and the author’s reflection on the meaning of a mother’s love as daughter and as a mother herself has made this particular “magic,” the selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional bond between a woman and her child, Rowling’s standard symbol of transcendent love and specifically of Christ’s love. Its use stretches from her first work to her most recent with remarkable consistency. Her correspondingly poor relationship with her father Peter is similarly reflected in her work as the origin of all evil in the world. The two together create her distinction between ‘Peter’ and ‘John’ as another “through-line” in her writing, this one a critical marker of a person’s orientation with respect to truth and reality, between good and evil.

### **C. Bad Dad**

In 2007 James Runcie filmed a documentary for ITV, ‘A Year in the Life: J. K. Rowling,’ for which he was given unprecedented and never-repeated-since access to the author. In an interview with both daughters of Peter Rowling, Joanne told Runcie that:

I was very frightened of my father for a very long time. But I also tried – well, it’s a common combination, isn’t it? – I also tried desperately to get his approval and make him happy, I suppose. And then there came a point, quite shamingly (sic) late in life, where I couldn’t do that anymore. And so I haven’t had any contact with my father now for a few years.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> She told Rose in 2012 that “We don’t really have a relationship.... Because sometimes I think our relationship is so difficult but that happens. And I don’t say that lightly. Obviously that’s a very big deal. But equally I’m not ashamed to say that I made a decision that I don’t regret. And that’s where we were. But I don’t want to go into really personal stuff. Because I do genuinely feel it’s unfair when the other person isn’t here to have their say” (Rose).



Runcie concluded that "the absence of any meaningful relationship with her father" is one "of the most important influences on Jo's writing" (Runcie). If *Casual Vacancy*'s Simon Price, a character with a first name resonant with 'Peter',<sup>72</sup> is indeed meant as something of a sketch of Rowling's father Peter and the fear he inspired in his wife and children in Tutshill, Rowling's childhood was something of a Dursley-esque nightmare.<sup>73</sup>

Peter Rowling has insisted in his several interviews that there is nothing to this. Joanne's sister Dianne was present at the Runcie interview and nodded her head in affirmation throughout the elder sister's comments about their shared experiences as children including those about Peter. Cousin Ben Rowling, son of Peter's brother Jeff and a frequent childhood companion, confirmed Joanne's memories of her childhood home:

Jo was a quiet, shy child, she wore glasses and only really seemed happy when she was telling stories or was immersed in a book. Sometimes, when we were alone together, Jo would tell me her dad was very cold and distant towards her, and I think she felt she didn't really know him very well. Both Peter and her mum Anne were very strict and she complained that they never showed her any love. I think that affected her profoundly. She often appeared sad and lonely...

I can remember Dad berating uncle Pete about why he didn't send his kids to a decent school, and he would say: "Oh, the comp [i.e. comprehensive school] is good enough for them"...

Though Jeff and Peter both worked at the same Rolls-Royce factory outside Bristol, Ben's father sent him to the Downs Preparatory School in Bristol and later to Ampleforth College in North Yorkshire. Ben confirmed in this interview, too, that Joanne was "devastated" when her father remarried as quickly as he did and that "she was convinced he had started an affair before their mum died" (Jeffrey 2021a). It is fair to speculate that this perceived betrayal and Anne Rowling's death have merged in the author's imagination into a Judas and Christ relationship of father and mother.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Rowling in the Runcie interview asserted that she was meant to be a boy and her father had chosen the name 'Simon John' for her, an echo of 'Peter John' (Runcie). This becomes the Peter-John distinction discussed below.

<sup>73</sup> See Hardman for the many connections between fictional Padsford and real world Tutshill.

<sup>74</sup> Rowling's remarks, too, about her mother's treatment for MS suggests that she believes her father could have done more for her mother. "Physiotherapy helped her physically when she received it, though we never seemed able to establish on-

Peter Rowling, consequently, casts a long shadow across his daughter's work in this regard. James Runcie's conclusion in his ITV documentary about daughter Jo Rowling that "the absence of any meaningful relationship with her father" is one "of the most important influences on Jo's writing" is hard to dispute.

In *Harry Potter*, for example, almost all of the Boy Who Lived's father figures die; his biological father James is murdered by Voldemort, Sirius Black his godfather by Bellatrix LeStrange, Remus Lupin his favorite teacher by Antonin Dolohov, and Albus Dumbledore by Severus Snape. These deaths can be read as wish-fulfillment fantasy on Rowling's part because the fictional dads all die but they die as good dads in self-sacrifice trying to protect their child or ward. Rowling admitted that she had planned to kill Arthur Weasley, too; he is attacked by Nagini in *Order of the Phoenix* and barely escapes death, a save Rowling admitted only happened because she realized she was killing all the fathers in the series (Brown, J.). The central novel of the septology, *Goblet of Fire*, the one dedicated to Peter Rowling, turns on Barty Crouch, Jr.'s, patricide of his negligent Ministry of Magic daddy.

Worse, the character responsible for the death of Harry's mother and his good father is the cowardly Peter Pettigrew, a Cratylic name that translates to 'Small Penis,' who betrays his best friends to save his own skin. Pettigrew's animagus form, his psychological "exteriorization," is a rat, not surprisingly.<sup>75</sup> Harry prevents Lupin and Black from killing Peter in the Shrieking Shack, but Peter is Voldemort's agent in his reincarnation, depicted also in *Goblet*, and winds up dying an ignoble death in the Malfoy Manor basement in *Hallows* because of his servitude to the Dark Lord. Rowling is intensely deliberate

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going care. People came and went ... I saw my mother's health decline steadily from the age of 35 until her death at 45. The care was intermittent and inadequate and she never came into sight of a specialist MS nurse. Nobody should have to suffer that lack of care or isolation in a rich, western country" (McQuillan). These might, though, only be criticisms of the NHS rather than an implied condemnation of her father Peter's negligence.

<sup>75</sup> His nickname, 'Wormtail,' reflects both his rat shape and the penile Cratylic meaning of his given name.

with names so the Peter Pettigrew-Peter Rowling first name coincidence was almost certainly not accidental. That Peter Rowling has rodentine facial features is another suggestive pointer.

The fathers of the four principal male characters in the series, Harry Potter, Lord Voldemort, Albus Dumbledore, and Severus Snape, were all absent or abusive parents. Potter rebukes Remus Lupin in *Deathly Hallows*, a character who like Rowling's father has the middle-name 'John,' for wanting to leave his wife and child to help Harry hunt Horcruxes, saying "Parents shouldn't leave their kids unless--- they've got to" (215). Rowling is well aware of this "as someone who's trying to look at my own work objectively." As she told Lev Grossman in 2005, evil and suffering in her stories springs from bad dads:

[people throw the word evil around a lot these days. what do kids learn about evil from HP?] My glib answer would be that you really need a good father. Because as I look back over the five published books I realize that it's kind of a litany of bad fathers. I would say that you have 2 examples of good fathers, really, in the whole series. Mr. Weasley, who is held up to be a pretty exemplary father, he connects well with all his sons, and his daughter (sic), he's very involved in his family. And you have Dumbledore as a father figure. However Dumbledore obviously is not perfect. He is detached, in many ways....

[W]hat do we know about evil? If you set aside Mr. Weasley, and you set aside Dumbledore, who's not actually a physical father. Also Hagrid's father, who died before we ever meet Hagrid, that Hagrid's father, who was a single father, we are meant to believe was a good father, you have a whole procession of bad dads who turned out bad sons. You have Voldemort – well, you find out a lot more about that in book 6 – you've Barty Crouch jr. and sr., Vernon Dursley – shocking stepfather, or whatever he is, adopted father to Harry, not a good father to his own natural son, who is allegedly the apple of his eye. And so it goes on. Maybe that's where evil seems to flourish, in places where people didn't get good fathering. More so than mothering.

Now I'm saying this is as someone who's trying to look at my own work objectively. I didn't set out to say that, but it kinda turns out *that that* what's I have, when I sit down and look at what I've written....[I]t's something that struck me as I've gone on, I look back and I see a repeated pattern of me saying that men have failed their [pause as she takes a deep, hoarse breath. she whispers:] *failed their families*. Sorry. But it does seem to be what I've written. Mothers – there are more good mothers in the books. (Grossman 2017, formatting from original notes)

Her “litany of bad fathers,” “bad dads who turned out bad sons,” did not end with *Deathly Hallows* and the *Potter* adventures. In *Casual Vacancy*, Rowling presents in story the man she was “very frightened of for a very long time.” The novel to begin with is set in a not very subtly disguised Tutshill, her childhood home, which sits on a hill with rivers and fields in relative splendor above downtrodden Sedbury, the equivalent of *Vacancy*’s Pagford and Yarvil. The real-world correspondences between the novel location and her home are well documented with Rowling’s confession that she hated life as an adolescent in Tutshill (Hardman).

Anyone familiar with Peter and Anne Rowling’s history does not struggle to find the real-world couple and their two children in rustic, fictional Pagsford. Simon Price is the story stand-in for Peter Rowling, a man whose family lives in fear of his arbitrary anger and violence. Andrew Price is the young Jo Rowling, Paul her younger sister Dianne, both of whom are terrified of their mad-dad, an ambitious social riser out of place in the upscale village. His wife Ruth Price, the nurse, is the long-suffering, apologetic Anne Rowling, who went back to work in a scientific field much as Ruth returns to nursing in the story. She is presented as a cartoon enabler living inside a co-dependency nightmare. If Peter Rowling “just kept smiling” after reading *Casual Vacancy*, as he claimed in 2012 (*Daily Mail* 2012), he must be incapable of emotional injury.

The men who are murderers in the Cormoran Strike novels, too, without exception and many of the suspects came from homes in which the father was emotionally absent, negligent, or horribly and physically abusive. Murderers John Bristow in *Cuckoo’s Calling*, Donny Laing in *Career of Evil*, and Raff Chiswell in *Lethal White*, as well as suspects Jeff Whittaker and Noel Brockbank in *Career* and Dennis Creed in *Troubled Blood*, had fathers who “failed their families,” as often as not by sadistically

abusing or criminally neglecting their sons.<sup>76</sup> The two women murderers, Elizabeth Tassel in *Silkworm* and Janice Beatty in *Troubled Blood*, were women driven to homicide in large part because they were overlooked or ill-used by men; Beatty came from a violent home whose dad “knocked me downstairs” (882), causing a head injury she believed made her a killer.

Strike himself is consumed by Oedipal rage about his rock-star father Jonny Rokeby, whom he has only met twice; any contact from his father by card or call in *Troubled Blood* results in the detective’s becoming unhinged. Rokeby’s right-hand man and barrister is named Peter Gillespie and in *Cuckoo’s Calling* he pesters Strike continually and threatens legal action if the struggling detective does not repay a Rokeby loan promptly.<sup>77</sup>

#### **D. Peter and John**

‘Bad Dads’ saturate Rowling’s works, which if, as many have asserted are tales of good and evil, have their evil take the form of negligent, absent, or abusive fathers with the hint of betrayal, possibly derived from Rowling’s relationship with her father Peter. His name and its reflection in her own has become a consistent marker, in fact, from the Hogwarts Saga through to the *Christmas Pig* story of characters’ orientation towards right and wrong, authentic virtue or juridical authority. In a nutshell, ‘Peters’ are bad guys incapable of empathy and selfless love and ‘Johns’ are white hat wearing heroes who embody just those capacities.

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<sup>76</sup> John Bristow was adopted and Steve Douthwaite, a pathetic man whose cowardice prevented the solution of the Bamborough case for forty years, grew up “in care.”

<sup>77</sup> The focus here on Rowling’s relationship with her father is not meant to neglect the abuse she suffered at the hands of her first husband in Portugal, the father of her daughter Jessica, and its oversized influence on her fiction. Rowling has only spoken of this physical abuse obliquely in deference to her daughter but detailed in the explanation she wrote about her concern for the safety of biological women in contact with transgender women that one reason for her advocacy of reserved spaces was her experience of Arantes’ violent, even murderous anger (Rowling 2020). As much as Rowling’s work is projection of her subconscious relatively unfiltered by artistry or elevation, the sheer number of violent attacks made by men on women and children, the virulence of which the author admitted in discussion of *Career of Evil* approached “violence porn.”

Any character or place named ‘Peter’ or one of that name’s derivations is a bad guy or suspect locale. As noted, Peter Pettigrew is the person most responsible besides Voldemort for the murder of James and Lily Potter, Simon Price, the wife and child beating husband and father of *Casual Vacancy* (the apostle Peter’s given name was ‘Simon bar Jonah’ so Simon is another name for Peter), Peter Gillespie in the Strike novels, the lawyer who did everything possible to make the detective’s already significant daddy issues much worse, and the St Peter’s Nursing Home and Symonds House in *Troubled Blood* are dangerous even Satanic places.<sup>78</sup>

In parallel, characters named ‘John’ or ‘James’ are as a rule the story white hats. James Potter, Remus John Lupin, Harry James Potter, Hermione Jean Granger, and Strike’s favorite nephew Jack like the Jack Jones or ‘John-squared’ hero of *The Christmas Pig* have names derived like Rowling’s own first name and the middle name of Mackenzie Jean Murray, her second daughter, from John or James, a pattern that suggests very strongly that Jonny Rokeby is anything but the bad guy of the Strike series. Rowling told Val McDermid that one of her favorite authors of mysteries always tipped her cards to the reader about whodunnit in the quality of hands her characters were given (McDermid); Rowling’s marker is in the names Peter and John.

Why she does this is no great mystery. Her father’s given name is Peter John Rowling and the name he wanted to give his first child, one he very much wanted to be a boy, was ‘Simon John.’ As Rowling explained in her ‘Year in the Life’ interviews with Runcie in 2007, the father never really got over this disappointment and her childhood, as detailed above, was something of a nightmare consequently.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> ‘Symound’ is the spelling for ‘Simon Peter’ used by Wycliffe according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Surnames* that Rowling uses as her reference text (see Reaney 410).

<sup>79</sup> Rowling attributes the third of her life crises, her marriage to an abusive man, to her having had unresolved father issues when she met Arantes. As she told Oprah Winfrey in 2007, “I think I repeated patterns from my first family as we often do in my selection of my first husband” (Winfrey).

Rowling was given the name Joanne instead of Simon John, perhaps as a concession to mother Anne (her sister is named Dianne), but as likely because of its roots in 'Johannes,' the Greek root of 'John' and there being no female equivalent in English for 'Peter' or 'Simon.'<sup>80</sup>

Whether Rowling's fascination with Cratylic names and literary cryptonyms springs from her reflection on the meaning of her own names or the interest led her to that reflection is unknown. What a careful reader is obliged to note is that an opposition between Peter and John is not something of her own invention but a *topos* or premise in the field of comparative religion, a distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric.

The conclusion of subject matter experts in this field is that there exist two sects of complementary beliefs within every revealed tradition, to include of course the Christian faith, that correspond to the exterior or institutional religion and its interior sanctifying substance or heart. As Marco Pallis explained the relationship of the exoteric and esoteric in *The Buddhist Spectrum*:

Of these two categories, the first corresponds roughly to the formal structure of a religion as conditioning the human individual and the finality he or she can normally aspire to, while the second corresponds to the innermost vision of things, the effective realization of all that Jesus Christ meant when he said that 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within you'. To this second category belongs whatever initiatic dedication with its attendant practices, of which the spiritual master (call him guru, lama, roshi, shaykh, or staretz) is the presiding figure, as distinct from the sacrificial priest, whose normal field is the exoteric part of the tradition with its rituals, its dogmatic teachings with their scholastic commentaries and its moral code. As a prime factor of illumination open to all must be mentioned the forms of piety (*bhakti*) but these, as well as Sacred Art, occupy a somewhat ambiguous position on the frontier between the more outward-facing and the inwardly poised intelligence; in a sense religious piety belongs to both. (1981, 116)

In addition to the *logos* ideas of imagination and empathy she has from Coleridge, Rowling's comments noted above in her 2000 interview with Solomon mark her as identifying primarily as an esotericist.

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<sup>80</sup> The same desire of a father to give his name to a first born daughter is evident in the peculiar spelling of author Stephenie Meyer's first name, the second 'e' instead of the usual 'a' being there on her father Stephen's insistence.

Her “problems with conventional organized religion,” and that “I wouldn’t expect [the church] to provide all the answers in a time of personal trouble], ‘cause I would expect to find some of those within me” signal an interior, individual focus in her faith. Her “problems” specifically are with “aspects” of what Solomon described as the church’s “institutional side,” “the rules” (Solomon), i.e., its exterior or exoteric dimension. Rowling’s disdain for believers she calls “fundamentalists” and her ecumenical insistence that she has no proselytizing aim in her work, too, mark her as a relatively esoteric Christian. The distinction she makes between characters named ‘Peter’ or ‘John’ reflect the native antagonism between the exoteric and esoteric sects within Christianity, one to be found in her father’s given names.

Based loosely on scriptural depictions of the relationships between Christ and St Peter, the ‘Prince of Apostles’ and between the Lord and His ‘beloved disciple,’ St John (and to a lesser degree St James, the brother of John), these inner and outer ‘churches’ are the faiths respectively of Peter, the ‘rock of faith’ to whom the keys to heaven were given, and of John, to whom the Virgin Mother was entrusted at the Cross and the only one of the disciples not to have died a martyr’s death. Peter, of course, is identified with the Roman Catholic Church and its hierarchy, especially the papacy and its ‘Petrine claims’ to primacy, and their rituals, theology, dogma, and exclusivist claims to truth, what anti-papists call “Church-ianity.” The esoteric faith of St John and its invisible church has a less obvious worldly referent but can be seen in sects in opposition to the Petrine authority, from Catholic mystics, Protestant sectarians of the Radical Reformation, and the Eastern Orthodox Church to theosophists and New Age syncretists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Rowling’s name artistry is to tag authorities and institutions such as media, government, and care facilities or boot-licking servants of power as ‘Peters’ (no doubt the playground use of that name as a



euphemism for penis is an aspect of this for the feminist),<sup>81</sup> which is to say, the bad guys whom the good resist. The Peters are the exterior and superficial in contrast with the Johns and James of her fiction, the inner essence reflected in the middle or hidden name of the character as often as not, who are on an esoteric journey to spiritual perfection. The tragedy of Peter John Rowling seems to be, from the author's view at least, that the 'Peter' ego identity killed 'John,' his heart, and tried to do the same to his eldest daughter with the Johannine name via his abuse of her. Rowling, as noted, told deRek that she leads an "intensely spiritual life" but, as she has said repeatedly and consistently, she struggles with formal religious belief and worship if she does attend "more than christenings and weddings" (cf. Solomon); she identifies with 'John,' her esoteric Christian faith, much more than with 'Peter,' the institutional church and intends for her readers to do the same.

This is critical for grasping what happens in her work. For instance, *Christmas Pig*; in this 'John' narrative, the child-hero Jack Jones' search for his mother's love "transitional object" in the Land of the Lost begin with sublimated agonies about his negligent biological father and Holly's bitterness about Jack's taking her father's love from her. This, as Rowling told Grossman in 2005 about her *Potter* books, reflects the same understanding that those stories largely turned on the failure of fathers (Grossman 2017). As will be discussed in the thesis' psychomachia chapter, Jack Jones' allegorical battle with Power and Ambition in the City of the Missed palace, one he wins through the intervention of Hope and Happiness, is a spiritual or Johannine conflict with Worldly or Petrine authority.

Rowling makes the connection between herself and this marker all but undeniable by inserting herself and her daughter Mackenzie into *Christmas Pig* at a decisive point. Jack, Christmas Pig, and Blue

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<sup>81</sup> See Rowling's contra Orwellian Newspeak tweet consequent to a transgender woman who raped a biological woman being classified as a woman by Scotland police: "War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength. The Penis Individual Who Raped You Is a Woman" (Rowling 2021d).

Bunny are outside the gates of the City of the Missed which are guarded by the dreaded Loss Adjusters. The Blue Bunny volunteers to sacrifice himself to act as a diversion enabling the boy and his toy to get around the guards. When the Bunny exposes himself to their attention meaning his almost certain capture and destruction, the “Saving Hole” above the lapine hero opens. A little girl named ‘Jeanne’ ‘Up There’ in the Land of the Living has found the Blue Bunny’s body that had been tossed aside in the mud; after she begs her mother to let her keep the Bunny, our hero is lifted out of the Land of the Lost into a loving home and Jack and CP sneak successfully past the guards (168-172).

If the ‘Jeanne’ character’s name, the doting mother, and the Bunny’s sacrificial act to save Jack, one he chooses to undertake because he recognizes Jack is “real,” were not enough, Rowling has shared that this critical event reflects an incident in her family’s life. As she told a group of children in a 2021 ‘webchat,’ her daughter Mackenzie Jean when a child found a blue bunny doll in a garden and she had the exact conversation *Pig*’s Jeanne has with her mum in the story (Rowling 2021b, see note 29 above).

The salvific appearance of grace from above is wrapped in a character’s self-sacrifice, a Jeanne-John, a child’s “transitional object” for her mother’s love, and Rowling’s admission that all of this sprang from her understanding of a “real life incident in my family,” i.e., “I am the mother-author in this story.” John defeats Peter, Good Mom trumps Bad Dad, and Jack returns to his mother in the end and realizes he can love his new father without betraying the old absent one. If there is a valid argument for the necessity of reading Rowling’s works through a biographical lens, the finding consequent to understanding Rowling’s relationship with her mother and her father, the Divine Mother and Bad Dad respectively, and of her Peter-John distinction that is a “through-line” in her books *Potter* to *Pig* may be it.

#### IV. Lake Conclusion

Rowling told “aspiring writers” in 2005 as noted above that they should “write what you know: your own interests, feelings, beliefs, friends, family and even pets will be your raw materials when you start writing” (BBC 2005) and it is clear that she has done the same with respect to her core beliefs and defining ideas. Her inspiration for the tropes of the Divine Mother, Bad Dad, and Peter-John deployed throughout her work obviously springs from her seven psychological crises reinvisioned in light of her esoteric Christian faith, ideas of the imagination, and belief in an immortal soul. It is critical to note how even the almost explicitly biographical projections into her fiction have taken on spiritual resonances: a mother’s selfless love with the sacrificial love of Christ, a father’s neglect and abuse of his children the complementary absence of this love, and the Peter John distinction, derived from her father’s name, is given the traditional meaning of conventional or institutional faith versus true spirituality. Her core beliefs in an immortal soul and Estecean imagination, her consequent “obsession” with “mortality and morality,” the Christian faith she says “is important” to her for all her doubts in the “rules,” her fascination with psychology as well as the hermetic arts are the substance of what she claims is an “intensely spiritual life.” (deRek)

Exploration of her Lake in search of her intention, then, strongly suggests, however conjectural such speculation must be, that her intention as a writer is spiritual, and, more concretely, that she writes to spur the “transformative and revelatory” power of the imagination in her readers with respect to soul and spirit, a power for transformation she said “[you] should not undersell” (Wagner, E.). The critical tools that are most appropriate for understanding her work and gauging her success in this effort, consequently, should reflect this anachronistic and relatively otherworldly intention that springs from her concerns, core beliefs, and life crises.

The elevation in her stories from her personal experience and interests to universal and timeless themes is, however, already obviously much more than “pain to brain” writing. It shows deliberate artistry and adaptation of her personal inspiration into story that is relevant and moving to readers everywhere. In that intentional craft, the focus must shift from the Lady in Rowling’s Lake to the genie working in her metaphorical Shed. The next chapter will explore Rowling’s most likely models for her artistry and what those models suggest is the best means of interpreting it.

## **Chapter 4: The Bibliography in Rowling's Shed**

### **I. Introduction**

The reading of Rowling's work in light of her life crises and core beliefs revealed both unconscious and conscious Lake "inspiration." The "unresolved issues" her unconscious mind was "processing" are evident in the story elements of death, loving mothers, abusive or negligent fathers, violence of men against women and children, as well as psychological issues around depression, gender role confusion in marriage, and children experiencing their parents' death or divorce. This was the "pain to brain" writing that Rowling acknowledged to Grossman in 2005.

Rowling claimed to Cruz in 2008, however, that she was also writing to explore "ideas" that interested her. Her relatively conscious core beliefs and practices with respect to her tentative Christian faith, hermetic arts, the immortal soul, mythology, psychology, and Estecean imagination, her obsession with "mortality and morality," show in her work in this regard in the "through lines" of Divine Mother, Bad Dad, the Peter/John distinction between institutional and authentic character and spirituality, not to mention the occult artistry, mythic templates, ghosts, and psychological exteriorizations.

Dredging Rowling's Lake revealed her intention as a writer was in large part to write stories with those conscious "ideas" and beliefs using the unconscious inspiration from her "Muse" as her start. A look at her work after creating an inventory of her Shed, the bibliography of writers she loves and deliberately imitated at least as she set out as a writer, in contrast will be about the common denominators of these favorites, what subjects she has studied, and what she says she likes most in authors, namely, that their stories demonstrate "control," that they have "everything in hand" (BBC 2018, cf. Thogerson).

When Rowling is asked to name the secret of her success or to explain what she did as a beginning writer that other hopefuls could imitate, she does not discuss her Lake inspiration, which is to say, her

psychological make-up, key concerns, or fundamental beliefs that constitute her unconscious mind. She talks about her relatively conscious work in the metaphorical Shed: the planning she does deliberately and how, when setting out herself, she chose to imitate her favorite writers. To discover Rowling's intention as a writer beyond her Lake inspiration, then, and to find the most fitting critical perspective and tools to gauge her success in this aim a close look at her writing models, the bibliography in her metaphorical Shed, is in order.

## II. The Authors Living in Rowling's Shed

Rowling has been asked in her many interviews what advice she has for young or new writers but it was not until January 2019 that she made a formal statement of her thoughts on this subject, the link to which statement she pinned to the top of her Twitter page for more than a year. In it she says the most important activity for writers and especially young writers is reading:

**Reading:** This is especially for younger writers. You can't be a good writer without being a devoted reader. Reading is the best way of analysing what makes a good book. Notice what works and what doesn't, what you enjoyed and why. At first you'll probably imitate your favourite writers, but that's a good way to learn. After a while, you'll find your own distinctive voice. (Rowling 2019a)

She also notes in this 'On Writing' Q&A, in answer to the question "What does it feel like to have your work scrutinized?" that she is "obsessive" in "picking over" her favorite books by other writers.<sup>82</sup> This advice for writers studying their craft to read with an eye for what works in better writing and to imitate it echoes previous comments she had made in interviews and in correspondence. In 2001, for example, she answered a child's question, "What advice could you give us young authors?" by saying:

Read as much as you can. I'd say, read anything. The more you read the better, because it'll teach you what you like and what you think makes good writing, and it will increase your vocabulary. And then you'll just have to keep on and on writing... (BBC 2001)

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<sup>82</sup> "I never dreamed that there would be a fandom the size of Harry Potter's picking over the books. It's staggering and wonderful. Given that I'm fairly obsessive myself, these are kindred spirits" (Rowling 2019a).

At the last stop of her 2007 ‘Open Book Tour’ in North America, Stacy Bolton asked her in Toronto explicitly what *she* had done to become a successful author that other writers could do as well.

Rowling’s answer, again, was to discern in favorite books what worked and to imitate it:

They should read a lot. Which is not me trying to sell more books. Because it’s the only way to enlarge your vocabulary and to decide what makes good writing, what makes bad writing. And then they’ll go through the phase of imitating their favorite authors, which is fine, because it’s a good learning process. Then they need to decide themselves, I’m afraid, wasting a lot of trees. (Rowling 2007a)

In correspondence with Dale Neuschwander, an American who had been an English teacher at her Comprehensive for a year, she was asked to give her advice to his Creative Writing Class students. She wrote these “words of inspiration for your students:” “Most of all: READ! Nothing else will teach you what makes good writing or bad” (Guthrey).

From this advice and her implicit admission in Toronto that it is what she herself had done, it might safely be assumed that the examination she made of her favorite writers revealed to her what worked in story-telling, which qualities she chose to imitate. A critic of her work, consequently, should first be aware of Rowling’s preferred writers and the signature elements they have in common which are also found in her work both to reveal her artistic intention and to choose in light of this the critical tools or perspective appropriate for exegesis of that writing. A survey of Rowling’s favorite authors and obvious influences to discover their common elements, then, is the first step to discover both what she deliberately chose to imitate in her *Shed* and the best method to critique her artistry or craftsmanship in shaping the inspiration “stuff” from her unconscious *Lake*. Bibliography must complement biography to grasp Rowling’s unconscious and conscious intentions as a writer.

With the help of Oxford Research Fellow Beatrice Grove and independent researcher Nick Jeffery, I compiled an alphabetical list of every author or book that Rowling has praised in her interviews since 1998 and on Twitter from 2009-2020. That list was published online as ‘Rowling’s Admitted Literary

Influences’ (Granger 2020) and includes just over one hundred writers, from Adams, Aeschylus, and Alcott to Whitman, Willans, and Wodehouse. The great majority of the writers mentioned by Rowling are ‘Literary Likes’ rather than ‘Important Influences’ but ten authors stand out, the ones Rowling has said repeatedly are her favorite writers, the books she claims she would take with her to a desert island, the ones mentioned most often in interviews, those whose books are visible in pictures of her library shelves, and those whose influence is undeniable in her work, specifically in the epigraphs that dominate *Lethal White* and *Troubled Blood*. Those ten authors are Jane Austen, Colette, Vladimir Nabokov, William Shakespeare, P. G. Wodehouse, Agatha Christie, C. S. Lewis, Dante Alighieri, Edmund Spenser, and Henrik Ibsen.<sup>83</sup>

Rowling has said repeatedly and consistently for more than twenty years that her three favorite writers are Jane Austen, Vladimir Nabokov, and Colette. “My big three [favorite writers] are Nabokov, Colette and Jane Austen. I read my favorite books over and over until they fall apart, literally” (Renton 2001a).

Her ‘Desert Island’ take-aways are the Complete Works of William Shakespeare, of Wodehouse, and Colette. “If you could bring only three books to a desert island, which would you pack? JKR: Collected works of Shakespeare (not cheating — I’ve got a single volume of them); collected works of P. G. Wodehouse (two volumes, but I’m sure I could find one); collected works of Colette” (Rowling 2012b).

The next two authors, Agatha Christie and C. S. Lewis, are representative picks. Agatha Christie is a Rowling favorite by her own admission and Christie novels outnumber any other author’s books in

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<sup>83</sup> Dickens was a strong candidate for Rowling’s ‘Top Ten’ authors both because of his evident influence on Rowling – the orphan coming-of-age novel, the celebration of sacrificial love, the humor, his social commentaries, etc. – and her testimony about him. She named Dickens as the one person she would most like to have dinner with (Wagner, D.) and named the finish of *Tale of Two Cities* the best single line in English literature (Smith, S., 88). For more on Rowling and Dickens, see Granger 2009, 3-20, 2012b, and Groves 2017, 122-3, 149-150. Ian Rankin, a contemporary mystery-thriller writer whose John Rebus novels are in many ways a model for Rowling’s Cormoran Strike series and *Career of Evil* specifically, might be included as well (Granger 2017c).



published pictures of her bookshelves (Granger 2019; Jeffrey 2020a); she is listed here as the stand-in for the several ‘Golden Age’ women detective fiction writers Rowling mentions in addition to the world’s bestselling novelist. “Val McDermid: How did that love affair with crime start for you? JKR: I know I was reading Christies when I was quite young. All of the Big Four – Marsh, Allingham, Christie and Sayers – I’ve read and loved.” (McDermid).

C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien were good friends and both are obvious and profound influences on Rowling. Lewis is picked instead of Tolkien only because Rowling’s seven book *Harry Potter* series has so many correspondences with the seven *Chronicles of Narnia* books, Lewis’ *Til We Have Faces* like the Strike series is a retelling of the Amor and Psyche myth, and Rowling’s *Christmas Pig* is reminiscent of Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and, in *Pig*’s finale, *Perelandra*. “As for the Enid Blyton books, Rowling says she read them all, but was never tempted to go back to them, whereas she would read and re-read Lewis. ‘Even now, if I was in a room with one of the Narnia books I would pick it up like a shot and re-read it’” (deBertodano).<sup>84</sup>

Dante Alighieri, though never mentioned by Rowling to date, is an evident influence in the Hogwarts Saga’s subplot about “green eyes” (see the death of Snape point to point connections with Dante’s entry into Paradise in Granger 2008a, 131-150) and the creative retelling of the *Divine Comedy* in her *Christmas Pig* allegory (Willis 2021, Granger 2021h, 2021i).

Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* and Henrik Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* are used as the source for every epigraph in *Troubled Blood* and *Lethal White*, respectively, and the works simultaneously act as

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<sup>84</sup> See Maureen Lamson’s discussion of Rowling’s hot and cold feelings with respect to both Lewis and Tolkien (Granger 2008c, 2009, 280-283, 302).

templates or models with which those books follow in significant ways (see Groves 2020, Baird-Hardy 2020 for Spenser, Granger 2018b for Ibsen).

Accepting these authors as Rowling's representative 'Top Ten,' if she herself followed the advice she gave new writers and imitated her favorites, her Shed artistry should be evident in the common characteristics of these writers. Writers as diverse in genre, focus, and historical era as Shakespeare and Rankin, Spenser and Christie, Nabokov and Colette, have no shared-by-all common denominators but there are seven signatures that many or most share and which are evident in Rowling's work as well.

**Humor:** All these authors are funny, with the possible exception of Dante and Ibsen. Nabokov, Austen, and Colette, Rowling's three favorite writers, as well as Shakespeare and Wodehouse, her 'Desert Island' picks, are especially so.

**'Big Twist' Finish:** The surprise ending is what Rowling says she especially admires in Austen's *Emma*, her favorite book, (Boquet) and Agatha Christie is famous for unexpected, even thrilling turn-about closing scenes. The suicides that close *Rosmersholm*, if heavily foreshadowed, are a cathartic experience for audiences.

**Intertextuality:** Rowling likes authors who are masters of the subtle and the pronounced literary allusion and self-conscious referencing of the context of texts within which each text exists. The smorgasbord of genres in *Faerie Queen*, Virgil's presence as guide in the *Commedia*, Wodehouse's endless similes and quotations of great poets in his Bertie and Jeeves farces, Christie's turning the accepted rules of narration in detective fiction on their head in *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?*, and Nabokov's *Pale Fire* with its embedded mad academic interpretation of his better-than-Frost Robert Frost poem all act as models for Rowling. Her genre melanges in *Harry Potter* and *Strike* and her

penchant for studied, meaningful, while still playful literary allusion in character names, story events, and locations, reflect these qualities in her favorite writers (cf. Groves 2017, Granger 2009).

**Genre Parody and Subversion:** Colette's most famous novels, *Cheri* and *Le Fin de Cheri*, are the reverse story of the clichéd tales about older men with young women lovers. Her *Claudine* novels, too, turn *Tom Brown* tropes on their head. Austen inserts a playful parody of Gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey* and then finishes with as harrowing a finale as any Radcliffe heroine experiences.<sup>85</sup> C. S. Lewis juggles fairy tale, myth, and contemporary children's story conventions in his *Narniad*.

**Literary Hermeticism:** Spenser and Shakespeare are the fount from which the stream of alchemical writing flows in English literature (Linden, Nicholl, Abraham 1998; see Weatherby, Yates 2001 for Spenser's astrological artistry) and both Nabokov and Lewis are adept in weaving covertly but effectively alchemical and astrological symbolism into the fabric of their stories (Abraham 1990, Ward). The esoteric and symbolic content of *The Divine Comedy* is a bottomless well from which exegetes have drawn (e.g., Guenon 1996, Burckhardt 1987, 82-97, Upton 2004, 2015).

**Parallelism:** Spenser was a master of *chiasmus* (Fowler) and Lewis, a close student and great admirer of *Faerie Queen* (Lewis 1967), wrote his novels in a traditional structural conceit anthropologist Mary Douglas called "ring composition" (Schwartz 2009, 8, 66, 98). Nabokov's *Lolita*, too, is a masterfully crafted book in which the front chapters mirror the second half's on the classical bracketing or *inclusio* model (Nabokov 1990, 20-21; Hamrit, Granger 2017b, Appel 375, Galati).

**Spiritual Allegory:** Shakespeare in his mature period and best plays was writing almost exclusively stories of the soul's purification or trial towards sanctification or perfection (Lings 1994, 1998). Lewis'

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Groves 2017, 115-116, for exegesis of Rowling's hat-tipping this exact event in *Half-Blood Prince's* subplot of Draco Malfoy and the Vanishing Cabinets.

Aslan allegories are heroic representations for children of the life in Christ and the synergistic transformation necessary to become His disciples. Spenser's *Faerie Queen* is in large part the spiritual journey of the Red Cross Knight and Una as well as Britomart and Artegall to true faith as opposed to the false formalism of Roman Catholicism.<sup>86</sup>

Whole books have already been written on these subjects with respect to Rowling's work and no doubt each will be the focus of future academic dissertations and popular treatments. In this axiological thesis, I have chosen to discuss only two, her creative adaptations of traditional literary hermeticism and spiritual allegory, because of their alignment with her core beliefs and consequently of her intention as a writer.

It is no surprise but important to note, nonetheless, that Rowling's favorite writers and the common denominators found in their work, influential as they may be, reflect the author's core beliefs and interests. All, for example, wrote in at least nominally Christian cultures and were baptized as children.<sup>87</sup> Eight of the ten might be classified as more or less "Christian writers." As noted, many wrote in the symbolic language of astrology and alchemy, took great pains with the structures of their work, and crafted allegories of the soul's journey to perfection in spirit. Rowling found both kindred spirits and mentors in her favorite writers whose works' common denominators act as a sketch of her own intentions as an author.

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<sup>86</sup> Rowling's penchants for ghosts in her stories, both those that are visible and audible as at Hogwarts and those that haunt *Casual Vacancy* and the Strike mysteries subliminally, were discussed in the previous chapter as a reflection of her belief in the immortality of the soul. It might be included here, too, as an eighth common denominator of her favorite writers or as a sub-category of 'Spiritual Allegories;' cf. Shakespeare's ghosts in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, Nabokov's in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, Ibsen's in *Rosmersholm*, Dickens' ghosts in *A Christmas Carol*, as well as the souls Dante meets in his *Divine Comedy*.

<sup>87</sup> Colette, though like her mother "an atheist from a family of free thinkers," was a "baptized Catholic," baptized her daughter, and flirted in her dotage with that faith after a libertine's life but was denied a Catholic funeral at her death (Thurman, 39, 310, 461-462, 498).

### III. Other Residents of the Shed

These fellow spirits and exemplars are an essential part of Rowling's Shed bibliography but they are not its exclusive members. The influence of Rowling's readings in mythology in the templates around which she has written *Harry Potter* and her post *Potter* publications as well as her studies in psychology and astrology are at least as important in this regard, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The congruence of Rowling's core beliefs and those of her favorite writers is mirrored in another overlap, those between her faith and psychological study, one evident in the mental make-up and practices of her story heroes and villains. In this regard it is worth reviewing that Rowling, for all her disdain for "fundamentalists," is "obvious", as she put it, in her borrowings from the Christian tradition. While denying, for example, that "Dumbledore was Jesus" as Aslan was in Lewis' *Narniad* (Grossman 2005), she said in an interview with Daniel Radcliffe as a DVD extra that she thought of the Headmaster as a "John the Baptist figure" in relation to Harry as Christ (Radcliffe). When Grossman described the *Potter* books as secular, even godless, she corrected him, politely but firmly:

**Q: whereas your books are quite thoroughly secular – there's no God at all in Harry Potter.** A: Ummm [choosing words very carefully] I don't think they're that secular. But. Obviously Dumbledore is not Jesus. And, I am certainly not working to any religious agenda. I think that the wizarding world is an interesting view of our world, in a sort of distorted mirror. so that it's as religious or irreligious as our world is.... I didn't give [the boy who asked me if wizards believed in God] a very full answer, because it was going to reveal things that I didn't particularly want to reveal, and I suppose I can't really give you a very full answer until book 7 is out there. but [sighs] I'm trying to find ways of saying things that I – well, well, I can certainly say, end of *Phoenix*, um, I think you do come really up hard against the notion of death, what does death mean. And you are given certain choices through the characters [in their reactions to the Veiled Arch in the Department of Mysteries], aren't you? you're given ron's determined – and probably quite healthy, in a 15-year-old boy, -- not interested in what's beyond the veil, and let's get out of here. Harry's attraction towards it – harry's actually quite attracted to it. right through to luna's belief that there is not only something beyond the veil, but that she can hear them talking beyond the veil. and that's, that's something that will be resolved as the books go on. (Grossman 2017; formatting from original notes)

In her *Harry Potter* novels at least, Rowling's stories are laden with traditional Christian symbols. Whole books have been devoted to explaining their meaning, which is to say, their allegorical referents.<sup>88</sup> There are so many symbols of Christ and of Satan in the adventures of The Boy Who Lived that there is a hint of parody, of Rowling's teasing the Christian touchstones of English High Fantasy: the Gryffindor Golden Lion (of Judah!), Salazar's Basilisk, the Dark Lord's Nagini, and the Slytherine Serpent (the Garden!), the Hippogriff elision of eagle and lion (King of Heaven and Earth!), Dumbledore's Phoenix (the Resurrection Bird!), the blood of the Unicorn (1 Corinthians 11:23-29!), the White Stag (Bane of Serpents and Resurrection Emblem!), the Philosopher's Stone (Eternal Life!), and the Bond of Blood (the Eucharist!).<sup>89</sup> Which is to neglect King's Cross (Calvary!). These images are not only significant in their number but via their place in the story-line; in each of the first six books, an animate symbol of Christ appears at Harry's near-death when all seems lost in his battle with Voldemort or evil wizards, an appearance coinciding with his 'rising from the dead.'<sup>90</sup>

Rowling chose not to answer questions about the Christian content of the series until 2007's Open Book Tour of North America after the publication of *Deathly Hallows*. Her response to an MTV reporter then, perhaps a shot at the Christian critics who claimed the witchcraft of the books made them a "gateway to the occult," was that, to her at least, the Christian symbolism was "obvious" (Adler). She

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<sup>88</sup> E.g., Connie Neal's *The Gospel According to Harry Potter*, Francis Bridger's *A Charmed Life: The Spirituality of Potterworld*, Leslie Barnhart's *The Christian Guide to Harry Potter*, Nancy Solon Villaluz' *Does Harry Potter Tickle Sleeping Dragons?* and Greg Garrett's *One Fine Potion: The Literary Magic of Harry Potter. My Hidden Key to Harry Potter* (2002), now *How Harry Cast His Spell* (2008), was the first book to explore and attempt to explain the Christian symbolism and meaning of the Hogwarts Saga. The chapter devoted to Rowling's Christian allegory in the Hogwarts Saga in Groves' *Literary Allusion in Harry Potter* (2017, 60-80) is perhaps the best piece written on the subject to date.

<sup>89</sup> Stratford Caldecott, late Catholic traditionalist and Tolkien scholar, shared his disappointment after the publication of *Beedle the Bard* that Rowling had not managed to include a pelican in these Wizarding World children's stories, the only remaining animal in the 'Symbol of Christ' menagerie she had not managed to squeeze into the *Potter* books (private correspondence; published in Granger 2014a). Rowling (obligingly?) included a headstone engraved with the image of a pelican as a plot point in her 2022 novel, *Ink Black Heart*.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Granger (2008, 22-25). In the series finale, *Deathly Hallows*, Harry rises from his death consequent to Dark Lord's death curse in the Forbidden Forest as a symbol of Christ himself, albeit as a Christian Everyman.

explained in the same interview that the scriptural passages (Matthew 6:19, 1 Corinthians 15:26) on the headstones in *Deathly Hallows* “sum up – they almost epitomize (sic) the whole series.” She told *Time* magazine later that year, too, that the First Corinthians quotation, “the last enemy to be destroyed is death,” is “the theme for the entire series” (Gibbs).

There are no magical mirrors,<sup>91</sup> golden griffins, or other “obvious” Christian symbolism and gospel parallels in the real-world detective stories featuring Cormoran Strike and his partner Robin Ellacott. These novels, though, have their own symbolic content. The mirroring element in them, for example, is found in the lead characters’ capacity for and reflex action of self-reflection or mental watchfulness, the Greek virtue of *nepsis* in which a person discerns his or her own thoughts and chooses the good and refuses the bad. “[*Nepsis*] signifies an attitude of attentiveness (*prosuchi*), whereby one keeps watch over one’s inward thoughts and fantasies, maintaining guard over the heart and intellect (*phylaki kardias/nou; tiris kardias/nou*)” (Ware, et alii trans. 1984, 365). Hierotheos Vlachos, citing St. Gregory Palamas, defines *nepsis* as “the oversight of the *nous*” over “the rational part” of man (Vlachos 114). Cavarnos writes that the *nous* is “the faculty not only of knowledge, but also of inner attention or observation (*prosochi*)” and that “through attention, *nous* observes evil and undesirable thoughts, images, desires, and feelings, and opposes them” (Cavarnos, 13-14).

This interior mirroring ability, thinking about thinking, a watchful self-consciousness, is a shared quality of traditional Christianity, then, and Rowling’s CBT practices. It is also a signature characteristic of Strike and Ellacott. When they think this way, Rowling-Galbraith highlights it by italicizing the voice within that notes their thought pattern and demands a shift, which demand is

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<sup>91</sup> See Granger 2008a, 159-163, for a discussion of the esoteric Christian symbolism of mirrors and Rowling’s use of this English High Fantasy *topos* after Coleridge in her *Harry Potter* novels, specifically, the Mirror of Erised, the Foe Glass, and the eye-in-the-mirror-shard of the first, fourth, and seventh books in that series.

uniformly obeyed. Strike, for example, in the first part of *Troubled Blood*, is in Cornwall to spend time with his Nancarrow Aunt and Uncle because Aunt Joan, Strike's *de facto* mother for much of his childhood, has been received a terminal cancer diagnosis. Thinking about one of his emotionally painful departures from Cornwall as a child when his flighty biological mother had torn him once again from something like a stable home life, he auto-corrects: "*Don't think about it*, Strike told himself, and he lit a second cigarette from the tip of his first" (32, italics in original).

This can be read, of course, as a man simply wishing not to recall or dwell on painful memories. Strike and his partner, however, are both persons in recovery from psychological and physical trauma. Ellacott has been trained to use Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) techniques, in essence, awareness of one's thoughts and thought patterns with reflex coaching to re-direct thinking and mollify panic, 'practices' that Strike is familiar with and makes weekly checks with Robin to see if she is doing the necessary exercises (cf. *Lethal White* 541, 550, 646). Each is an accomplished Occulomens, a Rowling Wizarding World neologism for a magical person able to shield their thoughts, literally a "mind closer" but with the suggestion too of "eye-on-the-mind-er," both of them able to "discipline [the] troubled mind back into obedience" (*Lethal White* 532).

Robin Ellacott, raped while in college, stabbed by the Shacklewell Ripper in *Career of Evil*, and held hostage at gun-point by a suicidal psychopath in *Lethal White*, has panic attacks which are triggered by her being approached from behind.<sup>92</sup> She practices CBT exercises to minimize the number and depth of these attacks. Her consequent mental self-awareness showed itself at the end of *Troubled Blood* while she waited for Barclay outside the Athorn flat. Three times on a single page she successfully audits and

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<sup>92</sup> Rowling revealed in her website essay explaining her opposition to transgender women having access to spaces previously restricted to biological women that she is similarly affected by being approached from behind (Rowling 2020). As Strike says to Robin when she tells him that "people coming up unexpectedly behind me – that's a major trigger" for her panic attacks, "Don't think we need Freud to explain that one" (*Lethal White* 549).



redirects her thinking from negative to different topics with an impatient ‘message to self:’ “*Think about something else*” (867, italics in the original).

This capacity to look into the psychological mirror, the looking glass of the mind, even of the soul, is not a tick or mental trick. Rowling-Galbraith clarifies at the end of *Troubled Blood* that it is central to the human ability to change behavior. When Strike arrives at Broadmoor to interview Dennis Creed, mass murderer, he first meets with Dr. Ranbir Bijral, the psychiatrist who leads Creed’s “treatment team.” Dr Bijral explains to Strike that treating Creed, though he is “a classic sociopath,” “a pure example of the type” who “scores very highly on the dark triad,” is not pointless. “People’s behavior can change, if they’re motivated, if they’re given the right help. Our aim is always recovery.” Creed remains “devious, sadistic, unrepentant, and extremely egotistical,” but the team continues to look for “a pathway to accountability and remorse,” what Bijral describes as “an important part of the therapeutic process.” The patient has not responded, however, to the usual approaches; “Dennis feels no remorse” (845, 847).

This incapacity to feel guilt or remorse is a signature quality of Rowling villains; the ability to self-reflect and change behavior, in correspondence, is the mark of her heroes and wise men. Dumbledore, for example, explains to Harry at their meeting in the other-worldly King’s Cross that his experience with Grindelwald as a young man, the death of his younger sister that resulted, and his consequent “guilt,” “grief,” and “shame” taught him that he was “selfish” and “not to be trusted with power,” hence his refusing repeated offers over many years to be made Minister of Magic. He tells Harry that “They say [Grindelwald] showed remorse in later years, alone in his cell at Nurmengard. I hope that it is true. I would like to think he did feel the horror and shame of what he had done” (*Deathly Hallows* 715, 717, 719). As the Headmaster explained to Harry after the death of Sirius Black, Harry’s ability to feel grief

and remorse for his own responsibility in that death is not only “part of being human” but “that you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength” (*Phoenix* 824, 823). Harry recalls this exchange as he mourns for Dobby in *Deathly Hallows*, that profound grief was proof against unwanted thoughts and that “Dumbledore, of course, would have said that [such grief] was love....” (*Deathly Hallows* 478). Empathy and remorse, as with *nepsis*, are both signature activities of the spiritual heart and its capacity to see and know its *logos* reflection in others.

This is evident in Cormoran Strike in his ability to self-reflect. Throughout *Troubled Blood*, Strike has struggled to give his partner appropriate gifts. While he gives her flowers she hates on her birthday and last second chocolates at Christmas, she gives him thoughtful gifts and cards at his birthday and at Christmas, presents reflecting her having made a serious effort to find something he needed or would enjoy. At the end of their screaming match in the rain on the street outside her apartment after the Valentine’s Day dinner disaster, she reveals to him as he departs how much she resents the paucity of attention and consideration reflected in his gifts. “And *don’t*,” Robin bellowed from behind him, “buy me any more *fucking flowers!*” (*Blood* 498, italics in original).

At the end of *Troubled Blood*, Strike takes Robin to ‘Liberty in London’ for her birthday. He asks her to choose a perfume that she likes as the present he will buy for her (a mutual friend had told him she was looking for a new scent). She is flabbergasted at this new “*thoughtful*” behavior (italics in original). “‘Yeah, well,’ said her partner, with a shrug. ‘People can change. Or so a psychiatrist in Broadmoor told me’” (925; cf. Granger 2021a).

Strike had noted Dr Bisral’s lesson about the value of “accountability and remorse” to a person willing to change behavior and acted on his obvious failing with respect to showing appreciation for Robin in

his gifts. He had noted in his conversation with Robin in Skegness about Scottish independence that changing behaviors is hard work that is rarely done: “But *people* who fundamentally change are rare, in my experience, because it’s bloody hard work compared to going on a march or waving a flag.” She shares that she thinks she has changed and he observes, “Yeah. But you’re exceptional, aren’t you?” (810, italics in original).

He buys Robin three gifts on her thirtieth birthday, a donkey balloon<sup>93</sup> and champagne at the Ritz in addition to the perfume, all evidence that he had self-reflecting, felt remorse for his failings, and made a deliberate change in his behaviors to become a “thoughtful” rather than a thoughtless person. Strike has not seen a single eye in a magical mirror but he has identified with his interior, cardiac, and neptic ‘eye/I’ on reflection as did Harry and made his choices accordingly.

The Strike novels, then, though certainly realistic in comparison with Rowling’s Wizarding World novels, texts, fairy tale collection, and screenplays, reflect the author’s Christian faith, fascination with mythology,<sup>94</sup> and study of psychology that shaped the *Potter* novels and spin-offs. With her favorite authors, the textbooks on Rowling’s Shelf bookshelves must be counted as near equivalents in importance with respect to shaping her intentional artistry.

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<sup>93</sup> Robin had shared in the Skegness conversation just quoted that her fond memories of the town came from her riding donkeys at the beach as a child. The donkey themed gift is both a marker that Strike was listening to her then and of Rowling’s Redcrosse Knight parallelism to be discussed in the next chapter (Una rides a donkey in the first book of *Faerie Queene*).

<sup>94</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Rowling is writing the Strike detective novels on the mythological templates of the Leda and the Swan and the Castor and Pollux myths (Gray) and the Psyche and Cupid narrative (Granger 2021, 2021a Neumann). Strike and Ellacott also represent in ways obvious and subtle the folk tales of the Fisher King and the Handless Maiden, stories celebrated by Jungian analysts (cf. Granger 2021f, Johnson). C. S. Lewis’ *Til We Have Faces* is similarly a re-telling of the Psyche and Cupid myth, albeit much more obviously so.

#### IV. Writing with “It All Worked Out”

As noted in the introduction, one of Rowling’s few statements about “the kind of book I want to write” was in a 2018 interview with the BBC in which she talked about her favorite writers.

I enjoy reading books of any kind, not just detective fiction[, w]here I feel the author really knows[; then] I feel like I’m in safe hands. They know everything – I don’t need to worry, they’ve got it all worked out. I like that feeling when I read a book. That’s the kind of book I want to write. (BBC 2018)

The ring structure of the Hogwarts Saga’s seven individual books and the series as a whole, not to mention the cross-series parallelism of the Strike and *Potter* apposite numbers, speaks to Rowling’s care to have her stories “all worked out” before she begins writing (Granger 2010, 2018d). Her comments about the care she puts into her planning, her slow narrative release, the plot-story distinction observed in her writing, and the “big twist” finishes testify to this as well. As she explained in a 2001 BBC Christmas Special, she works as hard as she does in the Shed to turn out a carefully planned book because “I like reading a book where I have the sense that the author knows everything” (Thogerson).

If there is a ‘secret to her success,’ Rowling has said repeatedly that it is the care with which she plans her stories.<sup>95</sup> She planned, for example, the seven *Harry Potter* books in detail for five years before even finishing the first book.

KING: Do you know, J.K., where you’re going?

ROWLING: Yes.

KING: You do? You plot it out?

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<sup>95</sup> Planning is not the entirety of her Shed labors of course. Much of that is the plain hard work of personal application. As Rowling said in 2012 about her frustrations in getting a chapter of a *Potter* book right: “You can work yourself into being inspired. I mean I have sat in front of the blank page, I remember chapter 13, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. The number of times I rewrote that damn chapter.... It was just technically very difficult because I need to show something without showing it. I need to -- I think it’s chapter 13. I’m pretty sure it is.... I can recite that chapter verbatim. I’m so humiliated.... Anyway, but it was technically very difficult to convey the information I need to convey while hiding certain things. And God knows how often I rewrote it and rewrote it. But the reality is, it’s like a scientist. Everything that fails brings you closer to what works” (Rose).

ROWLING: Yes, I spent five years – it was five years before – between having that idea and finishing the first book and during those five years I was planning the whole seven book series, so it's already written in stone. That's how it's going to happen. (King)

She has said, too, that she spent two months re-planning the new *Potter* novel she was working on before she began writing it (Rowling 2004). Why? She believes planning is one essential difference between good writers and bad. “Sometimes writing and seeing where it takes you will lead you to some really good ideas but I would say nearly always it won't be as good as if you sat down first and thought: Where do I want to go, what end am I working towards, what would be good, a good start?” (Rowling 2005a). She even said in August, 2000, that she wasn't about to make market driven changes in the books and “throw away 10 years' meticulous planning” (Jensen).<sup>96</sup>

At the release of *Lethal White*, the fourth Cormoran Strike mystery, in September 2018, Rowling went a step further. Not only does she plan her works in near obsessive-compulsive fashion, she will not deviate from the plan as she writes. The discovery is done before she begins to write. As she said to Graham Norton in her 2018 BBC2 interview with him: “I don't... I don't change my mind... I do very, very detailed plans” (Groves 2018).

What she plans in the *Shed* with such diligence, however, is never explained. In addition to her involved story structure conceits and thematic points, that is, ideas relating to her core beliefs about the soul and death, her mythological backdrops, as well as Christian and hermetic symbolism, her novels reflect careful planning in the plot-narrative distinction, narrative slow release, and surprise ending.

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<sup>96</sup> See also her comments to Lev Grossman about her efforts in planning *Half-Blood Prince* (“I really planned the hell out of it, this one. I took three months and I did nothing, I didn't actually do writing per se, I just sat there and went over and over and over the plan” Grossman 2017) and to Val McDermid about her “vast planning” efforts for *Career of Evil* (McDermid). As recently as 2022, she tweeted that planning her next novel is the most enjoyable part of the writing process for her (Rowling 2022).

The most important of these may be the intentional artistry of crafting a story, the difference between a police report of a case and a Perry Mason novel. In English, the words ‘plot’ and ‘narrative’ are used to describe this difference.

Imagine a murder has been committed on a magically Orwellian country estate where cameras and microphones are everywhere and where everyone is compelled by magical spell, drugs, or genetics to say aloud what they are thinking, at least in the days prior to this murder. Two ways of solving the crime, of discovering ‘whodunnit’ in this environment, clarify the difference between plot and narrative, what the Russian formalists called *syuzhet* and *fabula*.

The plot is the story as told by the multiple audio and video recording devices on the estate when spliced and edited in sequence so the investigator-reader is able to watch and listen to the murderer’s motivation, planning, execution, and implicit deception unfold as it did in actual time. It is the historical narrative in sequential order from its origin in the past to the present.

The narrative is the plot as told by the deliberately manipulative artist, i.e., how the reader is compelled to follow how the detective arriving at the murder scene while waiting for the plot-film to be edited is able to solve the mysteries of whodunnit, how he or she did it, and why - all by reverse-engineering from clues in the narrative the murderer ‘wrote’ to deceive everyone. The detective is obliged along with the reader to piece together himself the plot lest the murderer escape before the film and audio have been pieced together.

The actual plot in story-telling and reading, however, to depart from our fantasy detective model, isn’t the final police report sequence of real-time motivation, means, murder, and mystery or the detective’s recreation of same but the reader’s putting these together into an understanding of “what really

happened” and the consequent appreciation and experience of a net effect of the story-telling artistry, the narrative.

The author’s artistry -- narrative structure, style, symbolism -- is the deliberate choosing and crafting of these elements to create in the reader an intentional and specific plot-genesis effect. Narrative is the story-as-told and plot the story-in-sequence that *the reader creates* from the story-as-told or as the characters in their universe experience them chronologically. The narrative in other words is the story-teller’s art and the plot either the order of events re-created by the author or the interpretation a reader makes to understand the story events in a natural timeline. Narrative is the object of critical study, the deliberate story telling craft and use of literary devices that make a plot more than a police report. It is the author’s intentional artistry, the ‘Shed’ work in Rowling’s metaphor.

Rowling’s novels and screenplays are intricately woven narratives of structure and style each laid over a plot sequence the author artfully conceals. Rowling in fact makes notes of everything in and about a story she is writing though she knows it will be lost in the metonymic elision of plot-entirety to narrative-elision.

It was five years from the train journey, where I had the original idea, to finishing the book [*Philosopher’s Stone*]. And during those five years this massive material was generated -- some of which will *never* find its way into the book, will never need to be in the book. It’s just stuff I need to know for my own pleasure -- partly for my own pleasure and partly because I like reading a book where I have the sense that the author knows everything. They might not be telling me everything, but you have that confidence that the author really knows everything. (Thogerson)

Writing detective fiction, especially, is all about narrative versus plot and this is Rowling’s core genre. The murderer in the mystery being told is also an author; he or she simultaneously commits the crime and crafts a deceptive narrative that the police detective or private investigator must see through to arrive at the actual plot facts and sequence of the crime. Murder mysteries, as such, are metafictional

exercises because the detective is something of a ‘reader proxy’ in search of the plot which the omniscient author has written in such a way to confuse the investigator-reader.

Detective fiction may be less important in *Harry Potter* than the schoolboy story, fantasy fiction, and the Gothic romance, but it is still a critical part of each year’s adventure at Hogwarts; the Rowling/Galbraith Cormoran Strike novels, of course, are all examples of the crime genre *per se*. As Rowling said in 2014, “the *Harry Potter* books are really whodunnits in disguise” (McDermid).

There is no genre more dependent on the plot-narrative distinction than Rowling’s favorite. The author process, as noted, is plot to narrative elision: write the plot out as clearly as possible, the murder as committed, and then create the story-as-told, the narrative, usually from the discovery of the body forward, as the point by point, clues, logic, and events leading to revelation of the writer’s starting point plot at the finish. Rowling achieves this through her deliberate choices with respect to narrative voice and her signature slow release over the course of a series.

Reader experience of story is largely a function of narrative voice (Moore). The voice of the Hogwarts Saga, the perspective of the narration, is ‘third person limited omniscient,’ the narrative method of Rowling’s favorite novel, Austen’s *Emma*, a book she said she read more than twenty times before beginning to write Harry Potter’s adventures (Westman, 145-165). With only four exceptions in almost two hundred chapters, readers are parked over Harry Potter’s shoulder from which position they take in the action and events around him and listen to what he’s thinking. This is a remarkably difficult position from which to tell the reader a story as complicated and involving as many characters as the *Harry Potter* adventures; every piece of information to be shared about the world Harry enters in an ignorance as total as the reader’s has to be run-by Harry in his experience or through some artificial information dump (the Pensieve, Hermione’s trips to the library, etc.) for the observer to learn about it. It is the



story-telling equivalent of walking in the woods at night with a flashlight rather than in the light of day or searching the pitch-black sky for a passing drone with a lighthouse beacon.

This borderline arcane voice-choice relative to the more common first person or third person omniscient narration has two signature and related effects on Rowling's readers. First is its facility in obscuring plot; the larger reality can be obscured indefinitely because the conjoined reader-proxie and *de facto* narrator is for the most part clueless. This facilitates narrative misdirection because the clues as to what is really happening in context can be dropped as asides to which the hero-narrator is not sensitive. The reader can be manipulated into believing what the restricted account of events revealed in Harry's experience though he or she has been given the information necessary for piecing together something closer to reality. Rowling's *Potter* novels aim at an Austenesque "big twist" finish:

"I love a good whodunnit and my passion is plot construction. Readers loved to be tricked, but not conned," Rowling says, warming to her theme. "The best twist ever in literature is in Jane Austen's *Emma*. To me she is the target of perfection at which we shoot in vain." (Boquet)

That "twist," the revelation of the 'real story' plot beneath the narrative, is the defamiliarizing surprise finish with which each of Rowling's novels and screenplays closes, though none as successfully as the *Potter* books because of their narrative voice from *Emma*, one almost impossible to replicate in film or onstage, and which Rowling forsakes for two adult limited omniscient narrators in her Strike mysteries. Its great advantage, again, if executed properly, is that the reader is as clueless as the embedded reader-proxie for the length of the story until the big reveal at story's end, in which scene he or she learns how all the details in Harry's view that he just didn't understand or, as likely, dismissed as inconsequential given his biases constitute the plot.

Rowling's narrative misdirection and narrative artistry obscuring plot are also advanced by what, as a writer of novel and screenplay series, may be her most notable trademark as an author, namely, narrative slow release, the capacity to delay the release of information as long as possible without

cheating the reader of necessary contextual knowledge. Rowling relayed that this was her great struggle with the opening chapter of *Philosopher's Stone*:

I reckon I must've got through fifteen different alternative chapters of book one. The reason for which I discarded each of them were: They all gave too much away. And in fact if you put all those discarded first chapters together, almost the whole plot is explained. This is an old notebook in which I worked out -- and again, I don't want you to come too close on this -- [flashes paper] That is the history of the Death Eaters! Where's my Portuguese diary? God... There it is! So this is a Portuguese diary, as you can see. Not filled in, because I've never filled in a diary in my life, but it had paper in it to write on, so we have another draft of book one, chapter one. (Thogerson)

What the reader gets in the final version of that chapter, 'The Boy Who Lived,' is, instead of the flood of information about Harry's situation at the Dursley's home Rowling claims were in the first drafts, only a teasing minimum, an introduction to principal characters and that a magical world exists just out of Muggle sight. 'He Who Must Not Be Named' is the subject of conversation between Dumbledore and McGonagall on Privet Drive but the circumstances of the Dark Lord's seeming death during his murder of Harry's family is revealed in a slow drip over the course of the seven-novel series. We do not learn why Harry is at Privet Drive, for example, until the opening chapters of the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Each book has its slow release to the big reveal in the climactic confrontation with Voldemort or his servants but these revelations act only as chapter cliff-hangers in the series as a whole.

Every novel works as an independent story whose obscured plot comes clear in its finale while simultaneously uncovering one more aspect of the mystery of Harry's survival introduced in book one, chapter one. The first book revealed the "crucial and central question of the series" (Rowling 2004), how Harry and Voldemort survive the Halloween attack in Godric's Hollow, and each book thereafter answered a part of that question:

- In *Chamber of Secrets* Rowling introduced the young Tom Riddle as a living memory and shared essentials of his psychopathic back-story;
- In *Prisoner of Azkaban* Sirius Black and the Marauders made their entrance and explained how the Dark Lord was able to find and murder Harry's parents;
- In *Goblet of Fire*, the newly re-incarnate Dark Lord told Harry and the Death Eaters how he survived the killing curse that rebounded from Harry (albeit without revealing his Horcrux secret);
- In *Order of the Phoenix* Rowling at last had Dumbledore tell Harry about the Prophecy of Sybill Trelawney which drove Voldemort to find and attempt to murder Harry;
- In *Half-Blood Prince*, the Headmaster via tutorial lessons in the Pensieve told the Tom Riddle, Jr., story to Harry and explained the necessity of destroying the Dark Lord's horcruxes; and
- In *Deathly Hallows* the reader finally learned what really happened in Godric's Hollow the night Harry survived the killing curse and how 'The Boy Who Lived' must die sacrificially to defeat Voldemort.

The Cormoran Strike mysteries in similar fashion begin with the break-up of the detective's relationship with his supermodel girlfriend, Charlotte Campbell, and the engagement of his soon-to-be Watson, Robin Ellacott, to her longtime beau, Matt Cunliffe. The overarching question equivalent in some fashion to the Dark Lord-Harry relationship is the death, supposedly by suicide, of Strike's mother. In the five novels in this series that have been published to date, Strike's and Ellacott's relationships with lovers and with each other are the unfolding backdrop with clues in each adventure about the death of Leda Strike. Books one and four are of murders that were staged as suicides by the killers, *The Silkworm*, book two, included asides about Leda and Strike's supposed biological father,

rock star Jonny Rokeby, and *Career of Evil*, book three, featured the step-father Strike believes was responsible for his mother's death and a visit to the scene of her demise. *Troubled Blood* included at last the entry of Jonny Rokeby and with it the revelation of Strike's two meetings years ago with his indifferent biological father.

The remarkable structural relation of Rowling's series segments with one another in *Harry Potter* and their parallel numbers in the Cormoran Strike mysteries (Granger 2022a) are a reason the faked suicides in Strikes one and four are almost certainly relevant to the unpublished finale in Strike seven. The parallelism and chiasmic correspondences, though, of the individual books as integers and as components of a larger story must be mentioned here as a fascinating aspect of Rowling's skills with slow release. The strict internal echoing within each book and between books speaks to control and planning that is much more than a matter of narrative restraint or holding back information; the reveals in the finish are always suggested by perumbrations in the middle and beginning *and* the chapters in the back half have their content foreshadowed in their corresponding numbers of the front half, be it the book or series (Granger 2010). This organic unfolding of story in chiasmic fashion testifies to a hyper-awareness of narrative versus plot and a writer's responsibility to craft the one from the other in such a way as to maximize the charm or thrill of a reader at his or her recognition and re-creation of the story as police report as well as what obscured this recognition.

If this weren't sufficient demonstration of the author's concern about how a story is properly told, Rowling embeds the narrative-plot distinction in her stories. Rowling is special, perhaps unique, in her concerns about planning and making her narrative a cathartic experience of discovery for the reader. This is so much a focus of her work that in a metafictional and self-referential exercise she inserts in her stories reflections of the writer's efforts at this, the reader's struggle to unwind the narrative to get to

the facts, and, in one extraordinary case, one writer-character's actual discussion of plot versus narrative.

Every *Harry Potter* novel, for instance, is about the Terrible Trio's up-and-down journey to figuring out that school year's core mystery. As often as not, it turns on a core text that they have to understand, as detail of which escapes them (e.g., the Chocolate Frog Card in *Stone*, *Tales of Beedle the Bard* in *Deathly Hallows*), the narrative trickery which they overlook (Riddle's Diary in *Chamber*, the Potions textbook in *Half-Blood Prince*), or the meaning of which they either deny, misinterpret, or don't want to face, most notably the Prophecy, the *ur* text of Harry's life and battle with the Dark Lord.

*Casual Vacancy* similarly turns on the computer bulletin board text messages posted by several characters in the name of the departed Barry Fairbrother and what each character makes of these messages. *Cuckoo's Calling* revolves around the search for Lula Landry's will, and all of *Silkworm* is the search for the meaning of Owen Quine's *Bombyx Mori* in its re-written form to get at its original meaning, the Jacobean Revenge Drama of Liz Tassel.<sup>97</sup> *Troubled Blood*, the longest of the Strike novels, turns largely on the two detective's study and interpretation of a long dead Detective Inspector's occult notes written in his 'True Book.'

This metafictional awareness is evident in the *Potter* books as well. Why did Hermione Granger go to the lengths of freeing Rita Skeeter to write up her *Tattler* interview of Harry Potter in *Order of the Phoenix*? Because the Ministry's narrative via the *Daily Prophet* about the Dark Lord's re-appearance and Harry being a loose wing-nut had so obscured the truth that she had to take some kind of direct action to create a counter-narrative to begin to wake up the inattentive readers of the Wizarding World's

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<sup>97</sup> *Silkworm*, a novel about novelists, writing, and reading, Rowling's most explicitly literary story, though the second book in the series, was the first conceived of the stories (BBC 2018) and is something of a touchstone for Rowling's thoughts about writing; "It's a novel about novels with another novel inside of it" (Pocock).

only newspaper. Rowling's disdain for the news media is perhaps based on her writer's awareness that narrative must eventually reveal plot rather than forever remaining biased 'spin.'

In *The Silkworm*, however, a character actually discussed explicitly the *syuzhet-fabula* distinction within the story. The hapless author-blogger Kathryn Kent, perhaps Rowling's embedding of herself as a younger woman and writer, posted on her weblog the only note of a writer-about-writing in Rowling's work. Kent even uses the words 'plot' and 'narrative:'

Great talk with TFW [The Famous Writer, Owen Quine] about Plot and Narrative tonight which are of course not the same thing. For those wondering:- Plot is what happens, Narrative is how much you show your readers and how you show it to them.

An example from my second novel "Melina's Sacrifice."

*As they made their way towards the Forest of Harderell Lendor raised his handsome profile to see how near they were to it. His well-maintained body, honed by horseback riding and archery skills — (Silkworm, 66)*

This is definitively the distinction between plot and narrative, facts the reader has to get straight post narrative and the artistry that makes the story-points. It seems fair to suggest everything Rowling writes is to some degree part of her intentional artistry to obscure plot via narrative while displaying the same in her surface story for the reader's discovery and reflection.

Again, though, Rowling told Boquet, that her "target" was surpassing Austen's "best twist," the surprise ending of *Emma* (Boquet). Traditional and contemporary literary critics have different names for the shocking revelation within a story, from estrangement and defamiliarization to the Russian *ostrananie*. 'How' Rowling writes is only meaningful with respect to the 'why' of her artistry, this defamiliarizing or shock effect. The effort is perhaps most easily grasped using a metaphor from the pitch. Estrangement seems a relatively exotic idea but is as simple as the 'trick play' in sports.

The goal of the ‘trick play’ in American football, for example, is for the team with the ball or offense to surprise the defense with a variation on the anticipated ‘run’ or ‘pass’ options or an expected field goal attempt or punt. A ‘draw play,’ for instance, looks exactly like a passing play in which the quarterback steps back from receiving the ball into a protective ‘cup’ of linemen and backfield players as if he is about to throw the ball downfield to one of several receivers. After the defenders fall back to cover potential receivers running down field, he then deftly gives the ball to one of the running backs who seemed to be in position only to block for him. This back then runs through the line of defenders rushing the quarterback they think is about to throw the football downfield; the ball carrier gains as many yards as he can before the defensive backfield recovers from their mistaken initial ‘reading’ of the play.

Similarly, the quarterback can lateral the ball to a running back who runs toward the sideline behind several linemen blockers but, instead of following his protectors through or around the line of defenders, the runner throws the football either back to the quarterback or downfield to a receiver. If the defenders respond to the ‘fake’ as the real play, the offense is able to catch them out of position when the real play shows itself. This simultaneously creates an opening for a large gain on the play in question and creates a hesitation in future plays to react as quickly as possible to the signs of a conventional passing or running play for fear of being tricked again.

Writers and their readers as offense and defense are playing a similar game albeit without pads and helmets. The reader is in a contest to see-through the conventions and tropes of story-telling with which said reader is already familiar and anticipate the author’s revelation well before it plays itself out in the story-as-told. The authors aiming to upstage Austen’s *Emma*, however, work to ‘draw’ in the reader with genre cliches and confirmations of all he or she believes is normal or right not only in story but

with the world and then explode all these expectations with a ‘reverse’ or ‘twist’ that forces a new appreciation or understanding, a more ‘penetrating’ vision.

‘Defamiliarization’ or *ostranenie* is the goal of literature according to the Russian Formalists and is just this kind of exploded expectation. In his foreword to “Lolita,” Nabokov, impersonating the sociologist John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., writes that “a great work of art is of course always original, and thus by its very nature should come more or less as a shocking surprise.” Viktor Shklovsky, leading Russian formalist of the post-Revolutionary decades, wrote about a literary technique he dubbed “the Knight’s Move.” Unlike the straight-forward movement of the rook or bishop pieces which also move multiple squares in a single move on a chessboard, the knight changes direction once started, turning ninety degrees to left or right of its original path. Shklovsky argued that a writer’s “knight’s move” was his or her break with convention and reader expectation, a break that “defamiliarized” this reader’s experience of the narrative sufficiently to create an awareness of the work’s “literariness.” The point of this surprise or shock according to formalist theory is to “‘make strange’ the world of every day perception and [thereby renew] the reader’s lost capacity for fresh sensation” (Abrams 2005, 107).

The problem in the human condition, at least as the Formalists saw it, the problem which art in general and literature most importantly address, is the distance from reality in human cognition consequent to mental habit, the ruts in our thinking created by repeated experience that keep us from encountering the world as it is, freshly in each moment. The author’s job, as Coleridge wrote in his *Biographia Literaria*, is to remove the “film of familiarity” that cloaks and separates us from first-hand encounter with the world and relationships: “[Coleridge described] the ‘prime merit’ of a literary genius to be the representation of ‘familiar objects’ so as to evoke ‘freshness of sensation’” (Abrams 2005, 108).

Readers’ automatized thinking is best broken by imaginative defamiliarization.



The sort of break that story can and should inspire is a departure from the mundane to experience an encounter with an immaterial dimension of life. Coleridge, for example, wrote that the purpose of *Lyrical Ballads* was in large part

“to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.” (Coleridge 1817, 365; see Mark 8:17-18)

A. K. Coomaraswamy called this effect *samvega*, the Pali word for “the shock of a whip” “that represents the shock of conviction that only an intellectual<sup>98</sup> art can deliver, the body blow that is delivered by any perfect and therefore convincing statement of truth” (Coomaraswamy 1943a, 184). Kafka translated this traditional language into the relative vernacular of water and spirit: “I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us. If the book we are reading doesn’t shake us awake like a blow on the skull, why bother reading it in the first place?... A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.” (Kafka, 16)

Rowling’s principal targets in the surface stories of her work, *Philosopher’s Stone* to *Troubled Blood*, are the varieties of automatized thinking, from passive bias and natural ignorance to active bigotry and discrimination. In the Hogwarts Saga, the ‘white hats’ assembled as Dumbledore’s Army who resist the Dark Lord and his Pure-blood minions are in large part the victims of the prejudices against them by the aristocratic caste among witches and wizards and the Ministry of Magic power-holders. Sirius Black is a falsely convicted criminal on the run, Lupin is a werewolf, Hagrid is a half-giant – the list goes on. It is Harry’s trust in Dumbledore and bias against Severus Snape, however, the latter a prejudice he

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<sup>98</sup> Coomaraswamy uses the word “intellectual” not in the conventional way as a synonym for “intelligent” or “academic” but in its traditional meaning of “spiritual,” per the Latin *intellectus*, the equivalent of the Greek *nous*.

inherited from his father that, when revealed in the big finish to have been wrong, are together the great defamiliarizing experience of the series.

The Strike novels, too, celebrate the downtrodden and flip the accepted biases that obscure the killer. *The Silkworm* begins with Strike agreeing to help a poor woman trying to find her husband only because another client, a paying customer that is something of a cartoon Tory, demands Strike dismiss her immediately in order to attend to his needs (Strike closes investigation of the rich client's case instead). Throughout *Troubled Blood*, Robin discusses "social identity theory" and Everyman's inclination to trust certain classes of people, most notably priests and doctors, because of their authority over life and death. Strike is borderline enraged at the finish when he realizes that it is exactly this passive bias or unexamined metanarrative that has prevented him from seeing that the murderer was the friendly nurse. Rowling exploded the bias in her readers via their sharing Strike's experience of defamiliarization in the surface plot.

How she accomplishes such defamiliarization varies. To start, the fantasy genre is by definition all 'making strange;' an enchanted world inside our own Muggle existence re-enchants a secularized, atheistic existence. The mystery story, too, at the core of both her major series, has its end in exploding the seeming surety, the narrative understood to be true that is false. Her 'Knight's Move' are the genre mélange and departures from formula but especially the patented 'Big Twist' at the end of every *Potter* and Strike novel in which we learn that we "didn't see what we thought we saw!" as Sirius Black explained in the Shrieking Shack at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban* (351). The joy of discovery continues along these lines in re-readings where readers find the Easter Egg references and allusions to future events and hidden realities they missed on their first – and fifth – readings.

The defamiliarizing effect of reader transformation with respect to their ideas of soul via exteriorizations of its faculties, even of its journey to perfection, though, is a step well beyond story twists. This estrangement from accepted commonplaces of the historical period, one attempted via hermetic symbolism, mythological templates, and allegories of human inner capacities, the success or failure of which attempts to estrange and enlighten the reader are the subject of the thesis proper. The take-away point here is that this defamiliarization as with the relatively easy achievement of reader surprise or *samvega* is per Romantics, Formalists, and the Traditionalists the proper aim of reading and writing truly literary texts.

## **VI. Intention and Best Critical Perspective**

In looking at Rowling's work in light of her Lake's unconscious inspiration, it was not difficult to trace the tracks of her personal history and psychological issues. Her stories, however, are not just Mary Sue trauma and wish-fulfillment excretions and projections but are informed by her religious faith, belief in the immortality of the individual soul, hermetic arts familiarity, and Estecean idea of imagination.

Reviewing the authors and influences in Rowling's Shed whom she imitated, many of her core interests and beliefs are reflected with the attendant tools she has deployed in her own work, most notably her careful planning and chiasmic artistry mentioned above.

Her intention consequent to dredging her Lake and cataloging the contents of her Shed seems relatively evident, however conjectural; because she has nowhere expressed it directly in interviews or written statements about writing it remains speculative. Rowling's aim, judging from her Lake and Shed discussion and like comments, seems to be to write stories delivering her core beliefs using the methods of writers she admires and which she has turned to her own signature uses for the "revelation and transformation" of her readers via their imaginations.

What critical school is most fit, then, to read Rowling's work, and, specifically in terms of the aim of this thesis, to gauge the "ratio of intention to result" in her writing? It seems evident that the best critical perspective will be one that is most closely aligned with both her defining beliefs and those literary influences that have shaped her writing's inspiration and perspiration in the Lake and Shed. The ratchet must fit the bolt it aims to loosen.

This being the case, what critical school is the best fit with Rowling's remarkable set of interests, beliefs, and literary models? A survey of contemporary approaches suggests three possible matches.

Opening respected introductory textbooks of literature and criticism used in university classrooms reveals the number and contrary views of critical schools, each with attendant tools, for reading more challenging poetry, prose and drama. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan's 1300-page *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Rivkin), for example, surveys twelve schools of contemporary critical reading, from New Criticism, Linguistics, and Phenomenology to Marxism, Critical Race Theory, and Post-Colonial Studies. Robert DiYanni's 2230 page *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (DiYanni), in his chapter "Critical Theory: Approaches to the Analysis and Interpretation of Literature" explores formalist, biographical, historical, psychological/psychoanalytic, sociological/Marxist, feminist, reader-response, mythological or archetypal, structuralist/semiotic, deconstructive, and cultural studies approaches to any text. X.J. Kennedy and Dana Goia's equally massive *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama* lists these same schools and tools in its "Critical Approaches to Literature" chapter (Kennedy and Goia).

DiYanni warns in the conclusion to his survey that the choice of one of these ten perspectives that is "suitable and effective" to the work in hand is no simple thing; he points out that while one or another approach may seem obviously better, a combination of perspectives, especially those which overlap,

may be more effective. The “grave danger” he writes is of “using any critical approach to literature” so “that literary texts may be read with an eye toward making them conform to a particular critical theory rather than using that critical theory to illuminate the text” (DiYanni 2192). DiYanni’s concern, of course, is not a theoretical warning of a possible failing easily dodged but a pointer to the prevalent ideological reading of texts by the various schools and their proponents that as Rivkin notes, quoting the poet, “murders to dissect,” objectifying the text (Rivkin, x). Northrup Frye calls this failing “substituting a critical attitude for criticism” (Frye 1957, 6).

If the number, variety, and tendency to narrowness of these various approaches were not sufficient challenge in coming to critical consensus about the seriousness and quality of Rowling’s work, there are also the seemingly contradictory elements of her writing. The postmodern critic of a Marxist or deconstructive bent, for example, will find the *Harry Potter* novels are largely about a metanarrative of oppressor and oppressed, Death Eater pure-bloods contra mud-blood wizards and witches who defend the Muggles (see Beatty, Blake, Gupta for Marxist readings of *Harry Potter*). The reader enamored of archetypes and allegory will note the Hero’s Journey Harry takes each year, the battle between good and evil (see Paakkonen, Mikulan, Gerhold), and the “obvious” per Rowling (Adler) Christian symbolism of the series (see Granger 2008, Neal, Barnhart, Bell, Bridger, and Groves 2017). A feminist may celebrate or condemn the empowered or enabling witches of the books (see Asher, Mayes-Elme 2004, 2004a, 2006; Yeo, McDaniel, Schoefer, Mendlesohn) while a gender or Queer theorist may lament that, while Albus Dumbledore is supposedly gay, all relationships in the book are heteronormative (see Pugh, Ehnen, Kern). Rowling and her hero share a birthday and eye color which invites a biographical or psychoanalytic reading (see Byatt, Ingliss, Mills, A., Grimes; all these critics were writing even before Rowling herself invited this approach in her Lake and Shed comments).

DiYanni's warning and Rivkin's reservation, then, suggest both what serious readers wanting to understand and appraise Rowling's work should avoid and an alternative path to follow. The use of the preferred tools at hand or in the use of which the critic is skilled is almost certainly not "suitable and effective" if the work itself does not invite it and does not offer significant evidence that the author shares the concerns of that school. The critical way that will be most suitable may very well be a combination of methods or ways unknown rather than the one hammer in the critic's tool chest or the one in academic fashion: approaches to which the author's literary models, chosen genres, and implicit and explicit messages point rather than a single method preferred by a given reader or the cultural moment. Rowling's esoteric Christian beliefs and familiarity with hermetic arts are anachronistic and her use of Christian symbols and chiastic story scaffolding are similar throwbacks to pre-modernity.

Of the contemporary schools mentioned, only three appear as possibilities: the Psychological or Psychoanalytic treatments align with Rowling's CBT experiences, her interest and study of psychology, and the evidence of both in her work; the Mythological or Archetypal, inasmuch as these differ from psychological readings after Jung, reflect Rowling's lifelong study of myth, her discussion of "archetypes" in the writing of stories (Fry 2022), and the mythic templates used as backdrops to the *Harry Potter* and *Cormoran Strike* series; Formalism, as seen above in the discussion of the plot/narrative distinction and defamiliarization, has evident value in explaining the artistry of a writer consumed by the form of stories. The two members of Rowling's 'Top Ten Influences' who were also academic literary critics, Vladimir Nabokov and C. S. Lewis, were formalist writers (Glynn, Schakel).

Russian Formalism seems a fit with the 'how' and the 'why' of Rowling's writing and of her noted models. 'How' Rowling writes, as noted, is deliberate to the point of obsessiveness and a premise of Formalist criticism, as noted, is the distinction between *syuzhet* and *fabula*, the story in exact past to

present sequence and the story as crafted by the writer whose characters are presented and the events of which are ordered and presented to create particular effects on the reading or viewing audience. That effect, the ‘why’ of fiction, is *ostrananie* according to the Formalists, “defamiliarization” or “estrangement,” the jarring of the reader or play-goer into a cathartic re-awakening, a liberation from unexamined and rote thinking. These tools are close to ideal for the task of gauging Rowling’s success or failure as a deliberate writer, one working with a specific intention after well-chosen models. As Rene Welleck put it:

Russian Formalism keeps the work of art itself in the center of attention: it sharply emphasizes the difference between literature and life, it rejects the usual biographical, psychological, and sociological explanations of literature. It develops highly ingenious methods for analyzing works of literature and for tracing the history of literature in its own terms. (Welleck, quoted in Erlich, 9)

This relatively pure aestheticism or “literariness,” however, makes its use more than problematic in a thesis that springs from an essentially biographical foundation; Rowling’s Lake inspiration and Shed influences, “biographical, psychological” “explanations of literature,” are not Formalist concerns. The goal of the thesis, however, is to gauge Rowling’s success or failure as a writer in light of the “ratio of intention and result” in her work and the author invited, through her Lake and Shed comments as well as her advice to new writers a biographical and a bibliographical exam of her writing by critics.

Formalism and its critical progeny (New Criticism, Structuralism, et cetera) that embrace the “death of the author” or think of auctorial intentionality as a “fallacy” mark their approaches as being alien to Rowling’s ideas about her work and her intentions as a writer. She understands her work, which she told Grossman she works to look at “objectively,” (Grossman 2017) as clearly being an expression of her personal identity, the sum of her beliefs and experiences.

More to the point, however, Formalism, as well as the psychoanalytic and mythological approaches, is fundamentally modern, which is to say rational and analytic, a science of literature, a gauge of a

writer's aesthetic merits not his or her work's ratio of intention to result or meaning per se. Nabokov was never more the Formalist than when he said that "Style and structure are the essence of a book; great ideas are hogwash" (Nabokov 1980, xxiii). Contemporary critical schools, all born after the Industrial Revolution, share in common the mindset and blind-spots of modernity and postmodernity. Even the mythological and psychological approaches are not pre-modern in their ideas of mind and soul, indebted as they are to Freud and Jung (via Campbell). The surveys above, however, of Rowling's Lake biography and Shed bibliography revealed her core beliefs, interests, and literary models are almost exclusively archaic or, at least, out of step with the predominant ideas and beliefs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As "progressive" and anti-institutional as she may be, the ideas and literary toolbox she favors mark her as something of a postmodern traditionalist or an anti-modern Romantic.

Her favorite authors, again, are pre-moderns or critics of modernity and its defining beliefs, e.g., empiricism, rationalism, individualism, nominalism, materialism, etc. C. S. Lewis was a Medieval and Renaissance scholar, a self-described "dinosaur" at war with modernity and consumed with an evangelical spirit for his traditional perspective. Nabokov was notorious in his disdain for Freud and his minions; the author's preferred literary references in works like *Lolita* and *Pale Fire* are to Shakespeare, to Poe, and to Lewis Carroll, a late Medieval playwright, a Romantic poet and short story writer, and an Oxford Platonist and Coleridge disciple respectively. Jane Austen, according to at least one of her exegetes, wrote her novels largely as arguments against David Hume and the encroaching hegemony of empiricism in her time (Delasanta).

The admitted traditional Christian symbolism and evident occult artistry in Rowling's work, too, reflect a pre-modern or Estecean spiritual understanding of the world and the power of imaginative literature.



The definition of imagination she gave at Harvard in 2008 as being in essence the human capacity for empathy springs from the same *logos* understanding of subject and object from Coleridge, one aimed pointedly, as with Austen, at Hume and company.

The chiasmic or ring structure of almost everything Rowling writes is the form of myth, scripture, epic poetry, and fairy tales, all pre-modern; Douglas' contention that ring writing disappears in modernity and becomes invisible to readers at the same time (Jakobson's Conundrum) marks this divide (Douglas, 6, 125, 145-148).

Rowling's 2012 confessions that she is "obsessed" with death and the focus in "key" scenes such as the Potter-Dumbledore dialogue at the mythic King's Cross with what is "real" are reflective of a metaphysical, which is to say, "transcending the natural sphere," orientation unusual in a postmodern but typical in a pre-modern person.

Rowling's core genres outside allegory – detective mysteries, fantasy, the gothic novel, manners-and-morals fiction – are all born in the Romantic era's reaction against the Industrial Revolution and the attendant empiricist and materialist hegemony in the public square.

Pictures and art in Harry Potter, too, are in essence iconological; the photographs are as alive as the people whose images were captured on film and knowing the password to speak to certain paintings acts as a key allowing entry into the much greater world behind and beyond it.

David Bentley Hart's critique of analytic philosophy is perhaps as relevant with respect to the dominant schools of literary criticism today:

The philosophical tendencies and presuppositions of any age are, to a very great degree, determined by the prevailing cultural mood or by the ideological premises generally approved of by the educated classes. As often as not, the history of philosophy has been a history of prejudices masquerading as principles, and so merely a history of fashion. It is as possible today to be an intellectually scrupulous Platonist as it was more than two thousand years ago; it is simply not in vogue...

More to the point, inasmuch as the educated class is usually, at any given phase in history, also the most thoroughly indoctrinated, and therefore the most intellectually pliable and quiescent, professional philosophers are as likely as their colleagues in the sciences and humanities (and far more likely than the average person) to accept a reigning consensus uncritically, even credulously, and to adjust their thinking about everything accordingly. (Hart, 46-47)

Hart's comments about Platonism and academic fashion are reminiscent of C. S. Lewis' remarks about the two things he was taught by his best friend, Coleridge scholar Owen Barfield,<sup>99</sup> namely, "chronological snobbery" and that in the end "the universe is mental." The first refers to the unexamined belief in an age consumed by the delusion of unending progress that what is past is necessarily wrong or at least 'less right' than whatever is believed at present; the latter is the Estecean cosmological and epistemological tenet that the metaphysical fabric of reality and the substance of mind and thought share an origin or ground in "a cosmic *Logos*." That traditional conception, of course, was impossible for Lewis to have understood until he grasped the grip "chronological snobbery" had on his own thinking and was able thereafter to consider seriously the traditional, essentially Platonic and Christian view (Lewis 1955, 208-209).<sup>100</sup> Given Rowling's predilection to those *ante* and anti-modern

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<sup>99</sup> If there is an unbroken line of descent from Coleridge's ideas of imagination to Rowling's, it is through Barfield, author of *What Coleridge Thought*, and Lewis, about whom Barfield wrote, "He had no conception of the epistemological significance of the imagination [at first], although he valued it... But right at the end of his life he really did get the notion of the imagination as a vehicle of knowledge as well as of feeling through his idea of the Sacrament – one or two sermons he preached in the University church did rather suggest the idea that the imagination is a part of reality and not just an entertaining comment on reality" (Blaxson-delaage, 26). Lewis' description of the imagination as the human "organ for meaning" (Lewis 2013, 265) is a restatement of the Estecean idea of the Primary Imagination as *Logos*.

<sup>100</sup> Lewis dedicated *Allegory of Love* to Barfield, calling him the "Wiseest and best of my unofficial teachers." He also wrote in *Surprised by Joy* that Barfield was a "type" of every man's "Second Friend:" "The Second Friend is the man who disagrees with you about everything. He is not so much the alter ego as the anti-self.... He changed me a good deal more than I him." In fact, Lewis wrote in the Preface to *Allegory* that "I desire for myself no higher function than to be one of the instruments whereby his theory and practice in such matters may become more widely effective" (Hooper 1996, 622, 554). In *Surprised by Joy*, he wrote that Barfield's "counterattacks" in their 'Great War' about the veracity and value of

or traditional views and the weight of “chronological snobbery” evident in the uniform modernity of contemporary literary criticism, it seems logical and prudent to consider a critical perspective more in line with her thinking, literary models, and choices as a writer.

Because Rowling’s work has as its intention, one evident after a review of her Lake and Shed inventory, the attempt to shock the reader into some experience of a spiritual dimension of human life or at least a less disenchanted idea of what it means to be human, an explicitly theological though not necessarily religious understanding of art and literature seems preferable to any of the prevalent alternatives. Rowling’s use of traditional symbols, resurrection themes, archaic chiasmic structure, and hermetic content all suggest, despite her antagonism to institutional Christianity and Petrine authority, that an explicitly spiritual and anti-modern set of critical tools would be especially appropriate to reading her work.

Though profoundly unconventional and not listed among possibilities in any texts on literary criticism,<sup>101</sup> the Traditionalist school of interpreting sacred art founded by Coomaraswamy, Guenon,

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Anthroposophy “destroyed forever two elements in my own thought.” These two “destructive” or purgative thoughts were “chronological snobbery” and that the “World is mental.” “Chronological snobbery” Lewis defined as “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited” (Hooper 1996, 553). Understanding one’s own historical period is also an ‘Age’ with its own “characteristic illusions” allowed Lewis to examine skeptically “those wide-spread assumptions which are ingrained in the age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them.” “In the second place, [Barfield] convinced me that the positions we had hitherto held left no room for any satisfactory theory of knowledge. We had been, in the technical sense of the term, ‘realists’; that is, we accepted as rock-bottom reality the universe revealed by the senses. But at the same time we continued to make, for certain phenomena of consciousness, all the claims that really went with a theistic or idealistic view. We maintained that abstract thought (if obedient to logical rules) gave indisputable truth, that our moral judgment was ‘valid’, and our aesthetic experience not merely pleasing but “valuable”. . . . Barfield convinced me that it was inconsistent. If thought were a purely subjective event, these claims for it would have to be abandoned. . . . I was therefore compelled to give up realism. . . . I must admit that mind was no late-come epiphenomenon; that the whole universe was, in the last resort, mental; that our logic was participation in a cosmic *Logos*” (Lewis 1955, 208-209).

<sup>101</sup> The only text dedicated to the subject of Traditionalist understanding of literary art per se and not in the context of interpreting a specific work or author is Ray Livingston’s 1962 *The Traditional Theory of Literature*, a work focused all but exclusively on Coomaraswamy’s ideas because they were at that time the only Traditionalist essays available in English. Arthur Versluis’ *Gnosis and Literature* (1996) is perhaps the best example of Traditionalist interpretation of literature, ancient, Medieval, and modern, but his survey of transformative sacred literary art makes no effort to connect this work with Perennialism, per se.

and Schuon is an obvious match for Rowling's psychomachia and literary alchemy. Traditionalist interpretation of symbolism (Guenon 1995; Oldmeadow 2011, 102-115; Schuon 1981; Lings 1991), myth (Coomaraswamy 2004), scripture (Guenon 1975, Lings 1991, 58-66), Dante (Guenon 1996, Burckhardt 1987 82-97, Upton 2004, 2015), Blake (Raine 1977, 1982), Coleridge (Cutsinger 1988), and Shakespeare (Lings 1994, 1998; Perry 1975; Versluis 2001) and the school's writing on metallurgical alchemy (Burckhardt 1972; 1987, 132-141) and archetypes contra Jung (Burckhardt 1987, 48-67; Sherrard 1998, 134-157) are clear models for interpreting Rowling's work, full as it is with her alchemical, archetypal, Christian, immortal soul, and mythic content, all wrapped in chiasmic structure. Unlike the Formalists, whose defamiliarizing aim was to cause a reawakening or freshness of experience from the slumber of unconscious life inside conventional thinking, the artistic *samvega* or shock according to the Traditionalists has the specific goal of recalling the audience from sensual distraction to spiritual focus and acting as a support to their contemplation of what is real and true.

This perspective and its distinctions between sacred and profane art and between liturgical and extra-liturgical sacred art seems to promise greater alignment with Rowling's intention than any contemporary alternative.<sup>102</sup> If Dante in his insistence in his letter to Cangrande about reading the *Commedia* at four levels and Flannery O'Connor's remark that only a writer with "anagogical vision" is "ever going to write stories that have any chance of becoming a permanent part of our literature" (O'Connor, 72-73), then a critical school that by nature uses a Quadrigal reading of texts and symbolism would be a natural match for Rowling and her stories with, as will be discussed in chapter

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<sup>102</sup> In a traditional or theocentric civilization, the profane arts, while not communicating either "spiritual truths" or a "celestial presence," do provide the "sensible consolations" "conducive to a spiritual life" (Schuon 1981, 183). Sacred art is not exclusively liturgical and religious. Not only is there craftwork, from weaving to metalworking of household utensils and the architecture of buildings not used for worship, but there is also, painting, music, and dance – and story -- that are not used in formal worship, public or private. It is sacred rather than profane art so long as it observes traditional forms and boundaries that act as intellections and guard against individual excesses on the artist's part. Schuon described such "noble works impregnated with contemplative spirit" as "extra-liturgical art" (Idem, 184).

five, their embedded debate between a secular and sacred understanding of art and the world. Reading Rowling through this traditional lens, her work appears as a type of postmodern mythology, in which the soul is exteriorized or its various faculties, especially the heart or spiritual capacity as character or characters en route to perfection in spirit.

The distinction between a Platonic understanding of “archetypes” and the Jungian and currently prevalent idea is helpful here, especially in light of Rowling’s use of “archetypes” in her comments to Fry about writing (Fry 2022). Kallistos Ware's pithy summary of Sherrard's “two methodological principles,” ‘From above, downward; from within, outward,’ are pocket capsules of the Traditionalist worldview and understanding of knowledge as opposed to the modernist, nominalist positions (Ware 1998, xxix-xxxiv).

Reason works in the brain 'from without, inward,' taking sense perceptions of the environment, abstracting ideas, abstractions, and analogies from this data, and concluding with the little surety it can working from ignorance and ephemera to speculative knowledge. The Intellect, in contrast, the *logos* within each person, perceives and knows through the 'eye of the Heart' the Platonic ideas and archetypes, specifically, the inner essences or *logoi* in everything existent, the greater knowledge beneath, behind, and within the object of its perception much as a person knows its reflection in a mirror. Coleridge summarized this *logos* epistemology as “all knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject”<sup>103</sup> just as the knowing subject and known object coincide in a mirror's reflection.

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103 Coleridge held, quoting Schelling, that “all knowledge” was had by logos-within recognizing logos-without, not an elision but a coincidence or reflective perception, at once *alter et idem*: “All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject. (My readers have been warned in a former chapter that, as for their convenience as well as the writer’s, the term, subject, is used by me in its scholastic sense as equivalent to mind or sentient being, and as the necessary correlative of object or *quisquid obicitur menti*.) For we can *know* that only which is true: and the truth is universally placed in the coincidence of the thought with the thing, of the representation with the object represented” (Coleridge, 336).

Knowledge as much as our being springs "from within, outwards" via the *logos*-intellect rather than the reverse.<sup>104</sup>

The rationalist is also, from the Traditionalist perspective, by necessity a materialist because all that he knows comes from sense perceptions of measurable quantities and deductions from same. What is real to the modern, consequently, springs 'from below, upwards;' the existent world is made up of, that is, its existential ground is matter and energy in flux. Reality is most real and knowledgeable, from this view, at its most sensibly concrete and measurable and less and less real or certain the more the object departs from the realm of quantities to qualities. Human thoughts are chemical excretions of the brain in the end – and those thoughts of otherworldly realities can never have more truth value than subjective opinion (and as likely as not are psychological projection or delusional fantasy). The bedrock ideas informing this worldview are evolutionism, the progressive anti-entropic growth from the less complex to the exceedingly complex, and psychologism, which, restricting epistemology to body and soul, places a low ceiling on human knowledge, one shutting out the heavens or spiritual dimension.

The Traditionalists, after Plato and the great revealed traditions, in contrast are philosophical Realists. They hold, as Sherrard writes, "that there can be no true science of phenomena – of visible nature – that is not based on and rooted in a science of spiritual realities of which visible phenomena are the spatio-temporal manifestations or 'signatures;' and that consequently a knowledge of these metaphysical realities is a prerequisite of a knowledge of their physical analogues in the natural world." "In no way is it possible to separate physics from metaphysics, and in so far as we think it is possible we simply confirm the inanity of our thought" (Sherrard 1992, 131-132, 9; cited in Ware 1998, xxxii). Reality, that

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<sup>104</sup> Burckhardt notes that this is possible because of the "doctrine of the Logos as source of both being and knowledge" (Burckhardt 1987, 18).

is, the substance of knowledge and being, flows ‘from above’ in the *Logos*, archetypes and Divine Names, downward.

The different ways Traditionalists and modern thinkers understand the word ‘archetype,’ as mentioned in the thesis introduction, is perhaps the surest way to see the conflict between their perspectives<sup>105</sup> because, as with ‘traditional’ now meaning ‘conventional’ and ‘intellectual’ being used as a synonym for ‘rational,’ the prevalent definition of archetype after Jung is almost exactly the opposite of how Plato and orthodox theologians employ it.<sup>106</sup>

For the Traditionalists, archetypes are the noetically concrete realities outside of time in the intelligible world 'above' or outside space-time reality, the Forms in relation to which the forms 'below' acting as defining essences to matter are shadows; they are perceived by the supra-mental and transpersonal spiritual faculty within man, the *nous* or intellect, if this fallen capacity is purified and recovered from its fallen, atrophied state. For moderns after Jung, the archetypes are the remnant psychological substrata of a “collective unconsciousness” from man's evolutionary origins pre-consciousness, the human psychic residue which is only known by the subconscious mind and revealed in dreams while the conscious person sleeps. The aim of the science of psychology<sup>107</sup> according to Jung is the elevation and integration by and with the conscious mind of this limbic knowledge of the archetypes from the human psychological basement.<sup>108</sup>

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105 A conflict essential to understand Rowling-Galbraith’s “debate” within *Troubled Blood* as well, as will be discussed.

106 Thucydides’ description of words turning into their opposites during partisan conflict and thereby becoming meaningless seems apt here: “Words had to change their ordinary meaning [or value, *axiosis*] and to take that which was now given to them” (*Peloponnesian Wars*, 3.82.4). The examples he gives of such changes are uniformly what are now called ‘spin’ to make the bad seem good and the false true. Coomaraswamy quotes Plato in this regard, that “the misuse of words is the symptom of a sickness in the soul” (Coomaraswamy 1944, 309).

107 The Traditionalists note that, by Jung’s own admission, contemporary psychology has the psyche as both its subject and object, making any knowledge from its study necessarily anything but scientific (cf., Burckhardt 1987, 45; Sherrard 1998, 135-136).

108 The basement metaphor is deliberate; the dream Jung claimed revealed to him the existence of the archetypes or “forms of instinct” within the subconscious was one in which he moved from the upper floors of his home into its basement only to find there a cavern beneath it containing bones and pottery fragments. He was inspired by this vision to postulate the

Sherrard noted that Jung's equation of archetypes with 'forms of instinct' means that there is inevitable and perhaps deliberate confusion between this sense "with that of 'archetype' in the traditional Platonic and Christian meaning of the word" (Sherrard 1998, 144). Burckhardt called Jung's "use of the term 'archetype' to signify the latent, and as such inaccessible, contents of the 'collective unconscious'" a "usurpation" because the archetypes, though they are "reflected at the psychic level," "do not belong to the psychic realm, but to the world of pure Spirit."<sup>109</sup> He described Jung's ideas about the archetype as an "innate complex" "possession by [which] makes of a man a purely collective personage... under [which mask] human nature... degenerates progressively" as a *prima facie* absurdity: "As if an archetype, which is an immediate and supra-formal determination of Being – and non-limitative by this very fact – could in some way cast a spell on and vampirize a soul!" (Burckhardt 1987, 59).

To Jung, an archetype is from below and from without, a historical if vibrant vestige of human psychological origins in time, from which men have evolved as *homo sapiens* did physiologically from simian ancestors. He described it rationally and assigned it no otherworldly reality beyond the immaterial animic or occult sphere. He turned the "traditional Platonic and Christian meaning of the word" into its opposite to work within his humanist, rationalist, and psychologistic mental frame which excludes anything noetic in man or supranatural referents such a faculty might perceive. "Jung's ideas about 'archetypes' do not constitute a metaphysical doctrine but a hypothesis about certain psychic phenomenon" (Oldmeadow 2011, 103). Whether the collective unconscious exists or not and whether Jung or Plato understand archetypes correctly are not questions this thesis aims to answer; the divide or, as Rowling would have it, "the debate," however, between a modern psychological view that elides the

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existence of a "collective unconscious," innate "archaic psychic components which have entered the individual psyche without any direct line of tradition" (Jung 1963, 155-157, 35; cited by Sherrard 1998, 144-145).

109 Cf. Coomaraswamy's disregard of Jung "because the 'primordial images' are not of the subconscious, but of super-conscious origin, and Jung expressly repudiates the metaphysical" (Coomaraswamy 1946, 601).



psychic and spiritual realms, effectively denying the existence of the latter, and a Traditionalist perspective that begins with an Absolute above and within us as more real than the material and subtle realms of body and soul may be a “key” to unlocking Rowling's artistry and meaning.

The Traditionalist perspective, then, is at root one of multivalent reality with greater and lesser levels of being, more and less ontologically substantive. The world is, consequently, best understood, as is its literature, as an icon or transparency through which the archetypal realities can be seen and reading or listening to story is a cathartic exercise in transformed vision (Cutsinger 1988). A traditionalist reading of Rowling's varied depiction of the soul's journey to perfection in spirit, the exteriorization of its faculties and trials, is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Psychomachia

### **I. Introduction**

#### **A. The Debate: Rowling's Defamiliarization Focus**

Reading Rowling through a Traditionalist lens means in the end coming to terms with the conventional thinking or ideas about which she hopes to shock the reader into awareness. Writing story from this critical perspective exists to create a defamiliarizing experience and consequent fresh and more profound consciousness of reality. Clarity about the kind of defamiliarizing experience Rowling aims to create, then, is the first step in gauging her success in creating that estrangement and virgin appreciation of a brave new world. Rowling has framed this *samvega* or literary shock as a “debate” between conventional and secular ideas of the human person in general and of the mind specifically with her traditional beliefs about an immortal soul and its perfection in spirit. In light of her saying this was a story she “needed” rather than “wanted” to write when starting out with *Harry Potter* (Cruz), it might be assumed she is telling herself the same instructive tale. The “debate” the author aims to create in her readers appears in what Rowling described as the “key” scene in the Hogwarts seven book saga.

In Rowling's 2008 conversation with Adeel Amini, she claimed that she wanted there to be a “debate” about how to understand Harry's conversation with Dumbledore at the otherworldly King's Cross station. Readers are meant to ask themselves, “Was it just Harry's unconscious mind presenting him with a story or did he actually travel to a limbo, an alocal space between life and death?”

I should emphasise that I am not pushing a specifically Christian agenda, and indeed till the very last moment in book seven, one can interpret what happens to Harry after he presents himself with death as him going into an unconscious state in which his subconscious reveals to him what he already knew....

Any re-reading of Chapter 35 will show you that there's nothing that the Dumbledore he sees tells him that he couldn't have guessed for himself or already realised, and of course there's a

key piece of information that Dumbledore doesn't articulate that Harry has realised.<sup>110</sup> So you can deliberately interpret it that way, or you can say that he did go into a state of limbo beyond which there was another life, and that idea was expressed repeatedly, and most explicitly at the end of book five, *Order of the Phoenix*, where Harry understands that there is an 'on', that you do go on.

I wanted there to be a debate there, so of my three main characters – when they come into the room which examines death at the Ministry of Magic – Hermione, the ultimate sceptic and a hyper-rational person, hears nothing behind the veil and is scared of it. Ron is just uneasy; Ron is someone who does not grapple with anything deeper than beer, if he can avoid it. Harry's drawn to it, and therein lies Harry's slightly reckless, almost morbid streak, because Harry does have a hint of that dangerous adolescent trait which is the attraction to death.”  
(Amini)

This last is consistent with Rowling's comment in a *Today* interview in 2007 that “In many ways, all of my characters are defined by their attitude to death and the possibility of death” (Vieira). The “debate” she claimed to have intentionally set up here between a psychological or secular reading and a traditional or theocentric one is no small thing; Rowling told Juan Cruz in 2008 that the Potter-Dumbledore dialogue closing lines (“Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?” “Of course it is happening inside your head, but why on earth would that mean that is not real?”) are “the key.”

That dialogue is the key; I've waited seventeen years to use those lines. Yes, that's right. All this time I've worked to be able to write those two phrases; writing Harry entering the forest and Harry having that dialog. (Cruz)

What Rowling said about “Harry entering the forest” is that “Everything I have written [in the *Potter* series] was thought of for that precise moment:”

Q: Talk a bit about death. In the sixth and seventh Harry Potter books, death appears no[t] just as a word or thought but as a possibility, something obvious and a reality.

A: That was always the plan, that death should appear in that way.... The plan of the books was that he should have contact with death and with the experience of death.... For me, that chapter is the key of all the books. Everything, everything I have written, was thought of for that precise moment when Harry goes into the forest. That is the chapter that I had planned for 17 years. That moment is the heart of all of the books. And for me it is the last truth of the story. Even

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<sup>110</sup> i.e., that he, by taking Malfoy's wand, is the Master of the Elder Wand, a realization essential to his defeat of Voldemort in their duel to the death in the Great Hall after Harry's return from King's Cross.

though Harry survives, of that there was no doubt, he reaches that unique and very rare state which is to accept his own death. How many people have the possibility of accepting their death before they die? (Cruz)

As early as 1998 Rowling was telling reporters that in her *Harry Potter* novels “there’s an attempt to make some sense of death” (Simpson). Her claim ten years later that this is “the heart of all the books” and their “last truth”<sup>111</sup> echoes her comments about the gravestone epitaphs in the last book. She told one reporter that the passage on Harry’s parent’s headstone from I Corinthians in which Paul discusses Jesus’ Resurrection, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death,” “is the theme for the entire series” (Gibbs).

Taking the author at her word, Harry’s walk into the Forbidden Forest is critical for understanding her Death theme because it is her illustration of how one should understand and face death. The King’s Cross scene, correspondingly, is essential for right exegesis because it is her illustration of what happens when we die; the parting exchange she says is “the key” she “waited seventeen years to write” is her answer to the psychological versus spiritual views “debate” she claims to have set up.

Harry’s “Is this real or in my head?” question to Dumbledore, one that he has already asked himself twice and answered since arriving at what he describes as King’s Cross, is the empiricist position, namely, that “reality” is quantifiable matter or energy subject to sense perception (he has tested his reality by this method twice in the chapter)<sup>112</sup> and “delusion” or “non reality” are thoughts and

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<sup>111</sup>The Cruz interview was in English but translated into Spanish for publication in *El Pais*. The English re-translation (rather than Rowling’s original response which is not available) is what is quoted here. The “last truth” is presumably “ultimate truth” in the original.

<sup>112</sup>Harry after he awakes wonders if the experience he is having is real, whether he could be “perfectly sure that he was there himself.” He answers this question to his satisfaction by noticing that he feels the floor he is on, therefore he has a sense of touch “and the thing against which he lay existed too” (705). When Dumbledore begins to weep while recounting the death of his sister Ariana, Harry reaches out to comfort his dead mentor and “was glad to find that he could touch him” (717). There obviously was some persisting doubt about the reality of his surroundings which question Harry resolves again via sensation.

imaginings “in my head.” Dumbledore’s response,<sup>113</sup> which Harry takes as definitive and Rowling’s readers are expected to as well, is the traditional understanding of reality and knowledge being “from within, outwards” rather than the reverse (Ware 1998, xxx).

Rowling told Amini that she wanted a “debate” between psychological interpretation and traditional or spiritual reading but allowed that she had already given her answer in *Order of the Phoenix*, which of course is Dumbledore’s answer. She said she had already provided “repeatedly” and “explicitly” in the books that the correct position was that there is a life after death, that is, a real spiritual dimension beyond the temporal and embodied existence of the soul and that immortal aspect of the person is “in” us.

Dumbledore’s parting answer is Rowling’s “the key,” then, the answer to the mystery of life and death; the real is within the human person, not external or without; the soul survives death and “goes on” in a condition consequent to the quality of its choices while incarnate.<sup>114</sup> Rowling claimed to want “debate” about contrasting interpretations though she pointed to how she had already indicated in story what she believed to be the correct position. The purpose of the debate presumably, then, is to highlight the prevalence of the one position and its error because this is the critical issue and choice of human life, namely, whether one orients his or her life for this world or the next,<sup>115</sup> material well-being and psychological individuation (physical and mental health) or harmony and communion with the self-transcendent and spiritual. This “debate” and its end in Harry’s victory over the Dark Lord whose

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<sup>113</sup>Rowling writes that “Dumbledore beamed at him” (723) as he responds, which simultaneously points to the otherworldly light coming from the late Headmaster (cf., “Happiness seemed to radiate from Dumbledore like light, like fire” 708) and suggests he is smiling. The skeptic might say here that of course Dumbledore is pleased and amused; what kind of answer to a question about reality and delusion can one expect from the delusion you are experiencing as reality?

<sup>114</sup>Contrast the condition of the Voldemort soul-fragment at King’s Cross and Dumbledore’s luminescent state as well as Harry’s clear vision, creative power, and knowledge there.

<sup>115</sup>More accurately than ‘for the next world’ would be ‘for this world understood to include an immaterial dimension not restricted to space-time parameters.’

orientation with respect to death is to fear it and to prioritize escaping it over all else is the core defamiliarizing challenge and shock to the postmodern secular reader.

To gauge Rowling's success or failure in this effort, the critic must know the 'how' in addition to the 'why' of her artistry. As noted above, Rowling's literary depiction of Cognitive Behavior Therapy methodology, the externalization of the psyche's inner workings and beliefs for conscious reflection and choice, is her most easily recognized means to her defamiliarizing end.

### **B. Exteriorizing the Soul's Inner Invisible Workings via Objects and Characters**

The exteriorizing of interior psychic states is most obvious in the various magical objects and creatures designed for just this purpose in Rowling's 'Wizarding World.' The Mirror of Erised reflects the person's "heart's desire" rather than their image. The Dementor per Rowling is an incarnation of and catalyst for the experience of clinical depression. The boggart when confronted turns into the worst fears of anyone it meets. Howlers are letters which explode with the anger of the person writing. The Sorting Hat identifies the primary quality of every new student's soul and proclaims it to the student body as the name of a Hogwarts House. Dumbledore's Pensieve creates three-dimensional experience of a memory and the MACUSA Death Pool similarly projects the doomed convict's happy memories into the lethal black waters. The Room of Requirement changes into whatever space the person in need must have, be it a bathroom, an ever expanding secret headquarters for a resistance movement, or a dump for unwanted objects. Each "externalisation of psychological phenomenon" creates "comprehensible, physical forms" of "complex emotions" and soul capacities (Groves 2017, 112, citing Klaus 2012, 26-7, citing Kullman, 164).

Rowling, though, does not restrict these "comprehensible, physical forms" to magical objects but extends them to include characters and character sets in the tradition of allegorical writing known as

psychomachia. With respect to one character, Rowling does this via the Obscurus storyline within her *Fantastic Beasts* screenplays.

The gothic externalisation of psychological phenomena is germane to *Harry Potter*: the Mirror of Erised, Howlers, Boggarts and the Sorting Hat, all render complex emotions in a readily comprehensible, physical form – and the Obscurus is the most recent example of Rowling's gift at creating these eloquent objects. In *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* the gentle Obscurial Credence is the Jekyll to his Obscurus's 'Hyde' – the destructive force which '*he tries to stop... from rising up within him.*' For most of the first movie Credence fights the darkness within him, although at the end he embraces its destructive power (just as Jekyll becomes progressively more and more identified with Hyde). When Graves tells Credence he can control the Obscurus, he replies: 'but I don't think I want to, Mr. Graves' (Rowling 2016, 229). In *Crimes of Grindelwald* Rowling goes even further down this gothic-Obscurus route when Dumbledore describes it as the Obscurial's 'dark twin:' 'an Obscurus grows in the absence of love as a dark twin' (Rowling 2018a, 45). (Groves 2019)

The *Fantastic Beasts* films turn in large part on the secret power of Credence Barebone, a wizard whose abilities have been repressed by his time in an abusive orphanage and have taken the shape of a supernatural 'shadow' of unimaginable force when released. This Obscurus/Obscurial character may be an allegory of the soul along traditional lines or of its shadow in Jungian psychology; the film series will, if they follow the *Potter* series model, be the exteriorization of this Everyman's successful struggle to reintegrate his psychic shadow into his conscious identity.

Rowling is highlighting psychological interior elements, in other words, her characters' fears, desires, repressed emotions, for her readers to look for in character behavior and language in addition to what can be seen in her exteriorizing devices. In the *Fantastic Beasts* films Credence's agony is allegorical drama of the soul's journey to, in soteriological language, perfection or damnation. There are only two *Beasts* screenplays available at this writing, however, due to delays attributed to pandemic restrictions (which postponements may have been welcomed and fostered by Warner Brothers because of the transgender controversy).

Rowling's greater externalization artistry, however, is not in single Bunyan-esque character stick-figures of psychic states and faculties but in character sets of two and three representing the soul and its spiritual dimension and struggle. This is the principal 'how' of the author's defamiliarizing work, the success or failure of which can be gauged by a careful reading of the soul triptych within *Harry Potter*, the Shakespearean soul-spirit duo of Robin Ellacott and Cormoran Strike, and the Dante-inspired journey of *The Christmas Pig* and Jack Jones' transformation in transference therein.

## II. Soul Triptych in *Harry Potter*

### A. Soul Triptych

- **Models of a Tripartite Soul**

Coomaraswamy wrote in 'Literary Symbolism' about the language of symbolism and the sacred forms employed by a traditional artist. He gave two examples from Blake of the universality and history of these archetypal representations. One of the two was of the heavenly charioteer and the horses he controls:

We can say with Blake... that "if the spectator could enter into these images, approaching them on the fiery chariot of contemplative thought... then he would be happy." No one will suppose that Blake invented the "fiery chariot" or found it anywhere else than in the Old Testament; but some may not have remembered that the symbolism of the chariot is also used by Plato [*Phaedrus* 246a-254e], and in the Indian and Chinese books. The horses are the sensitive powers of the soul, the body of the chariot our bodily vehicle, the rider the spirit. The symbol can therefore be regarded from two points of view; if the untamed horses are allowed to go where they will, no one can say where this will be; but if they are curbed by the driver, his intended destination will be reached. Thus, just as there are two "minds," divine and human, so there is a fiery chariot of the gods, and a human vehicle, one bound for heaven, the other for the attainment of human ends, "whatever these may be." (*Taittiriya Samhita*, v.4.10.I) (Coomaraswamy 1943b, 326)

Hankins spells out in the 'Psychomachia' entry of the *Spencer Encyclopedia* what this depiction of the soul as three parts – rider Intellect and steeds of Passion and Reason – would look like in story:

As the tradition of the psychomachia developed, the conflict between the vices and the virtues was depicted as an internal struggle among the three faculties of the human soul: concupiscible, irascible, and rational. These were commonplace terms, comparable to id, ego, and superego in



Freudian psychology. From the concupiscible faculty proceed the desires for food, drink, sexual satisfaction, and other sensual pleasures, which are destructive if not controlled. The rational faculty, of which conscience is a part, perceives the correct path to be followed, and is aided by an enforcer, the irascible faculty, an emotional impetus marked by generous indignation or firm determination, which holds in check the fleshly lusts of the concupiscible faculty. When the irascible faculty forgets the directions of the rational faculty, excessive or rancorous anger may itself become a cause of vicious conduct. All three faculties seek to influence the will, which finally determines a course of action. (Hankins, 570)

C. S. Lewis wrote of this Patristic Model of the soul's three faculties in right alignment with one another in his essay 'The Abolition of Man:'

We were told it all long ago by Plato. As the king governs by its executive, so Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the 'spirited element' [*Republic* 442 B, C]. The head rules the belly through the chest – the seat as Alanus tells us of Magnanimity [Alanus ab Insulis, *De Planctu Naturae Prosa*, iii], of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment – these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal. (Lewis 1974, 24-25)

Lewis' language and perspective is much more traditional than Hanson's; Lewis used the word 'Reason' for the Intellect or *nous* as Coleridge and the Cambridge Platonists did, meaning that he did not confuse Patristic ideas of the soul with Freudian faculties and humanism. Philip Sherrard, in the glossary to his five volume translation of *The Philokalia*, distinguished "the three aspects or powers of the soul" as *to logistikon* or the Intelligent (literally, 'Logos-place') *to thymikon*, "the incensive aspect or power" (literally, 'Thymos/Will-place'), and *to epithymitikon*, "the appetitive aspect of the soul or the soul's desiring power" ('beneath the Will-place') (Ware/Palmer/Sherrard, trans. 1984, 356). The Logos-Intellect or Heart spiritual faculty directs the powers of the soul more subject to bodily influence when rightly ordered as Plato's charioteer steers the black and white steeds through the heavens.

As Hankins wrote above and as Lings noted in his interpretations of *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure* (Lings 1998, 77-100), this triptych was something of a commonplace in Spenser and Shakespeare which might be expected, unfamiliar as the idea may be to moderns. "The triple division into spirit, soul and body has been unanimously accepted by all the traditional doctrines of the West, both in

antiquity and in the Middle Ages” (Guenon 1991, 75),<sup>116</sup> with which doctrines Spenser and Shakespeare would have been familiar. The first and perhaps greatest deployment of this soul triptych in modern fiction is Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dmitri is all but unbridled passion, Ivan icy cold reason and will, and the third brother, Alyosha, disciple and attendant to the saintly Elder Zossima, is the spirit who winds up as their guide and care-taker by novel’s end. The fourth brother, Smerdyakov, the scheming murderer and prophetic image of Russia’s Soviet future who takes Ivan’s professed atheism as guiding light, is an image of the two stallions outside the charioteer’s influence. Tolkien, too, uses the same scheme in his epic *Lord of the Rings* that had such an influence on Rowling; the three hobbits on Mt. Doom at the story’s *euclastrophe*, Frodo Baggins the Ring Bearer, Samwise Gamgee his faithful servant, and Gollum, the fawning, duplicitous slave of the Ring’s power, are transparencies for the Intellect, the Will, and the Passions.

This triptych, though, is much better known today because of its use in the Star Trek television and movie series, in which ‘Bones’-Spock-and-Kirk are body-mind-and-spirit, ‘Kirk’ being German for ‘Church’ and whose orders, as the Star Fleet *Enterprise* captain, the cerebral Spock and the doctor ‘Bones’ obey. The lead trio of the original *Star Wars* films, too, were character stand-ins for Plato’s charioteer and the steeds: Luke Skywalker of course being the Spirit, ‘at one with the Force,’ Princess Leia as Will Incarnate, and Han Solo with Chewbacca the Wookiee being the egocentric passions that only decide in the end to risk all in service to Luke. Leia and Han match up as the curtain closes, though by nature she is closer to her brother Luke in keeping with the symbolism.

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<sup>116</sup>Guenon wrote here about modern ignorance of this symbol by moderns: “The fact that at a later age people came to forget it so completely that they began treating ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ as little more than vague synonyms and using the terms interchangeably, even though they refer to realities of a totally different order, is perhaps one of the most striking examples one could give of the confusion that is typical of the modern mentality” (Guenon 1991, 75).

Rowling's soul triptych of Harry, Ron, and Hermione and their experiences and transformation as a group are the principal psychomachia of the Hogwarts Saga.<sup>117</sup>

- **The Triptych of Ron-Hermione-Harry**

The Hogwarts adventures were not written from the author's lived experience at a boarding school on luxurious grounds. "As far as the boarding school goes, I very often get asked 'did I go to a boarding school?'" No, I went to a comprehensive. We did have four houses – that's as far as the similarities with Hogwarts go" (Fry 2000). Her imaginative experience, though, is a different matter.<sup>118</sup> In 2006, she allowed that she was very familiar with boarding school books. "Were you a big keen reader of boarding school stories?" Jo: "I read a few when I was younger" (Madeley and Finnigan). She admitted, too, that she "read a lot of Enid Blyton" (Matsuda), even that "as for the Enid Blyton books, Rowling says that she read them all" (deBertedano). This is unlikely as Blyton wrote more than seven hundred children's books, from kindergarten reading primers to *Famous Five* adventures and a retelling of *Pilgrim's Progress*, but it does seem likely that she read the *Mallory Towers*, *St. Clare's*, and *Naughtiest Girl* schoolgirl series, each a 'six books for six years' set, all modeled in large part on Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown Schooldays*. In any of these books, Rowling would have encountered the 'Three Friend' Model of Hero, Best Mate, and relatively swotty or effeminate Scholar:

Traditional school stories feature the hero (or heroine) and his (or her) best friend. A third companion commonly joins them, corresponding to the "Rule of three" policy that historically operated in many boarding schools...In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Tom Brown first makes friends with Harry East, and the two become inseparable. Later, they adopt the frail and saintly newcomer, George Arthur, who then helps, through his example, to transform the two prankish boys into Christian gentlemen. (Manners Smith, 74)

On to this template, Rowling grafts the Platonic and Patristic soul triptych.

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<sup>117</sup> Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series and Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy both deploy a version of the soul triptych in the genres of romance fiction and dystopian novels to great success as well.

<sup>118</sup> The only schoolboy fiction Rowling has quoted are the *Molesworth* satires; she closed her essay for a University of Exeter alumni magazine, 'What Was the Name of that Nymph Again?', with the words, "As any fule know," a *Molesworth* standard gibe (Rowling 1998a).

Ron Weasley, red headed, choleric (his middle name is Bilius), athletic by inclination, resistant to study, and always hungry naturally represents the “appetitive aspect of the soul,” the faculty most sensitive to physical conditions and the body. Though not head-smart, he is excellent at games, especially those simulating combat as in chess and Quidditch. He is susceptible to moods and self-pity, afraid of spiders, feels something like shame about his family’s poverty, and is much more vulnerable to the critical opinion of others than his two best friends. His best guesses about a mysterious situation are always offered immediately, which is to say ‘without a thought,’ with enthusiasm, and they prove almost every time to be wildly off the mark. Though he left Harry and Hermione in the first months of their quest for Horcruxes in *Deathly Hallows*, it was only because the Locket Horcrux and physical hunger took a greater toll on him than the others. When in service to his mentally and spiritually superior friends, he acts heroically, even reckless with his life. Witness his sacrificial move on the Enchanted Chess Board in the *Philosopher's Stone* gauntlet run, his willingness in *Chamber of Secrets* to “follow the spiders” into the Forbidden Forest despite his arachnophobia, and the dive into the Forest of Dean icy pool while fully clothed to save Harry's life in *Deathly Hallows*.

Remus Lupin pronounced Hermione Granger “the cleverest witch of your age that I’ve ever met” in *Prisoner of Azkaban*’s Shrieking Shack big reveal (346), and, if anything, this is understatement. Graced with almost total recall of what she has read and a determination to read as much as possible, Hermione has no equal in the classroom, in logical deduction, in insightful perception, and with respect to magic. She is profane knowledge personified. When she gives every member of Dumbledore’s Army a fake Galleon on which she has placed a Protean Charm to make it a fail-safe communication device, Terry Boot marvels at her skill and asks, “How come you’re not in Ravenclaw?...With brains like yours?” (*Phoenix*, 399). Because the Sorting Hat perceived she was as brave and loyal as she is smart. Her careful planning and quick thinking save the trio throughout the series, from her solving Snape’s

logic puzzle at the end of the *Philosopher's Stone* gauntlet of obstacles to her packing everything she, Ron, and Harry would need on their Horcrux Hunt in *Deathly Hallows* in anticipation of a Death Eater attack and the need for an immediate escape. Her dedication to Harry in his struggles include confronting him with her insights, most notably when, in his hurry in *Phoenix* to save Sirius in the Ministry of Magic, she insists that he confirm Sirius was there; thinking like the Dark Lord, she realized Harry might be subject to manipulation because of his “*saving-people thing*” (798). Harry has learned to trust this friend’s judgment and makes the check despite his rage about the delay. If she has a fault, it is, as Professor Trelawney observed in *Prisoner* (and Xenophilius Lovegood echoed in *Deathly Hallows*), “I don’t ever remember meeting a student whose mind was so hopelessly mundane” (298). She lacks, for all her virtues and brilliance, “the Inner Eye and superconscious,” faculties Trelawney labors to “clear” (297).

These faculties, Divination teacher and seeming fraud aside, Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived, has in abundance; he is the story symbol of the Heart or Intellect, the spiritual dimension or aspect of the soul. As Harry is the reader proxie whose annual defamiliarizing experience is in large part the reader’s as well, the traditional understanding of “heart” as well as its allegorical meaning in the Hogwarts stories merits close attention.

- **The Heart in Traditional Literature**

Perhaps the defining distinction between traditional cultures and modernity according to the Traditionalists is the difference in the understanding of the word ‘intellect.’ Intellect now is used as a synonym for ‘reason,’ assumed to reside in the brain, and intelligence or greater understanding are characteristics of anyone of intellectual accomplishment. ‘Intellectual’ is interchangeable with ‘thinker’ and as often as not ‘academic.’ Martin Lings notes the irony that “since much of the activity” of such thinkers today “is concerned with questioning the existence of the transcendent, many of the so-called

‘intellectuals’ are at the opposite pole from true intellectuality” (Lings 1987, 2). Guenon, Coomaraswamy, and Schuon and the Traditionalists thereafter use the word ‘intellect’ for the human spiritual capacity after the Latin *intellectus*, the word de Moerbeke used in his word-for-word translations of Aristotle for Aquinas in place of the Greek *nous*.

As Lings explained, traditional anthropology holds that the noetic capacity “enthroned in the Heart” is far removed from reasoning based on sense perception and abstractions from same.

Every human soul is imbued with what might be called the sense of the Absolute or of the Transcendent, the sense of a Supreme Power that is both Origin and End of the created universe which It infinitely transcends. This sense belongs to the faculty of the Intellect, which is man's means of perceiving what lies above and beyond the plane of his world; and though the full power of the Intellect was lost at the Fall, what remains of its light is none the less sufficiently strong to be undeniable... This residue of heart-knowledge – for the Intellect is enthroned in the Heart (this word is written here with a capital to indicate that it means, not the bodily heart, but the centre of the soul, that is, the point through which passes the vertical axis in virtue of which man is Mediator between Heaven and earth) – is man's highest faculty, and may still be termed intellect if only in a relative sense. Its survival does not however prevent the refusal to see it – a refusal which can become second nature. ‘Hardness of heart’ was originally the name of the chronic blindness in question (Lings 1987, 1-2).

It is this “blindness” or ‘noetic heart disease’ which is the principal characteristic of modern thinkers according to the Traditionalists. In moderns, reason supplants intellect from its rightful place as king or regent power and this usurpation, because of the consequent eclipse of the intellect in the human person, is in their view an interior regicide.

In the ‘Dark Ages’ students were taught that the faculties are ranged in hierarchy, of which the summit is Intellect, inasmuch as it is concerned with transcendent realities, whereas reason, which ranks as a subordinate second to it, is limited to this world. Since ‘the Enlightenment’ however the Intellect in its original sense has been withdrawn from the attention of students; but the word itself, brought down from its supernatural level, has been retained in virtue of its high-sounding effect.... Robbed of its name, the intellect still subsists, which means that there is still something in man which is incorruptible and inviolable, a supramental organ of knowledge, which unlike the mind is proof against error. (Lings 1987, 2-3)

As with supraformal Tradition and the various formal traditions in which it is manifested in spatio-temporal reality, so this ‘small-i’ intellect in each person is not the high end or spiritual aspect of the

individual human soul but somehow Spirit itself, to paraphrase C. S. Lewis, “continuous with the fabric of reality,” miniscule lamda *logos* of the Intellect that is *Logos*. Titus Burckhardt, writing in the language of Islam, writes “The First Intellect is to the whole cosmos what the reflected intellect is to man” (Burckhardt 1987, 187), that is, the *Logos* “by whom all things were made” (John 1:4), the Creative Principle and Second Person of the Christian Godhead and of whom Christ is the incarnation, is within each person as reflected *logos* or, as Schuon put it, “the equation ‘Christ-Intellect’” (Schuon 2006, 112).<sup>119</sup>

This is why the metaphysician often describes the Intellect as being “uncreated and uncreatable.” Coming from God, it is not just a creature. But neither is it God Himself. It is at once more than man and less than God. And yet it is not so much a third thing between them as it is the “permanent manifestation of the Divine in the human microcosm”... [which is] why we “say that there is an Absolute Reality, not because we believe in it, but because we know it, and we know it because we are it in our transpersonal Intellect.” (Cutsinger 1997, 30-31; quoting Schuon 1995, 81)

The Intellect, according to the Traditionalists, even creates the soul and body:

Seated in the heart, which is the center of man, the Intellect contains and prolongs all our faculties, including not only intelligence as such, but the will and the sentiment or feeling soul. In fact, the body too is a prolongation of the Intellect, which is refracted or polarized within the individual man into both corporeal and psychic aspects. "Mind and body both reflect the Intellect, or rather mind and body 'are' the Intellect by bipolarized reflection within peripheral and shifting Existence." (Cutsinger 1997, 29; quoting Schuon 2006, 75)

Coomaraswamy's touchstone aphorism was *Duo sunt in homine*, “there are two things in man,” both “an immortal spirit” or Intellect and “the mortal soul,” the distinction of which he thought “the fundamental doctrine of the Philosophia Perennis wherever we find it” (cited in Perry 1986, 21).

The natural reason, the faculty that operates via an idea, “an abstraction, or a concept, or an analogy drawn from an external object” through sense perception and its individual activity, is only a shadow of the Intellect. To a Traditionalist, “he who only sees what is sensible does not really see anything at all”

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<sup>119</sup> “If Christ shall come to ‘judge the quick and the dead’ [per the Nicæan Creed], this again relates to the Intellect – which alone has the right to judge – and to the equation ‘Christ-Intellect’.”

relative to the Intellect's perception of the intelligible or noumenal world which "contains the causes of, and is mirrored in the sensible world." As Sherrard put it, "the error" of denying the transpersonal noetic faculty and its perceptions, the signature quality of the *Kali Yuga* or Iron Age of the world's thinking today, is:

to imagine that sensible things are the only reality, or can be known without reference to intelligible things; that, in fact, we can really understand the shadow without reference to the subject casting it. This is what we imagine when the light of divine knowledge is eclipsed in us and we are left with only such knowledge as we think our individual and natural minds can adduce from sensible things. (Sherrard 1998, 6-7)<sup>120</sup>

Reason has so usurped the place of the Intellect<sup>121</sup> that the latter's existence is little known or discussed outside esoteric or antiquarian corners of academia and the purification of the faculty for spiritual knowledge or gnosis is pursued only in orthodox monastic communities. As the Traditionalists understand the consequences of this take-over or execution, human knowledge, even the human *telos* has been narrowed and diminished from the divine, man as an image of God, to the sub-human, the hairless ape of evolution and psychologism. It survives in ancient and contemporary traditional literature's use of the heart as a symbol of this faculty via characters who exteriorize or embody it.

To the Traditionalists, knowledge had by intellectual perception of the archetype through or in one of its manifestations is sure or true knowledge because it is an understanding of what is fixed and immutable;

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<sup>120</sup> James Cutsinger quoted Schuon to distinguish the subjects and relative value of rational and intellectual understanding: "The Intellect is in fact very different from the discursive mind or reason. 'The mind is analogous to the Intellect insofar as it is a kind of intelligence, but is opposed to it by its limited, indirect and discursive character.' While reason operates one step at a time, proceeding by stages from premises to conclusions, the Intellect goes straight to the conclusion, although in this case to speak of a conclusion could be a little misleading, for there is no summing up or synthesis of prior particularities. 'Reason obtains knowledge like a man walking about and exploring a countryside by successive discoveries, whereas the Intellect contemplates the same countryside from a mountain height.' Reason conceives – that is, it holds things together. But the Intellect perceives. It cuts right through those things, directly apprehending their esoteric meaning or essence. It is to the suprasensible order what vision and the other physical senses are to the material or empirical order. And this is why the content of the Intellect can be approached by the reason only through analogies. It is no more possible to show the reason what the Intellect sees than to prove the existence of color to a blind man (Cutsinger 1997, 28; citing Schuon 1995, 10, 65).

<sup>121</sup> The discussion of how and why human understanding of human understanding has changed so profoundly is discussed at length in 'Christianity and Christendom' and 'Desecration of the Cosmos' (Sherrard 1998, 27-52, 200-231) but is too involved a topic to engage in this introduction to Traditionalism as a school of literary criticism.



knowledge acquired by modern materialist science, because it begins in doubt rather than the surety of perception, works through discursive reason based on sense perceptions and ideas abstracted from same, perceptions of what it is ephemeral rather than eternal, is relatively groundless and subject to endless correction. Even the valid conclusions of traditional formal logic are little better than a shadow of noetic awareness and recognition of the archetypes.

As foundational, then, as symbolism is to the traditional worldview and the cultures of which it is a hallmark, it is not surprising that there is an attendant symbolism that communicates the means of grasping the meaning-at-depth of symbols, the actions corresponding to perception through a transpersonal faculty, and of symbolism itself. The 'Heart' and the 'Eye of the Heart' or just 'Eyes' are word-transparencies for the Intellect as such and its reflection in the person as a lower-case intellect or *nous*. Light, as in "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9), too, is a symbol in picture and written sacred art of the "Christ-Intellect" or *Logos*.

A mirror is "the symbol of the symbol" because "symbolism can best be described as the visible reflection of ideas or prototypes that cannot be fully expressed in conceptual terms" (Burckhardt 1987, 118); the heart's purification, the cleansing of the personal fallen or atrophied intellect, is described as the "polishing of the mirror" in which the Intellect and its forms may be seen (cf. Matthew 5:8; 1 Cor 13:12). As noted, Coleridge's axiom that all knowledge is founded in "the coincidence of an object with a subject" (Coleridge, 336) turns on the defining quality of a mirror, the elision of knowing subject and known object, and the logos of the imagination perceiving the logoi in everything created.

Knowledge of this kind as well as love for an *alter* or Other requires a death of sorts, a sacrifice of the individual or egocentric mind in order to identify with the transpersonal logos and its cardiac perceptions. The symbolism of sacrificial death, especially when chosen to save a beloved person or

family, is, while certainly an echo of Calvary, also and simultaneously about the "Christ-Intellect" within.

- **Heart in *Harry Potter***

In *Hallows*, the critical moments in the transformation of Ron Weasley and Harry Potter are described with repeated references to their hearts and the light and darkness within and around them.

Ron Weasley abandoned his two friends on their Horcrux destruction quest. He immediately regretted his decision but had no way to find them. His means of return, however, had been given to him by Albus Dumbledore in his will;<sup>122</sup> he left Ron the Deluminator, a magical device that can capture the light in any space and return it at the click of a button. To Ron's surprise, it works in the loving heart as well. As he explained to Harry and Hermione after his return in the Forest of Dean and his providential rescue of Harry from the Locket Horcrux, on Nativity safe at the Burrow he had heard Hermione call his name, a voice calling from the Deluminator in his pocket. When he clicked the device, a "ball of light appeared" outside, which when he approached it entered his heart and took him to his friends.<sup>123</sup> Ron, in brief, first surrenders in selfless faith to the light in his heart on Christmas morning,<sup>124</sup> the love he feels for his friends, then returns to them, risks his own life to rescue Harry in the pool, and confronts in the Locket Horcrux the eyes of Lord Voldemort who tell him, "*I have seen your heart, and it is mine*" (375). Having been literally illumined, however, Ron's heart is no longer dark or the Dark

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<sup>122</sup>When Ron laments that he was only given the device because the late Headmaster had known he would leave his friends at some point, "He must've known I'd run out on you," Harry counters with the observation that the gift was made because "He must've known you'd always want to come back" (391).

<sup>123</sup>"It sort of floated towards me," said Ron, illustrating the movement with his free index finger, 'right to my chest, and then – it just went straight through. It was here,' he touched a point close to his heart, 'I could feel it, it was hot. And once it was inside me I knew what I was supposed to do, I knew it would take me where I needed to go. So I Disapparated and came out on the side of a hill. There was snow everywhere' (383-385).

<sup>124</sup>*Nota bene*: The re-birth of the Light of the World in Ron's heart takes place at dawn on "Christmas morning," which is to say in Estecean synchronistic symbolism, at the appearance of light on the day dedicated to the remembrance and celebration of the incarnation of the *Logos*.

Lord's and he is able to muster sufficient will to destroy his worst fears and insecurities which the Eye-Bubbles incarnate and exteriorize.

Rowling as noted said repeatedly after *Deathly Hallows* was published that the most meaningful chapter in it, with the King's Cross dialogue a "key" to the books, was chapter 34, 'The Forest Again' (Bloomsbury, Cruz, Vieira). It is not an especially long chapter at 14 pages; 'King's Cross' is 18 pages, for example, and 'The Silver Doe,' another favorite and the chapter Rowling chooses for public readings, is 25 pages long. It is, however, laden with references to hearts, light, and "the mind's eye." "He felt his heart pounding fiercely in his chest. How strange that in his dread of death, it pumped all the harder, valiantly keeping him alive. But it would have to stop, and soon. Its beats were numbered" (691). "His heart was leaping against his ribs like a frantic bird. Perhaps it knew it had little time left, perhaps it was determined to fulfil a lifetime's beats before the end" (694). "[The Death Eaters] seemed as scared as Harry, whose heart was now throwing itself against his ribs as though determined to escape the body he was about to cast aside" (703).

Harry thinks, too, of his "bounding heart" (692) and his "mind's eye" (693), and he frightens Neville Longbottom sufficiently that he complains, "Blimey, Harry, you nearly gave me heart failure" (695). In addition to these explicit cardiac references, Harry, in something akin to Ron's experience with the Deluminator, feels the light within him give him the strength he needs to face death as a willing sacrifice. He summons the departed souls of his parents, godfather, and favorite teacher with the Resurrection Stone Dumbledore had left him in his will (698-699).

The soul-memories or spirits that present themselves to Harry, all of whom died to protect him from the Dark Lord or his Death Eaters, tell him "We are part of you" and "they acted like Patronuses to him" (700) with respect to protecting him from Dementors in the Forest. A Patronus is "nothing but

light” (*Prisoner* 366), an exteriorization or “projection of... hope, happiness, the desire to survive” and “it cannot feel despair” (*Prisoner*, 237).

Harry had been saved only an hour earlier than this walk into the Forest from Dementors in the Battle of Hogwarts. Despairing and unable to cast his protective spell of exteriorized inner light, his friends in Dumbledore’s Army protect him with their Patronuses (648-649) as he had taught them to (*Phoenix* 606-607). The repeated references to his heart and “mind’s eye” as well as this spectral light within him, the souls of three men and a woman who died in sacrificial love for him, are markers of the sacrificial love Harry exhibited in order to die in order to save his friends.

Harry, then, is the heart, Hermione the discursive mind, and Ron the passions or body. The three aspects taken together, the triptych, are a single soul, the invisible qualities of body-mind-and-spirit, in three bodies who act out the relationships within that hierarchy. With notable exceptions, Ron and Hermione quarrel endlessly but rarely do they individually or together decide not to defer to Harry's leadership in a pinch. Similarly, Ron the Passions, while incessantly disagreeing with and challenging Hermione, admires and gives way to her intelligence for the most part. From the traditional view from Plato to C. S. Lewis, they are the triple embodiment of the soul rightly understood and ordered.

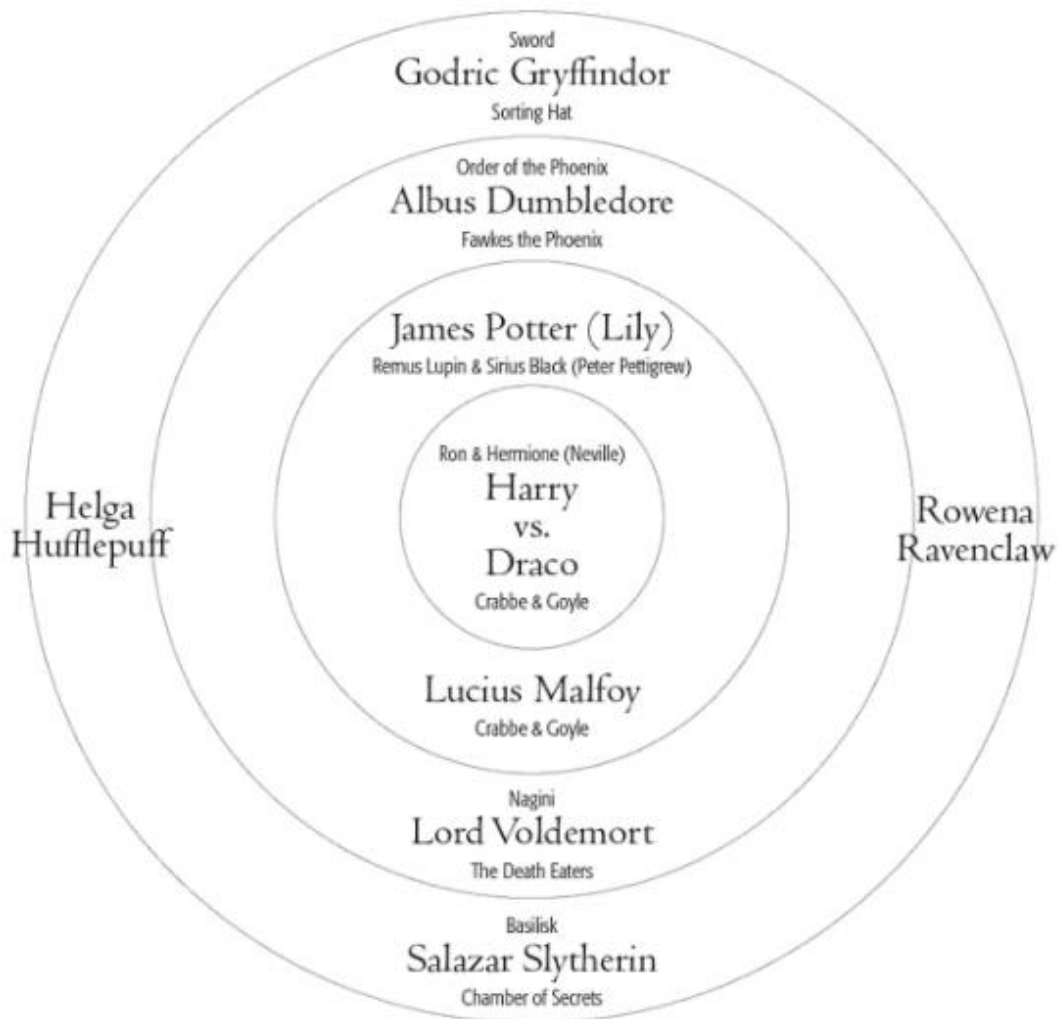
Rowling created a contrasting soul-faculty symbol set in Slytherin House. Draco Malfoy, Harry's contrary in almost every regard, has a name that makes clear he is not a story stand-in for the Heart; ‘Draco’ means ‘serpent’ and ‘Malfoy’ ‘bad-faith.’ The Anti-Harry has two brutish friends, Victor Crabbe and Gregory Goyle, who mindlessly do his bidding in the first six books but turn on him in the last. Though technically a triptych, the Slytherin set is symbolic of the soul sans spirit, of reason ruling ignorant desires and willful appetite. Malfoy in this role is wonderfully calculating and skilled in seeking advantage and privilege; Crabbe and Goyle are dumb as rocks and, until they dismiss reason’s

checks on them when their brutality and lack of principle is recognized and rewarded in a Hogwarts ruled by Death Eaters, they serve Malfoy as body guards and henchmen. They together are modern man personified; their conflict with Gryffindors is a representation of the antagonists in Rowling's "debate." Rowling makes this Gryffindor-Slytherin opposition cross generations which gives it a relatively timeless or eternal aspect.

As seen on the chart below (Granger 2008, 15), Harry-Hermione-Ron with Neville Longbottom as side-kick are carnival house mirror reflections of James-Remus-Sirius with Peter Pettigrew the pitiable friend in the Hogwarts of not many years previously. Draco's father Lucius, too, was served by Crabbe and Goyle's fathers when they were students in a like relationship. Each of these sets are subject to the guidance of Gryffindor and Slytherine exemplars, Dumbledore and Voldemort, each of whom has a fellowship under their direction and magical familiar of high symbolic resonance, a phoenix and a serpent that speaks Parseltongue to her master. These two in turn conform to the traditional forms, that is, the archetypes and Divine Names of those Houses, Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin, "from above and before, downward into the present."

- **Trio's Separation-Reunion**

As exciting as the *Potter* stories are to read and as engaging as each is at its finish with Rowling's signature twist in plot, their emotional peaks, the angst or agonies experienced, are more from disagreements between Harry and his friends rather than conflict with their Slytherin antagonists. These trials are symbolic markers of psychomachia, which Hankins defined as "the battle within the soul" (Hankins 570). The drama of aligning the soul's faculties, so that, as Lewis wrote, "the head rules the



belly through the chest”<sup>125</sup> (Lewis 1974, 24), is the agony of turning the person right-side-up. When Ron or Hermione refuse to serve Harry as Heart and insist on going their way, the peace of the three-person unity centered on their *logos* ‘inner essence’ is exploded. Correspondingly, when the faculty in rebellion returns to its ordained position, the triptych – and the reader whose soul faculties identify with the three symbolic representations – is reinvented and rejuvenated in this restoration.

<sup>125</sup>An alternative to this summary that is less punchy but more precisely from the Greek is: “the Heart-Center guides the most exterior or bodily aspect through the relatively invisible will.”

In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Goblet of Fire*, and *Deathly Hallows*, one of these separations and reconciliations occurs. In the third book, Hermione insisted that Harry have the Firebolt Quidditch broomstick he has been given by an anonymous donor checked for jinxes. Harry refused. Hermione, out of concern and perhaps a touch of know-it-all righteousness, reported the gift to McGonagall who confiscated it. Ron and Harry stopped talking with her, and just when they had made it up (after the Firebolt had passed Flitwick's inspection), Ron's pet rat, Scabbers, seemed to have been eaten by Hermione's pet Kneezle, Crookshanks. The trio split up again until Buckbeak was sentenced to death, at which point they are reconciled, Hermione sobbing and expressing remorse for Scabbers' death (292).

The separation is much more serious in *Goblet of Fire*. Ron, ever sensitive to his family's relative poverty, longed to enter the Tri-Wizard Tournament as a Hogwarts Champion in order to have a chance at the thousand galleon prize. He and Harry were under-age, however, and unable to enter their names into the Goblet of Fire. When the Goblet chose Harry as the fourth champion, Ron refused to believe Harry's claim that he had not put his name into the Goblet. The best mates consequently stop speaking to each other. Hermione, as one of Harry's few friends who believed he was an involuntary champion, was left to do everything possible to help him prepare for the first Tournament Task, namely, taking a golden egg away from a mother-dragon. Harry survived his encounter with the Hungarian Horntail and Ron, impressed by his friend's near death experience, apologized and the trio are reconciled. When Ron is outraged by biased scoring of Harry's victory, the Boy Who Lived noted his pleasure with reference to the heart; "Ron's indignation on his behalf was worth about a hundred points to him. He didn't tell

Ron this, of course, but his heart felt lighter than air as he turned to leave the enclosure” (*Goblet*, 360).<sup>126</sup>

As mentioned above, Ron abandoned Harry and Hermione on the Horcrux Hunt in *Deathly Hallows*. The Locket Horcrux’s corrosive spiritual influence, hunger, and his innate vulnerability to stress, jealousy, and fear as the most carnal member of the soul triptych made him the servant of his desires or “passions” and he fled from them in a righteous rage (*Hallows*, 310). Sorrowfully repentant, as noted above, he returned Christmas morning by means of a “ball of light” that came out Dumbledore’s Deluminator, light that “went inside me,” “‘here,’ he pointed close to his heart” (384). The light in his heart instructed him about how to return; he saved Harry’s life in the icy pool and destroyed the Locket Horcrux, though the Dark Lord’s two eyes from within it told him, “*I have seen your heart and it is mine!*” (375). Illumined by the light of the Christ-heart-*logos* within him, Ron confronted and transcended his carnal nature. Ron served Harry and Hermione faithfully and obediently thereafter in his purified state.

Dumbledore’s two other bequests also highlight the trio’s respective soul faculties. Hermione as reason-on-legs of course was given a book. The Headmaster inserted a symbol that was not a rune which only a very careful reader would note and try to understand. The radiant King’s Cross Dumbledore told Harry his plan: “I am afraid I counted on Miss Granger to slow you up, Harry. I was afraid that [on learning about the Deathly Hallows] that your hot head might dominate your good heart” (720). He knew, in other words, that Hermione’s cool reason, her signature and symbolic quality, would misinterpret the symbol and deny its correspondent meaning; Harry’s “good heart” had already

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<sup>126</sup>This was the fourth reference to Harry and “heart” in that chapter (see also 345, 352, 356) with his heart also “lighter than it had been in weeks” as soon as he succeeded in getting the egg. The coincidence of “heart” and “light” here is symbolically laden and consistent with traditional teaching that the heart is a person’s spiritual center.



penetrated the anagogical meaning of the symbol when burying Alastor Moody's disembodied 'Mad-eye' in the shadow of the oak tree he marked with a cross (284, cf. Granger 2008a, 230).

Harry was left a Golden Snitch in Dumbledore's will, a two-fold marker of Harry's heart-identity in the soul triptych. It is a mark of his being something of an alchemist, a champion seeker, for one, the Quidditch player that flies high over the play of contraries just above the pitch in pursuit of gold or "congealed light" as will be explained in the alchemy chapter which follows. This specific Golden Snitch with its flesh memory only opened "at the close," that is, when Harry had chosen to die a sacrificial death "and whispered [to the Snitch], 'I am about to die'" (698). The Snitch opened and revealed the Resurrection Stone Hallow within, with which Harry summoned "without having to think" his dead parents, god-father, and favorite teacher, all of whom had died to protect him. Only the heart, the transpersonal faculty existing at the nexus of the soul and Spirit, having transcended its last ego-identity concerns, mortal life itself, could walk with the dead visible at his side; Harry's vision is transformed again, as it was after Cedric's death in his ability to see Thestrals, in having detached himself from the sensible realm and choosing to see and act only on the intelligible or noetic. King's Cross Dumbledore told Harry that this had been his plan; "I wanted you to possess [the Hallows] safely. You bare the true master of death, because the true master of death does not seek to run away from Death" (720), an otherworldly understanding unique to the spiritual heart.

Harry Potter, from the time of his inexplicable survival of the Dark Lord's killing curse when the boy was still in a crib, was celebrated as a "master of death." His symbolic role as the heart-intellect of the trio soul triptych is shown in other signature qualities and relationships and especially in the embedded Morality Play or Everyman dramas embedded in the series.

Harry's Flashman foil in Rowling's magical *Tom Brown* stories, as noted, is the narcissistic and ever calculating for advantage Draco, the anti-thesis of the heart in the Slytherine triptych of Malfoy-Crabbe-and-Goyle. Draco was a Seeker only in name and because of his family wealth; he lost every Quidditch match in head-to-heart competition with Potter, Serpents against 'Golden Griffin' Lions. Rowling's spiritual allegory in Harry's Quidditch matches is not especially opaque; all the members of the team have heroic saint's names or ones that resonate with church furnishings: Angelina, Spinnet (organ), Bell, and Oliver Wood ('olive wood' being a preferred medium for religious statues).

Harry's signature power is love, and, also in keeping with the noetic-heart's capacity for empathy, his reflex spell in combat was the Disarmament Spell, Expelliarmus. This wand-remover magic was so much his default method that, having used it against the Death Eaters pursuing him from Privet Drive in *Deathly Hallows*, they immediately notified the Dark Lord that they had found the real item among the seven Potters. Lupin remonstrated that "The time for Disarming is past! These people are trying to capture and kill you! At least Stun if you aren't prepared to kill!" Harry refused to listen to that advice, hence his use of the spell in his final confrontation with Voldemort, and in the moment at the Burrow, refused to consider the possibility he had been betrayed by his friends (70, 80).

Harry's other "signature move" is what Hermione called his "*saving-people thing*" " (*Phoenix*, 733). His reflex when confronted with evil or injustice affecting others is to attack or defend without calculation of the odds of his own survival. He insisted that he must get the Philosopher's Stone as an eleven-year old when he realized the Headmaster was not there to protect it. He decided to enter the Chamber of Secrets to save Ginny. He exposed himself to a herd of Dementors in *Prisoner* and flew Buckbeak to the Hogwarts tower cell to save Sirius. He chose to save his Triwizard Tournament opponents at the cost of his own advantage: Fleur's sister in the Lake Task, Krum in the Maze, and Diggory before the first Task and from the Acromantula. He chose, too, to fight the Dark Lord at

Hangleton Graveyard. Having been manipulated by Voldemort, he flew to London to rescue Sirius in the Department of Mysteries. He pursued Snape from the Astronomy Tower after Dumbledore's death and attacked him, though Snape repeatedly rebuffed and punished him. He walked into the Forbidden Forest and died for his friends. King's Cross Dumbledore called him a “remarkably selfless person” (716), a function of his heart, the transpersonal faculty of soul, the spirit's residence.

This quality is highlighted as well by his repeated resurrection experiences in the presence of and, in the end, as a symbol of Christ. The Philosopher's Stone, the Phoenix (*Chamber*, *Goblet*, and *Order of the Phoenix*), the White Stag, and the Hippogriff appeared *ex machina* at the crisis of each book when Harry was about to be killed or dying. As the Everyman willing to die sinlessly or at least without defending himself, Harry rose from the dead (or limbo) in *Hallows* to defeat the Dark Lord. Harry is the symbol of the *logos*-within, a fact accentuated by the traditional forms and transparencies of the incarnate *Logos*-without that appear when he was being selfless and loving others sacrificially.

In a series, too, where Cratyllic or symbolic names are the Bunyan-esque rule rather than the exception, it is worth noting that the hero's name points to his other-worldly Son of God aspect in the soul triptych. A Bible Concordance reveals that Potter is a standard reference for the Creator God (cf. Genesis 2:7; Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:5-6; Romans 9:20-21) and the surname is assonant with the Latin word for ‘Father,’ *Pater*. The Boy Who Lived to become the Master of Death has a cryptonym that deciphers as ‘Heir of the Potter-Father,’ or ‘Son of God.’

- **Psychomachia – The Spiritual Allegories**

Psychomachia, in contrast with static painted or written symbols, icons, and forms whose supranatural correspondents foster noetic perception and serve as reminders of the greater world of archetypes, do what symbols do but in a story presentation, a moving picture. Having argued that the principal

characters are a soul triptych and Harry specifically the heart or human ego-transcending spiritual capacity, it remains to look for the Everyman dramas of these soul faculties and of the heart especially. Every *Harry Potter* novel and the series as a whole is an illustration of ‘the soul in battle within’ exteriorized, but the ending of three books are particularly detailed Medieval Morality Plays.

### **Running the Gauntlet and Winning the Mirror Battle in *Philosopher’s Stone***

As Harry’s first year ends, he learned that the Headmaster had left Hogwarts just when the trio believed the Potions Master would be stealing the Stone for Voldemort. Harry decided he must get there first and his two friends join him. Each of the obstacles and their sequence are transparencies of the soul’s trials and ascent to sanctification in the Spirit, all written in the language of mythic and Christian symbols.

The first obstacle the trio faced was Fluffy, the giant three-headed dog that guarded the trapdoor hiding the Stone. This is Cerberus, who played a role in several Greek myths as the monster guarding the gates of hell. Orpheus got past Cerberus by lulling him to sleep with a lyre, and that was Fluffy’s weak point as well. Quirrell used a harp (much like a lyre) and Harry used Hagrid’s gift flute.

Cerberus, the otherworldly canine, is at the gates guarding the gauntlet of trials to the Stone (or spiritual perfection), because the first step in spiritual life and alchemical work is renunciation of the world. This is the first rung on the “ladder of divine ascent” and the most difficult (John Climacus 1982, 73-80). The power-obsessed Quirrell/Voldemort struggles with the Fluffy obstacle above all others, which is why it takes him so long to enter through the trapdoor.

Renunciation is the better part of purification, and it was not until Harry put off earthly concerns (the house cup, detentions, being expelled, life itself) that he was able at last to enter the trapdoor. In a

heroic scene, he dismissed Ron and Hermione's concerns about school and family before the prospect of the return of Voldemort and took the plunge (*Stone*, 270).

The trials the trio went through in the first book's gauntlet to get to the Stone are symbolically heavy. In addition to the Platonic-Patristic soul triptych in motion, each trial Harry and company faced in his race to get the Stone, reflect a faculty or kind of soul in the Aristotelian model. The path to the Stone is an obstacle course symbolizing the soul's qualities and powers as presented in Aristotle's *On the Soul* and adapted by medieval theologians. To reach perfection (the Philosopher's Stone), Harry must necessarily show himself to have surpassed each obstacle within himself.

The Scholastic model, following Aristotle and Aquinas, is that there are three kinds of soul: vegetative, sensitive, and intellective. The powers or faculties closely tied to each kind are: (1) nourishment and reproduction with the vegetative; (2) discrimination and will with sensitivity to data; and (3) the rational and spiritual with the intellective kind (Wallace, 62). When Harry, Ron, and Hermione jumped through the trapdoor, they descended "miles under the school" into a netherworld crucible where their worthiness would be tested. Then, in sequence from carnal to spiritual, this trio of the soul's powers passed through tests for their purification.

First is the test for the vegetative kind of soul, by means of the vicious plant "devil's snare." Then comes discrimination, or choice (Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, 3:4). The team had to find the single winged key that fit the locked door at the opposite end of the Chamber, out of hundreds of flying keys. The right "key" here means both "answer unlocking a problem" and "musical note" perceived by the Heart. Desire or Mind cannot hear, find, or catch the right key except in obedience to Heart.

To pass the next obstacle, the magical chessboard test, the trio-triptych had to become pieces and win the game. Ron took charge here, because this was the ultimate test of the willing, or desiring, faculty he embodied. Of course, Ron chose the passionate, erratic knight and assigned the linear, analytical Hermione the rook (which only moves in straight lines). Harry, the heart or spiritual center, became a bishop.

Chess, a cerebral game, may seem a curious allegorical trial for the desires and the last or highest test for Ron, the soul's desiring part living token. It corresponds because, to win this game, Ron must sacrifice himself. There is no greater challenge for the passionate faculty than to forego its selfish interest and focus on the greater good. Ron transcended himself in selfless sacrifice and the test was passed.

Harry and Hermione stepped over the subconscious mind, the knocked-out troll appropriately beneath (sub) them, to confront upper-brain lobe cerebral challenge. "Pure logic!" Snape had left a word puzzle beside seven bottles of potions that will kill or liberate the contestant trapped by walls of flame. This was Hermione's final exam and Mind solved the puzzle without trouble. This was the end of the road for Hermione; the last test is only for the highest faculty of soul, and she retired, deferring to Harry with specific reference to their triptych roles of brain and heart, respectively:

Hermione's lip trembled, and she suddenly dashed at Harry and threw her arms around him.  
*"Hermione!"*

"Harry – you're a great wizard, you know."

"I'm not as good as you," said Harry, very embarrassed, as she let go of him.

"Me!" said Hermione. "Books! And cleverness! There are more important things – friendship and bravery and – oh Harry – be *careful!*" (286-287)

Harry at this point had passed down into hell à la Orpheus and ascended from vegetative soul, through the desiring passions and subconscious mind, to the height of ratiocination, that is, formal logic. He had passed every test with the help of the soul faculty friend-personification that matched the trial. His

journey's specifics suggest he was about to enter a Paradise of some kind. Dante also passed through flames as a cathartic trial near the summit of Purgatory where his guide and companion also disappeared (*Purgatorio* XXVII, ll. 49-51). The final trial is a magical mirror, a traditional symbol of symbolism itself in its reflection.

As Dumbledore explained to Harry later in the Hospital Wing, the Headmaster had concealed the Philosopher's Stone in the Mirror of Erised, an exteriorizing magical object that usually reveals "the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts" (*Stone*, 213), in such a way that "only one who wanted to *find* the Stone – find it, but not use it – would be able to get it, otherwise they'd just see themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life" (300). In *Half-Blood Prince's* "Horcrux" chapter, the Headmaster reviewed Harry's achievement in *Stone's* battle with Quirrell/Demort before the Mirror five years before. He congratulated Harry for remaining "pure of heart" and how his achievement in front of the Mirror should have revealed to the Dark Lord what an extraordinary adversary he had in this eleven-year-old. "You stared into a mirror that reflected your heart's desire, and it showed you only the way to thwart Lord Voldemort, and not immortality or riches. Harry, have you any idea how few wizards could have seen what you saw in that mirror?"<sup>127</sup> Voldemort cannot grasp what Harry is because "he was in such a hurry to mutilate his own soul, he never paused to understand the incomparable power of a soul that is untarnished and whole" (*Prince*, 511).

When read through the Traditionalist lens to perceive Rowling's defamiliarizing spiritual message, Harry the Pure Heart stands before a magic mirror in which is hidden a symbol of Christ, the

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<sup>127</sup> It is worth noting, especially in anticipation of what Harry will see in the *Hallows* Mirror Shard, that Dumbledore is another such person. The headmaster not only set the Mirror obstacle but is indifferent to the allure of the Philosopher's Stone, though as an accomplished alchemist (103) he can presumably make one himself; he destroys at book's end the one that was concealed in the Mirror lest the Dark Lord find it. The Headmaster expresses something like disdain for those who long for riches and endless life (297).

Philosopher's Stone, which has this meaning because the Elixir of Life that flows from it is a guarantor of eternal life (immortality) and spiritual riches (gold or solid light, symbolic illumination or enlightenment). (Abraham 1998, 145) Christ is the incarnate Word or *Logos* of God traditionally equated with the Heart or noetic intellect. Unlike the Dark-Lord and his minion also standing before the Mirror of Erised in the last chamber, Harry had a pure heart. Consequently, Subject and Object, noetic logos and Christ-*Logos*, unite and the "pure of heart sees God" as Jesus Christ promised in the Beatitudes ("Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God," Matthew 5:8). How? Harry's noetic faculty, his heart, who he truly is and what is reflected in the Mirror of Erised, sees the Stone as the *Logos* it is.<sup>128</sup> The God who is Love (1 John 4:8) lived within Harry's pure heart and recognized Himself in the mirror. This divine-other within him reflected there "smiled" and "winked" at the boy, put the Stone in His pocket, and Harry feels it "drop into his real pocket" (*Stone* 292).

Having discussed Harry's success in achieving the Stone, there remains the fascinating point of Harry's flesh causing Quirreldemort's hands to burn horribly at the touch. Harry still lost consciousness but Dumbledore saved him in the end and (after Harry's anything-but-subtle third-day resurrection) explained what happened:

"But why couldn't Quirrell touch me?"

"Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good." (299)

The allegorical message is that love conquers all, and of all loves, *sacrificial* love is the most important, because it has conquered the spiritual death of solipsism. Harry's protection against the assault of the

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<sup>128</sup> This is Estecean epistemology, that all knowledge is *logos* reflection, the "coincidence of subject and object," the only natural representation of which, again, is a mirror.



evil one was the love shown years ago by someone who made the greatest sacrifice for him. His bond with that sacrifice and the love it demonstrated permeated his person and repelled all evil. Voldemort in Quirrell could not touch him because of Harry's worthiness to receive the Stone (Christ) and because of both the Christlike love and sacrifice of his mother Lily that shielded him and the sanctification Harry the Heart had achieved in running the psychomachia gauntlet of soul-struggling-to-Spirit.

In addition to Harry's resurrection with and as the Philosopher's Stone, the Morality Play has a message, too, about those who believe with Quirrell a la Nietzsche that "There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it" (291). The allegorical meaning of Quirrell's hands and skin burning when they make contact with Harry is the traditional Christian doctrine concerning God's judgment and the nature of heaven and hell. One Christian theologian explains it this way:

God is Truth and Light. God's judgment is nothing else than our coming into contact with truth and light. In the day of the Great Judgment all men will appear naked before this penetrating light of truth. The "books" will be opened. What are these "books"? They are our hearts. Our hearts will be opened by the penetrating light of God, and what is in these hearts will be revealed. If in those hearts there is love for God, those hearts will rejoice seeing God's light. If, on the contrary, there is hatred for God in those hearts, these men will suffer by receiving on their opened hearts this penetrating light of truth which they detested all their life. (Kalomiros, 18)

Another theologian explained:

God himself is both reward and punishment. All men have been created to see God unceasingly in his uncreated glory. Whether God will be for each man heaven or hell, reward or punishment, depends on man's response to God's love and on man's transformation from the state of selfish and self-centered love, to God-like love which does not seek its own ends.... The primary purpose of Orthodox Christianity, then, is to prepare its members for an experience which every human being will sooner or later have. (Romanides, 46)

The Everyman drama depicts this baldly. Professor Quirrell was possessed by the evil one. He stood before the judging Mirror, which examined the quality of the desires reflected from his heart. It saw what possessed him: a selfish and self-centered love apart from God. He was unworthy of the Stone-Christ and the ensuing Elixir of Life, so these were kept from him. When he touched someone

blanketed by the sacrificial love of a savior (here, of course, Harry's mother) and worthy of having Christ in him, the love of God therein burned Quirrell. His judgment reflected the judgment of hell that rejecters of God will experience according to traditional Christian doctrine and the attendant symbolism of heart, mirror, and light.

### ***Chamber of Secrets* Morality Play and Everyman Drama**

The psychomachia of *Philosopher's Stone* delivers a spiritual allegory of the soul's three faculties and each of their perfections or sanctifications in overcoming obstacles appropriate to their quality or strength. Ron the passions and Hermione as discursive reason do their best in service to Harry and fall away as the trials exceed their powers leaving Harry the heart-intellect to face the Dark Lord and, "pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8) to see God, the Stone in the Mirror. The Everyman drama in *Chamber of Secrets* is not as Dante-esque a journey through the purgatory challenges for each of the soul faculties' dominion but the finish to the second *Potter* novel is the most transparent Christian allegory of salvation history since Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

It is worth reviewing the story before explaining the supranatural and largely Biblical referents of the players and the meaning of the Morality Play, Everyman's salvific journey and sanctifying victory over the Evil One. The story in the present tense as told is as follows (*Chamber*, 300-330):

Harry travels with two companions down the long slide to a subterranean passage miles beneath Hogwarts. The unwilling companion, Professor Lockhart, rebels but a malfunctioning wand causes the spell with which he was about to wipe Ron and Harry's memory to backfire – and to bring down the ceiling of the passage, separating Harry from Ron and the Professor. Harry heads on to the Chamber alone.

He enters the Chamber of Secrets to find and rescue Ginny Weasley. He finds her unconscious and cannot revive her. He meets Tom Riddle. Because he thinks Riddle is a friend, Harry asks for his help in restoring Ginny. Riddle refuses to help.

Harry learns then that Tom Riddle is anything but his friend; Riddle is instead the young Lord Voldemort. Far from helping him revive Ginny, Riddle has been the cause of her near death.

Harry boldly confesses to Riddle's face his loyalty to Albus Dumbledore and his belief that Dumbledore's power is greater than Lord Voldemort's.

The Chamber is filled with phoenix song at this confession, heralding the arrival of Fawkes (Dumbledore's phoenix), who brings Harry the Sorting Hat of Godric Gryffindor. The Dark Lord laughs at what Dumbledore has sent his defender and disciple. He offers to teach Harry a little lesson: Let's match the powers of Lord Voldemort, Heir of Salazar Slytherin, against famous Harry Potter and the best weapons Dumbledore can give him. He releases the giant basilisk from his reservoir, and the battle is joined.

The look of the basilisk is death, so Harry runs from it with eyes closed. Fawkes the phoenix attacks the charging basilisk and punctures its deadly eyes. Harry cries for help to "someone—anyone" as the phoenix and the blind basilisk continue to battle, and he is given the Sorting Hat by a sweep of the basilisk's tail.

Harry throws himself to the ground, rams the hat over his head, and begs for help again. A gleaming silver sword comes through the hat (it is, delightfully, a 'Sword-In-Hat' as well as a 'Sorting Hat').

Evil Tom Riddle directs the blind basilisk at this point to leave the phoenix and attack the boy. When it lunges for him, Harry drives the sword "to the hilt into the roof of the serpent's mouth" but one poisonous fang enters Harry's arm as the basilisk falls to its death.

Harry, mortally wounded, falls beside it. The phoenix weeps into Harry's wound as Riddle laughs at Harry's death.

Too late Riddle remembers the healing powers of phoenix tears and chases away the phoenix. He then confronts the prostrate boy and raises Harry's wand to murder him. The phoenix gives Harry the diary, and Harry drives the splintered basilisk fang into it. Riddle dies and disappears; red ink pours from the diary.

Ginny revives and the good guys (with Lockhart) escape by holding the tail feathers of the phoenix, who flies from the Cavern miles beneath Hogwarts to safety and freedom above. Harry celebrates with Dumbledore.

To translate this morality play and allegory from supra-conscious experience to conscious understanding, the reader needs a program of the traditional symbols in play and their corresponding archetypal referents.

Harry is Everyman, the Human Heart or Spiritual Faculty, who begins his journey seeking to recover his lost innocence and to return the fallen soul to heaven; Lockhart and Ron are the two

steeds the Platonic charioteer controls and ‘Lockhart’ is the passionate stallion in opposition to the heart; Ginny is virgin innocence and purity, the soul possessed by the Evil One; Riddle/Voldemort is Satan, the deceiver; The basilisk is sin, the agent of the Evil One in human death; Dumbledore is God the Father; Fawkes the phoenix is Christ; Phoenix song is the Holy Spirit; Gryffindor’s sword is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17); The Chamber is the world and hell, both the dominion of Satan; and Hogwarts, specifically, Dumbledore the Father’s office, is heaven.

The action of this salvation drama, the allegory of the soul’s sanctification, then, goes like this:

Man, alone and afraid in the world, loses his innocence. He tries to regain it with the help of the soul’s lower faculties but this is a spiritual journey Man as a Seeking Heart must pursue in faith alone.

In direct confrontation with the Deceiver, Man attempts to revive his fallen nature. He is prevented in this by Satan, who feeds on his fallen, lost innocence and reveals himself as Man’s mortal enemy and King of this World. Man confesses and calls on God the Father while facing Satan, and is graced immediately by the Holy Spirit and the protective presence of Christ who descends into the World from Heaven in obedience to the Father to save Man.

Satan confronts Man with the greatness of his sins, but Christ battles on man’s side for man’s salvation from his sins. God sends Man the sword of the Spirit, which he uses to slay his Christ-weakened enemy. His sins are absolved, but the weight of them still means Man’s death. Satan rejoices.

But the voluntary suffering of Christ heals man! Man rises from the dead, and with Christ’s help, Man destroys Satan. Man’s innocence is restored, and he leaves the world for heaven by means of the Ascension of Christ. Man, risen with Christ, lives with God the Father in joyful thanksgiving.

Using only traditional symbols, from the Ancient of Days figure as God the Father to the satanic serpent versus the Christlike phoenix (the “resurrection bird”), the drama takes us from the fall in the garden to eternal life without a hitch. Lockhart, pronounced “lock-heart,” is revealed as the anti-heart who having forgotten (and denied) selfless love and embraced murder for advantage is by his own choice condemned to permanent memory loss, eternity in a world of forgetting. Harry’s victory, the heart’s success in saving the innocent but fallen soul, his eventual love and bride, represents the path of selfless, sacrificial love, of faith in the Trinity, and of victory over death and the devil.

Dumbledore's lesson in his heavenly office *post bellum* is all about choices determining "what we really are, far more than our abilities" (333). The choice is between the Free Heart and the Locked Heart; the Morality Play displays the importance of this decision and which is the right choice, one the reader's heart recognizes in its story reflection's victory.

### **The *Deathly Hallows* Finale**

Rowling told a Canadian reporter in 2000 that she was just as happy that she was not being asked about the details of her faith because, if she spoke about it, she feared she would give away the ending. She thought readers aged "ten to sixty" would be able to guess where she was headed if her faith was public knowledge (Nelson).

Which fear, frankly, was ridiculous. By 2007, millions of people knew she was a Christian, if perhaps as many "knew" with as sure a conviction but in error that she was a witch, and no one guessed the ending of *Deathly Hallows*. What her confession of faith has done, though, is to make more credible interpreting the psychomachia of the finale's finish as the relatively transparent Christian allegory it is, an Everyman Morality Play akin to those in *Stone* and *Chamber*.<sup>129</sup> The last chapters of *Hallows* are the hero's sanctifying and agonizing exteriorized spiritual battle. Beginning with Harry's walk into the Forest to meet his death and ending with the death of the Dark Lord in the Great Hall and Harry's decisions in the aftermath, there is an almost unbroken Passion narrative either as Christ or a Christian Everyman moving in imitation of Christ:

Harry hesitates at the abyss when he reaches the Forest: "He had no strength left for a Patronus. He could no longer conceal his own trembling. It was not, after all, so easy to die.... At the same time he thought that he would not be able to go on, and knew that he must" (698) ~ Christ has

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<sup>129</sup> Rowling's comment to Amini post *Deathly Hallows* suggested she knew this would be the case: "There was a Christian commentator who said, which I thought was very interesting, that Harry Potter had been the Christian church's biggest missed opportunity. And I thought, there's someone who actually has their eyes open. I think he said it before the publication of the seventh book, and with the publication of the seventh book I think that clarified a lot of people's view on where I was standing."

‘Let This Cup Pass’ desires in the Garden of Gethsemane and chooses to act in obedience as Savior. (Matthew 26:39).

Harry’s mother, who appears with James, Remus, and Sirius when Harry opens the Snitch (698), is a great comfort to Harry on his walk to his death (700-701) ~ Christ walks the Via Dolorosa, stumbles, and is helped by his mother. (Luke 23: 27)

Pensieve Dumbledore had said Harry must die and “Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential” (686). He does not make any attempt to defend himself, consequently, when he reveals himself to the Dark Lord in the Forest clearing; Harry dies as a sacrifice (703) ~ Christ dies sacrificially as *Christus Victor* on the Cross and without resistance to defeat the unwitting Dark Lord; when Christ is betrayed and His disciples begin to fight, He rebukes them (Matthew 26:52-54) and goes to His Crucifixion as a lamb to the slaughter.

Harry learns at King’s Cross that he survived the Death Curse due to his ‘Bond of Blood’ with a savior who had died for him in an unremembered past ~ Christians commune with the eucharistic blood of Christ to share in His sacrificial victory over death.

Harry defeats the Dark Lord by fooling him into killing him, unwittingly destroying his own soul fragment ~ Christ defeats Satan and frees man from death by “beguiling the beguiler” into murdering and taking to Hades a sinless man (see Groves 2017, 71-74).

Harry sees in the writhing Voldemort soul remnant at King’s Cross, the state of what remains of his soul after creating seven Horcruxes, the irreparable condition of souls unprepared for eternal life ~ Christ tells this story in the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in hell in which the Rich Man in hell begs his former servant for help only to learn “between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence” (Luke 16:26).

Harry does his time in the King’s Cross netherworld but elects to return to the battle and complete his victory rather than “go on” ~ Christ’s breaks the gates of Hades, “harrowing” Hell between his Crucifixion and Resurrection but returns to the world; the victory over the Evil One, the Prince of the World, was not complete at Christ’s death on the Cross; that was won at His Resurrection and His preparing His disciples for the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Narcissa’s nails “pierce Harry’s flesh” and she announces his death, the story equivalent of the Crucifixion Of Christ with nails to the Cross and His Burial in the Tomb.

Voldemort desecrates Harry’s body with the Cruciatus Curse ~ Another Crucifixion reference, in passing, for anyone who missed the above.

Hagrid carries Harry’s body from the Forest ~ a picture like Michaelangelo’s *Pieta*, a reference to the women who come to the Tomb to care for Christ’s body.

The Dark Lord after returning from King’s Cross with Harry is unable to hurt Harry or his friends ~ Christ’s sacrifice has broken the Devil’s power over humanity.

Harry disappears under the Invisibility Cloak at Hagrid's feet ~ the Empty Tomb discovered by the women and their announcement of same to the Apostles.

Neville decapitates Nagini as Harry comes to life ~ the victory over the Garden's serpent at Christ's Resurrection.

Harry uses a Blackthorn wand and wins his victory over Voldemort using a Hawthorn Wand ~ *Christus Victor* triumphs via the Crown of Thorns and Cross, not through individual triumph in arms.

Harry urges Voldemort to "feel some remorse" and shares with him all he knows about the Elder Wand ~ Christ acts as Truth Himself waiting for the repentance of all sinners.

Harry rejects the Elder Wand and Resurrection Stone in the Hogwarts Headmaster's office ~ Christians have won a victory via Christ's Resurrection over the temptations of power and over the fear of death.

Harry's psychomachia, his purifying soul journey to communion with the Spirit and a victory over death, is an Everyman Christian drama that might have been written in the Middle Ages for performance in public squares as edifying entertainment for the faithful gathered for a feast day. It is less Shakespearean per se than it is a reflection of the source material from which the Bard wrote his plays.

This chapter began with discussion of Rowling's claim in 2008 that she had wanted to create at Harry's King's Cross dialogue with Dumbledore the conditions for a "debate" about how it was best understood. The "resolved" question to be addressed was supposed to have been the one Harry asked Dumbledore before returning to battle; was this otherworldly exchange with the dead Headmaster 'real' or 'in his head,' that is, a psychological phenomenon rather than a spiritual event? As Rowling admitted in the same interview (Amini), even if setting up a "debate" was her intention, she had already so weighted the argument about the reality of an existent after-life in her Wizarding World, that those who would have preferred to deny a spiritual dimension beyond the psychic had little in the end on which to build that argument.

*Deathly Hallows*, though, as psychomachia, is in large part Harry Potter's experience of this internal debate himself on his long walk from the wedding at the Burrow to his final meetings with Dumbledore and defeat of Voldemort. Harry's primary opponent, one over which he only wins in Dobby's grave, is his doubt, his inability to identify with the single eye visible in the mirror fragment as his own reflection and inner essence. Through his several nightmare experiences, he moves from "Dumbledore man through and through" through doubts about and at Christmas finally a denial of Dumbledore's love for him to his final meetings with his mentor at King's Cross and in the Headmaster's office. He won the interior battle of 'heart or head?' that determined his success in the exterior battle with the enemy who had chosen the contrary path. From the Traditionalist view of literature as spiritual awakening, this wrestling with doubt and consequent faith is Rowling's depiction of the Soul's Journey of every person in modernity, to include herself, the struggle to accept traditional understanding of Soul and Spirit, the embodied "debate" at King's Cross, rather than the empiricist and materialist view, the denial-of-the-transcendent implicit to the psychism of contemporary psychology.

Voldemort in this regard is the incarnate Modernist which is to say 'Anti-Christ' mirror image to Harry's heart and sacrificial love. The Dark Lord slices up his soul as a consumer who thinks of it as a renewable and indefinite material substance and he shows no awareness of a transpersonal intellect or human spiritual faculty. This disregard for Spirit is evident in his psychopathic relationship with others and *Avadra Kedavra*, the unforgiveable Killing Curse, being his signature spell. He pursued individual immortality, that is, an eternal life for his ego existence, in power and the creation-via-murder of Horcruxes, investing his soul in high-esteem objects rather than salvific repentance, remorse, and love, that is, intellectual ego transcendence and identification with the *logos* love and light within him.

Harry's struggle with doubt, almost certainly per Rowling's comments about her own tentative faith in organized religion, an intentional exteriorization and resolution in story of her spiritual 'debate,' is



compelling and engaging as psychomachia must be. Rowling, though, as she had admitted with respect to the psychological or spiritual ‘debate’ about what happened at King’s Cross, had so loaded the argument in her symbolism, embedded narratives about how to interpret them, and the repeated traditional soul journeys in the previous six books that there could be little doubt about how Harry’s doubts would end.

### III. Soul-Spirit in *Cormoran Strike*

Rowling’s psychomachia frame in *Harry Potter* turns on the traditional soul triptych of Harry-Ron-and-Hermione as Body-Brain-and-Spirit and individually on Harry as the Heart. The trio and the hero go on soul journeys of transformation through the individual books and series, with a parallel dark triptych of Draco-Crabbe-and-Goyle with a rationalist charioteer behind two mindless steeds that never get off the ground. The Dark Lord is Harry’s reverse image as Christ figure, hence his liturgical Black Mass ‘Rebirthing Party’ in the *Goblet of Fire* Hangleton graveyard that turns the Christian sacraments of Baptism, Confession, and Eucharist on their heads.

Turning to *Cormoran Strike*, Rowling’s other sustained work of serial fiction, there is no Dark Lord equivalent in the hero’s life, Strike has no Flashman foil or even a Moriarty, and the alchemical and Christian symbolism is muted relative to the traditional translucencies at Hogwarts. Even supposing that Rowling is writing spiritual allegories of the soul’s interior battles exteriorized in drama in her detective novels, there is no Platonic triptych in the cast of characters. If Strike is a charioteer, his partner Robin is driving alongside him and there are no steeds to lift the vehicle into the heavens. Even with the hiring of Barclay in *Lethal White* as the dependable ‘third’ player in Agency affairs, a Scotsman who is not unlike Ron in his relative simplicity and plain-speaking, he does not have anything like the friendship the *Potter* ‘third’ has with Harry or Hermione. Strike’s declaration in

*Troubled Blood* that he is “Team Rational” and averse to anything other-worldly or religious, too, makes the ‘Hero as Heart’ view a real ‘stretch.’

Rowling is writing a kind of soul’s journey allegory in these books as well, however, albeit of a different model. The psychomachia of the Strike novels is built on the Shakespearean soul-Spirit romantic model rather than the Platonic-Patristic body-mind-spirit soul triptych of ancient, Medieval, and contemporary film and written fiction. In this model, the man and woman lead players take the part of soul and spirit, Coomaraswamy’s *duo sunt in homine* human and divine aspects, either as fixed roles as in *Othello* and *The Tempest* or in relation to the other, each being soul and embracing the other as supra-natural as in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Rowling’s embedded models for this exteriorized drama of human sanctification are the myths of ‘Leda and the Swan’ and ‘Psyche and Cupid’ and the psychomachia spiritual allegories of Eros and Anteros, true and false Cupid, within Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*, the Redcrosse Knight and Una as well as Britomart and Artegell.

Rowling by her own admission failed to establish credibly in her *Harry Potter* novels a “debate” between belief in traditional ‘from above, downwards’ supra-conscious reality and the this-worldly ‘from below, upwards’ subconscious perspective of secular, which is to say ‘spirit-free,’ psychology. Harry’s epistemological and spiritual doubts with which he struggles as the Heart Hero in *Deathly Hallows* are the best part of this effort; the magical world, its “obvious” and subliminal Christian symbolism, not to mention the implicit denial of disenchanted nominalism in wand work and spells, though, all undermine the tension necessary for a credible debate between traditional and modern views.

The absence of magic in the *Cormoran Strike* novels mean the playing field or stage for Rowling’s desired debate is level or ‘even.’ In the series as a whole and in *Troubled Blood* especially, Rowling-

Galbraith has written a much more challenging and compelling profane alternative to the traditional sacred view in her pointers to a Jungian psychomachia of individuation, especially in the character of Robin Ellacott.

### A. Shakespearean Romance

Martin Lings described the Soul-Spirit psychomachia of several Shakespeare plays in his introduction to the *Othello* chapter in his *Secret of Shakespeare*:

The essential feature of man's primordial state was the union of his soul with the Spirit; and one of the more universal symbols of the regaining of that state is marriage, the union of lovers. The prototype of this symbolism in Christianity is Christ's own references to himself as 'the Bridegroom'; and the Middle Ages were dominated by the conception of the Church or, microcosmically, the soul as the bride of Christ....

Medieval art was continually expressing this union, in various ways, as for example in pictures of the mystical marriage of St Catherine of Alexandria with Christ, she representing the perfect soul and he the Spirit. But the Virgin Mary, in virtue of her Assumption and Coronation as Co-Redemptress, also stands for the Spirit, and so by extension may a perfect woman. In *The Divine Comedy*, when Dante reaches the Garden of Eden on the top of the Mountain of Purgatory, Beatrice his beloved, personifying spiritual wisdom, descends from Heaven and the two meet in the terrestrial Paradise; and in *The Faerie Queen*, the sequel to the Red Crosse Knight's victory over the dragon is his marriage to the Lady Una (Lings 1984, 42-43).

The marriages of Shakespeare's plays, especially those that end in a paired death and real union in the grave, are symbolic representations or icons-in-motion of the soul's union with sanctifying Spirit.

Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, Othello and Desdemona, Hamlet and Ophelia, even Lear and Cordelia though father and daughter, are soul and Spirit, Sun and moon to one another, who in their deaths have died to the world, their mundane existence, and realized their love in an archetypal domain (see Lings 1984, 83-87 on alchemical and mystical marriage and the place in Shakespeare's drama for suicide and death as means to join soul and Spirit). The characters speak of one another to highlight this spiritual allegory:

For Romeo *Juliet is the sun*; at their first encounter her hand is a *holy shrine*, she is a *saint* and he a *pilgrim*; and at the end the presence of her body transforms the burial vault into a *lantern*,

that part of a cathedral which according to Masonic symbolism corresponds to Heaven and the Spirit. For Juliet, Romeo is the *god* of her *idolatry*. (Lings 1984, 86)

This is the psychomachia allegory of the *Cormoran Strike* novels. In contrast with the soul triptych of the *Potter* novels and the annual soul journeys of purification and sanctifying transformation the trio make in opposition to the satanic Voldemort, Rowling-Galbraith's mysteries are in essence the unfolding story of the Strike-Ellacott romance, the only "through-story" in this series the author has acknowledged (BBC 2018). The novels are gritty and realistic with the city of London in the 21st Century as much a character in the books as the clients and 'perps.' At the same time, they are mythic and otherworldly, especially with respect to the partnership of Cormoran and Robin, a courtship in silence that is more Arthurian than Harlequin, more Medieval Romance than Austen-esque manners and morals.

In *Troubled Blood*, the pair admit to themselves in isolation how much the other means to them. Robin alone in a bar after visiting a Church in Leamington Spa, a parallel across time of Oonaugh Kennedy's conversion experience the night Margot Bamborough was murdered, has an epiphany about how much Strike means to her: "there was a kind of relief in admitting the painful truth, she cared deeply for her partner." She has to face the fact that "he was her best friend," that "she trusted him on the big things," admired his brains, doggedness, self-discipline, and his "almost total lack of self-pity," and that he respected her enough that "he had never once made her feel physically uncomfortable" (532-533). Though missing Shakespearean references to sun and moon, saints and pilgrims, this epiphany in parallel with the Rev. Oonaugh Kennedy's spiritual enlightenment in church and pub, the former featuring the death of Margot Bamborough, that Una's Red Crosse Knight, casts the new understanding Robin gains as her becoming conscious of Strike's transcendent role in her life.

Strike had a similar break-through in *Troubled Blood*, albeit in Robin's presence and only under the influence of remorse for having broken her nose and of drinking half a bottle of whiskey. In an unspoken soliloquy to her, "full of whisky, contrition and a powerful feeling he preferred at all times not to dwell upon," he struggled to put into words "something of the truth" though "the truth was dangerous." He wanted her to know, he mused, that "she occupied a unique place in his thoughts and his affections," but feared "it'll go wrong... because it always goes wrong." That would mean not only losing her

for good, and this thing we've built together, which is literally the only good part of my life, my vocation, my pride, my greatest achievement, will be forever fucked, because I won't find anyone I enjoy running things with, the way I enjoy running them with you, and everything afterward will be tainted by the memory of you. (725-726)

After conversation aloud with her about Charlotte Campbell, Jonny Rokeby, Robin's ex, their thoughts about the desirability of children, and about Strike's needing to trust her enough to talk about his personal life lest he explode in violence again, he admitted to her that she was his "best mate" (730). Shocked by this confession of affection, she is only able to say "the feeling's mutual" before Barclay interrupts their *tete a tete* in the dark.

To grasp the otherworldly quality of that exchange requires some familiarity with the mythological and allegorical templates Rowling-Galbraith has chosen for the backdrop to her Strike series as Orestes was to *Harry Potter* and Theseus is to the *Fantastic Beasts* film franchise. The three primary myths and allegory in play are 'Leda and the Swan,' 'Psyche and Cupid,' and 'Una and the Redcrosse Knight.' In the adaptation of the two Greek myths, Robin is soul to Strike's immortal spirit; in the reimagining of the *Faerie Queen*'s first book in *Troubled Blood*, Strike is the soul and Robin the fixed, pure Spirit.

## **B. Mythic Backdrops and Allegorical Coloration**

- **Leda and the Swan**

Leda was a beautiful Queen of Sparta, the ancient Greek city-state totally dedicated to military supremacy, who became the lover of Zeus. She was not the god's first or last mortal mate; Leda seems to be the only woman, however, with whom he used a swan guise. With both her mortal husband, the King of Sparta Tyndareus, and Zeus, the immortal King of the Gods, as her lovers, Leda gave birth to two sets of twins, one set of sons and one set of daughters. Leda's two daughters, Helen of Troy via Zeus and Clytemnestra by Tyndareus, were both tragic figures in the Trojan War. Her twin boys were named Castor and Pollux and they are the mythic players evident in the Strike series. Castor, son of Tyndareus, was known as a horse breaker and demigod Pollux, son of Zeus, was famous as a boxer. Both were also saviors to those in need, celebrated for their willingness to help anyone in trouble, especially travelers, guests, and sailors.

The links between this myth and Rowling's Cormoran Strike mysteries are not difficult to see once the connection with Leda Strike, Cormoran's late mother are made. Joanne Gray was the first to make them in 2017 (Gray). Pollux's conception was an otherworldly mating not only between different species of animal, but also a different order of being; the swan as a noble bird of heavens and water, the spiritual elements, is symbolic of divinity. Rowling-Galbraith's re-imagining of this tryst between god and mortal is of a 'groupie' having sex with a rock star of not-of-this-world celebrity. Strike's father in this postmodern version of the myth is Jonny Rokeby, lead singer of the Deadbeats, the equivalent of the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger in fame, fortune, and fecund infidelities.

Cormoran has no relationship with his other-worldly father, who, just as Zeus got in trouble with his wife Hera for sleeping around, supposedly lost a marriage when Leda was able to prove paternity. Strike is bitter and angry about this paternal neglect forty years on, though he allows that he became the

independent man he is largely in the wake of being the disregarded off-spring of a larger than life legend.

Mythic Leda's home in Sparta has to be included as a tie-in; Cormoran has a distinguished if not Victoria's Cross level heroic military background. His vocation as a private detective, too, in which he comes to the aid of a person in crisis or in which he can act as an avenger, an agent of otherworldly justice, corresponds with the qualities of Pollux and his brother Castor.

The tie that makes the mythology-link with the Strike books all but certain<sup>130</sup> is that Pollux the demigod is a boxer and Castor the mortal a master of horses. Cormoran, the retelling equivalent of Pollux as demigod son of Leda, was an accomplished boxer while in the Army, an identity he brags about when drunk. Robin, his relatively mortal partner and "best mate," is expert with, if not horses, then horse-power. She is a certified driving expert whose semi-miraculous negotiation of a highway accident involving trucks, sliding cars, and blinding snow saved their lives in *Silkworm*. Cormoran, who was blown up in Afghanistan by an IED while in a military vehicle, suffers from PTSD and panic attacks in cars. He is only comfortable when Robin-Castor is driving.

The relevance of this mythological backdrop for a reading of the psychomachia in the Strike stories is that the mortal soul and immortal Spirit pairing exists in the Castor and Pollux fraternity, the one a demigod and the other a hero subject to death. Pollux at Castor's death surrenders his semi-divine status to elevate his brother to the heavens where both reign as stars in the Gemini constellation. This is a pointer to the Strike-Ellacott relationship being a spiritual allegory of soul and Spirit achieving immortality in their union.

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<sup>130</sup> A less certain tie is Strike's quoting a line from Yeats' 'Leda and the Swan' in the adaptation of *Cuckoo's Calling* for television by Rowling's Bronte Studios for the BBC. He tells John Bristow in episode three that, to his rock star father, he was "only a shudder in the loins," as Yeats describes the swan in his poem (Granger 2019b).

- **Cupid and Psyche, Eros and Anteros**

The myth of ‘Leda and the Swan’ serves as a baseline to the books as the overarching mystery is the death of Leda Strike which necessarily involves Strike’s rockstar father Swan and because the core relationship is that of Robin and Cormoran, Castor and Pollux, little bird soul and Cornish Giant-sea hawk spirit. The myth, however, that first appears in the narrative is ‘Cupid and Psyche,’ an even more explicit soul and spirit psychomachia. In this myth, mortal beauty Psyche, whose name is the Greek word for ‘soul,’ is persecuted by the jealous goddess Venus, angry because men have forgotten devotions to her in their adoration of the young woman and then because her son Cupid saves and falls in love with the human soul. After Cupid has fled Psyche due to her inability to live with his terms of meeting her only in darkness, Venus sets a series of trials for the remorseful mortal. Psyche passes each test with the help of supra-natural guidance but fails in her self-control just after her successful journey into and back from Hell. Cupid intervenes for her, Hermes raises her to Mt Olympus, and Zeus grants her a drink of ambrosia which bestows immortality.

This apotheosis myth of the soul is evident in the first chapter of *Cuckoo's Calling* featuring Robin and Cormoran. The night before, “shortly after midnight, her long-term boyfriend, Matthew, had proposed to her under the statue of Eros in the middle of Piccadilly Circus.” Flush with excitement about her engagement on her way to a new job as an on office ‘temp’ on Denmark Street, Robin “loved Eros,” “she was, in fact, not far off loving the whole of London” (11). She had made a fundamental mistake, however, and was about to meet Venus and Cupid.

Her mistake was in thinking that the statue above Piccadilly Circus is of Eros or Cupid. It is Anteros, the god of reciprocal and selfless rather than erotic love, that is depicted there. This relatively chaste and spiritual love is what she comes most to admire about Strike, as she noted in the Leamington Spa



pub epiphany mentioned above; he never “capitalized on the situation to make advances,” attempting “to push a relationship into a different space.” “Never had there been an ostensibly helpful by unnecessary touch, no hand on the small of the back, no grasping of the arm, no look that made her skin prickle, or made her want to cover herself” (533). The reader learns only in the third Strike novel that Robin was raped while a psychology student at university, a nightmare experience that caused her to drop out of school and give up her dream of becoming a policewoman or private detective with her degree. Strike’s chaste affection and anti-erotic fellowship is what made the ugly ex-boxer lovable to Robin.

Anteros, the “true Cupid,” is the selfless love of the Heart or *Logos* and a large part of Spenser’s aim in *Faerie Queen*’s psychomachia. None of the Spenserian epigraphs chosen for *Troubled Blood*’s chapters and seven parts refer to Venus or Cupid which is a shame. As C. S. Lewis remarked in his *Spenser’s Images of Life*, “the mythology of Cupid and Venus is one of the central interests of the poem” (Lewis, C. S. 1967, 19); Lewis devoted the better part of his book on *Faerie Queen*, in fact, to discussion of its treatment of Cupid and “the false Cupid.” Thomas Hyde in his ‘Cupid’ entry for *The Spenser Encyclopedia* concurred: “The god of love, or more precisely, of amorous desire, appears in Spenser’s poetry more often and in greater variety than any other god or goddess.” Hyde thinks the two Cupids evident in *Faerie Queen* are aspects of the one god in his carnal and spiritual aspects, a “coherent mythology” as well as a “poetic theology of love.” “In fact, Spenser persistently relates human erotic impulses to the heavenly love that created and sustains the universe,” i.e., the Creative Word or *Logos* (Hyde, 201).

At Robin’s first meeting with Strike in *Calling*, however, she first encounters not the true Cupid, Anteros, but Venus, Strike’s girlfriend of many years, the otherworldly beauty Charlotte Campbell, who burst out of the entrance to the building in which the Agency has second floor offices. Robin just

missed being run over by this Aphrodite-esque aristocrat; they met face to face, “missing contact by a centimeter,” and Robin was astonished by the woman’s beauty and “exhilarated” appearance (13).

Strike here took on the role of Cupid in the myth directly. Cupid was charged by Venus to throw Psyche from the peak of the mountain; instead, he rescued her from the precipice, fell in love with her, and took the mortal beauty to a secret, magical place apart from the world, hiding himself from her vision.

Strike, in pursuit of Charlotte, knocked Robin off the top of the “lethal staircase” and she was “catapulted backwards, handbag flying, arms windmilling” (14) to her almost certain death. But he did not kill her. He saved her. “He seized a fistful of cloth and flesh” and “a second shriek of pain echoed around the stone walls and then, with a wrench and a tussle, he had succeeded in dragging the girl back on to firm ground. Her shrieks were still echoing off the walls, and he realized that he himself had bellowed, ‘Jesus Christ!’” (15). This is the first of only two times Strike has invoked the incarnate *Logos* in the series thus far; he thus introduced himself symbolically as Anteros at their first encounter, grabbing her breast, not with affection or erotically, but brutally in order to save her life.

In the subsequent four books, Robin and Strike worked together as chaste partners who rarely speak about their private lives, only in personal crisis as a rule or when drunk, usually both. They inhabit Strike's offices as their equivalent to Cupid’s secret barrow, apart from the world and largely in secret from the inner life of the other. In *Troubled Blood*, however, the *Faerie Queen* novel of the series, the myth resurfaces on Valentine's Day, most appropriately, the heartsy holiday dedicated to romantic love whose patron deity is Cupid. Three plot streams intersect which leads to Robin confronting Strike with a demand of change in their relationship akin to Psyche's insistence in the myth that her sisters be allowed to visit her in her hidden palace.

Strike was called by his Uncle Ted on Valentine's Day morning to share the news that his Aunt Joan would die within days. Then Nick Herbert, one of his oldest friends, asked if they could meet for a drink; it turns out that his wife Ilsa had miscarried their IVF baby and they had had a marriage threatening row. After an unpleasant meeting with Robin and the Agency's contract detectives, Strike received a call from Jonny Rokeby, the first ever. He asked to meet with his estranged son and made the mistake of hinting he'd make it worth Strike's while if he agreed. Strike screamed "GO FUCK YOURSELF!" at his father, left the office in a rage, and met, drunk after his day with Nick drinking, with Robin and her flat mate that night for dinner at their place. Strike was not the Eros-Cupid of Valentine's Day sentiment or the Anteros respectful partner to Robin but a disrespectful lout who shouted at Robin's guests, her brother's college student friends, for their political naivete. Rape became a subject in their argument about women's rights. When Strike exited, Robin followed him and, enraged, called him out in the rain for his indifferent treatment of her. This confrontation and Strike's uncharacteristic decision to apologize, is a turning point in their relationship, one in parallel with Psyche's sisters' visits to Cupid's palace.

Psyche's envious sisters convinced her that Cupid only insisted on remaining unseen by her in the light of day because he was the monster to which the beauty was supposed to have been sacrificed on the mountain peak. They persuaded her, consequently, to shine her oil lamp on him that night and to kill him with her knife. She did and saw instead of a monster that her lover was an immortal; Cupid, however, was wounded by oil that fell from her lamp and fled from Psyche because she had broken her promises to him via her brandishing light and knife.

Rowling-Galbraith re-wrote this scene in *Troubled Blood* to advance her theme of Anteros before Eros. Strike and Robin met with Hermes figure Carl Oakden to interview him in hopes of learning what he knew about Margot Bamborough's disappearance. At Oakden's insistence, the meeting took place in an

upscale hotel bar relatively near where Jonny Rokeby and family were celebrating a new Deadbeats album and the group's fiftieth anniversary. Strike realized it was a set-up,<sup>131</sup> threatened Oakden, and rose to leave. Oakden taunted Strike with his having been conceived in public, rock-star on groupie. Strike moved to punch him but instead struck Robin who had reached to grab his arm. Her nose was broken, her eyes blackened, and they escaped the scene by taxi before the press arrived and returned to the Agency office. There in the dark office, over curry and generous doses of whisky, the remorseful Strike by way of apology at last told Robin about Rokeby's call on Valentine's Day with the badgering texts from his half-siblings about the party he refused to attend. He shared, too, Charlotte Campbell-Ross's suicide attempt on Easter and how his calls had saved her life. Robin told him about why Matt had suddenly agreed to a divorce and they shared thoughts about children. Strike, after the internal soliloquy mentioned above, revealed to her in the darkness that she was his "best mate." She told him the feeling was "mutual" and both had thoughts about having sex in Strike's bedroom a floor above the office. Enter Barclay who turned on the lights, ending any thoughts of intimacy beyond Anteros. Both Strike and Ellacott are separately thrilled, however, to have learned that they shared profound feelings for each other.

Throughout *Troubled Blood*, a new Agency contractor, Saul Morris, had been the "false Cupid" to Robin, which is to say, only interested in her as a potential sex partner and forever touching her inappropriately and making suggestive comments. In a drunken exchange of texts at Christmas while she was at her family's home in Massam, he had even sent her a photo of his erect penis. She elected not to tell Strike at that time because of his problems in Cornwall and the Agency being short-staffed.

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<sup>131</sup> Trickster Hermes is the messenger and servant of Zeus so it is credible that Oakden brought Strike there on Rokeby's orders; both their names are tied to oak trees, a symbol of the Tree of Life and an Odin signature, the Nordic equivalent of Zeus. At the interview's end Oakden revealed detailed information about Strike's conception that is not public knowledge and which he may have learned from the best source, Strike's biological father.

Only moments after Barclay had turned on the lights, when he and Strike had gone into the inner office to change the week's schedule, Morris had surprised Robin from behind by grabbing her at the waist. She slammed the back of her head into his face, stomped on his foot with her high heel, and turned on him with a knife from the sink. When Strike and Barclay re-entered the main office, she explained what he had done that year and she was "done. I'm not working with him anymore. I want him gone" (738). Exit Morris.<sup>132</sup>

Deploying the mythic elements of light in the darkness and a mortal woman bearing a knife to protect herself from the false Cupid, the lover who only wants sex without commitment or selfless love, Rowling-Galbraith re-invented the Cupid and Psyche myth in celebration of Anteros, Strike's remorseful, respectful love. Robin's next move reflects the same theme.

Robin to this point in the series had been deferential to Strike, though her partner not her boss, to the point of being obsequious. After the light-and-knife night of epiphanies and liberation, though, she decided to approach in disguise a senescent mobster at St. Peter's, the nursing home where his dangerous sons have placed him. This was expressly against Strike's express direction, but Robin escaped a close encounter with Luca Ricci, who made a surprise visit to his father and found Robin in his room, a perilous meeting from which she gathered important evidence. Strike exploded on learning what she had done and it is weeks later before she confronted him with his hypocrisy and double standards, in which confrontation he at last yielded to her arguments and allowed that he had been unfair. At story's end, in celebration of their successful resolution of the Margot Bamborough case, Strike gave Robin the birthday gift of whatever perfume she wanted; together they decided on

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<sup>132</sup> Morris' name has an alchemical meaning that will be explored in the next chapter.

“Narciso” as her new scent to replace “Philosychos,” literally ‘love of figs’ but assonant with the ‘loving soul,’ Robin-Psyche’s previous fragrance (cf Granger 2021a).

Translated into the language of the ‘Cupid and Psyche’ myth, this episode is the story equivalent of the last Venereal trial of Psyche, in which she must take a box to the Underworld and return with a beauty-refresher gift from Persephone for Venus, who claimed her own has been depleted in having to care for the wounded Cupid. She told Psyche, literally, to go to hell. This out-of-this-world demand was impossible for a mortal to survive. Psyche despaired accordingly and she climbed a tower to commit suicide. The ‘Far-Seeing Tower’ came to life, however, and intervened with instructions for going to hell *and* coming back. She must, in brief, journey without feminine pity and ignore the traps set by Venus to engage her sympathy so she will not be able to travel successfully to and from Persephone with her assigned packages. Psyche must walk by the lame man with sticks in a cart, she must ignore the dead man in the river Styx, and she must not speak to the weaving women on her descent or return. Forewarned, she was pitiless and succeeded in entering and escaping Hell.

Robin's foray to St Peter's, a colloquialism for the ‘pearly gates’ and the afterlife, and her meeting there with a dangerous criminal whose name and behavior are both Luciferian, are the Strike novel equivalents of Psyche's journey to Hades. The pitiless aspect is her uncharacteristic, masculine disregard for what Strike had said in order to do the hard, right, and risk-laden thing to solve the case. This borderline selfish behavior and her refusal to apologize to Strike, but demanding he see it her way, is a sea-change from what she told Strike on Valentine's Day about herself in their street side battle:

“Now I've got to go back in there, and make it all right, soothe everyone's feelings...”

“No you haven't,” Strike contradicted her. “Go to fucking bed if you –”

“It's. What. I. DO!” shouted Robin, thumping herself hard on the sternum with each word. (497)

It is this new pitiless, hard dimension to Robin that the pair acknowledged and celebrated in ‘Narciso,’ a perfume whose name symbolizes self-awareness, a benign narcissism, and the consequent confidence to insist on justice.

In the myth at this point feckless Eros, the false Cupid, was in his mother's care. Only Psyche's mistake in judgment soon after escaping Hell moved him to leave Venus and take action to save Psyche and to make her immortal. Strike as Anteros, the true Cupid or *Logos* love, did not return to Venus, which is to say to Charlotte, though his ex had sent him a naked photo of herself on his birthday, texted him on Christmas when he was alone and at his physical and emotional nadir, and blackmailed him emotionally with self-pitying text messages from Symonds House. Strike played the role of fixed spirit then as he does to Robin-Psyche but in this case to Charlotte-Venus. He did this in sufficiently *Logos* anterotie, which is to say, dispassionate even apathetic fashion, that she rose from the dead (she had said she was “in hell” in her last phone call). She accused him, albeit with admiration, at story's end of only doing what he would have done for anybody, with which he agreed; his love of the good is greater than his love for any person now, except for Robin, the soul seeking perfection. That soul has been transformed in chaste love for Anteros, the selfless *Logos* lover.

This interpretation of the ‘Cupid and Psyche’ myth as it has been re-imagined by Rowling-Galbraith, is, as mentioned, in keeping with Spenser scholarship and the tenets of Shakespearean romance psychomachia. Having explored two myths with Robin as the soul and Strike as the fixed spirit, it is important to note that Rowling embeds a narrative parallel to *The Faerie Queen's* first book in which exteriorized battle of the soul's interior Strike plays the seeking and suffering soul in transformation and Robin the Desdemona or Cordelia fixed perfection that guides him.

- **Una and the Redcrosse Knight**

*Faerie Queen's* first book bears reviewing because it serves as something of a template not only of Strike's Redcrosse Knight adventure in 2014 but also of the missing person case, Margot Bamborough's disappearance in 1974, that he is trying to solve. The first book of Spenser's epic allegory has twelve cantos in which Redcrosse passes through the stages of transformation leading from election to sanctification according to the Protestant understanding of Spenser's time. Heale described this six stage "Paradigm of salvation" as a process beginning with election, calling and repentance, continuing through justification and mortification by "the intervention of grace," ending in "regeneration" and sanctity:

Such in outline is the Protestant 'paradigm of salvation', a story certainly on an epic scale and fraught with great spiritual drama. Spenser's Redcrosse is a type of the elect Christian. Through his initial errings and wanderings; in Orgoglio's dungeon, his 'gulf of perdition', where Grace intervenes; through his Repentance and Justification and his instruction in the course of Sanctification in the House of Holiness; and in his final defeat of Satan, he exemplifies the drama of salvation the reader might have already experienced, or might hope to face. (Heale, 20-21)

The Knight sets out with Una on a white donkey and their dwarf on a quest to free her mother and father, a King and Queen, from the castle in which a dragon is keeping them prisoner. The two are separated in the first canto and have independent if related adventures before their reunion in canto eight. Redcrosse is repeatedly broken in consequence of his pride but by book's end has been sufficiently tutored and transformed in the faith that he defeats the dragon after a three day battle.

Parallels with the story-line of *Troubled Blood* are sufficiently numerous and exact that a more detailed review of *Queen's* first twelve cantos is in order.

Redcrosse succeeds in his first fight with the monster Error in a sylvan cave but is deceived by the evil sorcerer Archimago into doubting the chastity of Una from whose company he departs (canto 1). He falls in with Fidessa, the wicked Duessa in disguise. The maid and knight move in different directions,



though she is ever seeking her true knight (2). Una pursues Redcrosse to the House of Abessa but is also tricked by Archimago who takes the form of her departed champion; Sansloy defeats the false Redcrosse and captures Una (3). Redcrosse and Fidessa travel to the House of Pride, where the knight meets with Lucifera and her Councillors, the Seven Deadly Sins, and does battle in a tournament with Sansjoy. He defeats Sansjoy but Duessa, with her companion the Night, travels to Hell where the shade of Aesculapius revives her favorite (4, 5). Una is rescued from Sansloy by the Satyrs and by Satyrane but they are deceived again by Archimago who takes them to Sansloy; Una flees as Satyrane and Sansloy battle (6). At the first book's turn in canto 7, Redcrosse removes the armor, sword, and shield which protect him, is seduced and poisoned by Duessa, and defeated by the monster Orgoglio, who becomes Duessa's lover and champion. He gifts her with a seven headed dragon steed (Revelations 13:1) which she rides as the Whore of Babylon, and imprisons Redcrosse. The dwarf escapes to Una and they both find Prince Arthur (7). Arthur defeats Orgoglio and Ignorance, saves Redcrosse, and disrobes Duessa to reveal her as a "loathly, wrinkled hag" (8). Arthur tells his story and about the beloved Faerie Queen he serves. Redcrosse and Una encounter Trevisan, a victim of Despair, whom Redcrosse naively confronts; he is only saved from suicide himself by Una's intervention (9). Una takes the weak and failing Redcrosse to the House of Holiness hospital, where Caelia, her three daughters named for Faith, Hope, and Charity, with six other personified virtues and the seven Bead Men restore the broken knight by allegorical training. By canto's end, he climbs a mountain for Contemplation from which height he is privileged to see the New Jerusalem, a sign of his regeneration and sanctification post mortification. Redcrosse here learns that he is George, patron saint of England, whose Redcrosse will be that country's standard (10). At last in canto 11, he does battle with the dragon who has Una's mother and father, the King and Queen of Eden, prisoner in the castle. He is defeated the first day but falls into the Well of Life, whose waters restore him. He loses again in the second day but his broken body providentially lands near the Tree of Life whose balm heals all his wounds. St George slays the

dragon on the third day (11). The first book ends with the King and Queen restored, Una and Redcrosse betrothed (though the knight must serve Gloriana his patron for six years before their nuptials), and Archimago is imprisoned but ready to escape.

The discussion thus far in the critical community about the place of Spenser's *Faerie Queen* in the *Troubled Blood* story has largely turned on the parallels between Robin and Strike with the epic's Britomart and Artégall (Groves 2020, Baird-Hardy 2020). As important as those parallels are in understanding the romantic story-line of the series, Redcrosse and Una deserve more attention; Strike, unknowingly of course, is both investigating a disappearance akin to *Faerie Queen's* first book as well as living a parallel St George existence himself. In something like meta-fiction cubed, Strike is within a book whose title and more than eighty epigraphs are taken from *The Faerie Queen*, he is investigating a crime in which the victim lived a life (and met her death) in parallel with the adventures and characters of *The Faerie Queen's* first book, and his life during this investigation becomes, in addition to being Anteros to Robin's Psyche, per Spenser the Redcrosse Knight of book one to her Una as well. In the narrative itself, epigraphs aside, only the surfeit of St. John's crosses and the Cratylic names act there as hints or clues that this spiritual allegory and inter- and intra-textual gymnastics is happening.

To begin, Margot Bamborough, the GP who disappeared in 1974, was a female Redcrosse, whose pride and "*Marmite* kind of" (98) feminism lead to her murder. That her life is meant to be read as an allegory along Spenserian lines is evident in her life having been dedicated to serving her parents who are imprisoned by disability and poverty, that her best friend was named Oonaugh, and that 'Margot' means 'Pearl,' perhaps the first English allegorical poem of note and a cryptonym pointing to her fate. 'Bamborough,' according to Rowling's preferred reference text, *The Oxford Dictionary of British Place*

*Names*,<sup>133</sup> means “stronghold of a queen named Bebbe,” i.e., Elizabeth, the patron of *Faerie Queen* (Mills, A. D., 39). Margot fell as did Redcrosse to carnal pleasures, she with artist Paul Satchwell, then to Pride. She married into a much wealthier and Catholic family; her husband’s name, Roy Phipps, translates as ‘King Phillip,’ the Spanish and Catholic King whose armada Queen Elizabeth’s fleet had defeated only three years before the first version of *Faerie Queen* was published. The marriage was an unhappy one and their manor home, though luxurious, has touchstones of Redcrosse’s battle with Sansjoy (“without joy”), most notably a statue of Aesculapius, the god of healing, to whom Duessa and Night travel to Hell with the defeated Sanjoy for his restoration. Oonaugh described her friend Margot as “miserable” in the weeks before her disappearance (276).

Margot met with Satchwell twice and he was as false as Duessa was with Redcrosse in canto 7 of Book 1 of *Faerie Queen*. She fell, however, not again to sexual sin but, as Redcrosse did, to Pride (‘Orgoglio’ is an Italian word for pride). Margot told her husband and her best friend Oonaugh that her experience in giving birth to her daughter Anna had changed her feminist views on abortion (274; 429-430).

This was not the case. Margot coached a young pregnant woman, a receptionist at the St. John’s Clinic in relationship with a gangster, to have an abortion lest she be trapped in a marriage to an abusive man. The Spenserian allegory, as uncomfortable as this is to postmoderns, suggests that Margot’s murder was a judgment by God for this failing because of the circumstances in the clinic on the day of her disappearance. A woman from a traveler or ‘Gypsy’ family came in just as the office is closing for the day and Margot was headed out to meet with Oonaugh. Kim Sullivan in the novel’s denouement explained what had happened based on notes found in Margot’s bag. “[The patient’s] full name was Theodosia Loveridge and she was from a traveler family. Margot suspected an ectopic pregnancy and

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<sup>133</sup> The book appears on the Robert-Galbraith.com Front Page in a stack of other reference works Rowling uses.

wanted to ring an ambulance, but Theo said her boyfriend would take her. Margot's notes suggest Theo was scared of her family knowing she was pregnant" (916-917).

The mysterious last patient is only known as "Theo" throughout the novel, which means "by God" or "from God." Her full name, using Rowling's preferred surname reference text, means "God's Gift-Beloved Ruler" (Reaney, 277). Margot's decision not to call an ambulance or to speak to Theo's boyfriend to explain to him what an ectopic pregnancy involved meant Theo's all but certain death. Along allegorical lines of Spenser's times, God appeared to Margot Bamborough after she had facilitated the death of an unborn child for the convenience of her receptionist in order to test the doctor's concern for women (Oonaugh has explained that her friend was an atheist "through and through"), her faith being in feminism. Margot failed this meeting with God/Theo which god died as a result of the doctor's decision to see her friend; Janice Beattie, the novel's Janus figure or Duessa, captured and murdered Bamborough on her way to the pub.

Bamborough's demise as Redcrosse takes place at the equivalent of Orgoglio's defeat of the Knight and his being poisoned by Duessa. Duessa was rewarded by Orgoglio or Pride with the steed the Whore of Babylon rides in the Book of Revelation (13:1). DI Talbot, practicing invocational magic at the height of his psychotic break, attempted to raise the spirit of the dead Dr Bamborough and succeeded, in his own mind at least, in raising the 'Whore of Babalon,' whom he saw as the demonic servant of Baphomet. If he had read less Alastair Crowley and more Edmund Spenser, he (and Strike and Ellacott who see his drawing in the 'True Book') would have recognized Duessa, the poisoner of Book 1, Canto 7, and her seven headed beast, Orgoglio's steed. They all attempt to read the embedded *Faerie Queen* in *Troubled Blood* using astrological tools of interpretation, which, though on the surface preposterous, is essential to understanding Spenser; both Alastair Fowler and Dame Frances Yates, though they differ in

their assignments of *Queen's* seven books to their corresponding planet, agree that the allegorical epic is built upon an astrological scaffolding (Fowler 1964, 63-236; Yates 2001, 117-119).

Margot Bamborough was a heroic if godless soul, in the psychomachic reading of her story as soul seeking spirit, was captured and murdered because of her “Marmite” nature and pride on her way to see Oonaugh, the Una character, who that night is called to return to the worship and service of God. Oonaugh, who became an Anglican priest, had protected Margot the precious soul from Satchwell, but was unable to save her from the consequences of pride. The characters inside *Troubled Blood* think that Margot was killed by Creed, the story stand-in for Spenser’s dragon at the end of *Queen's* book one; she, however, had not made it past *Queen's* canto seven.

Margot had a daughter she named Anna, one suggestive of her best friend Oonaugh and Spenser’s Una. Anna is almost forty years old at the start of *Troubled Blood* and, having been told by a psychic medium that she would receive “a leading” soon to her mother's whereabouts, acted on the seeming coincidence of seeing Cormoran Strike, detective, in a Cornwall pub. She looked like Una who is described in *Queen* as having a pale face and wearing a black stole over her head. Anna “had a long, pale face and her dark, shoulder-length hair was streaked with gray” (5). “Her large gray eyes shone palely in her long face. She had an air of intensity, even of fanaticism, about her in the half-light, like a medieval martyr” (15). When Strike told Anna how unlikely it was that the Agency would find Margot, she thanked him but in such a way that “he had the feeling that he had disappointed her, that she’d hoped he would make her a promise of the truth, that he would swear upon his honor to do what everyone else had failed to do” (52).

However great the resemblance and as chivalric and medieval as that seems, it is Robin who serves as Strike's Una on his unwitting Redcrosse spiritual quest. In parallel with the Knight and his maid, Robin

and Strike for the first time in the series are separated for long periods because of Strike's commitments to the Nancarrowes in Cornwall as his Aunt Joan dies and the torrential rains that fall throughout *Blood* trap him there. Robin has her epiphany in parallel with Oonaugh's before her Knight confronts Orgoglio and is present in Strike's meeting with the monster at the American bar; Oakden and Rokeby both have names signifying 'oak trees' and Orgoglio's fearsome weapon is an oak club the size of a tree.<sup>134</sup> Robin as fixed spirit kept Strike, the *megalopsychos*, great-souled or proud man, from hitting Oakden, which would have meant his arrest, and then counseled him in the Agency office about sharing his burdens with her in conversation. In remorse, regret, and love, he consented.

Una guided her Redcrosse to his transformation in the House of Holiness, and, after instruction there in humility, the cure to his pride, he is able to see his destiny as St George, patron saint of England. Robin trains Strike in humility herself, not only by her example, but in forcing him repeatedly to see what an arrogant, selfish hypocrite he could be: in the street after the Valentine's Day dinner debacle, in the office after the American Bar near disaster, and by her refusal to apologize or back down about having gone to St Peter's to interview Ricci. Strike as a soul in transformation may not be destined to be a saint, but he is moved after his training in humility to sing 'The Song of the Western Men' in recognition of his Cornish identity, something he denied having in the novel's first chapter conversation with Polworth.

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<sup>134</sup> *The Faerie Queen* I, vii:

So growen great through arrogant Delight  
 Of th' high Descent, whereof he was yborn,  
 And through presumption of his matchless dight,  
 All other Powers and Knighthood he did scorn.  
 Such now he marcheth to this Man forlorn,  
 And left to loss: his stalking Steps are staid  
 Upon a snaggy Oak, which he had torn  
 Out of his Mother's Bowels, and it made  
 His mortal Mace, wherewith his Foe-men he dismay'd.

Robin as Strike's Una, too, is responsible for preparing him to meet the dragon at story's end. She clandestinely petitioned Broadmoor for access to Creed using her Ministry contacts from *Lethal White* and interviewed Brian Tucker, from whom she gained the maps of the Well and the Forest that proved essential in solving Creed's riddle to Strike. The Redcrosse Knight is succored after his first day of battle with the dragon in the Well of Life and after the second by the Tree of Life.

Only by being broken, as Redcrosse was in his fall to Duessa and Orgoglio, and forsaking his pride, confessing and apologizing to Robin for abusing her at the Valentine's Day dinner party, for hitting her instead of Oakden at the American Bar, and for refusing to treat her as his equal as an investigator was he transformed and capable of transcending his positive bias to see the Nurse is the killer and to slay the dragon Dennis Creed. All the witnesses the duo cannot find appeared *ex machina* in the immediate wake of Strike's forsaking his pride and pledging his troth to the story equivalents of Una and Britomart, his partner Robin Ellacott.

Strike thanked her on her birthday not only with the Narciso perfume discussed above but also with a Donkey balloon, a token both of Una's riding a donkey, no doubt, and of Robin's fond childhood memories of riding one at Skegness. He took her to the Ritz for champagne as well, to show he remembered everything they had said the night he confessed she was his "best mate" and she agreed. Lings wrote, as noted, that "the essential feature of man's primordial state was the union of his soul with the Spirit; and one of the most universal symbols of the regaining of that state is marriage, the union of lovers." He mentioned the Redcrosse Knight specifically on this point: "A perfect woman [may stand for the Spirit]... and in *The Faerie Queen*, the sequel to the Red Crosse Knight's victory over the dragon is his marriage to the Lady Una" (Lings 1984, 42-43). The Knight and Una are betrothed, not married at the end of Book One, and this is a marker that there is a difference between

the Earthly and Celestial paradises, the ends respectively of the Lesser and the Greater Mysteries, of salvation and sanctification. As Lings wrote elsewhere,

[There is a difference] between betrothal and marriage. The Earthly Paradise is not the complete union of soul and Spirit but the leaning down as it were of Spirit to soul, of Heaven to earth. In the Earthly Paradise, symbolized... by the betrothal..., Everyman has reached the fulness of earthly possibility. It is therefore at this point that [the betrothed must be prepared] for the Greater Mysteries of the Celestial Paradise by telling them all the glories of earthly life are nothing more than a dream. (Lings 1984, 123)

Una, the Spirit in this relationship, is named for the One, “equivalent to the Centre, to the non-manifest point, to the creative power of the ‘unmoved mover’” (Cirlot 1991, 244). “The Center is an image of God” (Scott 2009, 115). Note that Una as Spirit is fixed and perfect, and her betrothal to the Knight is an affirmation of his soul’s purification and near readiness for perfect union with the Spirit. Robin and Cormoran have not yet pledged troth but this is the path of spiritual transformation the novels describing the changes and growth in their relationship is traveling.

### C. The Debate

The specific lines of the King’s Cross dialogue in *Deathly Hallows* between Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore that Rowling said she “waited seventeen years to write” (deRek) and that are “the key” to the series turns on what is “real” and “not real:”

“Tell me one last thing,” said Harry. Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?”

Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry’s ears though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure.

“Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?” (*Deathly Hallows*, 723)

Rowling echoed these weighted lines in a Strike-Ellacott conversation about astrology in *Troubled Blood*:

“You’re being affected!” she said. “Everyone knows their star sign. Don’t pretend to be above it.”



Strike grinned reluctantly, took a large drag on his cigarette, exhaled, then said, “Sagittarius, Scorpio rising, with the sun in the first house.”

“You’re --” Robin began to laugh. “Did you just pull that out of your backside, or is it real?”

“Of course, it’s not fucking *real*,” said Strike. “*None* of it’s real, is it?” (*Troubled Blood*, 242; highlighting in original)

Though Strike denied there the traditional hierarchal ontology and epistemology implicit in astrology that Dumbledore affirmed to Potter at their meeting in limbo, the question is the same. What is real and how can we know it? The debate Rowling stages in her work is between the traditional and theophanic understanding on the one hand of a visible world with a spiritual dimension that demands an "obsession" with "morality and mortality" (Parker, Rose) and on the other the conventional materialist perspective of our historical period. Potter in the finale of his seven book spiritual journey, after sacrificing himself in love for his friends, learned that what is real is the *logos* principle "inside my head" and, as Dumbledore insisted, the cause of everything existent, Reality itself.

Cormoran Strike seems to be on his way to this realization. Robin's question to him, playing Harry to Strike's Dumbledore, switched out “backside” for “head” in her question about what is real, which suggests that his answer is either not his final one or just incorrect. Strike is not only a mythological “avenger of murder” (*Silkworm* 348) but a seeker, not in the Quidditch role, but one who longs to know. In their argument consequent to her speaking with Luca Ricci at St Peter’s, Robin spelled that out and Strike reluctantly agreed:

“We wouldn’t know any of this if I hadn’t gone to St. Peter’s—” [Robin said.]

“We’d be better off not knowing it,” Strike snapped back. “Shanker said to me months back, ‘If Mucky’s the answer, you need to stop asking the question.’ Same goes for Luca, in spades.”

“You don’t mean that,” said Robin. “I know you don’t. You’d never choose not to know.”

She was right, but Strike didn’t want to admit it. (767)

This is especially evident in his dialogue at story's end with his dragon-equivalent, the mass murderer Dennis Creed, in Broadmoor. It is a rhetorical chess game, as Strike made clear in their first back and forth by explaining that he recognized Creed's opening as a chess move, the King's Gambit (849). Creed, for his part, said his aim was in essence defamiliarization, with the world in general as well as in dialogue with Strike.

“Why won't you tell me which so-called victim you're interested in?” [Creed asked]

“‘So-called’ victim?”

“Arbitrary labels,” said Creed. “‘Victim.’ ‘Patient.’ This one deserves pity... this one gets caged. Maybe those women I killed were the real patients, and I'm the true victim?”

“Novel point of view,” said Strike.

“Yeah, well, does people good to hear novel points of view,” said Creed, pushing his glasses up his nose again. “Wake them up, if they're capable of it.” (850)

Strike here, as Redcrosse Knight – Creed mentioned Strike's status as “a decorated soldier in the British Army” – is the reader and Creed the writer. Creed quoted Aleister Crowley, Friedrich Nietzsche, and H. G. Wells in their conversation to advance his aim of corrupting him and winning him to the ‘dark side.’ His Cratylic name means ‘Dionysian Belief’ and he is an evangelical nihilist. Strike successfully identified each author Creed quoted, which revealed he is familiar with the perspective; when Creed expressed surprise at this, Strike said, “We're all Satanists on the sly” (850). Strike, however, is not won over or manipulated by Creed; instead, by a deft deception via misdirection, Creed is tricked into revealing the location of a murder victim's body and shocked to learn that Strike rather than the psychotic manipulator had controlled the narrative and its ‘twist’ finish. Strike-Redcrosse's victory in Broadmoor over the Creed dragon and the detective's seeming betrothal to his Robin-Una at the end of *Troubled Blood*, though not the series finish, suggests his seeking will finish much as Harry's did, in the discovery of the real in his identity as the heart or Spirit in relation to Robin's soul (and vice-versa).

#### IV. Toy Transitional Object in *Christmas Pig*

Rowling's children's Christmas story, *The Christmas Pig*, was published in October 2021, and, though it became a best-seller for several months in the UK and abroad, drew little critical attention. If there is a single text, however, that crystallizes everything about the author as a writer working from her core issues with defamiliarizing intention and specifically one with Dantean ambitions with respect to her readers, it is *Pig*.

The story in brief is that Jack Jones, a seven year old boy whose parents have divorced and his mother remarried, has only one great friend, a plush toy pig named Dur Pig or DP, in whom he confides all his thoughts and fears. It is DP alone who understands the boy completely and loves him faithfully and unconditionally. Jack's older step-sister Holly throws this beloved toy out of the family car window on a Christmas Eve shopping trip. DP is lost and Jack is determined to find him. He wakes up that night to go back to the motorway to find DP but the Things in his bedroom explain to him that lost toys go to the Land of the Lost. Christmas Pig or CP, the toy pig Holly bought for Jack as a replacement, volunteers to guide Jack in the Land of the Lost to find DP, something only possible that night, the "Night of Miracles and Lost Causes." If not back by midnight, they will be stuck there forever in the realm of the satanic Loser.

Jack agrees to take the risk and shrinks down to CP's height. The boy and his replacement toy enter the Land of the Lost, a world beneath the Land of the Living ('Up There') in which lost Things wait for the wooden sky to open and a shaft of light from above to raise them back up consequent to their being found; status in this underworld is entirely related to the depth of feeling and attachment a human owner has for the object or idea. Jack and CP travel together through Misland, Disposable, Bother-It's Gone, the Wastes of the Unlamented, and the City of the Missed. Jack arrives at the Island of the Beloved by himself where he finds DP, but learns that DP can only return with him to the Land of the

Living because CP has surrendered himself to the Loser as something like an atoning sacrifice. Jack leaves DP on his island paradise to rescue CP. With the help of Santa, he travels to the Loser's Lair and frees all the Surplus, unwanted Things, about to be eaten there by the heartless robotic Loser. Jack, CP, and Broken Angel, with Santa's help are found beneath the Christmas tree and return to the Land of the Living. Jack and Holly reconcile and CP weeps as Jack embraces him as the boy's best friend that night in bed as he had DP.

As noted in the thesis' biography chapter, Rowling has admitted that the story was inspired by events in the life of her Murray family<sup>135</sup> and a plush toy turtle her own mother made for her that she still owns. If she had not confessed these parallels, they could have been inferred because the story is about a woman who leaves her abusive husband, a man living overseas, and then marries a doctor. She has a single child who struggles with the offspring of the doctor step-father, an older daughter. The story's real world or 'Land of the Living' beginning and end is not an exact retelling of Rowling's marriage to Dr. Neil Murray and the relationships of her daughter Jessica Arantes and the Murray children, but the ages of the older sister and younger brother in *Pig's* blended family do match up. This is a very personal story to Rowling, obviously, and shows how much she has reflected on the meaning of toys, the psychology of children and parents, and her own work as a writer.

The lost Poem that saves Jack and CP in *Bother-It's-Gone* tells her friend Pretense, in response to his accusation that because she is "completely made up" she lies as much as he does, that "*Great poems tell the truth – your fibs aren't art!*" She completes her rhyming couplet by excusing Pretense to Jack with the aside, "*He can't help lying, but he's good at heart!*" (128). Art is not just for distraction or

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<sup>135</sup>Most notably, the plush toy pigs belonging to her son David, the eye 'surgery' one of these toys undergoes, the finding of a blue bunny doll in a garden by daughter Mackenzie Jean ('Jeanie' in the book), and a lost pair of diamond earrings. Rowling has said, too, that she is always losing things, whence her imaginary 'Land of the Lost.' In the thanks she gives to her family in the last paragraph of the book's Acknowledgments page, she wrote that "any resemblance between the Things in these pages and the Things our family may have lost or found is, of course, entirely intentional" (273).

entertainment, Rowling relays, but to “*tell the truth*,” conjoined with the “*heart*” the throne of Truth in the human soul, and that this is salvific, as Poem has rescued the two pilgrims from the city’s cruel Loss Adjusters. Rowling is taking the material from her Lake and transforming it in her Shed’s CBT-crucible and Favorite Writers alembic into an other-worldly myth of personal transformation. The “debate” deliberately set up here is whether the boy Jack’s adventures in the Land of the Lost *really* happened or were ‘only a dream,’ a question, as with the dialogue at King’s Cross, that turns on ‘what is real.’ Rowling’s answer, embedded in the story and experienced imaginatively by her readers, is her defamiliarizing aim.

#### **A. Jack Jones as Johannine ‘Heart’**

The family in *Christmas Pig* features the three things a biographically focused reading of Rowling expects: the long-suffering mother with divine patience and love, the Bad Dad, and the Peter-John distinction. Besides the loving mother and delinquent father, the boy hero is named ‘Jack Jones,’ both of which names derive from ‘John.’ The Petrine authorities of the story in the Land of the Lost are the satanic Loser and his many agents and vassals in this underworld existing tangentially and somehow beneath the Land of the Living. The Loss Adjusters, Captures, and servants like Power and Ambition are all about the law and authority rather than justice and truth. Scissors, the heartless Loss Adjustor who escorts lost Things from Misland to Disposable, conflates the cruelty of the Loser’s dominion with the truth, saying, “You disobey the rules, you become Surplus, and Surplus gets eaten, always has, always will. That’s the law” (77). Injustice, in other words, is reality. Later, after being confronted by Specs for his unkindness to Lunchbox, Scissors replies, “Kind? It’s the truth. Things need to know their place. That’s how we all stay out of trouble” (92). Conform to authority and Petrine power in order to survive are the Law and the workaday truth that Jack and CP, the Johannine heroes, with help from Poem and Compass, work to overthrow in their search for DP.

The engine of the story is Jack's love for his toy DP, an attachment that moves him to risk his life by entering the Land of the Lost in a race against the clock and sustains through him all the hardships he encounters there. This love, though, is the shadow of the greater love in the story, Jack's mother's love for him. This love is unconditional, selfless, and sacrificial as Lily Potter's was for Harry and as Leda Strike's was for Cormoran. Judy Jones, unlike those mothers in Rowling stories, does not die, but her love does protect Jack as well as animate his search for DP. Rowling made that clear in a statement she made to the *Daily Mail* about the psychology of toys and within the *Christmas Pig* story. She said:

Psychologists call these treasured toys 'transitional objects', which can soothe children and act as a comforting stand-in for a parent when needed.

That's quite a clinical way of looking at it, though.

I see them as invested with a certain kind of magic. They may come to us formed, but we remake them in our own image, investing them with characteristics of our own and idealised personalities. (*Daily Mail* 2021)

A toy, in brief, as Rowling understands it, is both an exteriorization of the child's inner psychic state and a "comforting stand-in for a parent when needed." That in Jack's case this parent is his mother is made clear on the opening page of the story.

Jack Jones has exteriorized his mother's love into his psycho-spiritual symbiote or 'transitional object,' Dur Pig or DP. The reader is told in *Pig's* first paragraph that, when "very young," the boy "fell asleep every night sucking Dur Pig's ear" (1). DP is a pacifier in the sense that he takes the place and comes to represent his mother's nipple, the source of his union with and nourishment from his loving point of origin. When DP is defenestrated by Holly, Jack only wants his mother to return home and becomes unhinged in being separated not only from mum but his totem for her love. She, of course, is the person in the finale who finds him beneath the tree in the only chapter, 'Home,' of Part 7, and it is her scent,

the “trace of mum’s perfume” on DP and CP that is our talisman of what the toys represent throughout the book.

Rowling repeatedly connects this maternal love with redemption and salvation in the story. When the boy and the Pig are trapped by the Crusher the Hob-Nailed Boot in *Bother-Its-Gone*, it is thoughts of Jack’s mother’s love and his connection to this love with his toy pig that saves him:

The boot came hopping nearer, and he was soon so close that Jack could see how two of his shoelace holes had become cruel little eyes. As the nails in his sole glinted in the moonlight, Jack thought suddenly of Mum. If he were stamped on and broken by Crusher, he’d never see her again. Without realizing what he was doing, Jack reached out and grabbed the Christmas Pig’s trotter.

“Wait!” the Christmas Pig begged Crusher, gripping Jack’s hand in return. (125)

CP’s argument that Crusher needs to wait on “The thing that will change everything” delays the Loss Adjuster who, alone among his fellows, really doesn’t think about Up There or his chances of being found one day, just long enough for “a shaft of golden light” to fall “from the sky above” and for this “spotlight” or “golden column” to drag him quite unwillingly “upward toward the Land of the Living” (125-126).

When the Blue Bunny sacrifices himself at the gates of the City of the Missed by acting as a diversion to distract the guards there, his selfless immolation – the Loss Adjusters are certain to hand him over to the Loser as Surplus – seems to cause the sky to open. Jack and CP enter the City of the Missed without problem as the guards listen to the child, Jeanie, finding the toy Up There and begging her mother to let her keep it. Mom gives in with obvious recognition of the child’s maternal instincts and the Blue Bunny is, in the words of one of the guards, “saved” (170-174).

Rowling as discussed in the biography chapter told a group of young readers in a chat sponsored by Scholastic that this finding actually happened; her daughter Mackenzie Jean found a dirty blue bunny in a neighbor's garden and she allowed the daughter to keep it (Scholastic 2021). Note that Rowling has given her own daughter a name derived from 'John' and the story correspondent a similarly resonant Johannine name. It is not only Jack who has exteriorized this unconditional love in his toy; Rowling's fictional subcreation itself per the *logos* theology of the Prologue to the Gospel of St John and the first epistle of St John seems to the creation of a God who is love (John 1:3, 1 John 4:7-8), a sacrificial, selfless love whose best analogue in time and space is a mother's love for her child.

This is the symbolic, anagogical, and defamiliarizing meaning of Jack's toy pigs. Both DP and CP in the end are the exteriorizations of his spiritual heart, the *logos* light within everyone, which in Rowling's creative work are almost without exception physical representations of the God who is Love via story symbols of a mother's unconditional and sacrificial love. In *Christmas Pig*, CP chooses to sacrifice himself because, as DP explained to the distraught boy on the Isle of the Beloved, "[CP] knew your heart from the beginning and he believed that he could never be to you what I am. So he decided to sacrifice himself, because your happiness was more important to him than his own" (228).<sup>136</sup> The toy as "transitional object" is a "stand-in" for a mother's love per Rowling. Jack, when this sacrificial love is exteriorized in CP's sacrifice, chooses in turn to internalize that love and to sacrifice himself to save the beloved toy, which act of love in turn inspires the Surplus in the Loser's Lair with hope and happiness that liberates them all. Reunited with his mother in the Land of the Living, Jack's transformation -- from hysterical and selfish boy angry about his lost toy to a brother who forgives his

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<sup>136</sup> The chapter in which Jack learns this is tellingly titled 'The Truth,' as much a rebuke to the conformist "truth" of Scissors and a statement of the metaphysics involved as it is the revelation of CP's covert plan to save DP.



sister, embraces her replacement toy, and who understands that he can love his step-father without betraying his biological Bad Dad – is complete.

### **B. Echoes of *The Divine Comedy***

*Christmas Pig's* Land of the Lost invites allegorical interpretation. The allegorical level of meaning is one of direct correspondence and representation in story figure or event, and *Christmas Pig* has three tit-for-tats Dante readers find striking.

The first is simply that Jack's Land of the Lost is Plato's Cave, our world in this temporal life, what C. S. Lewis described as the 'Shadowlands.' Every Lost Thing, from this view, is a more realistic depiction of human existence than the day-to-day profane understanding of life in this world prevalent today. In the sub-creation in which the Loser and his servants are the ruler and the agents of his law respectively, Rowling depicts fallen existence, which is to say, Satan's realm and all the cutting, divisive instruments of evil and of Power in the world, what in the author's predominate metaphor is the Petrine dimension of human life.

Reality as such in the Land of the Lost is not in the experience of Mislaid, its three cities, or the Wastes, all of which are temporary unless the Loser consumes a Thing, but 'Up There,' the super-lunary world of light and love, a much greater plane of existence, from which every Thing is made, i.e., has its origin, and to which, except in perverse cases like the hob-nailed boot Crusher, all created Things long to return. Just as Lunchy looks longingly up at the Finding Hole in the Disposable saloon in hope of light descending to claim her, to save her, so the Things of the Land of the Lost all have as their natural and correct orientation an otherworldly focus and a consequent disdain of sorts, beyond their fear of the Loser, for the station in life and world 'down below' in which they find themselves.

This is, of course, an allegorical depiction of the traditional or theocentric understanding of Man in the World. Man is an image of God, a shadow of his greater self, an iconic quality most evident in his soul. Created by the Word of God, His Logos, and having something of this creative aspect of the Light of the World within him (John 1:3-4, 9), Man's purpose and destiny via the Creator's design is to live intentionally in hope and happiness to foster both his communion with Up There via the Creative Principle of selfless love and, in this, to insure his return to the world of Light above the Shadowlands of this temporal life. Rowling, in a 'charming Christmas story,' smuggles the traditional idea of human life and its origin and end in God through Christ past the Sleeping Dragons of the de facto atheist present and its myriad Loss Adjusters.

In this, Jack Jones' journey with CP make him a second Dante traveling through the *Commedia's* three dimensions, which is to say, an explicitly Christian allegory of the soul's journey to perfection in Spirit. With his guides the Christmas Pig, Dur Pig, and Santa as parallels to Dante's Virgil, Beatrice, and St Bernard, Jack journeys from the agonies of this life in the "Forest Dark," the straightforward path having been "lost" (*Inferno*, 1:1-3) to the Beatific vision of salvific, sanctifying spiraling light, the White Rose beyond Paradise. This end is prefigured in *Christmas Pig* by the snow which "swirled against the blackening sky outside his window while Jack waited for the house to fall completely silent" (39) the night he enters the Land of the Lost as well as by his experience with Dur Pig, Mum, and the recycling bin. Evan Willis was the first to spell out the *Divine Comedy* parallels in *Christmas Pig*:

*The Christmas Pig* is structured, to a surprising degree of detail, after Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

After the loss of a beloved (Beatrice/Dur Pig or 'DP'), Jack/Dante enters the land of perdition sometime around Christmas/Easter, where he is accompanied and guided by Christmas Pig ('CP')/Virgil through the various domains of the land of perdition (described in contrast to the Land of the Living).

After a few not-so-bad upper sections, they arrive at the city of Dis(posable), which has a foreboding entry message.

Continuing through this land, CP/Virgil is far harsher to its inhabitants than Jack/Dante is.

The ruler of this land of perdition is the Loser/Satan, who eats some of the inhabitants.

Having gone through the worst of it (the run-in with Satan/Loser in the depths of Hell/the Wastes of the Unlamented), they eventually make it out to an upper land surrounded by water, Purgatory/The City of the Missed. It is a region filled with the sound of carol/hymn singing.

Ascending from this city, Jack/Dante ascend to the borders of The Isle of the Beloved/Heaven, where Jack/Dante finally sees DP/Beatrice, only to realize somewhat belatedly that CP/Virgil is no longer with him.

Led to move beyond DP/Beatrice to a greater Love than retaining him/her would have meant, he is guided further on by Saint Nicholas/Bernard into a mystery of love represented by a vortex of circular motion.

Throughout this journey, Jack/Dante has talked along the way with numerous inhabitants who give him knowledge of the Land of the Living Jack/Dante would not have had otherwise.

This further explains the division of the book into nine sections. (Willis 2021)<sup>137</sup>

Just as Rowling told deRek she had done with Harry Potter, though, this Christian Everyman and hero is given “certain messianic traits” quite deliberately. Jack saves the Things in the Loser’s Lair — and by extension all Things in the Lands of the Lost — by being that Person who descended from Heaven in love for fallen creation, objects his love brought into their “alivened” or animated existence. He becomes their means to escape death and the Loser’s dominion by becoming the locus of their hope and faith of their greater life.

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<sup>137</sup> *Christmas Pig* has nine parts; nine being 3<sup>2</sup>, Willis suggested that, as with the *Faerie Queen* structure of *Troubled Blood*, its ‘six books with two chapters,’ so Rowling is hat-tipping Dante’s *Commedia* and its *terza rima* and thirty-three cantos in each of three books organization.

Jack, unlike Dante and his vision of the White Rose, becomes the cause of the spiraling light that literally lifts up the least of Things, the Surplus refuse, into the Up There of Heaven. The Loser's anger with the Things who cry out, "Not the Boy!" is the story-figure of the Petrine voices of this world that want all believers in God's love to despise their Creator and any longing they feel for Him as childish, what properly should be hatred of the Absolute as the cause of their current condition.

The Christian allegory, appropriate for a Christmas story, does not end, then, in its Christmas setting. As with the Nativity of Christ, however, *Pig* has as its root power not in the birth of the savior, essential as Jack's 'incarnation' as a Thing by his choice to descend into the lesser realm to save DP is, but the Paschal or salvific symbolism of the book. Christ becomes man that man might become God according to the Athanasian formula; Christ is born on the Night of Miracles and Lost Causes so the Incarnate Logos will in the end die without sin, 'beguiling the Beguiler,' and thereby become the means in that death and return to life, not to mention His harrowing of Hell, the despoiling of Hades, to the human potential for eternal life as members of His risen mystical body. [It is this membership the Loser apes in his plastering the dis-membered remains of the Things from whose bodies he has sucked the "alivened bit" to his exterior self, his luciferean, mechanistic body.] *Easter* is the heart of Rowling's *Christmas Pig*.

Rowling has been publicly modest about the aims of her work, allowing that it would be nice to think that readers will be more empathetic after reading her imaginative fiction (Wagner, D.). Dante was anything but modest or secretive in sharing his self-understanding in the letter he wrote to Cangrande about *The Divine Comedy*: "The purpose of the whole work is to remove those living in this life from the state of wretchedness and to lead them to the state of blessedness." His aim was to create a work of sacred art, a category of writing and experience that largely exists outside our understanding as profane postmoderns, but, given Rowling's esoteric artistry and clear debts to Dante, deserves serious

consideration as what she is writing as well, the ultimate in defamiliarizing experiences for postmoderns. If this were not evident in the Johannine aspects of the story or its allegorical Christian freight, it is in the story's Palace of Power psychomachia parable.

### **C. Palace Psychomachia**

To recap the embedded story start to finish, after the Blue Bunny's successful diversion at the gates of the City of the Missed, Jack and CP hunt for DP in its streets. The wily Ambition persuades them to go with her to the Palace where the King will be able to help them find their friend. CP does not trust her but, because she claims to be a friend of Happiness who had helped them enter the city proper, they follow her. It is a trap. King Power wants to turn them into the Loser, the real ruler of the Land of the Lost, in exchange for more authority and dominion. Power, though, cannot act arbitrarily; he needs to win an up or down vote on Jack and CP's fate among the residents of his palace: Power, Ambition, the six Principles, Optimism, Beauty, Memory, Hope, and Happiness. Though Ambition tries to tip the scales by locking Hope and Happiness in their rooms, the heroes win the vote 7 to 6 with support from Memory, Optimism, three of the six Principles, Hope and Happiness. Power refuses to recognize the validity of the decision and he orders his Loss Adjusters to seize Jack and CP as prisoners. Happiness blinds their pursuers and Hope, winged like an angel, flies the boy and CP to the Isle of the Beloved.

The allegory of the vote, in brief, is about which psychic capacity will be the ruling faculty of the soul. Rowling again has created a Peter and John conflict, this time in the 'up or down' vote to send Jack and CP to the Loser. The palace is a story stage for and exteriorized depiction of the drama played out in every conscious person between the inner life of love, hope, and blessedness and the path of pursuing exterior advantage and power; the players are aspects of every person who must decide if they will

serve King Power and Ambition, stand-ins for ego and individual pride, or Jack Jones and CP, the story ciphers for the Christ-like self-transcending maternal love within us.

On the side of King Power are Ambition, Beauty, and three of the six Principles. The arguments Ambition and Power advance to win these votes are the necessity of carrying out punishments according to the letter of the law regardless of the injustice involved, a payout of some kind, i.e., personal advantage, and, obscure at first but clarified in Power's rage, the threat of violence. They do their best, in addition, to lock-out voters they don't want to participate in this run-off election in the capitol building or palace.<sup>138</sup>

Memory, the mother of the nine mythological muses and a necessity for coherent thinking, is represented as a good-hearted if obviously senescent older woman. She votes for Jack and CP despite being bullied by Ambition and told by Green Beauty she is a bore because "They don't stop me from remembering. I like them" (206). Memory has a clear connection with tradition and Rowling may be suggesting only those with great recall or prodigious study of history appreciate the primacy of the Heart in the human person.

Three of the six Principles are persuaded by CP's plea that turning Jack and himself over to the Loser would be murder and "that's the worst crime of all!" Principles, who claim to be "the Things who make humans behave with honesty and decency" (199) based on their inner prompting in resistance to external temptations, clearly are not sure votes when it comes to choosing between the Petrine law and Johannine justice.

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<sup>138</sup> The story can be read as an allegorical depiction of President Trump's attempt to invalidate the 2020 election in the United States and the progressive conviction that Republicans tried to suppress voter turnout that year.

Optimism votes for Jack and CP not to be turned over though he, too, is brow-beaten by King Power. Optimism gives the first impression of superficiality and of being a glad-hander. It turns out he is only a mental posture that is sensitive first to the “deep-down, you know!” (199, 206) — and Jack and CP are the deepest aspect of the soul, that is, the Heart — so he votes that they not only be saved but also that the king “change your mind and let them live in the palace with us!” (206). He presents the possibility of Ego and Pride co-existing peacefully in the thinking of the same individual mind with the humble but all-powerful Heart and Conscience. Certainly that is an optimistic idea given the profundity of the good and evil contraries in play, akin to Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy becoming allies.

Hope and Happiness were not told about the meeting or invited by Power and Ambition. The Principles were told to stay in their rooms but elected to come because “it would have been against ourselves” to stay away. Happiness, in contrast, was locked in her room and left unaware of the vote. Both she and Hope were locked out of the Palace room in which the vote was to be held.

Ambition had told Jack and CP that she was lost by her owner, a politician, after the “small setback” of not winning a “trifling vote” (194). She clearly has counted the votes in advance, consequently, and is sure that Hope and Happiness will not be on the side of Power. The allegory is fairly transparent.

Hope is an interior virtue, one somewhat akin to Optimism but is the strength and sustenance primarily to the underdog, the person or, in this case, the faculty of soul that has little to no exterior aspect or power. It is easy to imagine Hope residing in the Heart; this attribute certainly proves to be the saving virtue Jack demonstrates having acquired in the Land of the Lost during his confrontation with the Loser in his Lair. She is the bane of Power and the friend of Happiness and the Heart.

Happiness is warmth and light, so she is representative, as are Jack and his toys, of the logos light of the world that is the inner life of every man (John 1:9). This is difficult to see at first because of the prevalent idea that happiness is getting everything desirable, especially advantage, pleasure, and power. Rowling is careful to have Happiness explain to the hide-aways in her gondola when they first enter the city that she is more of a cross between empathy and healthy self-awareness than wealth:

Jack's eyes were getting used to the extreme brightness of Happiness, and he found that if he peeped at her sideways, he could just make out the form of a smiling woman in the middle of the dazzling light.

"How were you lost?" he asked shyly.

"Through carelessness," sighed Happiness. "My owner is an actress. She's charming and talented, but she wasn't as kind as she should have been to the people she cared about, nor as hardworking as she might have been, even though she loved her job. Her gifts once brought her friends and success, but through laziness and selfishness, they slipped away and now, sadly, she has lost me, too."

"How will she get you back again?" asked the Christmas Pig.

"It will be difficult," said Happiness, "because she's looking for me in all the wrong places, and as she isn't used to admitting fault, I'm afraid I may be in the City of the Missed for a long time... perhaps forever". (181-182)

The actress is not a reflective person, is unkind even "to those she cared about," is negligent with respect to her vocation, which is to say, her defining idea, is insensitive to the spiritual light and darkness of her environment, and, worst, "she isn't used to admitting fault." These qualities expel Happiness — and all of them are the marks of someone insensitive to the logos within his or her self, the capacity to love another person as oneself, and, as noted above, to feel remorse or repentance after injuring or being insensitive to the neighbor who shares the same ontological ground. Happiness, as Ambition recognized, is a sister of Heart, more *eudaimonia* as Plato defined it, i.e. 'blessedness,' "the good composed of all good things; a power self-sufficient towards living well; consummation as



regards virtue; an utility self-sufficient for a living being” (Burges, 129) — than self-focused cheer on account of faring well and having great pleasures.

The ‘Turn them over to the Loser’ faction will not win the majority of the qualities of mind if Hope and Happiness are present, as Ambition must have anticipated, hence her attempts to have the meeting in the allegorical mind-palace about Heart without those qualities. King Power, however, our ego exteriorization as a character, is a true servant of the Loser who feels free to break the rules of His own kingdom. He sics the Palace Loss Adjusters on Jack and CP who escape them by the blinding light Happiness gives off and by Hope’s rapid and powerful intervention to save them.

If *Pig’s Compass* were telling this story, she would provide a moral or motto; this exegesis should list a simple explanation of Rowling’s allegorical decision-making process in the City of the Missed’s Palace.

- The question in play is whether Power or the Heart, Peter or John, will be the guiding concern of Everyman, whether his focus will be on the inner Up There or on worldly exterior concerns in the visible plane.
- The vote is very close because, especially today, trusting the Heart to discern what is best for the person in the long and short term rather than faculties adept to calculating privilege depends entirely on the presence of Hope and Happiness, the virtues the Power-ego will do everything to prevent having a voice in the decision.
- In the rare case that the Heart wins, fair and square, Power — the demands and concerns of exterior life, the desire for approval and confirmation from without but not above or within — will do everything to divide the Heart-servant from the Truth to be found on the Island of the Blessed.

- If Power decrees his rule overrules the law within the mind, the Heart is fed to the Loser and the Heart-within dies. The death of “the Living Boy” or Heart, akin to the murder of the ‘Boy Who Lived,’ is the spiritual death of the person and his surrender to the ephemeral understanding to be had on the horizontal plane divorced from the greater reality Up There.
- The light of Happiness and the wings of Hope deliver the Heart from the dualistic or dis-integrating forces serving ego and pride, the powers of corruption in alliance against the Heart, to a paradise well removed from the Palace of the Soul and its capacities. Heart learns ‘The Truth’ necessary to defeat the Loser-Satan, a shade of life without the inner life of love-logos, and return to the greater reality Up There in which the Heart can experience and accept the Love of the Father (mother) and of its Brother (step-sister).

This is a Medieval Morality Play, one very similar in construction to the *Chamber of Secrets*’ confrontation between Harry the Heart saving his best friend’s sister from the Memory of an Ego that never knew his mother’s love (not to mention the ties to Memory, Ambition, and Beauty, all of which are character features of *Chamber*’s Gilderoy Lockhart).

## V. Conclusion

The “key” to *Harry Potter* according to Rowling was in the King’s Cross dialogue scene between the Boy Who Lived and his late mentor, Albus Dumbledore, a conversation whose essential lines she “waited seven teen years to write” were about what is “real” and how that is known. Rowling echoed this passage in *Troubled Blood* in a back and forth about astrology between Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott. She ‘goes there’ again in *Christmas Pig* in the scene in which Jack, CP, and Blue Bunny discuss how to get into the well-guarded City of the Missed.

The Blue Bunny cannot understand why CP and Jack, whom he believes to be discarded lost objects like himself, think they can get into the City, a place only for those high-status Things who have owners Up There searching for them. Jack, before CP can intervene, explains that “Somebody I need’s in there. H’s called DP and he’s my favorite cuddly toy” (168). Blue Bunny is astounded.

For a long moment, Jack and Blue Bunny stared into each other’s eyes and then Blue Bunny let out a long sigh of amazement.

“You’re a boy,” he whispered. “You’re real.”

“He isn’t,” said the panic-stricken Christmas Pig. “He’s an action figure called --”

“It’s all right, Pig,” said Blue Bunny. “I won’t tell anybody, I promise. You really came all the way into the Land of the Lost to find your favorite toy?” he asked Jack, who nodded.

“Then I’ll be your decoy,” said Blue Bunny. “It would be an honor”. (169)

As discussed above, Bunny is inspired by Jack’s incarnation among lost Things on a salvific mission to sacrifice himself, an act of love that in turn causes his own *ex machina* and miraculous “finding” and return to the Land of the Living with Jeanie. “You’re real” is the “key” here; Rowling, as in *Deathly Hallows*, is linking consistently and surely metaphysical and ontological ground with selfless love analogous with a mother’s bond with her children, reflected here in children’s love for their “transitional objects,” what Rowling described as a “certain kind of magic,” i.e., something not subject to natural law or Petrine authority.

Her principal artistry in depicting this has been her use of psychomachia, allegories of the soul’s faculties in relation and conflict on the psychic journey to perfection in the spirit: a soul triptych in the *Harry Potter* series with Ron, Hermione, and Harry as Body, Mind, and Spirit or Heart figures, the Soul and Spirit romance in the Cormoran Strike mysteries between Strike and Ellacott, and the child and toy mirrored relationship of Johannine maternal love in *Christmas Pig*. This artistry, as defamiliarizing as it

is in a world whose readers do not think of the interior human person as ‘soul’ but as conscious and unconscious ‘mind,’ i.e., of its thinking and feeling mental aspects rather than its cardiac spirituality, is not restricted to Rowling’s allegorical surface narrative. It extends, as Nabokov would have it, to her “structure and style” as well. The next chapter in the thesis will explore her through-line of alchemical “structure and style” as the principal subliminal support of her attempts a la Dante “to remove those living in this life from the state of wretchedness and to lead them to the state of blessedness,” or more parochially, from the ruts of their mundane understanding and beliefs via CBT-esque exteriorization to a happier existence tied to the love beneath, behind, and within everything *real*. She is not didactic or moralistic in setting the “debate” between the traditional and modern views for her reader’s reflection but her surface stories, their structure and the symbol sets of her hermetic style are definitively arguing for the theocentric above the agnostic.

## Chapter 6: Literary Alchemy

### **I. Introduction**

Rowling's intentional artistry with respect to her allegorical and anagogical aims as a writer of postmodern psychomachia has fallen between the cracks of contemporary literary criticism both because of neglect of her biographical and bibliographic inspiration and an inherent blindspot in rational approaches to literature that are by definition skeptical about spiritual subjects and hermeticism. Though Rowling's first book was titled *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and featured a Headmaster who was an accomplished alchemist and friend of Nicolas Flamel, a historical rather than fictional alchemist, there has been, as noted in the critical literature review, a pronounced resistance to reading Rowling as a writer within the hermetic traditions of English letters. Her life-long interest and accomplishment in the occult arts as well as her favorite writers, from Dante, Spenser, and Shakespeare to Nabokov and Lewis, being adept in using alchemical symbolism as story scaffolding complementing their psychomachic allegories make reading her work as fictional alembics less of a 'reach' than a responsibility, even an inevitability.

The collective blind-spot and aversion to this reading, however, is testimony to the ontologically flat or nominalist worldview from which it is Rowling's aim to liberate her readers via a kind of cognitive shock therapy, Coomaraswamy's *samvega*, and experience of symbolic transformation. The pervasive understanding of metallurgical alchemy as superstitious nonsense and ignorance of its literary twin's persistence and importance in literature from Dante to Dickens to Tolkien and Angela Carter, however, makes the defamiliarizing power of its deployment that much greater. As readers of this thesis are as likely to share the post-Enlightenment prejudice about alchemy, it is best before discussing Rowling's hermetic symbolism, per Socrates in his *Apology*, to discuss briefly the metallurgical science's

revolutionary and subversive aspect, especially in English history, and how and why it came to play the role it does in drama, poetry, and story.

## II. Metallurgical Science – History

As Titus Burckhardt explained, “From the ‘the century of enlightenment’ up to and including our own times, it has been customary to regard alchemy as a primitive precursor of modern chemistry.” Students whose only exposure to the history of science and technology has been in the introductory classes of rudimentary experimental science are “much more inclined to take the view that until a century or so ago all humanity had been dreaming a stupid dream” (Burckhardt 1972, 7). Publicity for a history of chemistry, *The Last Sorcerers: The Path from Alchemy to the Periodic Table*, put it plainly:

What we now call chemistry began in the fiery cauldrons of mystics and sorcerers seeking not to make a better world through science, but rather to make themselves richer through magic formulas and con games. But among these early magicians, frauds, and con artists were a few far-seeing “alchemists” who, through rigorous experimentation, transformed mysticism into science. (Morris, flyleaf)

Not only was alchemy ‘chemistry for idiots’ and the way of charlatans, it was also about cauldrons, sorcery, mysticism, and magic, in essence, superstition.<sup>139</sup> The work of ‘Team Rational,’ Cormoran Strike’s name for the Enlightenment disdain for the spiritual dimension and human cardiac intelligence or perception, was and remains to displace the traditional worldview, i.e., mindless fidelity to received knowledge, with the experimental method and logical reasoning. Unfortunately for this historical perspective, prevalent as it is, metallurgical alchemy was the subversive, even revolutionary science of

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<sup>139</sup> At least as great a misunderstanding of alchemy according to historians of the metallurgical science is found in the depth psychology writings of Carl Jung and his followers. Eliade pointed out that Jung was right to have supposed that alchemy had a soteriological role for the alchemist (1978, 11) but in Jung’s assumption that the alchemist was primarily a gold seeker who experienced individuation or restoration (by contact with the archetypes of change in the collective unconscious) the psychoanalyst was 180 degrees off. The view of Traditionalists like Coomaraswamy is that Jung restricted alchemy as he did all psychology and pneumatology to the psychic or animic sphere and its work to the unconscious or subconscious part of this sphere; alchemy, however, is in the traditional view essentially a supra-conscious or spiritual work that happens through correspondence with archetypes that are above, not below, individual existence and consciousness (cf. Sherrard 1998, 134-157; Oldmeadow 2011, 106; Burckhardt 1972, 8-9; 1987, 45-67; Nasr 1993, 116, n. 41).

the late Medieval period into Reformation times that displaced the unexamined Aristotelian worldview with sacred science. It was the natural science of the Florentine Renaissance Christian *magi* and Platonists who rejected the ossified Aristotelianism of the Petrine Catholic Church. That Rowling was aware of this is evident in the history she writes for her Wizarding World and the texts about alchemy she is most likely to have read on the subject pre-*Potter*. Rowling admitted in 1998 that “To invent this wizard world, I’ve learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy” (Simpson) and a review of the sources of the “ridiculous amount about alchemy” Rowling claims to have “learned” from 1990-1997, the years between the inspiration for the books and the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* reveals alchemy’s defamiliarizing past.

The most readily available books on the subject before 1997 would be those found in the occult section of book shops, with which section Rowling’s familiarity with astrology suggests she would know. Rowling, however, has said she is not an admirer of this kind of book, saying to a reporter “New Ageism leaves me completely cold” (Hattenstone). The most noted academic works on alchemy in print were those by psychologist C. G. Jung (1977), Traditionalist Titus Burckhardt (1972, 1987), and historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1978). Gail Grynbaum interpreted the first four *Harry Potter* novels in light of Jungian psychology in a 2001 piece, ‘The Secrets of Harry Potter,’ for a San Francisco Jung journal (Grynbaum). The Penguin trade paperback cover of Burckhardt’s 1972 *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul* features a 1613 drawing by Basilius Valentinus called ‘Aurelia Occulta Philosophorum,’ which image has an hermaphroditic giant titled ‘Rebis’ astride a fire breathing dragon atop a golden globe with wings, possible sources for the androgynous giant Rubeus Hagrid, a great lover of dragons, and for the Golden Snitch, the Seeker’s aim in the game of Quidditch.

Grynbaum, as fascinating as her discussion of the Orphan, the Vampire, and Evil are in light of Jungian interpretation of dreams and alchemy, did not suggest that the books were influenced by the author’s

reading of the psychologist's books on alchemy.<sup>140</sup> Even if Rowling had read Jung, Burckhardt, and Eliade, though, all three experts on psychology and religion focus exclusively on the gnostic qualities of metallurgical alchemy rather than the laboratory art's *literary* progeny. A survey of the critical literature about the use of alchemical glyphs and symbols in story, that is, in poems, plays, and novels written in English, academic articles and books in print by 1997, the year of Rowling's inspiration for the series, points to Rowling's most likely sources for her hermetic artistry.<sup>141</sup>

Two books that were in print are Charles Nicholl's *The Chemical Theatre* (1980) and Lyndy Abraham's *Marvell and Alchemy* (1990).<sup>142</sup> Each argued that metallurgical alchemy pervaded the culture of seventeenth-century England and that the cosmological perspective and signature sequences and symbol sets informed the better literature of the period. Nicholl focused on the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights and poets with special attention to Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606) and Abraham's work on Marvell (1621-1678) naturally treated the later Civil War and Restoration eras and the literature of those periods. As groundbreaking and important as Nicholl's work is in this field of study<sup>143</sup> (Abraham's book is almost a mirror reflection of *Chemical Theatre* in organization and argument albeit about a different author), the time period of *fin de siecle* seventeenth-century England post Restoration is more important than the dawn of that century because Rowling situated a critical event of her Wizarding World's history in 1692. The International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy, the law

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<sup>140</sup> It should be noted that Rowling's 1998 interview comments about alchemy were not well known until 2007 when they were discovered and posted at Accio-Quotes.org (cf. Granger 2007a).

<sup>141</sup> Stanton Linden's *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration*, for example, is a seminal text in the field. It was published in 1996 by a relatively minor university press in the United States so Rowling is unlikely to have read it while planning the series and writing *Philosopher's Stone*, published in 1997. Linden edited an academic journal, 'Cauda Pavonis: Studies in Hermeticism,' from 1980 until his retirement from Washington State University in 2002 but there is no evidence that Rowling had access to this body of work.

<sup>142</sup> Abraham's invaluable *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, the standard reference work today, was not published until 1998.

<sup>143</sup> Rowling traveled to London as a Wyedean Comprehensive student to see a performance of *Lear* and it is possible, either in preparation for that field-trip or for her A Level exams, that Rowling's teachers, Lucy Shepherd with her structural focus and Steve Eddy with his mythological and hermetic interest, urged her to read Nicholl on *Lear*.



that required the disappearance of magical people from Muggle society and which forced them to live apart and underground, was passed in that year and defined the parameters of life for witches and wizards thenceforth (Granger 2010b). Rowling included an unusual number of references to people and subjects in the *Potter* series from this time period, ideas and persons discussed in the first chapter of *Marvell and Alchemy*.

Rowling's Everard Proudfoot, for example, is a former Hogwarts Headmaster. Dumbledore testified to his renown in a critical scene that takes place in Dumbledore's office in *Order of the Phoenix* (466-491). 'Everard Proudfoot,' whose animated painting hangs in Dumbledore's office, always referred to in text as "Everard," was tasked to move to his painting at the Ministry of Magic and to alert the guards there that Arthur Weasley had been attacked. The fictional Proudfoot is a point blank reference to John Everard, a leader of the Seeker religious movement and translator of hermetic texts in the Civil War period. The self-evident name, his round-head hair-cut ("short black bangs"), and Rowling's placement of his single appearance in brackets around the most esoteric if not occult-like of any magic Dumbledore practices in the entire series corresponds with Abraham's discussion of him in *Marvell and Alchemy*:

Robert Schuler has also pointed to the strong link between the radical sectarians and alchemy. Dr. John Everard (1575-1641), the Anglican minister who became associated with the Family of Love, provides Schuler with an example of that 'sectarian spiritual alchemy - sometimes tinged with political and religious millennialism - which flourished among some radical Puritans of the mid-century.' Everard translated a number of alchemical works, including the key medieval text, the *Emerald Tablet* in 1640, to which he added his own annotations expressing a combination of radical Puritanism and spiritual alchemy. Everard also made the first English translation of the significant Gnostic and Neo-Platonic work, *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus, in XVII Books*, which appeared in 1650 after his death. In 1657 the *Pymander* was again issued, this time together with Everard's translation of the *Asclepius* and a commentary. (Abraham 1990, 20)

Rowling's Wizarding World, too, resounds with hermetic notes from revolutionary Renaissance

Florence. The avuncular Centaur of the *Potter* series, for example, who teaches Divination at Hogwarts

after being expelled from the Forbidden Forest is named ‘Firenze,’ the Italian word for Florence. His expertise is astrology. A ‘fantastic beast’ who appears in every book after *Prisoner of Azkaban*, in addition, is the hippogriff, a creature straight out of Boiardo and Ariosto’s *Orlando* epics, published in sixteenth-century Florence. The most famous citizen and poet from Florence and an important influence on Rowling is Dante and she may have modeled her Severus Snape character on the popular Gustave Dore depictions of the poet in his version of the *Commedia*; the death of Snape in *Deathly Hallows* is a step-by-step repetition of the poet’s entry into Paradise after looking into the emerald green eyes of his beloved Beatrice. The *Commedia*’s three parts, too, are an alchemical sequence of *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo* for the perfection of the poet’s soul. Abraham discussed “the earlier Platonic academies in Florence” that were the model for John Dee’s home and library (Abraham 1990, 4) and she and Nicholl point to the translations of alchemical texts from Arabic into Latin in the Florentine Renaissance circa 1460 by Marsilio Ficino and the hermetic commentary of Pico Della Mirandola as foundations for English interest in *magia naturalis* and the alchemical seeker as *magus* or wizard (Abraham 1990, 20-21; Nicholl, 46-47, 49).

What is most relevant about the idea of Rowling’s having read Abraham’s historical survey of alchemy and its role in the English Civil War and in the arts of the period in a thesis about her defamiliarizing intention is that Abraham asserted that alchemy was as popular as it became then precisely because of its revolutionary quality, its subversiveness. “Occultism was an integral part of late Renaissance cosmology, and the interest in alchemy was overwhelming and widespread” is the argument of her first chapter. Whence this popularity? Alchemy subverted the Galenic-Aristotelian order within science, especially pharmaceutical medicine, as the Puritans did the established ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Although men of varying religious and political beliefs found inspiration in them, alchemy and chemical medicine were particularly espoused by radical Protestants. By the time of the Civil war, alchemy was a focal issue of medical reform, and during this period Protestant mysticism and Paracelsian medicine were closely associated.... The association of Protestant and

Paracelsian alchemists became intensified during the period of the English civil war. The Paracelsian system rejected traditional medical and religious dogma, and this sounded a sympathetic note with the ideals of the Puritan reformers and revolutionaries. (Abraham 1990, 2, 18-19)

Abraham wrote “the Paracelsian challenge of the medical establishment was seen as analogous to the Puritan challenge of the bishops.” She concluded that “It is clear that Protestantism, Hermeticism, and alchemy were not only live issues during the English civil war, but were also traditions that were largely in alliance” (Abraham 1990, 2, 19). Alchemy and its literary progeny are historically and inherently subversive.<sup>144</sup>

### **III. Metallurgical Science – Esoteric Means to Divinization**

Enlightenment rationalists and philosophic skeptics, however, did not create the straw-man of “superstitious” alchemy out of thin-air. The spirit-focused alchemy of the Christian *magi* reflected a top-down, inner to outer worldview that it was the empiricists’ determination to diminish and displace with modern materialist and mechanical ideas of causation. To grasp the link between metallurgical and literary alchemy, it is necessary to review how traditional alchemists understood their work in contrast with the idea of gold-seeking charlatans duping prince’s longing for a short-cut to immortality and riches.

Alchemy in traditional Chinese, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian civilizations, according to more sympathetic historians of science, was a sacred science or “way” within the respective revealed religions of each. There certainly was metallurgical work performed in laboratories dedicated to the purification of lead and like metals to gold through the production of a philosopher’s stone, but the aim

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<sup>144</sup> Abraham in her introductory chapter also discussed the “Paracelsian challenge of the medical establishment” and “the Puritan challenge of the bishops” with special emphasis on the work of Nicholas Culpepper, herbalist, who in 1649, “translated the pharmacopeia into English, making such information available to a much wider range of medical practitioners and lay people.” Rowling has said that Culpepper was her reference for much of her potions work, that she has two editions of his book, and that she “found the way [Culpepper] talked about these plants inspirational” (Abraham 1990, 19; on Rowling and Culpepper, see Groves 2018b).

of these efforts was the transformation of the artisan in parallel with the substance's alterations. It was akin to sacred art in being "an inward process whose goal is the ripening, 'transmutation,' or rebirth of the artist himself," "called an art – even the 'royal art' (*ars regia*) – by its masters:"

Alchemy may be called the art of the transmutations of the soul. In saying this I am not seeking to deny that alchemists also knew and practiced metallurgical procedures such as the purification and alloying of metals; their real work, however, for which all these procedures were merely the outward supports or 'operational' symbols, was the transmutation of the soul. The testimony of the alchemists on this point is unanimous. (Burckhardt 1972, 23)

Alchemy was certainly a way of enobling matter, hence its relation to sacred art. But this also means that alchemy is not just a prelude to chemistry, that it is a science of the soul in its relation to the cosmos and making use of external transformations for the sake of that inner transformation which is the ultimate goal of all the traditional sciences. (Nasr 1993, 107)

In brief, understanding the created world to include the alchemists themselves as symbols of the archetypes bringing each and all into existence, their professed aim was their own enlightenment or illumination, which is to say the cleansing of their noetic *logos*-mirror in the heart to reflect the *Logos* "light of the world," in correspondence with that of metals.

'To make of the body a spirit and of the spirit a body': this adage sums up the whole of alchemy. Gold itself, which outwardly represents the fruit of the work, appears as an opaque body become luminous, or as a light become solid. Transposed into the human and spiritual order, gold is bodily consciousness transmuted into spirit or spirit fixed in the body.... This transmutation of spirit into body and of body into spirit is to be found in a more or less direct and obvious manner in every method of spiritual realization; alchemy, however, has made of it its principal theme, in conformity with the metallurgical symbolism that is based on the possibility of changing the state of aggregation of a body. (Burckhardt 1987, 132)

Understood as symbols in this respect, lead is the earthly reflection of 'hard darkness' or a 'still-born metal;' gold is metal as all metal would be in a prelapsarian Eden, a substance that corresponds with the Spirit and the Sun, 'solid light.' Silver is the shadow in material of the Soul and the Moon.<sup>145</sup> Alchemy

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<sup>145</sup> "Lead represents the chaotic, 'heavy,' and sick condition of metal or of the inward man, while gold – 'congealed light' and 'earthly sun' – expresses the perfection of both metallic and human existence. According to the alchemists' way of looking at things, gold is the real goal of metallic nature; all other metals are either preparatory steps or experiments to that end. Gold alone possesses in itself a harmonious equilibrium of all metallic properties, and therefore also possesses durability. 'Copper is restless until it becomes gold,' said Meister Eckhart, referring in reality to the soul which longs for its own eternal being" (Burckhardt 1972, 24-25).

certainly was a secret science but not in the sense that its current reputation for being an occult practice would suggest.

The Western alchemist by attempting to ‘kill’ the ingredients, to reduce them to the *materia prima*, provokes a *sympatheia* between the ‘pathetic situations’ of the substance and his innermost being. In other words, he realizes, as it were, some initiatory experiences which, as the course of the opus proceeds, forge for him a new personality, comparable to the one which is achieved after successfully undergoing the ordeals of initiation. (Eliade 1978, 158-160)

Alchemy understood as a sacred science, then, rather than superstitious metallurgy or out-right fraud, was ancillary to the work of the several revealed traditions and their respective means of grace, for the purification and perfection of the alchemist’s soul in correspondence with the perfection of a base metal into gold. It is the natural science equivalent of psychomachia.

From the Christian point of view, alchemy was like a natural mirror for the revealed truths: the philosopher’s stone, which turned base metals into silver and gold, is a symbol of Christ, and its production from the ‘non-burning fire’ of sulphur and the ‘steadfast water’ of quicksilver resembled the birth of Christ-Emmanuel. By its assimilation into Christian belief, alchemy was spiritually fecundated, while Christianity found in it a way which through contemplation of nature, led to a true ‘gnosis’. (Burckhardt 1972, 18)

The alchemist on this way or spiritual path viewed nature’s working as a rotation of the archetypal four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, and of the polar qualities, hot and cold, dry and moist. Seeing that change is everywhere a function of the action of the two tendencies found everywhere and in anything, expansion and contraction, the alchemist worked to simulate and accelerate this natural action in his alembic (alchemist’s cauldron).

[Alchemy] is related at once to cosmology, medicine, the science of substances, and psychology. [It] is based on a primordial vision of the earth as a living being in whose bosom and with the help of celestial influences grow the metals which stand outside of the natural order. The metallurgist is like a gynecologist who delivers the metal from the womb of the earth and who, with the aid of spiritual forces is able to quicken the process by which this event takes place. (Nasr 1993, 106)

Risking simplification, the base metal was reduced to *prima materia* by the seven-cycle action of alchemical mercury and sulphur (not the same as the periodic table elements with these names), in a process known as *solve et coagula*, “dissolve and congeal,” “expand and contract.” By purifying the

metallic substance repeatedly in this way, both the metal and alchemist are transformed in sympathy, as essential polarity is transcended and subject and object join, as in a mirror. The *Logos*-light within each is manifested, the one in gold as “congealed light” and the artisan’s soul in its illumination and return to its Edenic purity of heart.

Two tangible products arise from this joined process. First and more famously, it yields a stone, the Philosopher’s Stone, contact with which can transform lead to gold and whose emitted elixir can make a man who drinks it immortal. As important, though more important in terms of literature and *Harry Potter*, it creates a transformed person, the *Rebis*, who is the conjunction of opposites, the resolution of contraries. Usually represented as a hermaphrodite or androgyne, this alchemist is an incarnation of peace and love, words that mean “polarity resolved.”

Rowling has tattooed the “Solve et Coagula” alchemical aphorism to the wrist of her writing hand as a pointed reference that this is the aim of her artistry as well as her personal journey of conscious reflection and deliberate self-transformation a la CBT. This is the literary ‘science’ of ‘Defamiliarization,’ recreation via estrangement and re-invention. The conjunction of metallurgical and literary alchemy is in that elision of self and story in imagination that creates a cathartic or purifying experience in the reader.

#### **IV. Connection to Literary Tradition**

The connection between alchemy and literature that makes these images the preferred tools of the best writers for centuries is in the transformative quality of the metallurgical symbols in play in both the laboratory science and the literary arts. This connection is probably most clear in drama. Eliade even suggested that the alchemical work grew out of initiatory dramas of the Greek Mystery religions (1978, 149). Shakespeare did not just make asides to alchemy in his plays; many of his later plays as

mentioned in the psychomachia chapter are built on alchemical symbol scaffolding and themes. *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labours Lost*, and *The Merchant of Venice* are discussed as such in Jean Paris' 'The Alchemistic Theatre' (Paris, 87-116; see also Lings 1984, 14, 83-86, 118-124). Frances Yates argued that Shakespeare built the Globe Theatre on Hermetic principles for the proper staging of his alchemical dramas (Yates 2009, 135-139; 1974, 364-367); similarly, it has credibly been postulated that the Globe's 'Heavens,' the superstructure of structural beams "whose smooth underside was clearly visible to the audience" was "decorated with a zodiac and stars" (Smith, I., 154-155).

This follows from the prevalent Aristotelian understanding from his *Poetics* in Elizabethan times of what happens in a proper tragedy, namely, that the audience identifies with the hero in his agony and shares in his passion. This identification and shared passion is effectively the same as the personal experience of the event portrayed on stage; the audience experiences catharsis or 'purification' in soul-to-symbol correspondence. Shakespeare and Jonson among other dramatists use alchemical imagery and themes because they understood that the work of theatre in human transformation was parallel if not identical to the alchemical work. The alchemical work, of course, claimed to be greater than an imaginative experience, but the idea of purification by identification or correspondence with an object and its transformations is 'spot on' with the purpose of catharsis-inducing drama.

Alchemical language and themes became the shorthand, consequently, of many great English novels, drama, poetry and prose. The success of an artist following this tradition is measured by the edification of their audience. By means of traditional methods and symbols, the alchemical artist provides delight and dramatic release for the souls of their audience and readers through archetypal and purifying experiences. Alchemy and literature are a match because they both endeavor in their undegenerate or

orthodox state to transform the human person. Literary alchemy, the use of alchemical images and structures, has been a constant in English poems, plays, and novels for six centuries.

Stanton Linden's *Darke Hieroglyphicks* surveyed this hermetic stream from Chaucer to the Restoration, but, though it has strong roots in Shakespearean drama (Nicholl, Yates (2001), Lings 1984, Dawkins, Pogson 1950, 1963), it is the subject of scholarship in authors as important and contemporary as Yeats, Joyce, Angela Carter, and J. R. R. Tolkien (Gorski, Dibenard, Cooke, Brown 2013, 2016). Add the important influence of Tolkien on Rowling to the alchemical Nabokov and Lewis to be discussed below and it is testimony to the strength of misconceptions about alchemy today that there has been such resistance to the idea that *Harry Potter* is written within this tradition.

An example of how understanding alchemy and the attendant symbolism opens certain writers may help the still-skeptical to see this, e.g., an entry from Abraham's *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* for 'red tincture'. The 'red tincture' is the blood-red elixir of the philosopher's stone that, when thrown upon base metals, changes them into gold. As Abraham explained:

It was thought that just one ounce of the tincture could transmute over a hundred or a thousand times its own weight of base metals into pure gold. Shakespeare used 'tinct' in its alchemical sense in *Anthony and Cleopatra* when Cleopatra says to her 'base' attendant Alexas: 'How much unlike art thou Mark Anthony!/ Yet coming from him, that great Medicine hath/ With his tinct gilded thee' (1.5.34-36). Milton likewise used this metaphor when, in the creation scene in *Paradise Lost*, the stars multiply their light and Venus 'gilds her horns' from the sun's quintessential source, 'By tincture or reflection' (7.364-9). (Abraham 2001, 169)

William Blake, too, assumed his readers knew their alchemy. As Roob explained, the two complementary and antagonistic principles of the alchemical work, the *solve et coagula* of alchemical mercury and sulphur, are where he begins his artistry:

William Blake identified the male principle with time and the female with space. The interpenetration of the two results in diverse reverberations of individual events, all of which, taken as a whole – totality, the micro-macrocosmic body of Christ in the image of the "human and the divine imagination" – occur in a state of relative simultaneity. Each individual element opens up, in passing, into the permanent present of this fluctuating organism and in the process



attains its “fourfold”, complete form, which Blake calls “Jerusalem”. This vision generated the kaleidoscopic, narrative structures of his late poems, which reveal themselves to the reader as a multi-layered structure of perspectival relations – aimed against the prevailing idea of a simple location of events in the absolutes of linear time and space. (Roob, 25)

Alchemy is key to understanding Blake’s last illuminated poem, *Jerusalem*, and his several paintings of Newton whom he singled out to deride for his mechanical and rationalist view. James Joyce in turn referred to both these works of Blake and other alchemical ideas and images in his *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake* (Roob, 482, 630). These are difficult writers and some of the best writers in the western canon; to understand their demanding transformative artistry requires at least a grounding in literary alchemy.

English Literature, then, is rich in alchemical language, references, themes, and symbols from Chaucer to Rowling; to be ignorant of this language and imagery is to miss out on the depths and heights of Shakespeare, Blake, Donne, Milton, even C. S. Lewis and James Joyce. Rowling, as she has testified, is conversant with the tropes and aim of literary alchemy. The remainder of this thesis chapter discusses how the *Harry Potter* books individually and as a series are built on alchemical structures, written in alchemical language, and have alchemical themes at their core. The alchemical sequence and transformation of Harry Potter through the seven cycles and Cormoran Strike through five are a cathartic psychomachia or soul’s journey to sanctification in parallel correspondence to those described in the previous chapter.

## **V. Rowling Connection**

The significant resistance to the evidence in the texts and to explanations of that evidence of alchemical artistry exists despite the fact that the author herself has testified in interviews and at her website to her use of alchemical symbolism. Rowling, in an interview she gave in 1998 to a local newspaper in Scotland, was asked if she ever wanted to be a witch:

I've never wanted to be a witch, but an alchemist, now that's a different matter. To invent this wizard world, I've learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy. Perhaps much of it I'll never use in the books, but I have to know in detail what magic can and cannot do in order to set the parameters and establish the stories' internal logic. (Simpson)

Rowling has written more about this usage on her PotterMore (now 'Wizarding World') website:

Colours also played their part in the naming of Hagrid and Dumbledore, whose first names are Rubeus (red) and Albus (white) respectively. The choice was a nod to alchemy, which is so important in the first Harry Potter book, where 'the red' and 'the white' are essential mystical components of the process. The symbolism of the colours in this context has mystic meaning, representing different stages of the alchemic process (which many people associate with a spiritual transformation). Where my two characters were concerned, I named them for the alchemical colours to convey their opposing but complementary natures: red meaning passion (or emotion); white for asceticism; Hagrid being the earthy, warm and physical man, lord of the forest; Dumbledore the spiritual theoretician, brilliant, idealised and somewhat detached. Each is a necessary counterpoint to the other as Harry seeks father figures in his new world. (Rowling 2013a)

She admitted at a 2018 London Museum exhibit on the history of Magic that even her dreaming life was consumed by alchemy when she began writing the series. "I had a really vivid dream about Nicolas Flamel, during the writing of *Philosopher's Stone*. I dreamt that I was in his alchemist's studio and this kind of symbolism was all over his walls. I didn't even ask questions, I was just watching. Typical writer, just observing. Didn't even ask!" (Rowling 2018c).

She shared on the early version of her website, JKRowling.com, that her drafts of *Philosopher's Stone* were much more obviously alchemical. *Harry Potter*, Book 1, in its first telling opened with a scene featuring Argis Pyrites, servant of Lord Voldemort and author of an alchemical textbook.

There were several discarded opening chapters for Book 1, one of which had a muggle betraying the Potters, one had a character called 'Pyrites,' whose name means 'fools gold' meeting Sirius in front of the Potter's house. Pyrites was a servant of Voldemort....

Very early page of Book1: Argis Pyrites mentioned as author of *Alchemy, Ancient Art and Science*. (Accio-Quote.org [no date])

In a very short piece at her PotterMore.com website, fans were told that "Very specialised subjects such as Alchemy are sometimes offered in the final two years, if there is sufficient demand." To which note

Rowling added under the title, ‘J. K. Rowling’s Thoughts’: “A slightly different list of school subjects appears in my earliest notes. Herbology is called ‘Herbalism’, Divination is compulsory from the first year, as are Alchemy and a subject called simply ‘Beasts’, whereas Transfiguration is called ‘Transfiguration/Metamorphosis’” (Rowling 2018b). As ‘Alchemy’ became ‘Potions’ and the “servant of Lord Voldemort” who had reason to be outside the Potters’ home on the night of their murder was Severus Snape, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Potions Master who plays such a large part in Harry’s adventures was originally conceived as the *Alchemy* instructor.<sup>146</sup>

This fascinating and explicit testimony of the author about how her having “learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy” “sets the interior logic” of the books and how much the subject consumed her waking and sleeping mind as she imagined the series makes the silence, even the denial of critics about the hermetic artistry of *Harry Potter* curious.

What largely confirms the thesis that Rowling is writing in this tradition is the discovery in 2015 of the only known texts written by Rowling before and during her composing the first drafts of *Philosopher’s Stone* in 1994. Though a single mother on the dole struggling to earn a teaching certificate, Rowling made time to create at least two, probably three elaborate and lengthy astrological natal charts for a friend’s new baby and her husband (Tarantino). The beautiful and involved drawing in color that Rowling did for the child’s chart with images derived from the signs and aspects given in it as well as Rowling’s detailed interpretation were posted in 2015 and are available at a fan site, TheRowlingLibrary.com, and the two known charts were listed at a London auction house, Paul Fraser Collectibles, for sale at 17,500 pounds each (PaulFraserCollectibles.com).

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<sup>146</sup> Readers learn only in the series finale, *Deathly Hallows*, ‘The Prince’s Tale’ (ch 33), that Snape was in Godric’s Hollow the night Voldemort murdered Linda Evans Potter, Snape’s true love; in *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry is given Snape’s annotated Potions textbook which is something of a link to the Pyrites book.

Beyond the risible investment opportunity passed up for at least four years by Rowling collectors, even the auction house notes that the charts are relevant to understanding *Harry Potter*:

J.K Rowling's fascination with astrology can be seen throughout the Harry Potter series of books, in characters such as Professor of Divination Sybill Trelawney and Firenze the star-gazing centaur.

Whilst writing her first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Rowling also produced highly detailed personal horoscopes for some of her friends....

Throughout the 12 page document Rowling displays a strong knowledge of astrology, referencing texts such as the influential 15<sup>th</sup> century French work 'The Kalendar and Compost of Shepherds'.

The strength and humour of her writing also clearly shines through, particularly during a passage in which she images the couple escaping from international terrorists, using hand grenades made from Coke cans and Semtex "*weaseled out of a guard who was no match for his Machiavellian Mars*". (PaulFraserCollectibles.com)

Readers are able to confirm this praise is not just salesmanship because TheRowlingLibrary, a fan website in Beunos Aires, was given permission to post the complete text of one of the natal charts.

Rowling refers in it to seven different astrologers and to fifteen books on astrology in addition to *The Kalendar and Compost of Shepherds* which quotations, while at first glance suggesting she had something of a library of reference materials, are all taken without citation from one book, Louis MacNeice's *Astrology* (1964).<sup>147</sup>

Though not the work of an authentic scholar of astrology, then, the chart as published does demonstrate that in 1994 Rowling was sufficiently fluent in the language and art, not to mention the math, of astrology to cast an accurate natal chart and write involved interpretations of one. Her eleven-page single-spaced exegesis of Roger Tosswill's natal chart is not only clever and humorous but accurate

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<sup>147</sup> In sequence of citation, John Varley, *A Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy*, Louis MacNeice, *Astrology*, Andre Barbault, *The Value of Astrology*, Anonymous, *The Kalendar of Compost and Shepherds*, Rupert Gleadow, *Your Character in the Zodiac*, (Magic and Divination, *The Unclouded Eye, Prophets and Prophecy*), Countess Nora Purtscher Wydenbruck, *Work It Out Yourself: Horoscopes of Prominent Statesmen (with charts)*, Sasha Fenton, the image of Professor Trelawney and author of more than 125 books on astrology and divination (Felton).

with respect to astrological conventions about the meanings of the specific planets in each house and their aspects to one another. She even engages in relationship astrology, the art of comparing the two charts of a couple in relationship to assess compatibility, which involved serious familiarity with the subject before online horoscope-dating services were omnipresent.<sup>148</sup>

Rowling's claim to have "read a ridiculous amount about alchemy" before writing *Harry Potter* seems both more credible and understandable in light of the appearance of these natal charts and interpretations.<sup>149</sup> Astrology and alchemy are paired sciences with shared symbols for metals and planets and intertwined meanings; the one rarely appears without the other in medieval mythos. Rowling's great familiarity with the one implies a facility if not fluency in the language of the other. The influence of alchemical writers and literary scholars, her own testimony about the alchemical conception and composition of the *Potter books*, and the discovery of documentary evidence of her accomplishments as an astrologer all point to her writing in the tradition of literary alchemists.

The most striking evidence of all, again, is Rowling's tattoo, one she had inked in late 2019 on the wrist of her writing hand. It reads, in her own hand-writing, '*Solve et Coagula*,' the summary formula of the alchemical work. It is the only tattoo Rowling has admitted to owning and its placement confirms the centrality of hermetic artistry to her work (Jeffery 2019, Granger 2019e).

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<sup>148</sup> This comparison work is also the reason that it may be assumed that there is a third chart, that of Roger's wife and the child's mother, that has not been put up for sale. All efforts to contact this family have failed.

<sup>149</sup> It should be noted that even the two readers who have suggested that Rowling wrote her seven *Potter* novels as Lewis did his *Narnia* books, i.e., with each book in the series being a symbol set for one particular planet, both seem unaware of Rowling's achievements as an amateur astrologer, for which discussion see Sweeney, Sprague 2019.

## VI. Textual Evidence

### A. Introduction

What, though, do Rowling's books tell us about her literary alchemy? What evidence is there in her novels themselves that demonstrates that she is the hermetic stylist her testimony and her important influences suggest she might be?

The known insignia of such a writer tells all. In addition to the hundreds of individual tokens listed in Abraham's *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, there are five key markers of a work written within the alchemical tradition:

**Three Stages:** The work is going to have three key stages marked by the use of specific colors and story events, namely, black, white, and red, which stages reflect, in sequence, the dissolution or break down of the subject character or main characters (*nigredo*) usually by heat, the purification or purgation of same (*albedo*) usually with water, and the revelation of the transformation undergone in the process in the story crisis (*rubedo*).<sup>150</sup>

**Antagonists:** There will be story contraries that must be resolved by the principals' transformation, contraries like the 'Two Cities' in Dickens' most popular and hermetic novel or the Montagues and Capulets of Shakespeare's Verona, or just groups like the Quileute Wolfpack and Cullen Vampires of Meyer's *Twilight*.

**Quarreling Couple:** Expect a 'Quarreling Couple,' a pair in opposition, one relatively feminine or lunar, the other masculine and solar, who engage the character being broken down to *prima materia* for

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<sup>150</sup> Alchemy is a seven-cycle work, each cycle and the work as a whole including the signature three stages. Attempts have been made to explain the seven book *Potter* series as one to one correspondents with each cycle but with contradictory results and a sense of pieces being forced into an external scheme; cf. Sweeney and Sipal.

illumination as ‘solid light’ or gold. This duo are polar opposites and they either quarrel or draw the principal in contrary directions. This ‘Quarreling Couple’ of alchemical mercury and Sulphur, think Shakespeare’s Tybalt and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* or Meyer’s Edward and Jacob in her *Twilight* books, are the catalysts of the reaction and character transformation.

**Alchemical Wedding:** Between the white and red stages noted above, there is an Alchemical Wedding of the Red King and White Queen that prefigures the conjunction of opposites signaling the golden moment of the Philosopher’s Stone creation, i.e., the divinization of the main character and birth of the Philosophical Orphan or story savior joining contraries as a Rebus or hermaphrodite.

**Resurrection:** And there should be remarkable resurrection imagery, something as simple as light shining out of darkness or grander images of a hero rising from the dead or even of a Phoenix, a Rose, or a Red Lion, symbols of the Stone and of Christ, the Light of the World. This is the story cipher for the illumination of lead to gold and the enlightenment of the alchemist.

### **B. *Harry Potter***

All five signature markers are evident and obvious in the *Harry Potter* series and these and other alchemical tokens appear in Rowling’s post *Potter* work as well.

- **Contraries**

Rowling noted in a 2005 interview that the Hogwarts Houses represent the four elements of traditional cosmology: Hufflepuff being ‘Earth,’ Ravenclaw ‘Air,’ Gryffindor ‘Fire,’ and Slytherin ‘Water’ (Anelli and Spartz, 2005). Each House’s defining qualities reflect these elements as do the locations of their common rooms and dormitories. The principal conflict of the books, the defining polarity, is less between that of Muggle and Wizard than between fire and water, the Houses of Gryffindor and Slytherin, an archetypal set of contraries that Rowling represents as a rift that stretches back to a break between two of the Hogwarts Founders, Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin (see Whited). At

series end, the death of Lord Voldemort brings about a resolution of these contraries when all four Houses sit down together rather than at separate tables in the Great Hall after the Battle of Hogwarts.

- **Quarreling Couple**

The ‘Quarreling Couple’ of Harry Potter who represent the catalysts of Alchemical Mercury and Alchemical Sulphur in the transformative reaction taking place are Harry’s closest friends, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. The hermetic reagents represent the poles of existence with Mercury being feminine, cool, and intelligent and Sulphur being masculine, volatile, and passionate. The story figures of these poles, brainiac Hermione and impulsive, raging Ron, not only are always bickering with one another, but their names point directly to Rowling’s artistry.

Mercurial Hermione’s name is the feminine of Hermes, her initials are Hg, the periodic table abbreviation for the element, and her parents are dentists, the only modern professionals who use mercury on a day-to-day basis for ‘fillings.’ Ron’s hair is fiery red and he is as brash and heated as Hermione is calm and collected; his middle name is ‘Bilius’ which highlights his sulphuric nature. The resolution of the Quarreling Couple in a kiss at the end of *Deathly Hallows* marks the beginning of the end of the Great Work itself and the beginning of the revelation of Harry’s becoming the Philosopher’s Stone.

- **Alchemical Wedding**

Readers learn in the *Deathly Hallows* Epilogue that Ron and Hermione do get married but the Alchemical Wedding of the series, the nuptials of Red King and the White Queen between the *albedo* and *rubedo* stages of the Work, is the marriage of British Bill Weasley, red headed and lupine after his battle with a werewolf in *Half-Blood Prince*, and French Fleur de la Couer, white haired Veela. Their wedding in the opening chapters of *Deathly Hallows*, though the reception and celebration is interrupted by a Death Eater attack, is all in gold and yellow, Rowling’s marking of the *citrinintas* or



‘yellow stage’ of the metallurgical process, also before the red and just after the white stages (Abraham 1998, 42).<sup>151</sup>

- **Resurrection**

The resurrection imagery is evident, as well. Every book and especially the finale ends with Harry’s rising from seeming or near death in the presence of a traditional symbol of Christ. Book by book, the symbols are the Philosopher’s Stone, Fawkes the Phoenix, a White Stag, Phoenix Song and tears, Fawkes again in the Ministry duel between the Dark Lord and Dumbledore, a Hippogriff, and Harry himself in *Deathly Hallows* when he sacrifices himself to save his friends. As discussed in the psychomachia chapter, Harry’s return in *Hallows* from his King’s Cross after-life conversation with Dumbledore, a destination to which he was dispatched by Voldemort’s death curse in the Forbidden Forest, is bursting with Calvary and Easter references, most notably his victory over the Dark Lord and death as the sun rises and illumines the Great Hall (see Groves 2017, 60-80).

- **Black, White, and Red**

These four markers of literary alchemy would be sufficient to convict Rowling of writing hermetically. The most convincing evidence, though, of her embedding alchemical ‘structure and style’ elements is in the use of the black, white, and red color sequences and their attendant imagery in each book and the series as a whole. Few if any postmodern readers, even those who majored in English, are familiar with the stages of metallurgical alchemy and their corresponding equivalents in poems, plays, and novels, so a brief introduction is in order.

Literary alchemy, like metallurgical *cum* spiritual alchemy, is described in three stages, each of which stages has a signature color. Those colors again are black, white, and red.

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<sup>151</sup> The change in Fleur from phlegmatic to choleric and the reverse in Molly Weasley takes place at the end of *Half-Blood Prince* at Bill’s bedside in the Hogwarts infirmary (621-623).

Alchemy as a spiritual work follows the revealed traditions in being a three-part task. The *nigredo* or “black” dissolution stage is the work of “renunciation” or “repentance.” It is preparatory to the work of “purification” and “illumination” that in alchemy is done in the second so-called “white” stage,” the *albedo*. Alchemy represents spiritual accomplishment or perfection in its *rubedo* or “red stage.”

From a traditional or theocentric perspective, the first step is the death of the ego-mind and its attachments to the sensible world and ratiocinations. This reduction to *prima materia* is the person’s turn to their transpersonal center in the *logos* intellect or heart. The *albedo* purification is the cleansing of this interior mirror so that it reflects the “image and likeness” of the archetypal *Logos* Intellect. The *rubedo* crisis of the great work is the completion and exteriorization or revelation of this interior transformation, the spirit’s metaphorical return to and resurrection of the physical body.

“The *albedo* occurs after the blackened matter, the putrefied body of the Stone has been washed to whiteness by the mercurial waters or fire” (Abraham 1998, 4). This is the stage of purification and the transformation of the subject, already broken down into *prima materia*, into the *rebis* or Philosopher’s Stone. This work, though, is hidden; the accomplishments of the white stage are revealed in the drama of the red finale.<sup>152</sup>

The three colors were originally metallurgical steps: dissolution or “blackening,” distillation and purification or “bleaching,” and recondensing or “reddening.” The axiomatic action of alchemy, again, is *solve et coagula*, “dissolve and recondense,” material dissolution that frees the spirit followed by reconstitution of the spirit with body in a purified state, action Nicholls describes as the ‘Chemical Theatre’ in the alembic that Shakespeare and others re-create in drama.

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<sup>152</sup> To understand the *albedo*, it helps to know that the Latin root of “*albedo*” is ‘*albus*,’ meaning both “white” and “resplendent.” There’s a hint of “luminescent” or “brilliant;” “purification unto illumination” via the *logos* “light of the world” perhaps best describes the albification process.

Thinking of the sun at day's end and human experience of twilight is analogous with this three-step. As the sun sets, the sky darkens and the observer become less focused; the ego-self dissolves into sleep. In the night, there is reflected light, sun on the moon, which illumines the supraconscious self in secret. At dawn, in the light of day, the person is re-membered and different, even re-created, because of the purifying rest in the lunar light.

The person is re-born every morning because of his or her rest in the darkness. This is not a poor one-line summary of the alchemical work. The recongealing or perfection of the human person in the *rubedo* or red stage is really only a revelation of the re-newing, purifying transformation that took place in the dark. With a full moon and a long ablution or bath in that white stage at night, and the analogy of the predominant white stage, imagery and meaning is complete.

This second step, the *albedo*, is represented in literature with the color white, the silver element or color, with light, especially the light at night (the moon or 'Luna' frequently plays a part), and with water. These elements are used as backdrops and props to story events of purification, illumination, and reconciliation or healing. Again, think of a prophetic dream or insight while lying in bed under the moon after a long bath when recovering from a shattering day; that's an *albedo*. No one will know about it until it is revealed in the light and through the events of the coming day, but that change in the moonlight is the greater part of the Great Work.

The *rubedo* or third step is "the reddening of the white matter of the stone at the final stage of the opus alchymicum" (Abraham 1998, 174). In the *nigredo*, all form, color, and light are taken from the substance to reduce it to blackened "prime matter." In the *albedo*, a light like the moon's reflected colorless light is evident in the white stone produced. In the *rubedo*, the contraries are resolved, the white stage's accomplishments are revealed, and the Stone becomes red.

As important as the idea of light as a symbol is in understanding alchemical gold, it is helpful to think of the three stages of the work in terms of light as well as color. As Burckhardt writes: “Black is the absence of color and light. White is purity; it is undivided light – light not broken down into colors. Red is the epitome of colors, its zenith and its point of greatest intensity” (Burckhardt 1976, 182). Imagine the lunar light in the darkness of night shining through a prism to reveal all colors and especially their epitome, red.

That is evident first in the books being largely about the resolution of contraries, especially the battle between the hot and dry Gryffindors up in their tower and the cold and moist Slytherins in the dungeons beneath the lake. Harry’s adventures are about his transcending this polarity, marrying the contraries, which *solve et coagula* purification happens in his passage through the black and a white and red stages. Every book and the *Potter* series as a whole come with a complete set.

In the individual books, the black stage or *nigredo* is almost always launched on Privet Drive, where Harry is treated horribly and, at least in *Philosopher’s Stone*, lives in a cupboard under the stairs. The work breaking Harry down is continued each year when he gets to Hogwarts and Severus Snape takes over, a figure whose hair, eyes, and clothing are uniformly black. But Hogwarts is the home of Albus Dumbledore, as well, whose first name means “white,” and Hogwarts, consequently, the “white house,” is where Harry is purified of the failing identified at the Dursleys’ as he and the Quarreling Couple solve that year’s mystery. The passage from Privet Drive to Hogwarts, Harry’s moving from the mundane world of the Dursleys where magic is forbidden to the Wizarding World where inner essence is fostered, is the jump from the sensible to the intelligible worlds. The understanding he gets through the solving of the mystery in each year is revealed in the book’s crisis, the confrontation with the bad guys, in which he always dies a figurative death and is re-born. From Privet Drive to his chat with Dumbledore at book’s end, Harry is always purified and transformed.

The clearest illustration of this is in *Prisoner of Azkaban*. At the start, Harry was an angry teenage boy. He blew Aunt Marge up, like a balloon rather than a bomb, because she had a little too much to drink and, in a flood of Thatcherisms (Aunt Marge and her bulldogs can be read as metaphors for Margaret Thatcher and the patriotic John Bull Tories), said unkind things about Harry's parents. At the end of same book, though, he was so much changed that he threw himself in front of Pettigrew, the man who actually betrayed his parents and was almost solely responsible for their deaths, because he felt his father wouldn't want his best friends to kill.

The *Potter* series taken altogether has a black, white and red stage, too, in books five, six, and seven: *Order of the Phoenix* is the series' 'Black book,' *Half-Blood Prince* is the White, and *Deathly Hallows* is the *rubedo* or Red stage.

The *nigredo*, again, is the stage in which the subject is broken down, stripped of all but the essential qualities for purification in the albedo or white work, the psychomachia of turning away from ego thinking to noetic perception. *Order of the Phoenix*, darkest and most disturbing of all the *Harry Potter* novels, is this stage in the series, a fact Ms. Rowling cued her readers to not only in the plot points, all of which are about Harry's loss of his identity, but in the "Black"-ness of the books. No small part of it takes place in the House of Black, Sirius' family manor, and it ends with the death of Sirius Black. More important, though, is that *Phoenix* details Harry's near complete dissolution. Every idea he had of himself was taken from him. Dolores Umbridge taught him that Hogwarts can be hell. He learned his father was a jerk. No Quidditch! Ron and Hermione outranked him on the Hogwarts totem pole. The entire "Girl thing" eluded him except for the agonizing confusion and heartbreak. Everything, in brief, was a nightmare for him in his fifth year. His self-understanding and identity were shattered - except, at the very end, after Sirius' death and with it any hope of a family life with his godfather, Harry learned

about the Prophecy. That understanding replaced everything else and that reduction to *prima materia* is the end and purpose of the black work.

When the next book, *Half-Blood Prince*, begins, the reader seems to have been transported to a different universe. Albus Dumbledore was not only back in Harry's life, he came to pick him up at Privet Drive. The Headmaster, largely absent in *Phoenix*, was everywhere in *Prince*. This is Dumbledore's book, which, given the meaning of his name and the work that was accomplished therein, might be called the 'White Book.' Not to mention, as with Sirius at the end of the 'Black book,' Albus died at the end of the 'White.' Through the tutorials with Dumbledore and the tasks he was given in *Prince*, Harry came to a whole new understanding of himself in terms of the Prophecy and his relationship to Lord Voldemort. Harry did get the whole truth from the Headmaster, but at the end of *Prince* he has been transformed from a boy who did not believe Dumbledore would show up as promised on Privet Drive to one that defiantly told the Minister of Magic, "I'm a Dumbledore man through and through."

*Deathly Hallows*, the next entry and series finale, is the 'Red book,' the *rubedo*. As explained above, just as in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Tale of Two Cities*, a wedding has to be revealed at this point, contraries have to be resolved, and a death to self must lead to greater life. After the dissolution and ablutions of the black and white stages respectively, Harry, the subject of the work, must reconstitute, the *coagula* of the alchemical axiom, in perfection or victory. The reader attuned to alchemical tropes would expect to see a philosopher's stone and a philosophical orphan as well. The *rubedo* of *Deathly Hallows* is the crisis of the whole series.

- **The *Potter* Series ‘Ring’ and Finale**

*Deathly Hallows* bears a much closer look because it is not only a *rubedo* and finish to the series’ alchemical artistry but an encapsulated and near perfect black-white-red story telling piece in and of itself. Before looking at it, though, in this way, two points need to be made about the series artistry over the course of seven books to answer an obvious question. If the last three novels are *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo* of the series, what function do the first four books serve?

First, William Sprague (2011) and Joe Packer (2017) independently have noted that the first three books are as alchemical as the last three books, but, in keeping with Rowling’s ring composition structural artistry, they are in reverse order, i.e., red-to-white-to-black, in parallel with each of the closing books. To make the reverse parallelism complete, the ends of the book are an upside-down version of the three stages; *Philosopher’s Stone* closes with Dumbledore destroying rather than creating a Stone, *Chamber of Secrets* ends with Harry filthy with Basilisk blood, Horcrux ink, and Chamber dirt rather than having been through an ablutionary *albedo*, and *Prisoner of Azkaban*, instead of breaking Harry down and stripping him of his identity, reveals his god-father, Sirius Black, to him with the promise that he might once again have a family and home. The literary alchemy of Rowling’s artistry is in itself not only the symbolic “style” of the series but is also fully integrated with and complement to her over-arching *structural* design

- ***Goblet of Fire***

Second, *Goblet of Fire*, the fourth and “crucial” book of the series according to Rowling,<sup>153</sup> is not any one of the three specific-colored stages at the series pivot but all three at once, a transition between the

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<sup>153</sup> CBBC: *And how vital is book four in the whole seven book series to Harry?* JKR: Crucial. The fourth is a very, very important book. Well you know because you read it, something incredibly important happens in book four and also it’s literally a central book, it’s almost the heart of the series, and it’s pivotal. It’s very difficult to talk about and I can’t wait for the day someone’s read all seven and I can talk completely freely about it. But it’s a very, very important book (Mzimba).

reverse alchemy of the opening books to the straight forward hermetic coloring of the closers. The three TriWizard Tournament tasks in *Goblet of Fire*, most notably, are snapshots of the three stages:

The *nigredo* is Harry's agonizing lead-up to his confrontation with the Hungarian Horntail in the first task. Everyone at Hogwarts, it seems, and his best friend Ron most importantly, think he has entered the Tournament himself and decided he is a conceited anti-hero they can openly despise. This breakdown in his identity is complemented by the very real danger of his being burned alive by the fire-breathing Horntail.

The *albedo* or ablutionary stage is Harry's reconciliation with Ron and the school as a whole before the second task. He figures out what the task is under water in the Prefect's bathroom and the challenge itself is about being able to breathe underwater in the Great Lake.

The *rubedo* finale in the Labyrinth Hagrid creates on the school's Quidditch pitch is a collection of obstacles that reveal all that Harry has learned and has become through the other stages and tasks.

Each of the events of the Triwizard Tournament and Harry's preparation for each trial by fire, water, or labyrinth in *Goblet of Fire*, then, is from the alchemical work. Not only the nature of the tasks themselves reflect the three stages; the specific tokens or story elements Rowling uses in *Goblet* are traditional symbols of the stages affecting *solve et coagula* in their appropriate sequence in the tale. Dragons, the egg, the prefects' bath and water trial, the labyrinth, and the graveyard resurrection and fight are each alchemical tokens.

**Dragons:** The first task in the tournament involves dragons, which are used in alchemy to represent "matter at the *beginning* of the work being resolved into philosophical sulphur and mercury" (Abraham 1998, 59).



**The egg:** Harry and the other champions then have to solve the mystery of the egg, which appropriately is the name given to “the alchemist’s vessel of transmutation in which the birth of the philosopher’s stone takes place... also known as the griffin’s egg” (i.e., from beginning to the place of the work) (Abraham 1998, 66).

**The bath:** Harry solves his egg puzzle in the prefects’ bath/swimming pool, a word used by alchemists to describe “the secret, inner, invisible fire which dissolves and kills, cleanses and resurrects the matter of the Stone in the vessel” (what makes the work proceed in the alchemist’s alembic) (Abraham 1998, 17-18).

**Water immersion/flood:** The second task in the tournament is the trial underwater in the lake. Interestingly, one of the alchemist’s maxims was “Perform no operation until all be made water.” Water immersion, it turns out, is “a symbol of the dissolution and putrefaction of the matter of the Stone during the black *nigredo* stage” (Abraham 1998, 78-79) and, more important, the ablutionary agent of the *second stage*, “the circulation of the matter of the philosopher’s stone in the alembic when the blackness of the *nigredo* is washed and purified into the whiteness of the *albedo*” (Abraham 1998, ‘Ablution,’ 1; see also ‘Albedo,’ 4-5).

**Labyrinth:** The third task, which is supposed to be the end of the tournament, is a maze and is a metaphor for life in the world, or “the dangerous journey of the alchemist through the *opus alchymicum*.... While in the labyrinth of the opus, illusion and confusion reign and the alchemist is in danger of losing all connection and clarity” (Abraham 1998, 113).

**Grave:** Harry and Cedric are transported to the graveyard, where they witness Voldemort’s rebirthing party. The graveyard is also what alchemists and poets refer to as “the alchemist’s vessel during the *nigredo*” (Abraham 1998, 90-91), when everything is broken down into formless elements—a metaphor for what happens to Harry there.

The graveyard scene includes a Black Mass of sorts in which the Dark Lord creates a new body for his fragmented soul, whose potion elements are an inversion of Christian sacramental liturgy. Harry's survival there is a Great Work in miniature as he endures a *nigredo* torture while tied to a grave marker, an ablutionary trial in his forced duel with the Dark Lord, and a *rubedo* revelation and triumph in the sphere of Phoenix Song that allows his escape back to Hogwarts with Cedric Diggory's corpse.

The seven-book series, then, is a mirrored alchemical work, first in reverse with a story turn featuring all three stages and a Great Work in miniature at its close and finally the work in order, *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*. The last book, as noted, is not only a *rubedo* to the series but the best black-white-red story sequence in itself with the possible exception of *Goblet*. It deserves a closer look, if only to demonstrate conclusively the depth and extent of Rowling's dedication to painting from this hermetic palette.

*Deathly Hallows* begins, as mentioned, with Bill and Fleur's alchemical wedding, in which France and England are married in the *sitzkrieg* before the shooting war with Voldemort's Nazis begins. The first eight chapters of *Deathly Hallows* are lead-up to this union of opposites, of choler and phlegm. The wedding itself is a meeting of contraries, of solar and lunar. That's why in addition to the Gallic/Briton jokes, the lunar Lovegoods showed up in sunlight bright yellow. Luna, the moon in solar outfit, explained that it's good luck to wear gold at a wedding. This was not just Luna being "loony" (the nickname unkind characters give her); everything at the Weasley-Delacour wedding was golden: the floor, the poles, the band jackets, the bridesmaids' dresses, even Nymphadora Tonks' hair.

The wedding, though, was only the entrance ramp to the long story journey to the conjunction of the Slytherin and Gryffindor opposites. The wedding broke up with the arrival of Kingsley's lynx patronus who sounded the alarm that Rufus Scrimgeour was dead and the Death Eater blitzkrieg had begun. With

that, the death of the first character whose name means ‘red,’ the real action of *Deathly Hallows*’ alchemical work began.

The rest of the book is best understood as black, white, and red stages in conjunction with Christian holy days, namely, Nativity, Theophany, and Easter. In summary, the *nigredo* stretches painfully from chapter nine, ‘A Place to Hide,’ to chapter eighteen, ‘The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore.’ Harry’s purification and illumination begins in chapter nineteen, ‘The Silver Doe,’ and ends with the trio’s return to Hogsmead in chapter twenty-eight, ‘The Missing Mirror.’ The crisis of the book and the series is in Harry’s return to Hogwarts, destruction of the remaining Horcruxes, and victory over Lord Voldemort, as told in the last eight chapters of *Deathly Hallows*.

The ten *nigredo* chapters are as dark and gothic as anything ever offered as “children’s literature.” The trio stayed in the House of Black, journeyed undercover to the Orwellian “Magic is Might” black statue in the new Ministry (accessible only by flush toilet...), and they went camping, where, for some reason, it was always night, or overcast, or the three friends could not get along. Ron finally departed, shattering the soul triptych. The *nigredo* camping trip of *Deathly Hallows* is only nine chapters in length, fourteen through twenty-two, but they are unpleasant reading and three are agony to the sympathetic reader, the three after Ron departed.

These are the Christmas chapters about Harry’s holiday trip with Hermione to Godric’s Hollow, which are the climax of the book’s *nigredo* and end with Harry’s crisis of faith. Harry at the end of *Half-Blood Prince* proclaimed that he was “a Dumbledore man.” In *Hallows*, he read one article by Rita Skeeter and his faith was shaken. He spoke with Aunt Muriel and ‘Dogbreath’ Doge at the wedding, and he was already struggling to believe what the Headmaster had told him about the Horcrux mission. By the end of the *nigredo*, when Harry read *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*, he denied Dumbledore was

his mentor, denied that he loved Albus, denied that Dumbledore loved him, etc. (362). Harry's holly and phoenix wand had been broken in battle with Nagini and he was left with a broken wand, a broken piece of glass, and shattered faith. He kept these fragments, though, in a bag around his neck. He denied Dumbledore, denied his mission, *and*, in something like despair, he kept these remnants or relics of the person he once was close to his heart. The symbolism of Nativity here is the darkness of creation before the advent of the "light of the world;" just as Harry had felt the Dementor-induced despair "inside his very heart" on his first encounter with one on the Hogwarts Express (*Prisoner*, 83), he again at this nadir *nigredo* felt crushed "by the weight of his own disillusionment" (*Hallows*, 362).

The *nigredo* darkness, however, mercifully ended in the next chapter with the brilliance reflecting off the Silver Doe in the snow-covered Forest of Dean. This chapter, 'The Silver Doe,' a meeting of Christian, alchemical and Arthurian images in one spot, is perhaps the height of Rowling's achievement as a writer in her *Potter* books. A more detailed look at the alchemy of *Deathly Hallows* than space permits here reveals the best of it is in the white stage: 'Ron the Baptist' saving Harry from his watery grave (the Theophany correspondence), Ron's ablutionary exorcism in destroying the Locket Horcrux, Harry's death to self and discovery of remorse, repentance, faith, and love in Dobby's grave, and the pale dragon in Gringott's are all images of purification, with water on hand or nearby.

The white stone on the red earth of Dobby's grave and the pink eyes are chromatic symbols, too, this time of the story's movement from white to red. The *rubedo* of *Deathly Hallows* begins when Harry refused to listen to Aberforth's complaints and criticism of his brother Albus. When Harry demonstrated his noetic faith and his choice to believe from his heart contra logic or calculation, Neville appeared *ex machina*, took him into the castle, and the battle for Hogwarts had its beginning. Perhaps the red stage really begins with an appropriately hued marker when Rubeus, the half-giant whose name means "red," flew through the window of Hogwarts Castle. It was in this battle, to include Harry's sacrifice in the

Forbidden Forest and his ultimate victory over Voldemort (the triumph at dawn over death completing the Easter correspondence of Harry's having risen from the 'tomb' limbo of King's Cross), that the contraries are resolved and all the Houses sat down at one table. The battle also caused the creation of the "philosophical orphan" when Nymphadora and Remus Lupin were killed. A Philosopher's Stone is produced, as well; Hermione and Ron's daughter, we learn in the epilogue is named 'Rose,' which is another name for the Stone.

The turning-into-its-opposite transformation in the last novel of the series is how the world has been changed by Harry's internal victory and destruction of the scar-Horcrux as explained in the psychomachia chapter. Lord Voldemort tortured and murdered the Hogwarts Muggle Studies Teacher in the first chapter of the book. Her name was Charity Burbage and her corpse was dinner for Nagini. Charity or Love was destroyed by Death. Via Harry's death to self in the white stage's Dobby burial, revealed in his willing self-sacrifice before Voldemort, death's power was broken. Lily and Harry's sacrificial and selfless love sustained life and had its victory over death.

There is a parallel complete *solve et coagula* transformation in Harry, too. He was a Dumbledore man by confession as the story began but his disbelief and lack of trust came to the fore after his fight with Nagini in Godric's Hallow. After choosing to believe, however, when he was in Dobby's grave and chose to pursue the Horcruxes as instructed rather than Hallows, he became almost Christ-like in dying and rising from the dead to vanquish death. Even the near omnipotent Dumbledore begged Harry's forgiveness and told him that he had "known for a long time" Harry was "the better man" (713).

What has made him the better man, was becoming the Gryffindor/Slytherin union himself; something like 'Albus Severus Potter,' as Harry and Ginevra name their younger son. He becomes the conjunction of contraries by acquiring the seemingly contradictory views and qualities of both Albus Dumbledore,

champion Gryffindor, and Severus Snape, Slytherin House Master and icon, by the end of *Deathly Hallows*.

The *Deathly Hallows* Epilogue is the return to the gold of the Alchemical Wedding and to a peaceful, post *rubedo* version of the opening chapters' challenge, much as *Deathly Hallows* is a return to and re-telling of *Philosopher's Stone*'s story and events. In the Epilogue's seven pages, we meet the Rebis, the Orphan, and the Stone in the children of the next generation (Albus Severus, Teddy Lupin, and Rose, respectively). The work is simultaneously complete and ready for its next beginning, an *uroboros* loop or ring.

### **Harry's Transformations from Lead to Gold**

The alchemical work is about changing the soul from lead to gold, from sin and failing to virtue, in order to create a *Rebis* that is the union of opposites. This is evident in the title character's transformations in each *Harry Potter* book.

*Philosopher's Stone*: As the novel opens, Harry is an orphan child who lives in fear of his aunt and uncle and without any knowledge or delight in who he is. By book's end, he shows himself a champion of remarkable courage and daring – and reconciled to both his parents' death and destiny as a wizard.

*Chamber of Secrets*: Harry begins the book as a prisoner both of the Dursleys and of his own self-doubts and self-pity; at the heroic finish in the morality play acted out in the *Chamber*, he is the liberator of Ginny and vanquisher of Tom Riddle, who is an incarnation of selfishness and self-importance.

*Prisoner of Azkaban*: Harry blows up Aunt Marge on Privet Drive because he cannot overlook her slights of his parents; in the crucible of the Shrieking Shack, he rescues the man who betrayed his

parents to Voldemort by offering his own life as a shield to him! Unforgiving judgment to Semi-divine Mercy in a year.

*Goblet of Fire*: Harry begins the book consumed by thoughts of what others think of him, his external person; by book's end, after trials with Ron, the Hogwarts student body, and a dragon, he is able to shrug off without a dent or tear a Daily Prophet hatchet job beacons to all corners of the Wizarding World.

*Order of the Phoenix*: Harry is consumed by a desire for news at the beginning of the latest book. He struggles to listen to television reports, agonizes over the lack of reports from friends, and wanders his neighborhood in search of newspapers in trash cans. At the end, he is aware of his need to turn inward and discover and strengthen his inner life; his extroverted dependence on the outer world and events has become his point of vulnerability by which Voldemort manipulates him (and causes Sirius' death).

*Half-Blood Prince*: Having been broken down in the heat and drought of Phoenix, Harry is rebuilt and purified in the cold and damp of *Prince's* ablutions for the revelations of the *Deathly Hallows*. Harry begins to reveal himself as the Gryffindor/Slytherin androgyne.

*Deathly Hallows*: The first chapter of Harry's adventure, 'In Memoriam,' reveals how weak Harry's faith in Dumbledore is and his conviction that there is no life after death: "If anything was certain, it was that the bright blue eyes of Albus Dumbledore would never pierce him again" (*Hallows*, 2, page 20). Not the Dumbledore man he had told the Minister of Magic he was! At book's end, Harry meets with Dumbledore's shade and is pronounced not only a good and faithful servant but a "better man" by his mentor.

### C. The *Nigredo* of *Troubled Blood*

Rowling has not forsaken her alchemical artistry in her post *Potter* efforts. Though *Casual Vacancy*, the Cormoran Strike mysteries, and the two *Fantastic Beasts* film franchise screenplays published since 2010 do not feature the evident hermetic coloring, sequences, and symbols found in the Hogwarts Saga, each has significant alchemical touches and symbolism.

The coitus-on-a-grave that Krystall Wheedon and ‘Fats’ Wall have above Barry Fairbrother’s grave, for instance, and the *ouroboros* figure of ‘Fats’ and Andrew Price in their cave are unmistakable alchemical glyphs. *The Fantastic Beasts* screenplays feature humoral comedy elements reminiscent of Jonson and Shakespeare and their ‘Beasts Within’ theme, especially the idea of Grindelwald as Dragon and Dumbledore as Phoenix, are traditional tropes of hermetic writing (see Baird-Hardy 2018a; Whited). Cormoran Strike, as well, not surprisingly in light of its being a seven-book series written in parallel and as commentary on its Harry Potter equivalents, has a host of Great Work signatures embedded, especially with reference to Mercury, Castor and Pollux, and swans (see Gray, Willis 2018).

The last point in this survey of alchemical artistry in Rowling’s work is her latest novel in the Cormoran Strike detective series, *Troubled Blood*, her longest book to date at well over eight hundred pages. It is a fitting conclusion because it encapsulates the author’s over-lapping use of embedded symbols characters and readers are challenged to grasp, and of the soul’s journey of transformation in traditional exteriorized soul-faculty sets, as discussed in the previous chapter. It remains to discuss her use of symbols and sequences from metallurgical alchemy in a parallel psychomachia to her ‘Psyche and Cupid’ myth and Red Crosse Knight intertextual iconography.



- **The *Nigredo***

*Troubled Blood* is the *nigredo* or black stage novel of the Strike series. This was assumed to be the case before the book was published and has been confirmed since. Why speculation along this line was so confident and the reality little surprise is because the author has written to date in a chiasmic structure anthropologist Mary Douglas described as ‘ring composition.’ It was expected, consequently, that the fifth novel would be as dark as the third novel, *Career of Evil*, its correspondent in a seven-book turtle-back structure (see Freeman 2021c). Rowling, too, has been writing each of the Strike books in playful parallel with their corresponding numbers in the *Harry Potter* series; *Lethal White*, the fourth book, for example, is laden with references and echoes of *Goblet of Fire*, the fourth *Potter* novel. *Order of the Phoenix*, the fifth Hogwarts adventure, is the *nigredo* of that series, hence the assumption that ‘Strike5’ would be one as well (cf. Granger 2022). *Troubled Blood* did not disappoint on this expectation. A quick review of what the *nigredo* stage is and with a look at the definition in Lyndy Abraham’s *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, then, is in order before reading *Blood* through the defamiliarizing hermetic lens.

As noted above, alchemy as a spiritual work follows the revealed traditions in being a three-part task. The *nigredo* or “black” dissolution stage is the work of “renunciation” or “repentance.” It is preparatory to the work of “purification” and “illumination” that in alchemy is done in the second so-called “white” stage,” the *albedo*. Alchemy represents spiritual accomplishment or perfection in its *rubedo* or “red stage.” Literary Alchemy, in correspondence with the metallurgical sacred science, is the written sacred art of psychomachia, i.e., an exteriorization of the soul’s journey to communion with Spirit expressed in alchemical symbolism and sequences.

In traditional language, again, the first step or black stage is the death of the ego-mind and its attachments to the sensible world and ratiocinations. This reduction to *prima materia* is the person’s

turn to their transpersonal center in the *logos* intellect or heart. The black stage's purpose in alchemical jargon is the reduction of the subject, in the laboratory a base metal, here the soul, to prime matter, which is to say, that person's defining idea, his or her *logos* inner essence, represented in the core psychological obstacle the hero must confront and transcend for spiritual achievement.

In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry Potter's nightmare *nigredo*, he was stripped of everything non-essential in his schoolboy existence to prepare him for the revelation of his singular power and life challenge. The Wizarding World newspaper, *The Daily Prophet*, and the Ministry of Magic waged a campaign to discredit his testimony that the Dark Lord had returned, for example, which tore away his 'Boy Who Lived' heroic reputation. Dumbledore avoided contact with him as much as possible, which neglect took away one of his expected supports. He was not made a school prefect but his two best friends were, so he lost the visible status of being their leader. His first romantic efforts exploded in his face. Hogwarts, under the direction of Dolores Umbridge, became a nightmare of restrictive rules. She not only tortured him in detentions, but gave him a lifetime ban from playing Quidditch, his greatest pleasure at the school. He learned, too, his father had been a self-important jerk while at Hogwarts, just as Severus Snape had told him for years. The book ended with the murder of Sirius Black, a death for which Harry was in large part responsible. The hero in the *nigredo* of *Order of the Phoenix* is sometimes referred to by Potter fans as 'CAPS LOCK Harry' because he rages so often in the book, most especially in his grief and remorse after Black's death in the finale.

After yelling at the Headmaster in his office out of this misery, Dumbledore told Harry at last about the Prophecy that linked him and Lord Voldemort. The climax and fruit of Harry's near complete dissolution was the revelation that he was destined to a death match with the most powerful evil wizard alive and that the boy's power, love, according to Dumbledore, was his only hope in that conflict. The year's ego-denuding agonies, in other words, made plain the spiritual allegory; the battle with

Voldemort, the Dark Lord, is a battle exteriorization of Everyman's interior *jihad* between the light in the Heart and the darkness of individual ego attachments and considerations. Harry had been stripped of every distraction and dissipation, all of which was burned away in continuous disappointment, denial of privilege and rank, and the metaphorical heat of adolescent rage and frustration. The *nigredo* of *Phoenix* prepared Harry for the ablutionary and enlightenment of the next book's *albedo*.

As different as the subject, milieu, and characters of Rowling's two series are, *Troubled Blood* as literary *nigredo* should reflect the same process and product as *Order of the Phoenix*. Abraham's *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* in its *nigredo* and related entries details what hermetic symbols a reader can expect in a black stage literary piece.

Abraham defines the alchemical equivalent of religious renunciation and repentance this way:

**Nigredo:** the initial, black stage of the opus alchymicum in which the body of the impure metal, the matter for the Stone, or the old outmoded state of being is killed, putrefied and dissolved into the original substance of creation, the *prima materia*, in order that it may be renovated and reborn in a new form. The alchemists, along with popular seventeenth-century belief, held that there could be no regeneration without corruption. Nature could only be renewed after first dying away. (Abraham 1998, 135)

She offers a catalog of signature symbols that are used as corresponding experiences for the dissolution and mortification of this stage in the work. In addition to the corpses of united lovers in a coffin or grave, writers use "the skeleton, the skull, the angel of death, Saturn with his scythe, the eclipse of the sun and the moon, the beheaded king or bird, the crow's head, the severed head, and all things black – night, the crow, the raven, coal, pitch, ebony, the black man, Moor or Ethiopian" as *nigredo* translucencies. The novel begins with Strike in Cornwall in dutiful attendance to his aunt and uncle there because she had received a diagnosis of terminal cancer. The first half of the book involves his trips back and forth, London to St Mawes, and ends with his bedside presence at her death. Joan's

burial at sea on Easter Sunday, as explored earlier, are a turning point in Strike, and his last thoughts on the case he solved in *Troubled Blood* were of his late aunt:

As Cynthia's face crumpled, Strike and Robin both looked tactfully away. Robin at the cat in the window and Strike at the seascape over the mantelpiece. The rain drummed against the window, the cat in his lap purred, and he remembered the lily urn [that held his aunt's ashes] bobbing away. With a twist in his chest, and in spite of the satisfaction at having done what he set out to do, he wished he could have called Joan, and told her the end of Margot Bamborough's story, and heard her say she was proud of him, one last time. (919)

Beginning, middle, and end with points between, *Troubled Blood* is a meditation on death different in its prolonged nature and personal relation than the murders Strike has worked to solve all his professional life. Burckhardt wrote about the *nigredo* that “at the beginning of every spiritual realization stands death, in the form of ‘dying to the world.’ Consciousness must be withdrawn from the senses and turned inward. As the ‘inner light’ has not yet risen, this turning away from the outward world is experienced as a *nox profunda*” (Burckhardt 1972, 186). Other than the melancholy and the frustrations inevitable to the death of a loved one not close at hand, *Troubled Blood* is buried or, better, flooded with black stage symbols and experiences that foster this ‘inner light,’ “the new light of illumination” post *nigredo* (Abraham 1998, 136).

- **The Symbolism of Water**

Most relevant to *Troubled Blood*, with respect both to the otherwise mysterious title and its primary symbolism, “the beginning of the opus is a time of bloodshed and lamentation” and “the dissolution is also symbolized by the flood... and the death of the king (sometimes compared to Christ's crucifixion)” (Abraham 1998, 135). The title points to the hermetic meaning of the novel; the book's primary symbols, water and the cross, which are referenced more or less constantly throughout the work are the black coloration appropriate to the *nigredo*.

Abraham defines ‘The Flood’ as “a symbol of the dissolution and putrefaction of the matter of the Stone during the black nigredo stage when water is the dominant element.... During this stage the alchemical vessel is sometimes symbolized by the ark which rides on the flood and becomes a vessel of generation, of new life” (Abraham 1998, 78). The predominant symbolism of *Troubled Blood*, even more than the repeated references to the cross, is this water of dissolution. “Rain, rain everywhere” might be the Estecan subtitle to *Blood*. The 1974 disappearance of Margot Bamborough took place during a downpour. The 2014 investigation that lasts for more than a year takes place during a period unusually wet even for England and included a historic storm that flooded Cornwall. Leaving aside other mentions of water, the word ‘rain’ is used, as in the passage above, in reference to the prevailing weather 137 times. The reader experiences something akin to a symbolic drowning in *Troubled Blood*; it colors every scene as its backdrop condition of darkness and dissolution.

The pithy description of the two-fold action of alchemy is *solve et coagula*, ‘dissolve and recondense,’ the formula Rowling has had tattooed on to the wrist of her writing hand. Water, of course, is the apt element for *solve* “when water is the dominant element” as Abraham noted, though it is the opposite of the heat and drought symbolism of the *nigredo* in *Phoenix*, in which Harry’s external ego-attachments were burned rather than washed away. The key scenes in *Blood* take place in the rain or indoors with the precipitation pounding on windows, trapped in place because of flooding, or by the sea.

Flood water and heavy rain have almost magical transformative effects, especially on the women in Strike’s life, all of whom become agents of his reflection or deliverance in wet weather, people whom he struggles to recognize. Strike travels to Cornwall in January and is trapped there because of a “vicious weather front, the flooding from which “cut off” the “Cornish peninsula” “from the rest of England” (347-348). Joan Nancarrow, something of a nag to Cormoran in normal times, in the rain that makes the Macmillan Nurse describe the atmosphere as more “fresh water” than “fresh air” (350), an

“emerging,” “unfamiliar” aunt (349), one who “offered simple honesty and plain-speaking” in place of the hen who “demanded a kind of falseness from all around her, a rose-tinted view of everything” (353). Strike was able to share with this wise crone his thoughts about women and marriage, to learn from her wishes for her funeral and burial, and to talk openly about his feelings for the aunt and uncle who had been his *de facto* mother and father growing up, love that Cormoran had never voiced aloud before. Most tellingly, the new Joan urged him to speak to Jonny Rokeby, his biological father, and to accept the invitation to his party; “I know what went on.... I think your father’s at the heart of... of a lot of things” (355-356).

As discussed, Robin confronted Strike in the street outside her flat after his drunken behavior at the Valentine Day’s dinner party with her flat-mate, her brother, and his college friends. The weather was, as it is for most of *Blood*, what Robin described as “vile” (292). As Strike heaved up his dinner, Doom Bar, and brandy between two parked cars, “rain and high winds battered him.” Standing up, “rain sparkled in the street lights and blurred Strike’s vision,” and “it was a mighty effort to walk in these high winds.” The Robin who appeared *ex machina* in the storm was not the kind, subservient, and deferential helpmate his business partner was as a rule. In “the damp night air” “Robin appeared to be angry: angrier in fact than he’d ever seen her” (494-495). “The “unique woman in his life who’d never tried to change him” was enraged, in fact, by his boorish treatment of her in front of the dinner party guests and confronted him with all his failings. Strike only belatedly apologized late the next day; in the event, all he thought was “This wasn’t the Robin he knew” (496).

Uncle Ted had called his nephew to say his aunt was on her last legs and her nephew committed, despite historic flooding – “The trains are all off, the roads are flooded” (464) – to driving to Cornwall in a rented Jeep with his half-sister Lucy. They drove through “storm water, rain and gales” in “dream-like” conditions: “rain lashed the car, high winds lifted the wind-screen wipers from the glass” and, “to

Strike's grateful surprise, the crisis had revealed a different Lucy, just as illness had revealed a different Joan" (515). Strike thought of his diminutive half-sister, as "Joan-esque" in conversation, a woman who dealt in "statement of fact" with a "lack of inquiry. "Like Joan, Lucy had total confidence in her own judgment of her nearest and dearest's best interests" (32-33). The new Lucy, as they "diverted around great wide lakes where lately there had been fields," was "focused," "efficient and practical," "patient," "resolute," a woman of calm determination" (515-516), rather than the woman who had nagged and "baited" him in the Nancarrow's garden in the novel's first chapters (33).

Perhaps the greatest transformation of a woman that is linked to water was the sea-change in Charlotte Campbell-Ross, "milady beserko," the Aphrodite ex-fiancee who haunted Strike's dream and relations with all other women. She was a notorious liar, a woman who spoke untruths as naturally as other people breathed. On Easter morning, Strike was on the water in his uncle's boat, the *Jahomet*, with his nephew Jack, to dedicate Joan's ashes to the sea.<sup>154</sup> Charlotte texted him when he was surrounded by the ocean off Cornwall's coast; first, to admit at last what Strike had always suspected about her marriage to Jago Ross (that she had done it to goad him into returning to her), and, after this uncharacteristic confession, as she attempted suicide by overdose, a message about honesty: "I want to die speaking the truth people are such liars everyone I know lies in such if them want to stop pretending" (665-666). Strike having returned to land saved the new Charlotte by contacting the treatment facility in time for them to find and resuscitate her. The insanely self-focused goddess of beauty texted him on a rainy day months later to thank him and expressed the sentiment that her resurrection on Easter had been transformative; "I've started to appreciate people who're decent to everyone" (906-907).

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<sup>154</sup> The names Jack, Joan, and Jahonet, as noted in the biography chapter, are all derivations of 'John.' This is in keeping with Spenser's heavy use of the Gospel of St. John and the Book of Revelation (Kaske, 88; Fowler 1964, 66) and the traditional symbolism of light and darkness in the Prologue to St John discussed previously on Rowling's core Peter-John distinction. Rowling's use of the names 'John' and 'Peter' have special relevance given her own name, the one she would have been given if born a boy, her father's name, and the exoteric-esoteric relationship of the "churches" of Sts John and Peter in Christianity.

Joan's dispersion on the waters was recalled by Strike after he and Robin had interviewed the Douthwaites in seaside Skegness. Their conversation over fish and chips there turned on the difficulty of real change, transforming oneself at depth rather than the pervasive delusion that "if they subsume themselves in something bigger, and that changes, they'll change, too." Strike argued that "*people* who fundamentally change are rare, in my experience, because it's bloody hard work, compared to going on a march or waving a flag" (810). Strike voiced here the mantra of the alchemists who strove for inner transformation and whose work began in dissolution by immersion in water, the return to *prima materia*. Strike insisted that he and his partner walk down to the sea before returning to London; "It's wrong, being by the sea without actually laying eyes on it." There he thought of Joan and her life after death in the water. "Cornish-born, Cornish-bred, Joan had known that this need to reconnect with the sea had lived in all of them. Now, every time they made their way to the coast they paid her tribute, along with the obeisance due to the waves" (814).

It was in Skegness that Strike had treated Robin to renditions of 'The Song of the Western Men' and claimed his Cornish identity, a transformation from his opinion in the first sentences of the book, when in answer to Polworth's pointed question, he said, "Would I call myself English?... No, I'd probably say British." Having been as much changed as the women in his life by the erosive effect of the continuous rain and sea water, Strike has reached his core identity in the Cornish trait of paying "obeisance to the waves." Water, the agent and environment of the ego-solvent *nigredo*, is also its destination or aim; it is traditionally the symbol of prime matter. As Scott wrote:

The symbolism of water is most commonly recognised as that of potentiality: ontological possibility or *materia prima*. 'Water, thou art the source of all things and of all existence!' [*Bhavisyottarapurana*, 31.14]. This is the immediate symbolism of the Waters of *Genesis*. Potentiality is a reflection at the ontological level, of the Divine All Possibility. Thus, one can talk of the "Divine Sea," which is none other than the Infinitude of the Absolute. According to number symbolism the Absolute is symbolized by either "The One," expressing Its Unity, or by "zero," expressing both Its Infinite possibility and Its transcendent unknowability. (Scott, 37)



Strike, nearing the end of *Troubled Blood* and the agonies of his transformation in the story alembic, was able at last to see the sea with the eye of his Heart, having been reduced to the *prima materia* of a Cornishman's link with the metaphysical ground, the ocean of the Absolute or God in Its Infinitude transcending and eclipsing all ego and attendant individual history. Coincidental with this theophanic epiphany, the detectives received a text from the last witness who had thus far eluded their searches.

- **Rainbows and Unicorns**

The alchemical marker for the end of the *nigredo* is a full spectrum of color after the darkness, most often the 'tail of the peacock' (*cauda pavonis*) or a rainbow. "The rainbow, the sign of the promise sent at the end of the flood, is, in alchemy, a symbol of the stage of many colours, the peacock's tail, which follows the nigredo and precedes the albedo" (Abraham 1998, 79, see also 163). Strike in Skegness spoke disparagingly of Gaelic nationalists seeking independence from Britain as hucksters making "promises everything'll be rainbows and unicorns if only they cut themselves free of London" (809-810). The phrase "rainbows and unicorns" is a two-fold pointer, though, to the revelation of the *Logos* light that "shineth in darkness" that the darkness "comprehend not" (John 1:5). God told Noah after the deluge that reduced the earth to its origins that the rainbow was "the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations" (Genesis 9:12-17). The unicorn is a traditional symbol of Christ (Cirlot, 357-358).<sup>155</sup> What those who "promise rainbows and unicorns" are pledging is the paradise consequent to the realization of the

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<sup>155</sup> Hence what Harry learned from Firenze on his first trip into the Forbidden Forest: "The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenceless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips" (*Stone*, 258). This is a sacred art representation in story of the Christian doctrine of the power of Christ's blood in the Eucharist (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23-29), one essential for understanding the traditional symbolism of *Harry Potter*. Voldemort drank the blood in the Forest that night and suffered the spiritual consequences; Harry's sacrificial death and victory over the Dark Lord in *Deathly Hallows* is an echo of this unicorn scene in *Stone*, a reverberation highlighted by the chapter title, 'The Forest Again,' and Dumbledore's explanation at King's Cross of Harry's survival being due to the "bond of blood," his mother's sacrificial death and Voldemort's recreating himself through Harry's blood in *Goblet*. Rowling-Galbraith understands the traditional symbolism of the unicorn.

covenant with God in Christ, one only possible as had Noah after surviving the “deluge” of the *nigredo* and paying “obeisance to the waves” as Absolute.

This symbolism is presented in *Troubled Blood* both at the end of Strike’s interview with Roy Phipps, in which the patriarch dissolved at last into tears and confessed his culpability in his first wife’s death and the discovery at book’s end of Margot Bamborough’s body. After the breakdown of the proudest of men and his confession to his estranged daughter, a transformation the psychologist present described as “healing” and “well, close to a miracle,” Strike and Robin exit Broom House on Church Street, a locale apt for spiritual cleansing, to a change in the weather. “The rain had ceased and the sun had come out. A double rainbow lay over the woods opposite the house. Strike and Robin stepped outside, into clean fresh air” (430-431). Phipps’ *nigredo* was over.

When Barclay figured out that Margot’s body had been hidden in the Athorn’s ottoman, the piece of furniture is covered with a telling jigsaw puzzle image: “Barclay was looking down at the almost completed jigsaw of unicorns leaping over a rainbow” (871). The second-sight of the medium who told Anna Phipps in the inciting incident of the novel that her mother was lying “in a holy place” is played out here; Margot Bamborough is found in a room whose primary decorations are an Egyptian ankh, or cross, hidden beneath a puzzle “almost completed” depicting the traditional symbols of the post diluvian covenant and its realization in Christ.

Strike decided when trapped in Cornwall by flood waters to talk with Aunt Joan about his biological father, a subject he had never broached with her. “He didn’t know whether her new appreciation for honesty would stretch as far as his father, but somehow, with the wind and rain whipping around them, an air of the confessional had descended upon the house. He told her about the text” (355). If the symbolism of water and its deployment in *Troubled Blood* as the means and end of the alchemical

*nigredo* were to be reduced to one phrase, it would be either “the obeisance due to the waves” or “the air of the confessional” created here “by wind and rain.” Confession as a sacrament is the purification of the soul by admittance before God and priest or the equivalent of one’s sins and a consequent purification or absolution having ‘let go’ of these failings into the Absolute. It is the return to *prima materia* expressed symbolically in the black stage of the Great Work and Rowling’s subtle but constant deployment of water in rain, floods, rainbows and like iconography and its effect on characters in *Troubled Blood* delivers to the engaged reader a similar cathartic experience in the imagination.

- **Water and the Cross**

The *nigredo* symbol that Rowling-Galbraith uses almost as often as water in *Troubled Blood* is the cross. She conjoined the two at least twice to make this connection. At Broom House’s doorway, just as Robin and Cormoran exited Phipps’ agonies and noted the double rainbow there, Strike stopped and asked Kim Sullivan about the Cross of St John inlaid in marble in the gazebo floor (431). The rainbows and unicorn jigsaw puzzle in the Athorn apartment, too, exists in the shadow of the Egyptian ankh-cross. The cross symbolism relates to both the symbolism of water and to the alchemical *nigredo*.

Abraham wrote that one of the symbols of the black stage is the “death of the king (sometimes compared to Christ’s crucifixion)” (Abraham 1998, 135). Therein is the complementary symbolism of water and the cross of Calvary, the sacrificial death of the *Logos* incarnate, that is, the death to mortal ego existence and a simultaneous reduction to and revelation of the metaphysical center or *logos*, the Heart, the human intellectual point of passage according to the great revealed traditions to the transcendent Intellect or Absolute. This reduction to *prima materia*, the origin and causal center revealed in the intersection of the arms of the cross, is the essential *solve* first step in the alchemical drama. The water and cross symbolism of *Troubled Blood* perform this tandem tag-team work of “dissolution” in the received forms of traditional sacred art.

The most important, perhaps, and least obvious cross symbolism is the embedded adventure of the Red Crosse Knight in Cormoran's *nigredo* experience. As discussed in the previous psychomachia chapter, Strike's soul-journey in *Blood* is a re-telling of *Faerie Queen*, Book One, in which he experienced the literal 'return to ground' that Red Crosse did. The Knight learned only at the end of canto ten, that is, just before his battle with the dragon, that he had been brought as a babe to "Faery lond" from a royal nursery in Britain and that the Faery who kidnapped him "in an heaped furrow did thee hide,/ Where thee a Ploughman all unweeting fond" (*Queen* I.x.2-3). Found in the ground and raised to be a farmer (hence 'George'), the soul journey of Red Crosse, a.k.a. St George, patron saint of England, requires a black stage equivalent experience of his return to this origin in humility, the word for that virtue deriving from the Latin word for dirt or ground, and the corollary victory over pride (cf. Baird-Hardy 2020). Red Crosse's inability to overcome Orgoglio, the namesake of Pride in this spiritual allegory, and Duessa, the 'Whore of Babylon,' on his own, only succeeding and surviving through the intervention of Una and the Christ-like Arthur, is the turning point of his spiritual journey.

The lessons in humility and of the dangers of pride and self-will he learned there and later lessons in the House of Holiness prepared him for his three-day victory over the dragon, the exteriorization of this inward struggle. Spenser may or may not have been familiar with or welcome to using alchemical imagery;<sup>156</sup> Rowling-Galbraith, though, after Abraham, might be assumed to have recognized the

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<sup>156</sup> Considering Alastair Fowler's demonstration of the poet's fluency in the symbols of traditional planets in *Faerie Queen* (1964), given the complementary relationship of astrology and alchemy and the several references to the Work in his poetry, ignorance seems unlikely and willingness to use an open question. One point strongly suggests he was well aware of and very willing to use alchemical symbolism in his epic. The *rubedo* of alchemy, the crisis and revelation of the Philosopher's Stone after the ablutionary *albedo* or white stage, is often referred to as 'the red within the white' (Abraham 1998, 169, 174-175), which, when combined with the symbolism of the cross and the Christian symbolism of the alchemical work, makes the Red Crosse Knight, whose emblem with England is the flag of St George, a red cross within a white field, one filled with hermetic meaning of a specifically alchemical character. To assert that Spenser was unaware of this meaning in his spiritual allegory featuring the Red Crosse Knight, given the traditional character of his times and of *Faerie Queen*, is at least as remarkable a conjecture as that he was fully aware of it.

*nigredo* symbolism of the dragon. “The dissolution” of the *nigredo* is “symbolized by... the dismemberment of the mercurial serpent or dragon,” the dragon being “the dual-natured Mercurius in his first dark chthonic phase [the black stage of the Work]” (Abraham 1998, 59, 124). Fowler wrote that “the allegory of the *Faerie Queen*, Book 1, is conceived in terms of the imagery of the Revelation of St. John,” specifically, “the character of Una, and the outline of her story, are based on the twelfth chapter of Revelation about ‘a woman clothed with the sun’ who fled into the wilderness to escape a persecuting dragon” (Fowler 1964, 66). Strike’s being broken down to humility from a point of pride consequent to insecurities about his birth-circumstances is a reflection of the *nigredo* experience of Red Crosse in preparation for his victory over the dragon and destined life as St. George; Spenser’s and Rowling’s depiction of dissolution in these traditional symbols is a parallel and complementary intertextual artistry.

- **Occult Symbolism: The Astrological *Nigredo***

The *prima materia* to which Harry Potter is reduced in the heated crucible of *Order of the Phoenix* is the Prophecy, an otherworldly declaration that his *raison d’etre* was a battle to the death with the Dark Lord, an allegorical depiction of Everyman’s essential choice between ephemeral ego identity and eternal life as an image of the Absolute in the personal *intellectus* or Heart. Strike’s prime matter is a parabolic representation in story of the same conflict and choice, his psychomachia or spiritual journey being framed in mythological allusion and couched in his Oedipal issues with his negligent biological father. As the offspring of ‘Leda and the Swan,’ his father the rock-star is an otherworldly divinity of sorts. Strike’s visceral hatred of his father, though, for not being present in his life when he was a child and his claiming to be “Team Rational” at Hampden Court is the projected Everyman drama of the struggle between the atrophied divine within and the fallen sensible self of discursive reason. Even Strike acknowledged that his father’s celebrity combined with his seeming indifference made him who

he is: “Yet with all the disadvantages and pain they had brought, Strike knew that the peculiar circumstances of his birth and upbringing had given him a head start as an investigator” (178). In *Troubled Blood*, for the first time in the series although Rokeby has always been a shadow figure in Strike’s personal history, Cormoran is faced repeatedly with “the circumstances of his birth” and their symbolic meaning.

This confrontation takes the form of Rokeby contacting him by birthday card and phone-call, of texts and drop-in visits from two of his half-siblings, and of incessant references to birthdays and how properly to acknowledge them. Less obviously but of a higher symbolic valence is Strike’s hesitant study of natal astrology in order to solve the Bamborough missing-person case. The primary embedded text of *Blood* is Talbot’s ‘True Book’ and the image Robin and Strike study endlessly is the ‘natal chart’ of the murder scene to the neglect of tarot card spreads and the various occult images in it. Strike is “Team Rational” and repeatedly expressed his disdain for astrology because his mother “loved all that shit;” on his birthday, when the two discover the Talbot astrological chart for the time and place of Bamborough’s disappearance, Strike gave his most vehement rejection of the science as “all bollucks.”<sup>157</sup> As quoted above, Robin asked him for his astrological sign, which he at first denied knowing. When pressed, he revealed his sun sign, rising sign, and the house in which the sun resided at the time of his birth. Robin was startled by this and asked if he had made it up, “Is it real?” Strike retorted with no little disgust, “Of course, it’s not fucking *real*,” said Strike. “*None* of it’s real, is it?” (240-242, highlighting in original).

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<sup>157</sup> This is Strike’s expletive of choice; he uses it nine times in *Troubled Blood*, four in reference to astrology. The word means “testicles,” which, given the source of Strike’s issues, what Yeats described in his *Leda* and the *Swan* poem as a “shudder in the loins,” makes this particular curse especially apt.

As noted in the psychomachia chapter, Strike here echoes the Harry Potter-Dumbledore dialogue at King's Cross Limbo Station's final words about "what is real," the lines Rowling told Cruz she'd "waited seventeen years to write," words that act as a "key" to the whole series. Strike denied the 'reality' of astrology, though he behaves exactly as astrology predicts an archetypal Sagittarius would and shows all the corresponding characteristics of a person born with Scorpio rising and the sun in the first house. *Troubled Blood* is his forced repeated exposure to astrological symbolism, and through it, though Talbot's chart is not about a birth per se, to reflect on the supra-natural influences of the planets at the moment of birth and their shape in determining the course of one's life in addition to character.

Strike's core issue, coming to terms with "the circumstances of his birth," and the art and science of astrology are identical, that is, the importance of birth with respect to its determining influence on life. The core premise of natal astrology is that the time and place of a person's birth is not accidental or arbitrary but profoundly meaningful. Strike told Robin in *Blood* about his first meeting with Rokeby as a seven-year-old boy:

"Then he clocked my mother, and he twigged. They started rowing. I can't remember everything they said. I was a kid. The gist was how dare she butt in, she had his lawyer's contact details, he was paying enough, it was her problem if she pissed it all away, and then he said, 'This was a fucking accident.' I thought he meant, he'd come to the studio accidentally or something. But then he looked at me, and I realized, he meant me. I was the accident". (722)

Strike struggled throughout the Bamborough case with 'coincidences' and 'accidents,' seemingly arbitrary relationships between events that, dismissed as such at first, turn out to have been meaningful. Cormoran's dismissive attitude towards astrology, its un-reality or "bollucks" nature, in *Troubled Blood* as well as his failing to grasp the connection between events is a function of his having assumed the identity his father gave him. As he said to Robin with respect to his not wanting children, "I'm an accident. I'm not inclined to perpetuate the mistake" (729). This is Strike's essential blind-spot that the *nigredo* and his unwilling study of occult natal symbolism is meant to expose to the light.

Rowling the astrologer links her alchemical artistry with the planets in *Troubled Blood* in repeated references to the number 29. The story takes place within the story brackets of Robin's 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> birthdays, so she is 29 throughout. Margot Bamborough was 29 when she disappeared. The street address of the St. John's Medical Practice was 29 St. John's Lane and Robin is jarred when, in reading on her birthday about Creed, the first line of a chapter where she begins is about the psychopath's release from prison on his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. "The coincidence of the first line caused her an odd inward tremor" (89). These, of course, are not "coincidences" but deliberate choices of the author. Saturn's transit around the sun takes twenty-nine earth years. The 29<sup>th</sup> year of any person's life, then, according to astrologers, means that Saturn will be in a like position as it was at their nativity, the so-called 'Saturn's Return.' It is, in brief, the turning point of a given person's life as a mature adult, which represents, because of Saturn's identification with death, the time most apt for discarding the old self and the psychological detritus of childhood in preparation for one's inevitable demise. The link with the alchemical *nigredo* is evident. Abraham relates that to alchemists, Saturn was "the base metal lead; a secret name for the *prima materia* and for philosophical mercury; the name of the soul's matter during its putrefaction at the bottom of its vessel" in the *nigredo* (Abraham 1998, 178, see also 135).

- **Agency Cases**

If this astrological backdrop were insufficient coloration and pointer of Strike's core issues being in "the circumstances of his birth," the cases the C. B. Strike Detective Agency take on and solve during the course of *Troubled Blood* double down on the messaging. The most important client of the year is Anna Phipps, a woman who resembles a "medieval martyr," who hires Strike as knight errant to help her solve mystery of her parent's forty year absence from her life, a disappearance that has defined the



most important of her life choices.<sup>158</sup> Strike, 39 years old, is in the fortieth year since the time of his birth, 1974, in which year he must immerse himself throughout the novel in search of a client's missing parent, an obvious correspondent with his own 'daddy issues.'

The Agency's second most important case, one solved the night of the incident in the American Bar, is that of 'Shifty' and 'Shifty's Boss.' A corporation has hired Strike to find out why 'Shifty,' a not especially impressive talent, has been promoted by 'Shifty's Boss' over more qualified candidates: "Exactly what leverage Shifty had on the CEO (known to the agency as Shifty's Boss or SB) was now a matter of interest not only to Shifty's subordinates, but to a couple of suspicious board members, who'd met Strike in a dark bar in the City to lay out their concerns" (58). It turns out that SB's "kink" is "Autonepiophilia. 'Being aroused by the thought of oneself as an infant'" (733). The parallel with Strike's babyish behavior and anger about Rokeby, he is uncharacteristically enraged, for example, by the pleasantries of a birthday card and by a polite phone call asking for an end to their "feud," is hard to miss. That Barclay revealed this discovery to Robin and Strike when he did, just as they had been discussing Strike's relationship with his father, is additional highlighting. Strike, as with SB, is hung-up on his repressed desires to be loved and cared for unconditionally as an infant-child.

Two other cases, given the generic names of 'Smith' and 'Jones' which suggest their commonplace nature, reinforce the centrality of child-parent relations in Strike's *nigredo*. In the second, the heiress 'Miss Jones' "was involved in a bitter custody battle with her estranged boyfriend, on whom she was seeking dirt to use in court." The daddy of her "six-month old daughter" is clearly, like Rokeby who heads a band called The Deadbeats, a failed father. "She told Strike about her hypocritical ex-partner's

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<sup>158</sup> She is a lesbian married to a doctor (psychologist) who, in all physical points at least – tall leggy blonde -- as in her profession is the image of Margot Bamborough, Anna Phipps' missing mother.

drug use, the fact that he was feeding stories about her to the papers, and that he had no interest in his six-month old daughter other than as a means to make Miss Jones unhappy” (629).

In the first, a wealthy commodities broker suspected correctly that her recently unemployed husband is sleeping with the voluptuous nanny of their children. This is a less obvious connection with Strike’s childhood, except that Nannies are mentioned repeatedly in the book. The Lord Lucan case, for example, happened soon after the fictional Bamborough disappearance in 1974, in which case the father is supposed to have killed the nanny before disappearing. Roy Phipps marries Anna Phipps’ nanny and, despite her insistence there was “nothing going on,” it is suggested by more than one suspect or witness that the nanny was in love with her charge’s father. Oonaugh Kennedy, Red Crosse Bamborough’s ‘Una,’ is accused by Satchwell of acting as her friend’s “nanny,” as well (267). A nanny, of course, is a mother replacement, a woman who plays the part in exchange for money. Strike grew up amid taunts from school mates “telling him his mother had got pregnant with him purely to get Rokeby’s money” (200). This case, then, as with the others, acts as something of a mirror that obliquely reflects Strike’s own repressed issues with respect to Rokeby, his dead mother, his conception and childhood.

- **Birthdays**

*Troubled Blood* begins in The Victory, the St Mawes pub, where Strike and his oldest mate, Dave Polworth, are raising a pint in celebration of the friend’s birthday. Birthdays continue to be mentioned, observed, neglected, and stumbled upon throughout the rest of the book. The word ‘birthday’ is used seventy-nine times; only ‘cross’ and ‘rain’ are mentioned more often. The novel’s story-frame or brackets are Polworth’s and Robin’s birthdays, the first and last chapters of the book, and the novel has its proper beginning after the necessary throat clearing, as mentioned on Robin’s 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. Strike

forgets to buy her a present and token gift of flowers; this is not a slip but a character trait – Strike hates birthdays, wishes people would forget his, and neglects others to avoid thoughts about his own birth:

As far back as he could remember, the day of his birth had brought up unhappy memories on which he chose, usually successfully, not to dwell. His mother had sometimes forgotten to buy him anything when he was a child. His biological father had never acknowledged the date. Birthdays were inextricably linked with the knowledge, which had long since become part of him, that his existence was accidental, that his genetic inheritance had been contested in court, and that the birth itself had been “fucking hideous, darling, if men had to do it the human race would be extinct in a year”. (198)

On his birthday, he received a card from Rokeby, a first, which sends him into a rage:

Quite suddenly, and with a force that shocked Strike, he found himself full of rage, rage on behalf of the small boy who would once have sold his soul to receive a birthday card from his father. He’d grown well beyond any desire to have contact with Jonny Rokeby, but he could still recall the acute pain his father’s continual and implacable absence had so often caused him as a child. (200)

This is the day he learned with Robin that Talbot had calculated the horoscope for the time and place of Bamborough’s disappearance which immerses him in the study of astrology and its traditional symbolism against his will. They make this discovery in a pub where the children of an eighty-year-old woman are coincidentally celebrating her birthday (242).

Rokeby and Strike’s half-siblings continue to contact Cormoran with the request that he come to a celebration of the Deadbeat band’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a birthday party of sorts. Aunt Joan, having told her nephew that she doubted she would live to see “my next birthday” (352) and talking about astrology, advised him to “go to your father’s party” (355). Strike ignored this advice and the pleas of his siblings but goes unwittingly despite himself, which leads to the novel’s *nigredo* crisis.

Abraham describes the action of the *nigredo* with reference to a specific catalyst, the Mercurius:

In the process of generating the philosopher’s stone, the two seeds of metals, philosophical sulphur (hot, dry, male) and philosophical argent vive (cold, moist, female), must be obtained from the *prima materia* and then joined together. After they are united in the chemical wedding, they are then killed and dissolved into their first matter by the universal solvent, Mercurius. At the dissolution, the soul and spirit of the matter rise to the top of the alembic, separated from the

body, which lies below, blackening and putrefying. The body is then washed by the dew of mercurial water so that it may become pure and white, ready for the reunion with the soul (or with the soul and spirit which have already united to form an entity). (Abraham 1998, 135)

In the American Bar interview with Carl Oakden, the Hermes trickster figure and Zeus messenger plays the role of the *Mercurius* catalyst to Robin-Psyche-Soul's "killing" at Strike's hands; Cormoran's attempt to punch Oakden for shouting the details of his conception in a New York City bar forty years previous (716) winds up hitting Robin inadvertently, knocking her out momentarily and blackening both her eyes. He is slain as well, metaphorically, in his guilt about being taunted into losing his self-control and hitting his partner instead.

They travel back to the Agency office, climb the stairs to "rise to the top of the alembic," and Strike, moved by remorse and by Spirits (neat whiskey and Indian food), confesses his past and present Daddy Rokeby issues, his defining issue of shame about the circumstances of his conception. Robin, as discussed in the psychomachia chapter section on the Psyche and Cupid myth, at this moment delivers her core CBT insight about the risibility of his "self-indulgence" of letting the "circumstances of conception" determine his life. The soul and spirit in the *nigredo* alembic, again per Abraham, at this point "have already united to become an entity;" both have thoughts of sexual union with the other and their "You're my best mate" exchange (730) is the symbolic chaste marriage of soul and Spirit.

Barclay enters the *nigredo* darkness of the office at this point and signals the black stage is over by turning on the lights and sharing the revelation of SB's baby-love kink, a symbol of Strike's own issues, at which they can all now laugh, body-soul-and-spirit. Saul Morris enters and Robin definitively ends the *nigredo* by symbolically slaying the 'Black Sun.' Morris' name is a cryptonym for *Sol Niger*:<sup>159</sup>

***Sol Niger*:** (the black sun), symbol of the death and putrefaction of the metal, or of united sulphur and argent vive at the *nigredo*, the initial stage of the opus alchymicum. At the *nigredo*

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<sup>159</sup> 'Saul Morris' is assonant with 'Sol Maurice,' 'Maurice' being a name derived from 'Moor' or black man, whence 'Sol Niger.'

the metal or matter for the Stone is ‘killed’ and dissolved into its prima materia so that it may be resurrected in a new form. At the death of the matter, darkness reigns. The light of the sun (gold) is said to be put out, totally eclipsed. (Abraham 1998, 186)

When Strike cancels Morris’ contract at Robin’s insistence, he is expelled from the office; the Bamborough cold case, though all but closed officially, simultaneously begins to open up. Robin enters and exits the underworld of St. Peter’s successfully and the clients call to end the investigation, which nadirs signal the advent of Strike’s transformation and the attendant revelations, one after another, beginning with his discovery of Steve ‘Diamond’ immediately after the detective chooses to be nice to Pat the receptionist. The rest of the novel is revelation following revelation and the Agency’s victory over Creed and Beattie, the *nigredo* dragon and Duessa the deceiver. The *nigredo* climax in the Agency office the night of the Oakden interview is a brilliant intersection of the ‘Cupid and Psyche’ myth and hermetic symbolism of soul and spirit in the black stage, artistry with light and knife and the *prima materia* of Strike’s spiritual journey, equal to Rowling’s ‘Silver Doe’ chapter in *Deathly Hallows* and Ron Weasley’s transformation over the Locket Horcrux.

- **Nigredo Resolution in *Troubled Blood*’s Seventh Part**

Harry Potter heard the young Tom Riddle, Jr. assert in a Pensieve memory taken from Horace Slughorn, that seven “is the most powerfully magic number” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 498). Rowling prefers to organize her series of books in seven installments and her individual stories are most often organized into seven parts. *Troubled Blood* is no exception in this regard.<sup>160</sup> Lings explained that the symbolism of the number seven is that of “repose in the Divine Center” consequent to the extension in six radiant directions; it is “the symbol of Absolute Finality and Perfection, appearing in this world as a Divine Seal upon earthly things, as in the number of the days of the week, the planets, the sacraments of the

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<sup>160</sup> *Blood* is organized in six main parts with many chapters in each and a seventh part of only two chapters in correspondence with the six books of *Faerie Queen* and the two-chapter fragment of the seventh book never finished.

[western] church, and many other septenaries” (Lings 1991, 99). In the repose of each of the two chapters at the end of Strike’s *nigredo* experience, the reader is assured that Strike is simultaneously a broken man and one at last in touch with his defining conflict.

In the first chapter of Part Seven, the mystery of Margot Bamborough’s disappearance is wrapped up in a neat denouement at a Phipps family gathering. That chapter ends with Strike thinking of his Aunt Joan’s last words in which she expressed pride in him; his only wish at story’s end, having pledged to Robin-Psyche that he would be open with her about his family angst, was to hear that parental approval again “one last time” (919).

The second and last chapter is the demonstration in story that Strike has learned the lesson of *nigredo*; he celebrates his Best Mate Robin’s birthday properly with three thoughtfully selected gifts: a Donkey Balloon that is a pointer to Skegness and their conversation there about the difficulty and importance of change, a bottle of Narciso Perfume which is an acknowledgment of Robin’s transformation and growth in her partnership, her ability to ‘go to hell’ and confront him with his failings, and, most important, he takes her out for Champagne at the Ritz, what Robin requested the night he ‘killed’ her at the American Bar and they were symbolically ‘betrothed’ in the darkness of the Agency office. From beginning to end, the *nigredo* of *Troubled Blood* is a rich alchemical tapestry with remarkable mythological highlighting; it is, frankly, the author’s masterpiece, the best yet of Rowling’s hermetic symbolism texts.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> I am obliged to mention, however briefly, that though *Troubled Blood* is the Strike series *nigredo* in which his essential issue or ‘prime matter’ is revealed, the novel itself has distinct black, white, and red parts, which, as with *Deathly Hallows* did with Christmas, Epiphany, and two Easters, one on the day and another as the hero’s resurrection, has holiday markers for these stages: Strike’s birthday as the *nigredo’s nigredo*, Valentine’s Day and its flooding as the *albedo*, and Easter proper and Strike’s raising of two dead women from their hidden graves in the finale as his *rubedo* defeat of the story dragon.

### D. *Christmas Pig*

Rowling's 2021 *Christmas Pig* is a crystallized version of the *Potter* and *Strike* series with its *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo* sequences in relatively straight-forward representation. Jack's adventures in The Land of the Lost with Christmas Pig as his guide in the search for the beloved DP follows a Dantean *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso* sequence in the places he visits.

The *nigredo*, in which 'Pajama Boy with the Power of Sleep and Dreams,' Jack's *persona* as an action figure who is lost, learns what a selfish boy he is takes place in Disposable, Bother-Its-Gone, and especially the Wastes of the Unlamented.<sup>162</sup> Just as Dante and Virgil meet Satan himself at the lowest pit and center of Hades' rings, so Jack and CP encounter the Loser at *Pig's* story center and the boy realizes he has been wrong about his step-sister Holly and CP, the replacement toy he'd been given. His miraculous entry to The City of the Missed by the sacrificial death and divinization of the Blue Bunny discussed in the previous chapter reflected his successful completion of his spiritual *nigredo*.

The story *albedo* begins on the water in a gondola ride with Happiness. Jack and CP have to swim to shore in order to escape capture by the Loss Adjusters at the docks which dunking leaves them both sodden throughout their time in the City of the Missed, representative of the ablutionary stage. The critical part of Jack's transformation in the Christmas story is the psychomachia allegory of the vote taken in the palace of King Power explained in the previous chapter. Hope and Happiness defeat Power and Ambition, the servants of the Loser, and it is Hope that transports Jack and CP to the Isle of the Beloved, a paradise of sunshine and the beach, light and warmth, enjoyed by lost Things who inspired love in their owners.

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<sup>162</sup> Evan Willis, again, was the first to note the parallels with the *Divine Comedy* and its alchemical highlighting, not to mention the echoing of 'Dis' or 'Hades' in 'Disposable' (Willis 2021).

As perfect as life is on the Isle and as happy as Jack and DP are in being reunited, the *rubedo* crisis of *Pig* begins there. Jack learns that the Christmas Pig had sacrificed himself so that Jack could take DP back to the Land of the Living, i.e., having given himself as a ransom to the satanic Loser *in imitatio Christi*. Jack, having been reduced to prime matter on the Wastes of the Unlamented and purified in the alembic of Power's Palace, elects to save Christmas Pig and the other Lost "surplus" in the Loser's Lair as a parallel sacrifice of himself. Jack's choice and his inspiring the Surplus with the liberating power of hope frees everyone there in a spirallike light display mirroring the White Rose Dante sees in his theophanic vision at the end of *Paradiso*.

## VII. Conclusion

Rowling, then, by her own testimony, the evidence of her texts, her life-long interest in occult arts, and by the example of her favorite writers, is a literary alchemist. This subversive and defamiliarizing artistry with its symbol sets, sequences, and process is her primary and signature "style." Just as metallurgical alchemy is about the transformation of the adept, its literary equivalent works on the reader covertly and subliminally to undermine their attachment to mistaken conceptions and beliefs and liberate them via cathartic chrysalis. This anagogical artistry in hermetic symbolism parallels and buttresses the psychomachian allegory of Rowling's soul triptych, Soul-Spirit romance, and toy transference stories. That the author chose this archaic and obscure tradition as her vehicle testifies to the centrality of the soul's journey to perfection in her intention as an artist.

The ending of *Troubled Blood*, the longest and most involved Rowling novel to date, is a neat encapsulation of this relationship. The *Faerie Queen* epigraph chosen for the final chapter of *Troubled Blood* has appropriate metallurgical and mythological references:

For naturall affection soone doth cesse,  
And quenched is with *Cupid's* greater flame:  
But faithfull friendship doth them both suppress,



And them with maystring discipline doth tame,  
 Through thoughts aspyring to eternall fame.  
 For as the soule doth rule the earthly masse,  
 And all the seruice of the bodie frame,  
 So loue of soule doth loue of bodie passe,  
 No lesse then perfect gold surmounts the meanest brasse. (920)

The alchemical psychomachia, Strike's reduction to his essence and rebirth, is about the central importance of "the love of soul," in story his chaste affection for Robin-Psyche as the demigod Cupid-Castor, which outstrips carnal attachment "no less than perfect gold," the aim of spiritual alchemy, "surmounts the meanest brass," the unenlightened metal as false Cupid. Rowling's traditional artistry and intertextual echoing here is a remarkable illustration of the depth and consistency of her traditional artistry.

What remains, the subject of the thesis conclusion, is an assessment of Rowling's success or failure as a writer in light of the ratio of her product over her intention.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **I. Introduction**

The aim of the thesis has been to anticipate the judgement of history about the value or worth of J. K. Rowling as an author. Putting aside her historically unprecedented sales and celebrity, her philanthropic contributions, the controversy about her feminist positions regarding transgender people's access to spaces reserved for women, and her consequent status as a lightning rod and click-bait goddess in the public sphere, will the coming years confirm that her work has sold as well as it has because it is excellent writing or for another reason or combination of causes? A. S. Byatt, for example, wrote in a 2003 opinion piece for *The New York Times* that Potter Mania was testimony only to the number of "childish adults" without taste or discernment who enjoyed Rowling's work (Byatt). Adam Blake in *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter* argued that the author's success was due to a conjunction of historical events and trends to include the advent of the internet, successful global marketing, and the author's capturing the subliminal *Zeitgeist* successfully, the last not a conscious achievement or one worthy of admiration (Blake). The approach chosen in this axiological effort was to attempt to measure the ratio of Rowling's "intention to result" per Coomaraswamy in order to judge her, as Updike advised, in light of what she "set out to do" rather than by imposing another standard.

This approach had three steps: first, to identify Rowling's intention as a writer; next, to discover the best critical school or perspective for interpreting the work of a writer with those aims; and, finally, to survey Rowling's work with that perspective in pursuit of evidence of her success or failure to achieve her goals. What remains to be done is to review the findings of the thesis for a preliminary judgement and to suggest paths of future studies of her work and literary criticism in general.

## II. Findings

### A. Rowling's Intentions

Rowling has to date offered no explicit statement of her aims as a writer equivalent to Dante's about *The Divine Comedy*, which was "to remove those who are living in this life from the state of wretchedness and to lead them to the state of blessedness" (Letter to Cangrande, paragraph 15-16; quoted in Coomaraswamy 1947, 270). She has given hints and clues to interviewers, however, about her intention, from saying that she wrote in order to come to terms with certain "ideas" (Grossman 2017) to noting that the "kind of book I want to write" was akin to those she loved to read, one in which the author had "everything in hand" and "knows everything" (BBC 2018, Thogerson). A path to discovering her intentions only came in 2019 via Rowling's revealing and extensive comments about her source of inspiration and method of writing that she made in an appearance on the BBC4 'Museum of Curiosity' Christmas program (Lloyd). In that discussion, she shared her working metaphor of the Lake and the Shed; the Lake is the source of her inspiration, what she said then was her "unconscious mind" and elsewhere she has described as her "Muse" (Cruz), and the Shed is the workplace in which she shapes the "stuff" given her by the Lake into crafted story.

This metaphorical description of Lake and Shed serves as something of a roadmap to Rowling's intention, as close as critics are likely to get to a statement of how best to read and understand her work, as speculative and conjectural as this guesswork must be. To grasp the origin of her writing, what she described as "unresolved issues" her "unconscious mind" is "processing" in the Lake of her inspiration, a close reading of her biography seemed to be warranted to discover the "ideas," core beliefs, interests, and life crises that are the substance of her creative effort. To understand her craft, per Rowling's consistent advice to new writers that they read widely and carefully to find authors they can imitate, a bibliography of her favorite writers and their common techniques and qualities was assembled. These

studies of Rowling's biography and bibliography and preliminary readings of her work in light of findings made in them revealed a fascinating mental *mélange* of a postmodern woman who claims to lead an "intensely spiritual life" (deRek) while having doubts about her religious faith (Thogerson, Solomon).

Her core beliefs and interests, in brief, according to the survey made here of what she has said about them, are about, in addition to her esoteric Christian faith, an "immortal soul" (Cruz), an Estecean imagination, astrology and other occult arts, psychology, and mythology. She is "obsessed" with "mortality and morality" (Parker, Rose) and the "archetypal" power of story and what that says about what it means to be human (Fry 2022), the "magic" connecting writer and reader (Fry 2005). These beliefs and interests in large part baptize or elevate what she told in Grossman in 2005 was the "pain to brain" inspiration around her "unresolved issues" and life crises (Grossman 2017, Lloyd).

The common denominators of Rowling's favorite writers, not surprisingly in a person to whom reading and writing are activities almost akin to eating and breathing, reflect these beliefs and interests; no doubt these authors became favorites because of Rowling's nascent beliefs and interests and in turn fostered her in them. The literary hermeticism, chiasmic or ring writing, esoteric Christian content and symbolism, and mythic allegories typical of these writers, Dante, Shakespeare, and Spenser to Nabokov and Lewis, she in turn made her own.

Her intention, consequent to these close readings of her biography and bibliography, seems to be to write stories of the soul's journey to perfection in spirit, stories which, because of the imagination's "revelatory and transformative" power (Rowling 2008a), will have some "effect," small or great, on the reader, one which "should not be minimized" (Wagner, D.). Her primary means to this end is to write

stories that are superficially realistic, often comic, always engaging, but heavily laden just beneath this surface with mythological, Christian, hermetic, and psychological symbolism.

### **B. Critical Perspective**

This unusual intention and approach in a writer of this time period, a uniquely secular and skeptical age, is largely invisible, in essence impenetrable, to the critical tools and approaches born of this time. Reductive or analytic perspectives that reflect the defining beliefs of modernity, especially rationalism, empiricism, and de facto atheism in pursuit of an ever-elusive objectivity, when used to interpret a writer like Rowling are something like scientists using microscopes to survey the night sky instead of telescopes, astronomers attempting to explain the meaning of an astrological natal chart, or chemists attempting to explain the action in an alchemist's alembic.

The perspective of the Traditionalist school and especially A. K. Coomaraswamy, though also a product of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, is, in contrast to contemporary literary criticism, anti-modern and a celebration of the perennial wisdom to be found in the various orthodox revealed traditions and pre-modern cultures. Symbolism with archetypal referents is the primary language of this wisdom and the Traditionalists' aim is to explain in discursive, rational exegesis the noetic and spiritual content of what Schuon called "extra-liturgical sacred art" (1981, 183)

### **C. Axiological Judgement: "Ratio of Intention to Result"**

Rowling's artistry, that is, her psychomachian allegory and alchemical imagery and sequences, each work in their own ways *and* together to deliver the same meaning and experience of cathartic transformation, of "remembering in a world of forgetting." Rowling exteriorizes the faculties of the soul in various ways – as triptych, as Shakespearean soul and Spirit, as psychology's "transitional object" toys – to depict allegorically its journey to perfection; literary alchemy and its subliminal

symbolism of dissolution, purification, and resurrection, complements and parallels this allegorical journey with precision. Using the tools of her favorite writers, her work is both about the soul's perfection in the spirit by dissolution of its failed beliefs and ego-identity and recongealing around the heart, the Johannine *logos* or heart of the Divine Mother, sacrificial, selfless love. Rowling's use of traditional allegory and hermetic imagery simultaneously exercises the "transformative and revelatory" power of the reader's imagination, the *logos* Heart, as it reveals in story the quintessential origin and the soul's perfection in the same alocal, transpersonal 'space,' Everyman's King's Cross.

This serves at least in part as an answer to the question of Rowling's success or failure in what she set out to do. Her intention, revealed in part through a close reading of her biography and bibliography, was confirmed in the symbolic, psychomachian, and hermetic spiritual content of her work when read through a Traditionalist lens. Beyond, even *forgetting* her sales and celebrity, Rowling's accomplishments as a writer, to anticipate the judgement of history, are heroic and tribute to her unique vision, understanding, and dedicated craftsmanship.

What remains in the thesis to summarize its contributions and to suggest future topics for study.

### **III. Contributions of Thesis**

The contributions of this thesis are threefold. First, in creating a test of Rowling's merits within the parameters of the author's own making, namely, her Lake and Shed metaphor of her writing process and her testimony about how writers create, at least at first, in imitation of favorite authors, the thesis works from standards that are relatively objective and fair to the artist. Rather than using critical tools at hand, those that are prevalent or in fashion, or just those in which the critic is skilled regardless of their applicability to Rowling's intentions, the argument of the thesis proceeds from the author's aims to

measure her success or failure. Future critical work will be obliged to start from this point as well or to justify building on a different foundation.

Second, the thesis overturns the predominant opinion in both the popular mind and in much of academia that Rowling is not a “serious” writer. The exegesis of her varied allegorical approaches to depicting the soul’s perfection in spirit adopting and adapting Platonic, Shakespearean, and modern psychological models and the revelation of her alchemical artistry in support of this anagogical effort reveals Rowling as a profoundly accomplished writer and one who has been as successful in obscuring her literary magic as her witches and wizards in the Hogwarts saga have been in hiding themselves from Muggle awareness.

Third and most challenging, the revelation of Rowling as something of a psychopomp, a guide of souls in the nether regions of imagination, especially in the context of her unprecedented success with the global audience of readers young and old, suggests that current understanding of the role of story-teller and of story itself in culture is mistaken. This contribution acts as a segue to discussion of avenues for future study of Rowling’s work and in other fields.

#### **IV. Possibilities for Further Studies**

Possibilities for further studies suggested by the findings of this thesis include those using Rowling’s Lake and Shed model to examine her fiction and about contemporary literary criticism in general, its premises and blindspots, in light of Rowling’s work and unprecedented success with readers.

##### **A. Biography Focused Reading of Rowling’s Work**

In the list of Rowling’s life crises, the challenges of her second marriage and its blended family was included, though these are not public knowledge, because they are evident in *Troubled Blood*’s Phillips

family and Jack Jones' trials in *The Christmas Pig*. This assertion, argued from Shed to Lake in Rowling's metaphor or from effect to cause, was made almost as an aside. Two subjects that appear in Rowling's work from *Harry Potter* to her most recent publications, however, deserve consideration as having been inspired by Rowling's reflections on her history that have so far remained private.

Women who seek stability and security or just escape by securing a man's support or marriage via sex and pregnancy appear throughout her work. Merope Gaunt, Voldemort's mother, Leda Strike, Cormoran Strike's mother, Krystall Weedon and Kay Bawden in *Casual Vacancy*, Bellatrix Lestrange in *Cursed Child*, as well as Robin Ellacott, Charlotte Campbell, Janice Beattie, and Sarah Shadlock in the Cormoran Strike mysteries all play this role and, in it, an over-sized place in the inciting incidents and plots of those stories. Because Rowling was conceived four months before her parents' marriage and had a poor relationship with her father, it seems plausible<sup>163</sup> that she was in this position herself with respect to her first long-term relationship, a boyfriend at the University of Exeter and in Manchester afterwards, as well as when she met her first husband in Portugal.

Rowling's work, too, includes a significant number of women in abusive relationships with men who bear evil or psychologically damaged children, e.g., Merope Gaunt and psychopathic Voldemort, Eileen Prince and Severus Snape, Agnes Waite and serial killer Dennis Creed. There are a number of characters, too, who are haunted by dead children, off-spring or siblings for whose deaths they feel responsible or for which they are blamed: Albus Dumbledore and his sister Ariana, Leta Lestrange and her baby brother Corvis, Krystall Weedon and her little brother Robbie, Gloria Conti for the baby she aborted with the assistance of Margot Bamborough, Cormoran Strike for the baby he was told he had

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<sup>163</sup> Rowling attributes the third of her life crises, her marriage to an abusive man, to her having had unresolved father issues when she met Arantes. As she told Oprah Winfrey in 2007, "I think I repeated patterns from my first family as we often do in my selection of my first husband" (Winfrey).



conceived with Charlotte Campbell but who disappeared, and Ilsa Herbert for the IVF child she miscarried. Rowling, who has said the themes of her book from *Philosopher's Stone* to *Troubled Blood* include “love and loss,” seems to be consumed with the subject of abortion, specifically with respect to justifying the death of unwanted children and to the psychological struggles of women who have killed children they carried. It seems credible to speculate that Rowling had an abortion before inspired to write the story of ‘The Boy Who Lived’ and ‘He Who Must Not Be Named’ and that her nuanced reflections on this subjection inform, at least in part, everything she has written.

This Shed-to-Lake-back-to-Shed approach to reading her work, which is to say, finding patterns in her work, reasoning back to possible life events that may have inspired it, and then returning to the work to see how Rowling has elevated or treated the subject might lead only to what C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard called ‘The Personal Heresy,’ reducing literary criticism to psycho-biography or just gossip. It may also add support and a new dimension to the understanding of Rowling’s Divine Mother and Bad Dad touchstone themes, which, as argued in the thesis, are keys to the author’s allegory of good, evil, and obstacles and helps on the soul’s journey to perfection.

### **B. Implication for Literary Theory and Critical Studies of Literature**

Mircea Eliade wrote in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (and) the Significance of Religious Myth, Symbolism, and Ritual within Life and Culture* that in a secular culture, that is, one in which the sacred was ostracized from the public square, “reading includes a mythological function.”

[N]on-religious man *in the pure state* is a comparatively rare phenomenon, even in the most desacralized of modern societies. The majority of the “irreligious” still behave religiously, even though they are not aware of the fact.... [T]hrough reading, the modern man succeeds in obtaining an “escape from time” comparable to the “emergence from time” effected by myths. Whether modern man “kills” time with a detective story or enters such a foreign temporal universe as is represented by any novel, reading projects him out of his personal duration and incorporates him into other Rhythms, makes him live in another “history.” (Eliade 1959, 204-205)

This “mythological” or religious function of reading has led to what is known as the “Eliade Thesis,” namely, that modern man, restricted in his freedom to experience the sacred dimension in religious ritual as such in worship or to exercise his inborn noetic capacity, has created religious or mythological “behaviors” in compensation. The advent of novels, from this view, in the Georgian era was a consequence of such compensation during the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the attendant empiricism, skepticism, and naturalism of modernity. Those books which were reader favorites from this period forward were those that argued covertly with the desacralization of the world (see Delasanta’s 2003 essay, ‘Hume, Austen, and First Impressions’). Rowling’s popularity according to the Eliade Thesis is because the defamiliarizing spiritual experience contra profane worldview that her books and screenplays offer is exactly and profoundly what readers want in stories they read or watch.

This possibility, of course, is alien to any school of literary criticism that denies implicitly or explicitly an anagogical dimension in the world, not to mention in story, or a human faculty that is able to perceive such a world, the so-called ‘eye of the heart.’ This, unfortunately, is the rule rather than the exception among literary theorists today. All born well after the Romantic era, these schools of thought are inherently part of what the Traditionalists and Eliade would call the desacralizing mission of modernity as a force contra everything theocentric. Stanley Fish argued cogently that what makes an interpretation of a literary text “acceptable” is the existence of an “interpretive community” who use a specific lens to examine a work (Fish). As seemingly discredited or outlier as a Traditionalist reading may be today, the absence of a theocentric “interpretive community” among academic exegetes and book reviewers renders Rowling’s allegorical and anagogical artistry and achievement all but invisible.

If Eliade is right about why human beings enjoy story and pursue imaginative experience, especially in a profane period in which the spiritual dimension of life is denigrated and denied, then Rowling’s popularity is connected to her core beliefs about the soul and her covert mission as described in the

thesis. Postmodern theories of why people read focus on evolutionary advantage (Boyd, Cron, Wolf, Gottschall) rather than cathartic, defamiliarizing experience of the souls' struggle exteriorized allegorically. Recall in this regard Rowling's 2022 BBC interview with Stephen Fry for a *Fantastic Beasts* promotional piece. In it, she admitted, "I am very interested in story, inevitably. I am not just interested in writing stories but I am interested in why we write stories." Because "we are the only animal" that tells stories, she believes that human motivation in story writing reveals something "about what it means to be human," a capacity that "lives in the back of our minds in our subconscious." She was not speaking of evolutionary advantage here, but the "archetypes" prevalent "throughout different cultures" in their "myth and folklore" that produce such nigh on universal creatures as the firebird and mermaid (Fry 2022).

Neo-marxist schools of literary criticism that focus on deconstruction of text to expose metanarratives of oppressor and oppressed – feminist, anti-colonialist, Marxist, et cetera – that are often bundled together under the "critique" umbrella term are effectively blind to the anagogical depths of traditional Greats because of these contemporary schools' inherent rationalism, psychism and reductionist denial of a noetic human capacity and the spiritual realm which it perceives. If Dante and O'Connor as noted pointed to precisely these depths and if Coleridge was correct in positing that imagination is continuous with the *Logos* fabric of reality, a Traditionalist alternative to postmodern ideas of what constitutes proper exegesis of text, one exploring story as "extra-liturgical sacred art" per Schuon, Sherrard, and Coomaraswamy seems in order.

The work produced in imitation of God's "manner of operation," to include story-telling of course, resembles the symbolic or iconographic quality of everything existent, according to the Traditionalist view, in being a transparency whose allegorical and anagogical content within its traditional forms is

relatively easy to access and a consequent support and edifying shock-reminder to man on his spiritual journey. The spiritual function of art is that “it exteriorizes truths and beauties in view of our interiorization... or simply, so that the human soul might, through given phenomena, make contact with the heavenly archetypes, and thereby with its own archetype” (Schuon 1995a, 45-46). The relevance of this “exteriorization” with respect to “interiorization” and spiritual transformation with the interpretation of Rowling’s work is evident; it is also, if only in this, cause for reflection and further study on the contemporary consensus in literary theory and criticism that this perspective is all but unknown or dismissed as a historical relic of Platonism and “fundamentalist” traditions.

## **VI. Summary Conclusion**

J. K. Rowling is the bestselling writer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and there is no consensus with respect to her abilities as a writer besides her capacity to write stories that sell very well. Using the calipers of Updike and Coomaraswamy to assess her merits and failings in light of her success or failure in creating what she intended, her aim as a writer was teased out of her public statements about writing in general and her own process as well as her advice to new writers. Her biography and bibliography were studied to discover on the one hand her core beliefs, key interests, religious faith, and responses to life crises and on the other the most influential writers and their common denominators she might credibly be assumed to have imitated. This ‘Lake and Shed’ analysis revealed that her aim was to write covert allegories of the soul’s journey to perfection using character sets from traditional psychomachia and mythology and hermetic symbolism. The Traditionalist perspective was chosen as the most appropriate critical lens to read Rowling’s work in light of her core beliefs, studies, and literary influences. Close reading of her work in search of evidence that she succeeded or failed to hit the mark of psychomachia, literary alchemy, and symbolic writing, especially in *Deathly Hallows*, *Troubled Blood*, and *The Christmas Pig*, showed that she had indeed done what she set out to do.

These findings suggest avenues for future studies of Rowling's work along biographical and Traditionalist lines, as well as a possible reassessment of prevalent postmodern assumptions of why readers read and writers write. It seems Rowling's work delivers best what readers want, and, if, as the Eliade Thesis suggests, this is exercise of their transpersonal spiritual faculty and self-transcendence in contact with archetypes, then deconstructive and empiricist-derived critical schools will not understand either the artistry or the meaning of writers, ancient or modern, who share Rowling's theocentric beliefs. That the writer of fiction is at least as important as psychopomp as entertainer or court jester seems a credible possibility.

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