DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

"The portrayal of villains in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*"

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2020 / Vienna, 2020

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1. Introduction

It has now been more than twelve years since the publication of the last book in the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). Yet the unparalleled popularity of this children's book series, which has enthralled readers of all walks of life and generations, is far from reaching an end. The plot of *Harry Potter* is too well known to bear repeating here in too much detail, beyond the fact that it is about an orphaned boy who discovers that he is a wizard and destined not to just attend Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry, but also to defeat the evil Lord Voldemort (Levy and Mendlesohn 166). The *Harry Potter* series is well known for being a publishing phenomenon, making money the likes of which its publishers – Bloomsbury in the UK and Scholastic in the USA – had not dreamt possible (Levy and Mendlesohn 165). The universe of *Harry Potter*, which has been rebranded and expanded by author J.K. Rowling and Warner Bros. as the *Wizarding World*, has received numerous additions since the publication of the original seven books. The books were followed by an equally successful film series, several spin-off publications (e.g. *Quidditch Through the Ages*, *The Tales of Beedle The Bard*), video games, an entire theme park in Florida, a studio tour in London, a theatre play (*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*) and most recently, a new three-part film series (*Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them*). This is in addition to the countless websites and merchandise, all of which has made J.K. Rowling the world's first self-made billionaire author – a position she has since lost, because of high British taxes as well as her hefty donations to charity (Weisman par. 1-2)[1]. Having sold more than 500 million copies worldwide as of 2018, the book series is also the best-selling book series in history (Pottermore par. 1).

This thesis focuses on the topic of villains in *Harry Potter*. This topic has been chosen partly because, while there is a substantial amount of research on the protagonists as heroes and the hero's journey in *Harry Potter*, the same cannot be said for the antagonists. There is a little more to be found on the character of Voldemort because he is the main villain, but I have found little research on other antagonistic characters. This thesis will thus focus on the question of whether and how the characters chosen for analysis can be described and evaluated as villains from a genre perspective.

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[1] The abbreviation "par" indicates the paragraph in the online article that is referenced.

The characters I chose to have a closer look at are these four:

- Lord Voldemort, because he is the main villain of the series
- Severus Snape, because of his grey morality and position as "heroic villain/villainous hero" (Flotmann 145)
- Dolores Umbridge, because she is one of the few female villains and also, arguably, one of the most hated characters of the series
- Draco Malfoy because of his original role of the school bully and interesting redemption arc

There are, of course, many other villainous and antagonistic characters in the series. Others that would have been interesting to explore as well are for example the Death Eaters as a group, Bellatrix Lestrange and Peter Pettigrew as individuals with very different reasons for joining the Dark Lord, the abusive Dursley family, caretaker Argus Filch who seems to hate children with a passion, the professors Quirrell and Lockhart and many more. Unfortunately, there is not enough space here to explore all these characters with the amount of detail that I intend to, which is why I have chosen to focus on the above mentioned four. The members of house Slytherin are also coded as evil (with very few exceptions, such as Professor Slughorn) and Slytherin as a breeding ground for pure-blood racism will also be touched on in this thesis, because it is relevant in relation to Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy, who were both members of the house.

The above-mentioned research question will be dealt with on two levels: firstly, on an evaluative level, the question of genre will be posed: whether the *Harry Potter* series fits neatly under the umbrella of fantasy fiction, whether it is a fantasy series for children or young adults, and why there is such a strong appeal to adult readers. Secondly, on a descriptive level, the villains in the *Harry Potter* books will be described and analysed with a focus on their attributes and appearance, their role as a character in the story, and whether this makes them a villain. The method used in the analytical part of this thesis will be that of a close reading of the source material. The seven original *Harry Potter* books will be combed through and the selected characters' introduction, their physical description, Harry's reaction to them (as the books are told from his perspective), and their characteristics will be analysed. Drawing also on secondary literature on the topic, this thesis will attempt to work out an answer to the research question.

List of Abbreviations

Stone	*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997)
Chamber	*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998)
Prisoner	*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999)
Goblet	*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000)
Order	*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003)
Prince	*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005)
Hallows	*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007)

All direct citations from the books are taken from different English-language editions, for details please see the bibliography. Furthermore, the term *Harry Potter* is used to mean the book series as a whole. However, only the septology published from 1997 to 2007 will be considered. Other publications set in the same universe, for example *Cursed Child* or *Fantastic beasts and where to find them* will not be included in this analysis.

The thesis begins with two chapters focusing on theory and information necessary to follow the arguments of the second, analytical part. The first chapter looks closely at the question of genre and tries to work out which genre *Harry Potter* best fits into. Arguments and examples are given for several genres, such as children's fantasy literature and the boarding school story. Chapter two focuses on the concepts of good and evil in literature, more specifically fantasy literature and will try to define what makes a villain, how they can be recognised in fantastic fiction and how they can be distinguished from 'good' characters. After these two chapters, the analytical part of the thesis follows, in which the four characters of Lord Voldemort, Severus Snape, Dolores Umbridge, and Draco Malfoy will be closely analysed from a genre perspective. This means that, through a close reading of the source material as well as selected secondary literature, I will find out whether and how these characters can be described as villains in a fantasy story (and also, if applicable, as villains in other genres if they apply to *Harry Potter*). Above all, these characters' physical attributes, their characteristics, goals and motivations, introduction to the story and interactions with the main characters will be examined. After this analysis, there will be a summary of the arguments presented.

2. The Question of Genre

„Fantasy is the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil in the soul." (Le Guin 64, qtd. in Hunt 1)

2.2 Children's literature

Interestingly, children's literature is the only type of literature that is defined in terms of who it is written for, which is a unique position among the many categories of literature (Grenby 199). Children's literature is unfortunately also often met with negative reactions and with condescension, in contrast to other types of literature. Researching and studying children's literature was originally often seen as beneath the dignity of literary scholars and as too easy or maybe even too much fun (Grenby 200). Fortunately, such condescension is disappearing nowadays, arguably because of the immense impact some children's books have had in our culture. Especially during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century children's books have been on bestseller lists and have also been incorporated into the reading lives of adults, into the cinema, theatre and many other types of media (Grenby 200). This might actually be called the *Harry Potter effect*, since these books incited a lot of change in the way children's literature was regarded. And phenomena as big as this are unquestionably worthy of, and even demand, scholarly attention.

Interestingly, children's literature has been far more extensively researched than fantasy specifically, with the first studies of the former appearing in the 1920s (Levy and Mendlesohn 4). Levy and Mendlesohn define children's literature as "fiction read to or by children, whether or not it was originally published for children and whether or not adults have approved of children reading it" (5). They also write that the target group, school-aged children, has extended over time. Originally, in the early 20th century, the protagonist of children's literature was rarely over eight years old, during the 1950s and 60s the protagonist was usually up to fourteen years old, and from the 1980s onwards up to today, protagonists are often in their late teens and early twenties. This type of literature has now been labelled "Young Adult" literature – of course, readers of these books are nowadays still often in school or university themselves (Levy and Mendlesohn 6). We also have to ask ourselves why fantasy and children's literature are so inextricably linked in people's perceptions. Hunt posits that there is no natural connection between the two (3) and then cites J.R.R. Tolkien's famous statement on fairy tales, which Hunt

argues can be applied to fantasy fiction as well: "[T]he association of children and fairy stories is an accident of our domestic history […] Children as a class neither like fairy stories more nor understand them better than adults do" (Tolkien 34, qtd. in Hunt 4).

2.2 Fantasy literature

2.2.1 Defending fantasy literature

As Levy and Mendlesohn write, the study of fantasy literature is relatively recent, because for many years, scholarly articles have been focused mainly on just defining and defending fantasy (1-3). Why defending it? Levy and Mendlesohn explain that this need stems from "the division between high and low in our literary culture" and the idea that the best literature was one where authors could accurately describe reality (1). Furthermore, before the eighteenth century, fantastical folk tales were meant to be read by the peasantry and adults but not children (2). Since fantasy was often disparaged as being immoral, it was believed that it should definitely not be fed to children. However, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a change in how childhood was understood – as being born innocent and, through the fantastic, being led towards the marvellous in Christianity – led to fantasy being allowed into children's reading (2). However, even nowadays fantasy as a literary form at times finds itself under attack. For example, *The Wizard of Oz* has been banned in the United States numerous times; the *Harry Potter* series has spiked criticism from religious fundamentalists (2-3). Similarly to children's literature, fantasy literature has unfortunately also often been criticised as being childish and thus, not worthy of being taken seriously (Hunt 3).

2.2.2 Towards a definition of fantasy literature

> Fantasy is an extensive, amorphous and ambiguous genre, resistant to attempts at quick definition. It can incorporate the serious and the comic, the scary and the whimsical, the moral and the anarchic. It can be 'high' – taking place in alternative worlds – or 'low' – set in the world we know. Or it can combine the two. Besides texts set in other worlds, fantasy includes stories of magic, ghosts, talking animals and superhuman heroes, of time travel, hallucinations and dreams. It overlaps with other major genres, notably the fairy tale and the adventure story, but it intersects also with almost any other kind of children's book [...]
> (Grenby 144)

As we can glean from this quote by M.O. Grenby, there is a wide variety of things fantasy can be. Now, how *can* fantasy be defined, if it is such a wide, all-encompassing genre? James and Mendlesohn state that fantasy literature "has proven tremendously difficult to pin down" (1).

There are many scholars who have worked on definitions of fantasy literature and explored it in great depth, notable examples are Kathryn Hume, Tzvetan Todorov, W. R. Irwin, Brian Attebery, and Colin Manlove. These critics all agree that fantasy fiction is about "the construction of the impossible", in contrast to science fiction, which is grounded in the scientifically possible, even though it may be unlikely (James and Mendlesohn 1). This very broad definition is re-worded by certain scholars to emphasise what they find relevant. Fenske, for example, states that "[a] text is fantastic when the events it relates contradict the common consensus of what is 'real'", but she also emphasises that, while the illogical is a marker of fantasy, fantastic stories nevertheless have laws of their own and an internal logic (376). That is to say, there are also constraints in fantasy and not everything is possible. Colin Manlove simply states that fantasy is "fiction involving the supernatural or impossible" (3), which is a workable definition, but poses many questions if we were to dissect and question what "supernatural" and "impossible" mean. Either way, from this point onwards, the scholars part ways and have come up with many different definitions and characterisations of fantasy literature. According to Farah Mendlesohn (*Rhetorics*, xiii) it is nowadays rare to find a scholar who chooses and works exclusively with one definition.

In most cases, there are two worlds that come together in fantasy literature: one is the same as the readers' reality, and the other is an "anti-empiric" (Fenske 375) world. These two worlds then meet, and the protagonist is often sceptic and not sure whether what he or she experiences is real or not (Fenske 375). This "scepticism" also provides the basis for Bulgarian philosopher Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic that uses the issue of credibility to define fantasy. For Todorov, the fantastic "lies at the edge of the uncanny and the marvellous" (Todorov 41-42, qtd. in Fenske 375). In the latter, the readers simply accept that supernatural and strange events that are taking place. But in successful fantasy, according to Todorov, there is always an attempt to understand the supernatural experiences that readers just had. Also, up until the end, readers cannot always be sure whether the events are natural or supernatural. This uncertainty that readers have is very often represented by a character within a story who is introduced into this new, wondrous world themselves, like Harry into the wizarding world. Through his eyes, we experience the same strangeness, which allows readers, just like Harry, to make up their minds. While Todorov's theory has been criticised for being too narrow (for example, by Stanislaw Lem 1974, qtd. in Fenske 376), he nevertheless provides vital interpretative tools (Fenske 376).

For yet another attempt at a working definition, Brian Attebery, who has authored a number of studies on science fiction and fantasy literature, has proposed the use of the "fuzzy set" (originally a mathematical term) to identify common tropes or narrative techniques which may appear in fantasy literature (James and Mendlesohn 1). This definition has worked well, as we can point to some fantastic texts that contain common and typical elements, and as we move outward from this core, the texts only include a small number of tropes, i.e. the boundaries become fuzzy (Attebery 12-13). Farah Mendlesohn, in her introduction to *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, states that a "consensus has emerged, accepting as a viable 'fuzzy set' a range of critical definitions", and thus engaging in discussions over the precise definition of fantasy no longer makes sense (xiii). Thus, she abandons the search for a definition and accepts the "fuzzy set". She does, however, introduce a new classification system wherein the *mode of fantasy* is crucial, i.e., the way in which the fantastic enters the text (James and Mendlesohn 2). These four modes are:

- the portal-quest fantasy, wherein the protagonist enters a new and unknown world
- the intrusion fantasy, where the fantastic enters the primary world
- the immersive fantasy, where the protagonist is part of the fantastic world
- the liminal fantasy, wherein magic might or might not actually exist

(Levy and Mendlesohn 3-4)

Similarly to Farah Mendlesohn's classification system of fantasy literature, also other scholars have provided us with tools to further dissect the narrative structure of the genre. We will have a look at this in the following chapter.

2.2.3 Attempts to categorise types of fantasy

Many different scholars and authors have tried to classify fantasy. In order to illustrate the richness with which the subject of fantasy has been treated, some examples shall be shown here. The most essential difference in classifying fantasy might be between fantasy set in 'our' world and fantasy set in alternative worlds – in these 'other' worlds, fantasy is part of the norm (Hunt 11). Fantasy that is set in 'our' world may just happen to have some magic in it as well, it may be intruding from another world, or the protagonists might be transported into a parallel world (for example, the Pevensie children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). In the latter case, there is a great deal of authorial imagination taking place regarding the devices that allow one to travel between worlds (e.g. a wardrobe, mirror, rings, a train) (Hunt 11).

Also focusing on the way the fantastic world is accessed and interacted with, Farah Mendlesohn in *Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy* gives us four different types of fantasy fiction to work with (169-183):

- Portal fantasy: "a fantastic world entered through a portal. [...] Crucially, the fantastic is on the other side and does not 'leak'. Although individuals may cross both ways, the magic does not."

- Immersive fantasy: "presents the fantastic without comment as the norm both for the protagonist and for the reader: we sit on the protagonists' shoulders and while we have access to their eyes and ears, we are not provided with an explanatory narrative."

- Intrusive fantasy: "is usually set, often ostentatiously, in our world. In the intrusive fantasy the fantastic is the bringer of chaos."

- Estranged fantasy: "we are given to understand, through cues to the familiar, that this is our world. When the fantastic appears, it should be intrusive, disruptive of expectation, but [...] their magical origins barely raise an eyebrow. We are disoriented."

Maria Nikolajeva, who has carried out decades of research on children's literature, introduces a new system for distinguishing different forms of fantasy worlds. These are the concepts of *closed world* and *open world.* In a *closed world* fantasy, there is "a self-contained secondary world without any contact with the primary world (= high fantasy)". In an *open world* fantasy "both primary and secondary worlds are present in the text, but [the secondary world] intrudes on the primary world in some way (= low fantasy)" (Nikolajeva, *Magic Code* 36, qtd. in Fenske 377). According to Nikolajeva's system, *Harry Potter* would be considered an "open world", as characters can travel between the wizarding and Muggle worlds.

Colin Manlove defines six variants: secondary world fantasy, metaphysical fantasy, emotive fantasy, comic fantasy, subversive fantasy, and children's fantasy (4). If we have a closer look at Manlove's classifications, not all apply to the *Harry Potter* series, only secondary world, comic and children's fantasy do, as also Fenske agrees (376). In secondary world fantasy, the reader is immersed into a world that is different from their own reality. This specific kind of fantasy is very old, for example *Beowulf* belongs to it, as do classics like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Gulliver's Travels* (Fenske 377). This kind of fantasy is still very popular today and has produced huge successes like *Star Wars* or *The Lord of the Rings* (Fenske 377). Other scholars like Hunt do not like using the term 'secondary world' though, because they believe that all imaginary worlds are 'secondary' (13-14). Actually, Hunt does not particularly like this

practice of further splitting up fantasy in general, calling it an "activity that goes against the general spirit of expansive extravagance" (11).

2.2.4 How can *Harry Potter* be classified?

As already mentioned, since the 1990s children's fantasy literature has been reshaped by the success of several authors, one of these of course being J.K. Rowling. Catherine Butler writes that the *Harry Potter* books are a fusion of several genres, all of which contributed to its success (232-233). She mentions social satire, the quest fantasy, and its most generic features belonging to boarding school fiction. Butler also emphasises that while all these genres are established and, as with the school story, can often be conservative, Rowling's chief innovation lies in the marriage of not only these generic tropes of different sub-genres of children's literature, but also in the combination of two other familiar types of fantastic writing. Firstly, Rowling positions the secondary magical world within 'our' world and thus the magical elite is hidden from nonmagical, Muggle eyes, which creates exclusivity. Hunt describes the wizarding world in Harry Potter as a 'parallel' world – the magical world exists besides, or, within the same world as ours (the 'Muggle' world) and they sometimes overlap (35). Secondly, Rowling employs the use of portal fantasy, emphasising the ways in which one can travel from the Muggle world to the hidden magical world (the most memorable being the use of a train, the Hogwarts Express, being used to cross over) (Butler 233). Butler states that especially in the first books of the series, portal fantasy is the dominant mode (233) Now, only the question remains whether Harry Potter is children's literature, young adult literature or maybe even literature for adults. After all, the books have been read and cherished by readers of all ages.

2.3 Children's fantasy since the 1990s – the *Potter boom*

From the 1980s onwards, it became clearer that a teen market was emerging from within the children's literature market, so much so that it would no longer make sense that publishers conflated the two age groups into one (Levy and Mendlesohn 161).[2] Since it is impossible to say that the age of a book's protagonist is an indicator of the target audience, Levy and Mendlesohn explain that a division emerged along the line of fiction that recognises puberty and the themes that come up in adolescence, and fiction which does not do that (161). In the 1980s and 1990s children's fantasy literature was in decline, as there was more demand for

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[2] Of course, it has to be mentioned and emphasised that teens and adults still read children's literature, whether or not it is labelled as such – and this has always been the case (Levy and Mendlesohn 161).

social realism (Levy and Mendlesohn 161). But then, in the 1990s, fantasy became the most popular and visible genre of children's literature. There were three main factors that contributed to this, as Levy and Mendlesohn posit (164). The most easily recognisable factor was the immense and unexpected success of both Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997). Other factors were the globalisation of the book trade with lower shipping costs and the rise of Internet shopping platforms such as Amazon; as well as the growth of overseas contracts with publishers. While Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy addressed darker themes and adolescence and is thus more appropriately categorised as young adult literature, the first Harry Potter book directly addressed the readership of children (Levy and Mendlesohn 165). *Harry Potter* was followed by six increasingly popular novels and became a global publishing phenomenon, resulting in far more profit for the publishing houses and author J.K. Rowling than anyone had thought possible. The huge success of the Harry Potter novels then led to several successful young adult series in the 2000s, for example, the *Twilight* books by Stephenie Meyer (2005-2008), *The Hunger Games* books by Suzanne Collins (2008-2010) or the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth (2011-2013) (Levy and Mendlesohn 165).

2.4 A book series for children or adults?

J.K. Rowling's accessible style of writing, the humour in the books as well as the unexpected twists, the understandable plot and the vividly written characters have made her books very popular with young readers (Butler 232). This is arguably in contrast to other authors who often write for an audience that consists of devoted and experienced readers of the genre. This might have contributed to the success of the Harry Potter books and its popularity with young readers. However, also adults have been reading and cherishing the books that were originally marketed as children's books. Already with *Stone* the success was unexpectedly great. In the United States, the pre-orders of the first Harry Potter book were so many that the *New York Times* felt compelled to introduce a separate children's bestseller list, arguably to protect adults from the embarrassment of being outperformed in sales by a children's book (Levy and Mendlesohn 165). Bloomsbury, the original British publisher of *Harry Potter* also issued all books with two separate covers: one 'children's edition', featuring cartoonish illustrations, and another 'adult edition', usually featuring black-and-white photographs, in order to perhaps save adult readers from the embarrassment of being seen in public reading an obvious children's book (Levy and Mendlesohn 165). Then, as the series went on and the themes dealt with in the books turned

darker, Harry Potter arguably moved into young adult territory. Still, as Nikolajeva writes, the "best examples of children's fantasy have always been questioned as books for children" (*Development*, 61). As of 2018, more than 500 million copies of J.K. Rowling's books have been sold worldwide (Pottermore par. 1), many of them to adult readers. So, to answer the question of whether these books are children's literature or not: The first two books would probably be considered children's literature, and from the third novel (*Prisoner*) onwards young adult literature. Starting with book three, we really get to experience the characters' adolescence, their struggles during puberty, and also, we are confronted with darker issues in in the story. But we might also say that it does not matter – books written for or marketed towards children have always been read by adults as well. Author Stephen King, in his review for *Order*, remarks upon this blurring of lines as well:

> A more interesting question is when did Ms. Rowling stop writing the stories for children and start writing them for everyone […]? I'm guessing it was a process – mostly subconscious – that began with volume 3 (*Azkaban*) and hit warp speed in volume 4 (*Goblet of Fire*). By the time we finish *The Order of the Phoenix*, with its extraordinary passages of fear and despair, the distinction between "children's literature" and plain old "literature" has ceased to exist. (King, question 4[3])

2.5 Other relevant genres to consider

2.5.1 The boarding school story

Harry Potter is part of the long history and evolution of the boarding school story, which is a very old and traditional genre in children's literature (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016: 167).[4] While there is something new in each school story, they all draw on previous conventions; as Grenby puts it, with "literary genes having been passed on" throughout the centuries (3). Over the past 150 years, the school story has become an established genre in its own right (Steege 142). Notable school stories are for example those by Enid Blyton, Frank Richards, Thomas Hughes and Sarah Fielding.[5] School stories are generally defined as literature that deals with the experiences of students at private schools (Steege 140). This genre is usually very positive about the school experience and the message is often that the school is a wonderful place to grow

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[3] Stephen Kings' review is structed in the form of questions which he then answers himself, question four being: "There's been a lot of discussion – some of it pretty warm – about whether or not kids, especially those under the age of 10, should be reading these novels, which contain vivid scenes of grief, terror, death, and even torture. What's your take on this?"

[4] See *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction* (1988) by Jeffrey Richards for the formula and explanations for the continuing popularity of this genre.

[5] Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or: The Little Female Academy* (1749) is often considered to be the first school story (Grenby 3).

(Steege 142, 152). Grenby argues that the classic tradition of the school story is a quintessential part of British culture: stories where the school features very prominently, and almost as a character itself, and where students fit happily into the school, helping their peers and forming each other's characters (87). Historically and within literature, most British boarding schools were exclusive, drawing their students from the social elite; they were also segregated by gender (Grenby 88). This division along the lines of gender resulted in very different literary traditions for boys' and girls' school stories; the readers of these stories were similarly rigidly divided (Steege 141). For example, a core element of boys' school stories is summarised by John Reed here:

> [I]n boys' school novels the school itself is as much the protagonist as the individual student, and the structure of many of these novels follows the progress of a boy from his anxious but excited arrival at the school to eventual triumphant but regretful leave-taking years later, after he has risen through the ranks to become a leader, a hero, and a protector of first-years. (17)

However, in recent times, the traditions of boys' and girls' school stories have begun to mix together, again, for example, in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books (Grenby 88). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the hallmarks of school stories for children were basically these three: the story was set almost entirely in a school, the interactions between students and teachers were the primary focus, and it contained adventures unique to a setting in a school (Grenby 90). Some scholars have felt that these traditional markers of school stories were disappearing by the mid-twentieth century, such as Isabel Quigly, who fittingly called the last chapter of her work on the genre *The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story* "The decline and fall". Other scholars argue against such a view, such as M.O. Grenby. In the case of *Harry Potter*, Grenby writes that J.K. Rowling "reused the conventions of the classic school story to great popular acclaim, setting the action at Hogwarts, a school for magicians but in all other respects a reiteration of the traditional British public school" (90-91).

Next, we will look at some of the core components of the school story and see how they apply to the *Harry Potter* books. Traditional school stories feature a protagonist (the hero) and his best friend; a third friend usually joins them later (Manners Smith 74). In *Harry Potter*, this friendship is made up of Harry and Ron, who become best friends after meeting on the Hogwarts Express. Once their friendship is established and Hermione Granger has proven herself, she joins them to complete the trio. This is where Rowling has introduced something new to the school story genre: for one, the school is coeducational and has an ethnically diverse

student body (Steege 153), and secondly, she is adding a girl to the classic boys' friendship (Manners Smith 75). In most of the traditional school stories, there is a bully and his friends who try to make life hard for the protagonist, and, frequently there is also a weak or shy student in need of the hero's protection (Manners Smith 75). Harry faces this bully in the form of Draco Malfoy and his cronies Crabbe and Goyle. Another character targeted by Draco and his friends is Neville Longbottom, who could be seen as the "weak" student who Harry has to protect, at least in the first books (Manners Smith 77). Another feature of school stories is the protagonists' proclivity for breaking the school rules, usually aided by the best friend. Midnight parties, forbidden excursions off the school grounds or pranks are a core part of the protagonist's life at the school. All these can be seen as a test of the protagonist's character; he is gaining in life experience and originality, which he will need to succeed in life, or, in Harry's case, save the world (Manners Smith 79). The punishments Harry and his schoolmates receive, the rule-breaking itself as well as the threat of expulsion that comes up throughout the series are absolutely typical of the genre of the traditional school story – Rowling manages to embed the magical fantasy elements of her books in a structure that children are familiar with and can identify with. When it comes to the relationship between students and teachers, especially in older texts, questions of authority and obedience arise (Grenby 95). In general, schools in these stories are authoritarian places, with pupils facing harsh punishments if they fail to obey. In more recent texts however – also the case in *Harry Potter* – the school story is more about children working out a balance between "the obedience of childhood and independence of adulthood" (Grenby 95). While boarding schools in these cases are still authoritarian places with strict rules, they are also places that represent great freedom. Manners Smith writes that teachers and headmasters are often the only adults in school stories (78). The outside world and the students' families do not permeate this bubble, and the students are left to interact with each other – and as long as pupils abide by the rules, they are left as mostly autonomous agents (Levy and Mendlesohn 168; Grenby 95-96). Another interesting generic tradition of many school stories – originally almost exclusively in boys' school stories – is the role of the remote headmaster. With very few exceptions, school stories present "wise, fair-minded, and inspiring headmasters" (Manners Smith 78). If pupils feel that they have been treated unfairly by their teachers, they can appeal to the headmaster, who sits in judgment over not only the students but also the teaching staff. Usually, headmasters rarely abuse this role in school stories, but they can ignore school codes and regulations sometimes in order to help the hero (Manners Smith 78-79). As Manners Smith writes: "Usually they are exemplars of goodness and integrity, providing blueprints for the moral life" (78). J.K. Rowling's Albus Dumbledore as headmaster

of Hogwarts fits in here. He is very influential, powerful and wiser than anyone else in the series – he is, however, humanised by his eccentricities and his comic sensibilities (Manners Smith 78). Rowling stresses the important connection between hero and headmaster, an "adult mentor who helps the hero develop into a functioning, useful young man of good character" (Steege 150). Dumbledore also administers life lessons throughout the books about compassion, courage and integrity. Near the end of *Stone*, for example, he gives the assembled students a gentle lesson about peer pressure: "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends" (221). This is another element that *Harry Potter* has in common with many other school stories: it provides a moral tale while still being an engaging and good story overall (Steege 151).

Despite the school story being an old genre and often conservative, it still flourishes today because of its ability to merge with other genres. Grenby argues that *Harry Potter* is one of the most successful genre fusions that incorporate a school story (112). According to him, Rowling has been able to use the traditions of the British boarding school story while successfully blending them with adventure and fantasy. Obviously, the Harry Potter books are far more popular than the average school story – but the school story element has arguably contributed to its success, even in countries that do not have experience with traditional boarding schools, like the US. In interviews about the success of *Harry Potter* conducted in 1999, American middle-school children said that while they loved the magic and wizarding elements of the book, they were also fascinated by the fact that Harry went to a boarding school (Manners Smith 69). J.K. Rowling herself, interviewed in March 1999 for online magazine *Salon*, commented on the "taboo allure" that an institution like a boarding school might hold for young readers:

> No child wants to lose their parents, yet the idea of being removed from the expectations of parents is alluring. […] There is something liberating, too, about being transported into the kind of surrogate family which boarding school represents, where the relationships are less intense and the boundaries perhaps more clearly defined. (Weir, question 4)[6]

In reality, only a minority of students in England attend private boarding schools, but, as Manners Smith writes: "[T]hese low numbers have not diminished the enduring appeal of the *idea* of boarding schools or its popularity as subject matter for British writers of children's fiction and their readers" (70, original emphasis). Manners Smith also suggests that it may be

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[6] J.K. Rowling said this in answer to the fourth question in Weir's interview, which was: "In this era of very involved parenting, do you think that the notion of boarding school and the autonomy it offers might hold an almost taboo allure for both kids and parents?"

the predictability of the genre that makes school stories such a popular branch of children's literature (70). To summarise and conclude this chapter on the school story, I will quote Steege: "As a result, we have [in *Harry Potter*] the return of the boarding school novel, updated and modified for contemporary readers in ways so appealing that we are left envious, wishing we too had received that invitation to enter Hogwarts and become boarding school boys and girls" (156).

2.5.2 Adventure story, fairy and folk tale

As Grenby writes, it is hard to explain precisely what makes up an adventure story and what elements distinguish it from other children's literature (170). Many classic texts fit under that description, such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) or *Treasure Island* (1883). An example of an adventure story in the twentieth century is the popular *Famous Five* book series by Enid Blyton (starting from 1942), where the young protagonists unmask and defeat villains and solve cases. Many books, such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) for example, were originally intended for an adult audience but then were abridged and altered to make them easier for younger readers to enjoy (Grenby 171). As we can see, the boundaries of what constitutes an adventure story are very blurred (Grenby 171). As another example, we can see that the line between history books (e.g. biographical accounts of Alexander the Great) and adventure stories is anything but distinct. Similarly, myths, legends, and even biblical stories were also read as adventure stories, e.g. Hercules, Odysseus, David and Goliath (Grenby 172). In fact, it is questionable whether adventure is even a distinct literary genre by itself, since there are not many texts that can be regarded as *solely* belonging to that genre. Another very unclear line is that between adventure stories and fantasy literature (Grenby 173). Adventure stories for children usually have protagonists that lead insignificant lives on the margins of society, but through circumstances in the story suddenly find themselves in the centre of an important quest or event, where they have to face great dangers. Their success or failure does not only have an effect on themselves but usually on society as a whole. What this comes down to, is that the adventure story is a story of empowerment that young readers can imagine themselves in (Grenby 174). A very classic example of this wish fulfilment fantasy is the sub-genre of child detective stories (again, for example, the *Famous Five* series, or Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives* from 1929) (Grenby 174). Adventure stories have a very characteristic plot: they generally start out with the protagonist having to leave the security of home because of a crisis of some kind. This is usually followed by a small adventure during which he or she can prove his or her worthiness.

Soon after that, the main quest of the story is revealed, and this will provide the excitement and suspense for the rest of the book. The quest is often structured as consisting of several minor challenges finally culminating in a big show-down which finalises the mission (e.g. solving the crime, finding the treasure, freeing the hostage etc.). The hero often has a special asset (a device or skill) as well as a trusted sidekick or a group of friends that help him or her achieve his or her goal (Grenby 183). This is structured in essentially the same way as the narrative of quest fantasies, which usually "start in a place of security and stability, and then a disruption from the outside world occurs" (Senior 190). Apart from elements of the adventure story, there are also elements of fairy tales in J.K. Rowling's books: she introduced gnomes, goblins, elves and other mythical creatures into her texts (Levy and Mendlesohn 170). However, when it comes to the narrative structure of *Harry Potter*, there is not much that would be considered as fitting into the genre of fairy tales.[7]

As we have seen, *Harry Potter* mostly fits into the genre of fantasy literature for children and, later on, fantasy literature for young adults because of its darker themes. However, J.K. Rowling has actually managed to merge elements from several other genres into it as well, the most prominent of those being the boarding school story. This chapter tried to give an overview of the different definitions of fantasy literature, and the difficulty associated with this endeavour. Furthermore, the modes of fantasy employed in the *Harry Potter* series have been discussed, as well as how *Harry Potter* fits into the boarding school genre. The following chapter will deal with the concepts of good and evil in literature, as well as defining what a villain is and how he or she can be identified in a story.

3. Good and evil in fantasy fiction

"Fantasy for children has always had a dark side, of course, for without danger there is no triumph and with danger comes a certain amount of fear." (Levy and Mendlesohn 185)

Before we can embark on the analysis of the chosen texts and characters, it has to be clear what parameters we are analysing and how these are defined. Good and evil represent the two highest moral categories and the fight between these two takes centre stage in many or most fantastic

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[7] For futher reading, the fundamental narrative units of folk tales have been categorised by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928).

texts (Kulik 5, 57). Thus, in this chapter, the definition of a villain and of evil in literature, the challenges of distinguishing between good and evil, and some of the ways characters are coded as evil in *Harry Potter*, will be examined.

3.1 What is evil?

"What is evil?" This is a question that Jamey Heit, editor of *Vader, Voldemort and Other Villains* asked his students in an introductory philosophy lecture. Many students, in their answers to this question, referenced figures from popular culture to answer it and also tied their answers to philosophical concepts. One recurring answer was that "evil is that which good must overcome to restore social order" (Heit 1). This is something we can clearly see in *Harry Potter* – Harry must defeat Voldemort in the end to restore the wizarding world to its normal state again, it is his destiny to do so. Also searching for a definition of evil, Robert Ellwood understands evil as: "that which causes suffering, which intrudes on what we think ought to be the rightful course of events, and maims or cuts short any life well before it has fulfilled its natural cycle" (2, qt. in Flotmann 110). We can see that this is also a very abstract definition, and the words 'what we think ought to be' suggest that evil is subjective or culture specific. Forbes similarly writes that it is very hard to define evil, and that maybe this inexplicability is precisely what defines it, and that only that which is good is, he argues, "capable of genuine explanation or justification" (15).

Within our culture(s), there are deeply rooted ways of understanding evil. Jamey Heit (6) mentions the influence of the Judeo-Christian narrative in the book of Genesis as paramount in our understanding of evil in popular culture. In Genesis, we find a paradigm that clearly emphasises good over evil, but in a way that does not allow us to ignore evil's presence as a counterweight to the goodness of God's created world (Heit 7). Similarly, Forbes also explains that the good and evil binary is often thought about from a theological perspective (14). From a theological perspective, one could ask oneself: if there is a benevolent God, why would there even would be such a thing as evil in the world? This religiously rooted way of understanding evil is also something Kulik mentions when he writes about *Harry Potter*. More specifically, Kulik sees Voldemort's snake or the snake as the animal of Slytherin house in this light, and he explains that snakes are often regarded as the devil's animal, and the devil himself is of course seen as the personification of evil (290). This could explain why snakes in *Harry Potter* are

associated with Voldemort and the Slytherin students – to subtly suggest to the readers that these are anything but good characters.

We have still not made it entirely clear what 'evil' means and especially, how it contrasts with 'good'. Good and evil are, in our cultural understanding and in literature, intrinsically linked. Heit, for example, writes that in our culture, we do not glorify good and heroic characters just by themselves, but only if they work against some kind of evil and overcome it (7). So then, one could arrive at the conclusion that evil only exists as a foil for good, something that good characters have to defeat in order to be heroes. However, Heit disagrees with this statement and cites Georges Bataille, who posits that evil is a "sovereign value" (ix, qtd. in Heit 7) in its own right. This is crucial: evil is afforded a specific *value* within our culture. Still, villains have to fulfil their function as the enemies of the heroic good character. As Kokorski puts it: "Without the villains, the protagonists would not grow to their full capacities and develop their extraordinary strengths. Without the villains, the books would not be as captivating as they are. A good hero needs a 'good' villain" (147). Thus, we can see one of the main functions of evil and villainous characters in literature: they serve to propel the story forward and create tension and new challenges for the hero (Flotmann 111). On another note, Rothman also adds that "part of the recipe of commercial success […] is a grandly horrifying villain" (203). In the *Harry Potter* books, this grand villain is, of course, Lord Voldemort.

The narrative structure of a story aids us in identifying the villain and the hero as well: The bad guy often has great power and, in order to reach his goals, makes use of that power, which in turn kicks off the events of the story. The hero tries to overcome and defeat the villain, leading to the two of them eventually facing off against each other (Forbes 18). We can, of course, quickly pick up on this in *Harry Potter*, when during the first few chapters the roles of good and bad characters are made clear to us. Forbes writes that we see evil in popular culture as important, but at the same time recognise that it is something that needs to be overcome and eliminated (15). This is a very intriguing contradiction and will be examined in a later chapter dealing with our interest in and fascination with villainous characters.

Kokorski writes that villains in children's and young adult literature are usually portrayed in very black-and-white terms and thus the villains, in contrast to the heroes, symbolise pure evil (147). Most of the time, villains' goals are to amass as much power and influence over people as they can, a goal which they try to achieve with extraordinary cruelty. Even though they are

often already extremely powerful, they may be struggling with keeping their position and they always aim to increase their power (Kokorski 147). What Kokorski writes about applies really only to Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* books, as he is the arch-villain. There are also other evil characters, though, whose goals are different. Some of these characters cannot even be confidently identified as villains, but rather as just unlikeable and an enemy of the main protagonist Harry. Coincidentally, this may be one of the reasons why adult readers are still so drawn to the story: there is not just one black-and-white villain, whose goals are made perfectly clear, but there are also other villainous characters. These are more nuanced, like Severus Snape or Draco Malfoy[8] – these characters are arguably more interesting for adults and keep their continued interest in the *Harry Potter* series, as these characters are not so 'simple' and black-and-white when it comes to their morality.

3.2 The question of free will and morality

Several scholars have written on the question of free will and morality. David and Catherine Deavel argue that "moral evil can only really exist as the result of free choice" (*Reflection*, 132). Thus, if moral evil exists in a story, it follows that characters have chosen freely to follow this path. Rothman writes that "our free will makes our actions morally meaningful" (208) and Flotmann similarly writes that evil is not inherent but "springs from choices single persons make" (123). The fact that our choices define who we are is something that we can see quite clearly in *Harry Potter*. For example, Harry could have accepted Draco's friendship offer, Harry could have given in to the Sorting Hat's suggestion that he join Slytherin House. All of these options are portrayed as morally dubious in *Harry Potter*, and Harry always refuses them, which sets him up as a good and morally sound character. Other characters in the books make choices differently than Harry, or, in some cases, they refuse to make a decision at all. If characters refuse to make a decision, this can also lead to disastrous consequences. For example, Minister Fudge buries his head in the sand and refuses to acknowledge that Voldemort has returned in *Order*. He thus refuses to take action that could have aided the fight against Voldemort. As Deavel and Deavel put it, this is an easy way out (*Reflection*, 147). Refusing to make decisions does not immediately make characters like Fudge into evil ones, of course, but every single choice and action shows who we are (Rothman 208). J.K. Rowling's focus on choice and free will in the book series can be exemplified best in the character of Harry who, similar to Voldemort, had a very bad and traumatising childhood, but who does not turn evil

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[8] More on Snape's and Malfoy's complex characters will follow in the respective chapters.

(Flotmann 133). Actually, Harry at several points in the story wonders and fears that he is in some respects becoming very similar to Lord Voldemort. Is he an evil wizard in the making? Dumbledore, the ceaseless voice of wisdom, reassure Harry and the readers alike: "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (*Chamber* 358). Deavel and Deavel argue that this element of free choice in *Harry Potter* is what makes Voldemort such a chilling villain: he chose evil freely (*Reflection*, 136). Or did he? There is an important question about nature or nurture that has to be explored here. As Heit explains, villains often "possess some inherent quality that predisposes them to evil, a deficiency that inhibits their free choice" (8). This is something that we can arguably see in Voldemort, who lacks any feelings of love, as he himself has also never experienced it through his parents – this fact is used to explain in *Harry Potter* why Voldemort is so cruel and cold-hearted. So maybe, in his case, he did not choose evil, but he was born like this. More on this topic will follow in the chapter on Voldemort. One important philosophical question remains: if evil people cannot help themselves, we have to ask ourselves: is it really their fault then? Can we even really categorise them as evil, if this 'deficiency' is out of their hands? Heit tries to answer this, writing that in our collective minds, the "consequences of 'evil' actions are so troubling that the cause ceases to be a consideration" (8). In the case of Voldemort, this would also be the case. The consequences of his and his followers' actions are so atrocious that the underlying cause of his evil is ultimately not that relevant within the story. From a scholarly perspective, of course, it is nevertheless an interesting question to pursue.

3.3 Distinguishing between good and evil

"We understand evil in a particular way, a fact evident in the way that we conceptualize and privilege that which we value, namely evil's constant foe: what is good." (Heit 2)

As Flotmann explains, if the primary function of literature is to show people how to behave and what social norms to follow, then it makes sense that there should be a very clear-cut line between good and evil in fiction (137-138). However, there is not always such a clear distinction between good and evil in literature as we might think. This is evidenced by the fact that characters identified as villains sometimes make choices that we understand or arouse our sympathy for them. More on this topic will be said in the chapter *The Allure of Villains*. When we look at the characters in *Harry Potter*, we can also see that not all of them are either good or bad. As Sirius tells Harry in *Order*: "[T]he world isn't split into good people and Death

Eaters" (*Order* 271). In the context of the book, Sirius is referring to Dolores Umbridge, however, this can arguably also apply to other characters such as Severus Snape. Snape is a former Death Eater who, as a Hogwarts teacher, can barely hide his dislike for Harry. Nevertheless, Snape has chosen to leave his former days as a Death Eater behind and join the fight against Voldemort as a double agent (which the reader only finds out about at the end of *Hallows*, of course). This moral ambiguity does not only show up on the side of formerly evil characters, though. Also characters regarded as belonging firmly on the good side have less than perfect traits. For example, as Harry is disappointed to learn, his father James and godfather Sirius Black were at times arrogant and cruelly bullied other students during their time at Hogwarts. If we look further into defining the differences between good and bad characters, we quickly encounter more blurry lines and grey areas. For example, if we were to give examples of what constitutes a typically evil character or action, we would probably mention acts of violence, deception, and force. However, also good characters will make use of these methods. Usually, in order for the good and valiant hero to overcome the villain, they must in the end often use force to defeat their foe. Incidentally, if a character tries to negotiate with a villain to peacefully resolve their situation, they are often depicted as naïve (Forbes 16). But maybe the real difference lies not in the methods these characters employ, but in their goals. One could argue that villains cause injustice and heroes fight against that to restore justice. As Forbes mentions, though, at this point we are met with the equally daunting task of defining just what exactly 'justice' means (17). At the end of the day, it is a difference in perspective, which this next point touches on: we must be careful not to see good and evil as intrinsic character traits of a person, but rather should regard them as different perspectives (Forbes 16). If we regard this matter as such, it conveniently solves the problem regarding clear-cut definitions of good and evil – instead, we can just focus on analysing characters' motives and actions as they are (Forbes 16). Nevertheless, as Heit points out, in much of popular culture and literature it is still relatively easy to spot the villains (8). This is especially the case when it comes to children's literature: because the texts often want to teach young readers about morality, it is important to clearly identify characters as either good or evil (Forbes 18). Conveniently, literature can draw on well-established conventions when it comes to villains' characterisation, because the same ingredients are being used many times over. Villains often possess some inherent quality, or lack certain characteristics, that predispose them to evil. They also have certain physical attributes and characteristics, all of which is usually accompanied by plans to gain power, take over the world, etc. (Heit 8).

3.4 Semantic fields of evil

In his research on good and evil as it is depicted in fantasy literature for children, Nils Kulik has unearthed and analysed the semantic fields that describe characters. Kulik writes that good and evil are defined by the abstract semantic categories that they are described with (62). 'Good' and 'evil' in a fantastic text – or really, in any text – are made up not only of characters, but also of places, and actions. This 'marking' or ascribing to certain semantic categories can happen through the author, through the speech of characters, or an established closeness to a character that has already been marked as either good or evil (Kulik 62, 328). In *Harry Potter*, good and evil are almost exclusively represented by the characters (Kulik 287). One of the few examples of a place being coded as evil is the Chamber of Secrets in the second book. Thus, it makes sense to analyse specific characters of the books to decide whether and how they are categorised – in the case of this thesis, as villains. In the process, we will discover that there are also some ambiguous characters. Similarly, for some characters, the classification of being an either evil or good character is not constant throughout the books, but changes. Kulik explains that in fantastic texts, the words used to describe evil characters usually come from several semantic fields such as 'coldness' or 'emptiness' to accurately convey to the reader through such descriptions that this *is* in fact a villainous character (57). Similarly, also colour coding takes place; with dark colours, mainly the colour black, being ascribed to the evil side – maybe also the colour red, but that is usually it, as Kulik explains (57). Kulik criticizes that some scholars (he mentions Meißner 1989) focus more on codifying evil rather than good (58). However, scholars such as Nikolajeva (*Magic Code*, 116, qtd. in Kulik 58) reject the idea that good and evil in a fantastic story as well as the characters in it can be neatly ascribed to either one or the other, especially in more recent fantastic texts. Nikolajeva writes that "[t]he secondary world has […] become highly ambivalent, it cannot any longer be described exclusively in terms of good and evil, light and dark." (*Magic Code*, 116, qtd. in Kulik 58). Kulik also examines the characters' outward appearance to try and see whether this is a useful parameter for discerning whether they are good or evil. He comes to the conclusion that this is not the case (324). What arguments does Kulik give for his reasoning? After having analysed several children's fantasy books, Kulik finds that 'beauty' is commonly associated with good characters and 'ugliness' with evil characters when it comes to their physical appearance (324). Furthermore, also the two terms 'light' and 'darkness' are ascribed to good and, respectively, evil characters. However, Kulik then argues that both beauty and ugliness can be found on either side in *Harry Potter*. He writes that, for example, Tom Riddle had a "handsome face" as a young man (*Prince* 346), concluding that this is evidence that beauty can also be found on the

evil side (325). However, in this case I must disagree with his reasoning: Tom Riddle was, as a child and teenager, handsome, however, as he turned to the Dark Arts and descended into darkness to become the evil Lord Voldemort, his appearance changed to become ugly. Thus, a turn towards the evil side is connoted with 'turning' ugly. Of course, there are also good characters who are ugly, such as the house-elf Dobby. The house-elves are not human, though, and for creatures and other beings in the magical world there may very well be other rules. Rowling may also use our collective expectations regarding evil characters usually being ugly for her own purpose, for example, to succinctly present a plot twist. An example of this would be Professor Snape, who is described as ugly throughout, which arguably contributes to Harry and his friends suspecting him in *Stone*. As Quirrell says, when it is revealed that he is the culprit: "Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn't he? So useful to have him swooping around like an overgrown bat. Next to him, who would suspect p-p-poor st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?" (*Stone* 209). Other characters who are described in a very unflattering way are the Slytherin students. In the first book, Harry notes that they all "looked an unpleasant lot" (*Stone* 89). For example, Pansy Parkinson is "hard-faced" (*Stone* 110) and has a "face like a pug" (*Prisoner* 107), Millicent Bulstrode is described as "large and square" and having a "heavy jaw" (*Chamber* 208), Warrington looks like a "sloth" (*Goblet* 287), and Marcus Flint is compared to a troll (*Stone* 136). It seems that J.K. Rowling uses Slytherin house as a foil to the valiant and 'good' house Gryffindor and its students. As Heilman and Gregory write: "Descriptions of the Slytherin members related that they are often dark, unattractive, greedy, and a bit dense" (246). Thus, if Rowling wants to communicate to the readers that these are bad characters who are not to be trusted by Harry, she employs the device of equating bad or evil characters with 'ugliness' – and in the minds of readers, this connection happens, because we all know of this unwritten rule that bad characters *are* in fact ugly. However, because Rowling uses this to confuse readers, it also works to surprise us in the end and, arguably, teaches readers that they should not judge a person by their appearance. For example, this would apply to Snape, who is described in a very unflattering way, or also to Sirius Black, especially in his form of a black and threatening dog, who both turn out to be not so bad after all. Therefore, we can agree with Courtney B. Strimel, who writes that "[c]hildren may notice that a person's appearance should not be used to judge everyone who looks similarly" (45). Apart from the semantic fields and characters' physical appearance, the many creatively chosen names in many cases already indicate a certain character's affiliation with either the good or evil side, because they describe an attribute or the nature of the character's mind. More about this in detail can be found in the respective chapters on the characters.

3.5 The allure of villains

Jamey Heit in *Vader, Voldemort and Other Villains* writes that sometimes we identify more with the evil character in a text, which is rather interesting and thus merits further investigation (9). He is rightly posing the question of why "our culture find[s] itself drawn to characters that are so clearly bad within our generally accepted moral binaries" (9). Forbes gives us an example of what this might look like in his article titled *The Aesthetic of Evil*:

> When *Star Wars* came out I was a kid who loved to play with action figures. But the first action figures I wanted from *Star Wars* were not the heroes Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. I wanted Darth Vader and an Imperial Stormtrooper. [T]he bad guys were the ones that I found most fascinating and desirable. (Forbes 13)

Forbes writes that he, like many young people, found the villains of a story very cool, maybe even more interesting than the good guys. Why is this? What gives this attraction to villains, when we are obviously supposed to root for the good guys? There are always compelling reasons to root for the good side, after all. Forbes theorises that this may be because in the real world there are no clear and definite lines between good and evil, rather, these labels show our own judgments and classifications of people – and a change in perspective can be refreshing sometimes (13). Often, the role of a villain in a certain narrative can also positively influence our perception of the character; for example, when the story is told from a sympathetic perspective. Of course, there are also villains that are not at all 'cool' but rather repelling – Forbes argues that this is because they serve a different purpose and represent a different kind of narrative (14). The fact that we sometimes identify more with characters who are coded as evil can also be due to the fact that, as already mentioned, there are not always clear-cut lines between good and evil in popular culture and literature (Forbes 16). Forbes continues by arguing that we also maybe just categorise the perspective we prefer as 'good', while labelling any opposing perspective as 'evil' (16). Another explanation is also that heroic characters are sometimes bland or boring while villains are more interesting. However, this does not apply to Harry Potter, because Harry and his friends are also complex and interesting characters. The binary of good and evil also allows us to examine the motives of villains while at the same time asking ourselves which values we take for granted (Forbes 19). As Forbes continues, by exploring the story we "take on the danger of examining our values and possibly changing them" (19). Or, put differently, the appeal of the villain may lie in the fact that, within the narrative, he works as an "instigator of a challenge to our values" (Forbes 19) – and in order for us to seriously consider this challenge, the villain needs to be appealing and have this certain 'cool factor' that Forbes talks about. Of course, it has to be mentioned that villains are not

always appealing. Sometimes they are very banal, sometimes they can be almost pitied because they are so unsuccessful, sometimes we also outright and legitimately hate them. However, Forbes' essay *The Aesthetic of Evil* is still crucial for this argument, because it shows us what a villain's role in a narrative is – and how sometimes this can be very intriguing for the reader. Regarding *Harry Potter*, there are probably more readers intrigued by characters like Professor Snape and Draco Malfoy, who are more grey morality-wise, and not as definitively evil as Voldemort and arguably Professor Umbridge. This question shall be examined in more detail in the analytical chapters of this thesis regarding these characters.

3.6 A wide spectrum of villainy

Not all villains are on the same level when it comes to their position as an antagonist within the story. In *Harry Potter*, Lord Voldemort is unquestionably the main antagonist, he is the archetypal villain. Other antagonistic characters that oppose Harry and his friends in some way are, however, not quite on the same level. Here we have what I call a spectrum of villainy. This spectrum could be seen as extending from "archetypal villain" on one side to "unexpected, atypical villain" on the other side. This has to do with audience expectations and what readers expect a typical villain to look and act like. An example for this would be the character Severus Snape. In *Stone*, Harry and his friends suspect Snape of wanting to steal the Philosopher's Stone from the beginning, mainly because of his unfriendliness, bullying of students, unfairness and menacing looks. This contributes to the surprising revelation in the end, when Harry and the reader learn that it was Quirrell who was behind the whole affair. However, the spectrum of villainy could be described in even more detail. For example, there is a separate spectrum on which antagonists in *Harry Potter* can be placed depending on the type and intensity of the threat they pose to Harry individually or the wizarding world as a whole. Obviously, Voldemort poses the biggest threat, jeopardising the well-being of everyone in the wizarding and Muggle worlds. On the other hand, there is Draco Malfoy, who in the first books of the series is nothing more than a school bully. Another spectrum of villainy consists of how effective villainous characters are when it comes to implementing their plans. Here, we could look at Draco being tasked with killing Dumbledore in *Prince*, but failing to do so. In contrast, Dolores Umbridge is very effective in carrying out her plans for the most part. Of course, the fact that ultimately villains in children's fantasy literature are not supposed to win in the end puts a stopper on how 'effective' a villain can really be. Lastly, we could also sort characters on a spectrum that deals with how much the books' readership hates or is supposed to hate them. Draco Malfoy would

probably not feature very high on that scale – also because he is not very effective – but Professor Umbridge would arguably come out on top. While Voldemort is the arch-villain of the series, Professor Umbridge is still one of the characters most hated by many readers. Again, this will be dealt with in more detail in the respective chapters of this thesis. Another important factor when it comes to villains is that they usually intensify in menace over the course of the story, as evidenced by all four characters that are examined in this thesis. This is not only restricted to villains in fantasy or children's literature, it happens across the board in all media: the villains the hero has to defeat and overcome become bigger, stronger, and harder to fight as the story goes on. This is to show the hero's development, growing strength and skills but it also serves, of course, to keep the audience entertained, with always bigger threats ensuring that excitement will not wane.

In the end, like in most fantastic children's literature, good triumphs over evil. In *Harry Potter*, this happens at the end of every single book, because Harry always manages to defeat or escape Voldemort. In the first book, he stops Voldemort from getting to the Philosopher's Stone and coming back to life, similarly, in book two, he defeats the basilisk, saves Ginny and destroys Tom Riddle's diary. This goes on, and even though Voldemort manages to return to his body in *Goblet*, Harry still survives and carries out heroic deeds. Finally, in *Hallows*, Harry manages to kill Voldemort once and for all, which means that the good side has defeated and overcome evil, as is usual in fantasy literature for children and young adults.

4. Analysis of the portrayal of villains in *Harry Potter*

4.1 Lord Voldemort

4.1.1 Introduction

The main villain in the *Harry Potter* series is Lord Voldemort. Already in the beginning of *Stone* Voldemort is clearly coded as evil through another character's words. Hagrid says: "[T]here was this wizard who went … bad. As bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse. […]" (*Stone* 44). In the later books, Voldemort is 'confirmed' as belonging to the evil side by the extradiegetic narrator, who refers to him as "the greatest dark sorcerer of all time" (*Chamber* 10), "the most feared Dark wizard for a hundred years" (*Prisoner* 12) and "the most powerful Dark wizard for a century" (*Goblet* 27). Voldemort is thus the highest ranking and most

powerful figure of evil in *Harry Potter*. Flotmann describes him as "the constant evil principle" in the book series (122).

4.1.2 Naming an evil

The first time we, the readers, along with Harry find out about an adversary is in *Stone* chapter four, when Hagrid comes to take Harry from the Dursleys and tells him about his origin and his being a wizard. He also tells Harry about how his parents died:

> He [Hagrid] sat down, stared into the fire for a few seconds and then said, "It begins, I suppose, with – with a person called – but it's incredible yeh don't know his name, everyone in our world knows – "
> "Who?"
> "Well I don' like sayin' the name if I can help it. No one does."
> "Why not?"
> "Gulpin' gargoyles, Harry, people are still scared. Blimey, this is difficult. See, there was this wizard who went … bad. As bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse. His name was …"
> Hagrid gulped, but now words came out.
> "Could you write it down?" Harry suggested.
> "Nah – can't spell it. Alright – *Voldemort*." Hagrid shuddered. "Don' make me say it again." (*Stone* 44-45, original emphasis)

In this passage, we can already glean one of the many defining features of the character Voldemort: people are afraid to call him by his name. Voldemort's followers and sympathisers respectfully address him as "my Lord" (e.g. *Goblet* 626, *Goblet* 705) or "master" (e.g. *Goblet* 732). He is referred to as "The Dark Lord" (e.g. *Chamber* 59), often by sympathisers but not exclusively (for example Dobby refers to him as such in *Chamber* 363, Karkaroff in *Goblet* 639, or Mr Ollivander in *Hallows* 401). By most people, he is fearfully called "You-Know-Who" or "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named". This is interesting, as if by not speaking the name aloud the danger somehow is less real, or as if by speaking the name, you conjure up the person. However, as Fenske writes, this idea of a name being taboo is quite old and not a new invention by J.K. Rowling (174). For example, in Christianity there is the belief that naming the devil summons him; in Judaism the name of God is not to be pronounced. In *Harry Potter*, most characters avoid pronouncing the name and react viscerally if someone else does. For example:

> "Maybe … *Lord Voldemort*?"
> Ron gasped; Lavender Brown uttered a little scream; Neville slipped sideways off his stool. (*Order* 220, original emphasis)

> "[…] Because …" [Hermione] took a great breath and finished, "because Lord Voldemort is back."
> The reaction was immediate and predictable. Cho's friend shrieked and slopped Butterbeer down herself; Terry Boot gave a kind of involuntary twitch; Padma Patil shuddered, and Neville have an odd yelp that he managed to turn into a cough. (*Order* 303)

The taboo around speaking aloud Voldemort's name is mentioned countless times in the books. However, as the resistance against Voldemort grows stronger, especially from *Order* onwards, individual people are encouraged by Harry and his friends to get used to hearing and speaking aloud Voldemort's name as a form of resistance. Albus Dumbledore, one of the most powerful wizards and supposedly the only one who Voldemort has ever feared (*Stone* 45, *Prince* 73), always speaks Voldemort's name. He advises Harry to "[a]lways use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself" *(Stone* 2016). People not daring to speak aloud his name is a powerful effect of Voldemort as a villain. His power and the level of threat emanating from him only increase by this – after all, it is a remarkable show of power to be so frightening and terrible that people are too afraid to even speak your name. In *Hallows*, the speaking aloud of Voldemort's name takes on another important development as a Taboo is placed on it, meaning that anyone who speaks it can be located and arrested. Harry makes this mistake and immediately Snatchers turn up at their location to take them prisoner. One of them says: "[…] And you thought, just for a laugh, you'd use the Dark Lord's name?" (*Hallows* 364) and another one says: "You know who used to like using the Dark Lord's name, Weasley? […] The Order of the Phoenix. […] They don't show the Dark Lord proper respect, so the name's been Tabooed. A few Order members have been tracked that way. […]" (*Hallows* 364).

During *Prince* we find out about Voldemort's past and also his complicated relationship with his name when Harry and Dumbledore revisit memories in the Pensieve concerning a young Tom Riddle. Dumbledore talks to Harry about this:

> "[…] I hope you noticed Riddle's reaction when I mentioned that another shared his first name, 'Tom'?"
> Harry nodded.
> "There he showed his contempt for anything that tied him to other people, anything that made him ordinary. Even then, he wished to be different, separate, nitrous. He shed his name, as you know, within a few short years of that conversation and created the mask of 'Lord Voldemort' behind which he has been hidden for so long." (*Prince* 259)

We see that Voldemort wants to be seen as someone separate and special. He also dislikes the name because it reminds him of his Muggle father – and, as we shall discuss later, Voldemort despises Muggles. In *Chamber*, the Tom Riddle from the diary tells Harry:

> "You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name for ever? […] I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born just because he found out his wife was a witch? […] I fashioned myself a new name, a name I knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world!" (*Chamber* 337)

Tom Riddle already changed his name when he was a student at Hogwarts, as he delved deeper into the Dark Arts and acquired more power. Flotmann argues that this name change in the case of Voldemort can also be regarded as a shedding of something human (his 'human', given name) for something else which he chose (122). Apart from changing his name to 'Voldemort', he also gave himself the title of 'Lord'. The fact the he adopts an aristocratic title as well, shows his confidence in his superiority as well as his belief in a hierarchical system in which he is on top (Flotmann 123). But what does his newly fashioned name 'Voldemort' actually mean? It consists of words and syllables from the Romance languages: *vol-* comes from *volo*, the first person singular of Latin *velle* (to want) or *volare* (to fly), while the word *de* signals possession (Fenske 174). *Mort* means death, coming from French *la mort* or Latin *mors, mortis*. So put together, Voldemort means 'flight of death' – at least, this is the most commonly accepted meaning of the name. Seeing as Voldemort strives for immortality because his biggest fear is death, the name seems fitting (Fenske 174).

4.1.3 Voldemort's physical appearance

As Kulik points out, in order to accurately analyse markers of evil, one also has to have a look at a character's outer appearance, as it is often very telling (289). We are most familiar with Voldemort's appearance in the form of his restored physical body after the rebirthing ritual near the end of *Goblet*, and he looks like that until his death in *Hallows*. The physical description of Voldemort in the scene where he regains his body is as follows:

> But then, through the mist in front of him, [Harry] saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron. […] The thin man stepped out of the cauldron staring at Harry … and Harry stared back into the face that had haunted his nightmares for three years. Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes, and a nose that was as flat as a snake's, with slits for nostrils … Lord Voldemort had risen again. (*Goblet* 696-697)

> Voldemort looked away from Harry, and began examining his own body. His hands were like large, pale spiders; his long white fingers caressed his own chest, his arms, his face; the red eyes, whose pupils were slits, like a cat's, gleamed still more brightly through the darkness. He held up his hands, and flexed the fingers, his expression rapt and exultant. […] Voldemort slipped one of those unnaturally long-fingered hands into a deep pocket and drew out a wand. (*Goblet* 698)

If we make use of Kulik's semantic fields again, it is apparent that some of the ways in which Voldemort's appearance is described relate to the field of 'death': he is "skeletally thin" (*Goblet* 696) and has a face which is "[w]hiter than a skull" (*Goblet* 697). All of this confirms Kulik's claim that 'death' is indeed a marker of evil (289). Another marker of evil are Voldemort's red eyes. As already mentioned, apart from the colour black, red is the one other colour mainly used and associated with evil. According to Kulik, the red colour of his eyes connote death, hate, war, and blood, which in turn, also all relate to death (289). Voldemort's kind of evil is thus clearly associated with death, a link that is only strengthened by his Horcruxes, which he creates through killing (Flotmann 124). Furthermore, another semantic field related to Voldemort is 'coldness', which is evidenced by his "high, cold voice" (*Order* 716), "high cold laugh" (*Chamber* 333), and the "cold hatred in his face" (*Hallows* 598). At another point, his laugh is described as "an entirely mirthless laugh, cold as his speech" (*Goblet* 18). Other connotations that Kulik mentions are those of a snake, as Voldemort's face not only resembles a skull but also a snake (Kulik 290). Voldemort has a "snake-like face" (*Goblet* 700) with "slits for nostrils, like a snake" (*Stone* 212). Snakes come up at several points in *Harry Potter*, but almost all of them are related to the dark side. For one, as already mentioned, Voldemort's face looks "snake-like" (*Goblet* 700) and he has a pet snake called Nagini. But the snake is also part of the Dark Mark, the identifying symbol of the Death Eaters. When the Dark Mark is described in more detail in *Goblet*, we learn that it looks like "a skull, with a snake protruding from its mouth" (*Goblet* 699). Here, we not only see the snake as a symbol of evil, but also again as connected with death, represented by the skull. Thirdly, snakes are the symbol of Slytherin house, which is codified as evil in *Harry Potter*. Voldemort can also communicate with snakes as he speaks parseltongue, and he is very protective of his pet snake. Nagini is arguably the only creature in the world for which he harbours positive feelings. He even conceals a part of his soul inside his pet snake, which hints at the amount of trust and appreciation he feels towards her. Also, as already mentioned earlier, the snake is a symbol of evil in the Bible, where it is regarded as the devil's animal (Kulik 290). After all the devil, disguised as a snake, convinced Eve to pick the apple from the tree in the Garden of Eden.

However, Voldemort has not always looked like he does from *Goblet* onwards. In fact, his appearance has changed considerably over the years from when he was an orphaned child in London, to a promising student at Hogwarts, to a young adult working jobs after Hogwarts until he finally became the Voldemort we are most familiar with. As a teenager at Hogwarts, Riddle has a "handsome face" (*Prince* 347), a "soft voice" (*Chamber* 330) and even says he and Harry look alike (*Chamber* 340). As a child he was the spitting image of his handsome Muggle-born father. So how does he change so drastically and become this ugly, snake-like Voldemort we know throughout the series? This change in appearance happened gradually through a series of magical transformations, which were not necessarily carried out purposefully by Voldemort himself. Rather, it is suggested by several characters, and also the narrative itself, that it is an accompanying effect of Voldemort turning to the Dark Arts. In the following, we will have a closer look at his change in appearance and what caused it. In *Prince*, we learn a lot about Tom Riddle's past when Harry and Dumbledore revisit memories in the Pensieve. We find out that as a child, Tom Riddle was handsome and looked exactly like his Muggle father, also as a teenager at Hogwarts he was very good-looking. As a young adult, during his first job for Borgin and Burkes, he "looked more handsome than ever" (*Prince* 406). Ten years later, when we next see him as he applies for a teaching post at Hogwarts, his appearance has already changed drastically.

> [H]e was no longer handsome Tom Riddle. It was as though his features had been burned and blurred; they were waxy and oddly distorted, and the whites of the eyes now had a permanently bloody look, though the pupils were not yet the slits that Harry knew they would become. He was wearing a long black cloak and his face was as pale as the snow glistening on his shoulders. (*Prince* 413)

What happened during those ten years that could have facilitated such a change in appearance? Voldemort himself puts it this way; as he tells Dumbledore: "I have experimented; I have pushed the boundaries of magic further, perhaps, than they have ever been pushed […]" (*Prince* 415). Dumbledore is not impressed, however, and says that Voldemort has only experimented with "*some* kinds of magic" (*Prince* 415, added emphasis), implying that Voldemort has experimented with the Dark Arts. Dumbledore then denies Voldemort's request to teach at Hogwarts. At the end of the meeting, we read this about Voldemort's appearance: "Voldemort stood up. He looked less like Tom Riddle than ever, his features thick with rage" (*Prince* 417). This suggests that Voldemort's characteristics and feelings affect his appearance – becoming more angry, resentful and negative is contributing to this change. Voldemort has already created several Horcruxes by that time. The side effects that creating these Horcruxes have on

Voldemort physically as well as on the part of the soul remaining within himself are disastrous. It is during this time that he physically transforms so horribly. We find out more about the effect of creating Horcruxes on Voldemort during Voldemort's "rebirthing party" (*Goblet* 706), where he makes a very illuminating statement on this topic to his Death Eaters. He says: "I, who have gone further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality" (*Goblet* 708). Dumbledore later theorises (*Prince* 469), that the Death Eaters did not really know what this meant, though Dumbledore did: Voldemort was referring to his Horcruxes, Horcruxes which no other wizard has ever had more than one of. Dumbledore says: "Yet it fitted: Lord Voldemort had seemed to grow less human with the passing years, and the transformation he had undergone seemed to me to be only explicable if his soul was mutilated beyond the realms of what we might call usual evil …" (*Prince* 469). This is a convincing argument supporting the theory that the ripping apart of Voldemort's soul into several pieces is what contributed to his physical transformation. Another important point we can glean from Dumbledore's words is the usage of the expression "usual evil". This is another important puzzle piece in our categorisation of villains: Voldemort is more than usual evil, he has gone further than that, which cements his position as the ultimate and most evil person in *Harry Potter*. There is still the minor question of whether all these physical changes just happened to Voldemort as a symptom of his splintering his soul, or whether he did it on purpose or aided this transformation. One would assume the former, because what benefits would altering his appearance in such a way have? There is only one argument in the text for the latter, namely in *Hallows* when Ron and Hermione open the locket Horcrux in order to destroy it: "Behind both of the glass windows within blinked a living eye, dark and handsome as Tom Riddle's eyes had been before he turned them scarlet and slit-pupilled" (*Hallows* 305). It actually says "before *he* turned them", implying Voldemort facilitated this change himself. However, this is never mentioned anywhere else again, so the importance of this statement is arguably not that high. There is yet another type of 'appearance' Voldemort has had over the years, namely his spirit-like state of being from when the Killing Curse on baby Harry backfired on him up until he regains his body in *Goblet*. The fact that Voldemort does not have a physical body during all these years made some wizards and witches believe, or rather hope, he was dead. However, the uncertainty also contributed to the fear and terror in the wizarding world concerning Lord Voldemort.

4.1.4 Voldemort's characteristics

To make use of Kulik's identification markers of semantic fields of evil, there is a correlation between the words used to describe Voldemort and the semantic field of 'darkness'. For example, Voldemort refers to himself as 'the Dark Lord' (e.g. *Chamber* 59), as do many of his followers, and his side as 'the dark side'. His followers, the Death Eaters, also wear a tattoo of the 'Dark Mark' as an identifying sign. Among these evil wizards and witches on Voldemort's side there is also a great proclivity for the Dark Arts – on the good side and at Hogwarts, only Defence Against the Dark Arts is taught, clearly showing on which side of good and evil either area of magic is located. Another semantic field that is related to Voldemort and his followers is that of 'death' (Kulik 288). As already mentioned, his followers call themselves Death Eaters. Furthermore, also Voldemort's name, meaning 'flight of death' confirms this. Contrasted with Harry and the good side, Voldemort also represents death because he has killed countless wizards, witches, and muggles or has ordered his loyal followers to do so. Adding on to that, Voldemort's main goal in the seven books is to kill Harry himself. Kulik also posits that the concept of death as related to Voldemort in the books is connected to impurity in a moral sense (289). For example, the killing of a unicorn in *Stone* breaks a big ethical norm in the wizarding world. Similarly, Harry feels impure and filthy after having experienced the attack on Arthur Weasley from the perspective of the snake Nagini.

As we have established, 'death' is a marker of evil and one that applies to Lord Voldemort. It then seems almost contradictory that also the category of 'life' applies to him. While Voldemort represents death in *Harry Potter*, he himself also fears actual death more than anything else. Apart from destroying Harry Potter, it is his main goal to achieve immortality, which he tries to do in a number of different ways. The Philosopher's Stone would not only bring him back to life, but also grant him immortality. In *Order*, during the fight between Dumbledore and Voldemort, we can see first-hand how important life is for the latter when he says: "There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!", to which Dumbledore replies: "Your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness […]" (*Order* 718). According to Kulik, this apparent contradiction in which both 'life' and 'death' are categories associated with evil resolves itself, because they only apply to Voldemort both at the same time (290). All other characters in the books are still threatened with death by the figure of Lord Voldemort. In other words, within the Muggle and wizarding worlds in the books, Voldemort represents death for everyone else – only if we look at him more closely, we see that he also struggles with the concept and unavoidability of death.

It is interesting, then, that while Voldemort wants nothing more than immortality, he lives a joyless life by our standards: he has no interest in friends, love, sex, food and drink, affiliation or constructive achievement in life (Rothman 204). He exhibits only an intense will for power and passion for vengeance for anyone who threatens to thwart him (Rothman 204). Rothman asks an interesting question regarding this topic: why does Voldemort, with all the great powers he has, "desire […] so small a portion of the […] benefits which earthly life affords?" (205). Often, villains in literature and popular media have plans on what to do with their power once they have consolidated it, e.g. enjoy the benefits of material goods, sex, food, and the friends that come along with that. Voldemort has absolutely no interest in any of those things. Voldemort's ultimate goal is immortality, but we are right to ask ourselves: what will he do with all his time on earth if he is not interested in these 'benefits of earthly life'?

Another very central part of Voldemort's character is his inability to feel and understand love. It actually is his ultimate downfall. Firstly, it contributed to his downfall in the first wizarding war, when he is reduced to something less than a spirit after failing to kill Harry. Voldemort did not understand and was unable to appreciate the power Lily's love has to protect her baby – thus, his ignorance of love contributed to his (first) downfall. Regarding Voldemort's second and final downfall during the second wizarding war, he ultimately fails because of Snape working as a double agent and secretly protecting Harry. Voldemort did not realise this could happen, because he failed to understand Snape's enduring love for and attachment to Lily Potter – something which Voldemort does not experience or value himself. Also, he again underestimated the strength of a mother's love for her child: when Draco's mother Narcissa has to check whether Harry is really dead, she asks Harry if Draco is still alive, which Harry affirms. In gratitude Narcissa lies to Voldemort, telling him Harry is dead, which secures Harry's survival. Voldemort has always been alone, without attachment to any friends, and it is in this way that he ends. His lack of knowledge is most crucial in his destruction, as Dumbledore says:

> "And his knowledge remained woefully incomplete, Harry! That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped." (*Hallows* 568)

As Rothman mentions, though, Voldemort does not actually lack knowledge of things such as love, but rather, he 'forgets' it (207). At several points in the story Dumbledore or Harry try to

"kindle a spark of humanity" (Rothman 211) in Voldemort, but to no avail. For example, during Harry's and Voldemort's final fight at Hogwarts:

> "Is it love again?" said Voldemort, his snake's face jeering, "Dumbledore's favourite solution, *love*, which he claimed conquered death, though love did not stop him falling from the Tower and breaking like and old waxwork […]" (*Hallows* 592, original emphasis)

Voldemort does not take the reminders of valuing love to heart, and this results in him making crucial mistakes that lead to his downfall. During their final battle at Hogwarts, Harry asks Voldemort to reconsider his actions and even offers him the possibility to achieve redemption if he could just feel remorse. Of course, Voldemort rejects this offer – because he does not understand the incredible damage he has caused. Because he refuses to feel remorse, he is forever trapped in his state of being, a many-splintered soul that has no chance of healing ever again. This is represented by the helpless creature that is left to writhe in agony at King's Cross station in *Hallows* when Harry meets Dumbledore while hovering in between life and death (or arguably, having died temporarily). Voldemort never regrets any of his actions and thus "Voldemort died rejecting an opportunity for reconsideration of the self he had made […]", as Rothman puts it (216). Voldemort's two central weaknesses, which are also most relevant for the plot, are therefore his fear of death and his inability to love. Dumbledore says (regarding Voldemort only being interested in the Elder wand out of all three Deathly Hallows): "[Voldemort] would not think that he needed the Cloak, and, as for the stone, whom would he want to bring back from the dead? He fears the dead. He does not love" (*Hallows* 577). After all, one of the main points about values that are being made in *Harry Potter* is the importance of love and how it can conquer anything, even death. So it is only fitting that the main antagonistic character who opposes this mindset is killed at the end. To quote one of Dumbledore's wise words of advice to Harry again: "Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love" (*Hallows* 578).

4.1.5 Voldemort's ideology, values and goals

The highest values on the side of evil are power and domination over others (Kulik 291). Voldemort even indirectly tells us about his views on good and evil. In *Stone*, Voldemort's loyal follower Quirrell tells Harry that before he met his master he was "full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil" (*Stone* 211). But then Voldemort showed him how "[t]here is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it" (*Stone* 211). Thus, Voldemort and his

followers have adopted a social Darwinist system, in which only the categories 'power-powerlessness', 'strength-weakness' etc. matter (Kulik 291). One could also say that Voldemort has replaced the binary of good and evil with another binary, namely that of power and weakness (Flotmann 124). Ultimately, Quirrell pays the price for following Voldemort's ideology, because the latter abandons him to die. As Dumbledore says: "[Voldemort] shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies" (*Stone* 216). Voldemort, in his binary system, "equates his own evil deeds with power and the good side's efforts with weakness" (Flotmann 125). However, this does not mean that the Harry Potter books question the binary opposition of good and evil, but rather, one binary system is swapped out for another, as Flotmann argues (125). Of course, we have to keep in mind that this is a binary system set up by the major villain of the series, and so we should rightly question whether it is even legitimate. This could incite readers to actually think more consciously about binary systems of good and evil. Flotmann, however, still argues that binaries are upheld more clearly in *Harry Potter* than in other fantastic texts, such as, for example, in *Star Wars* (125).

The core element of Voldemort and his followers' ideology is pure-blood superiority. Flotmann, in fact, argues that Voldemort is racism personified (130). He sees himself and other pure-bloods on the top of the social hierarchy, and muggles and muggle-born wizards and witches as below him – because their blood is 'impure'. Voldemort himself talks about this 'value' of his at several points in the story, which gives us more insight into his worldview, which is all about pure-blood wizarding domination of the world:

> "Many of our oldest family trees become a little diseased over time," he said, as Bellatrix gazed at him, breathless and imploring. "You must prune yours, must you not, to keep it healthy? Cut away those parts that threaten the health of the rest. […] And in your family, so in the world … we shall cut away the cancer that infects us until only those of the true blood remain …" (*Hallows* 17)

Voldemort talking about 'diseases' and impurity of blood is also reminiscent of the Nazi regime and how Jews were seen as inherently worth less than others because of their blood, their genes, and not necessarily because of what they believed in. Voldemort aims, however, not only at destroying people whose blood he regards as impure, but also those that support or defend these people. For example, in *Hallows* he murders Charity Burbage, who was a professor of Muggle studies at Hogwarts.

He says this to his followers before he kills her:

> "Professor Burbage taught the children of witches and wizards all about Muggles … how they were not so different from us … […] Not content with corrupting and polluting the minds of wizarding children, last week Professor Burbage wrote an impassioned defence of Mudbloods in the *Daily Prophet*. Wizards, she says, must accept these thieves of their knowledge and magic. The dwindling of the pure-bloods is, says Professor Burbage, a most desirable circumstance … she would have us all mate with Muggles … or, no doubt, werewolves …" (*Hallows* 18, original emphasis)

However, as Flotmann further points out, it is interesting that the wizards and witches in Harry Potter often forget that racism also comes from their own midst (130). Racism and pure-blood superiority can only exist if there are many people who implicitly or explicitly support this ideology; and in *Harry Potter* some of these people even count themselves to be on the good side (Flotmann 130). Thus, Voldemort could not make much difference or have success with his endeavours if he were the only one adherent to this racist ideology. Flotmann posits that Voldemort thus serves as a scapegoat in the wizarding world, whose death supposedly brings back balance and removes this threat (130). We are left to wonder how his death will also remove this ideology from other wizards' and witches' minds.

When it comes to Voldemort's leadership and his domination over his followers, his values can also be seen when we look at how he calls his followers – and they also call themselves – "servants" (*Goblet* 706, *Prince* 34) and how they in turn refer to him as "master" (*Goblet* 732) and "my Lord" (*Goblet* 626, *Hallows* 580). Kulik also argues that the Death Eaters' masks and cloaks, which hide their features and anonymise them, serve to 'de-individualise' them and thus emphasise Voldemort's sovereign position and power over them even more (292). This is also reminiscent of the Ku Klux Clan – yet another connection between Voldemort's racist ideology and racism in the real world. Voldemort's followers and supporters are entranced by his power and his mastery of the Dark Arts and, at the same time, fear him because of this. Others are chiefly motivated by the lure of potential glory that comes with riding on his coattails (Rothman 203). Voldemort's most fanatic and crazy servant is Bellatrix Lestrange, who idolises him and craves his recognition. However, apart from maybe Bellatrix, none of Voldemort's adherents love or even like him (Rothman 203). The fear Voldemort incites in people also shows itself in some of his followers' motives for joining him, most notably Peter Pettigrew. In *Goblet*, we learn that Voldemort also knows this, and he says about Wormtail: "You returned to me, not out of loyalty, but out of fear of your old friends" (*Goblet* 703) and "Your devotion is nothing

more than cowardice" (*Goblet* 16). Thus, Kulik argues, cowardice can be seen as yet another marker of evil (293). The same goes for betrayal, as Wormtail betrayed his close friends James and Lily Potter to Voldemort, which led to their eventual murder (Kulik 293). However, even though betrayal is associated with evil, also its opposite 'loyalty' is a very high value of Voldemort's. He asks his followers for "eternal loyalty" (*Goblet* 702) and says the Lestranges will be "honoured beyond their dreams" for their unwavering dedication to him (*Goblet* 705). Kulik elaborates on this and succinctly argues that because of this high value of loyalty set out by Voldemort, it is practically impossible for any Death Eaters to turn away from him (294). Thus, 'unfreedom' or 'bondage' is also a feature that can be counted as belonging to the evil side and to Voldemort specifically. Sirius Black refers to this strict code when he talks about his brother Regulus, who was killed after turning away from Voldemort: "[Y]ou don't just hand in your resignation to Voldemort. It's a lifetime of service or death" (*Order* 104). Related to this is another characteristic of Voldemort's: to never or rarely forgive and to show no mercy. Thus, 'cruelty' is another marker of Voldemort's evil (Kulik 294). There are many examples of this if we look at Voldemort's countless horrific actions in the story, but cruelty is also attributed to him quite literally through the narrator's words: Voldemort smiles with "cruel amusement" (*Goblet* 17), he has a "cruel look of satisfaction on his face" (*Goblet* 699) and he is possessed of a "cruel sense of purpose" (*Hallows* 488) just before committing a murder.

As far as Voldemort's treatment of his followers is concerned, it should also be mentioned that he has no problem humiliating or even sacrificing them if it helps him achieve his goals. Bellatrix Lestrange is, without a doubt, his most ardent and loyal follower, yet he ridicules her in front of all the other Death Eaters, because her niece has just married a werewolf (*Hallows* 16). Voldemort actually went beyond 'sacrificing' his people for the greater cause, because for him, they have no intrinsic value and therefore are used like objects. For example, when he orders Nagini to kill Snape, he does so with cold calculation, because he is (only) losing a valuable tool. He probably does not really want to kill Snape (as Snape has proven himself useful), but he does not regret it for morally sound, humane reasons. In this instance, Voldemort is only losing a lesser tool (Snape) for a more powerful one (the Elder wand), hence his indifferent 'regret'.

4.1.6 From Tom Riddle to Lord Voldemort

Voldemort, as we meet him in the books, is very static and does not undergo any character development (Flotmann 122). However, readers are given a great deal of background information that gives us hints about how he became to be this way. Most of this information comes from *Prince*, where Dumbledore gives Harry private lessons in which they explore Voldemort's past together. This is very useful for a character study of Voldemort. In the case of Voldemort, we quickly arrive at the nature-nurture question: was Tom Riddle born evil or did he become evil? And if he turned evil at some point, why? What factors contributed to this development? Both scenarios will be given consideration and we should, at the very least, be able to formulate an educated guess when we consider the large amount of background information. As Rothman writes, we are given almost too much information (211).

In *Prince*, it is revealed that Tom Riddle is descended from the Gaunt family, which is the last surviving line that descends from Salazar Slytherin, but has degenerated through incest and lost all its family money long ago (*Prince* 201). The family, much like Salazar Slytherin was, are pure-blood fanatics and have usually married their cousins in order to keep the blood "pure" (*Prince* 201). All the members of the Gaunt family are described in a very unflattering way: they are all physically deformed and even their house looks neglected (*Prince* 340). For example, Morfin Gaunt has "thick hair so matted with dirt it could have been any colour. Several of his teeth were missing. His eyes were small and dark and stared in opposite directions" (*Prince* 191). Tom Riddle's mother, Merope Gaunt, fell in love with a Muggle from a wealthy family. She used a love potion to make him fall in love with her; they ran away and married. After some time, she could not bear giving him the potion anymore, believing he would stay with his pregnant wife. However, he leaves her, Merope renounces her magical powers and dies giving birth to her son. Tom then grows up in an orphanage in London, never having known either of his parents – his mother is dead, and his father is absent. The first time we see Tom Riddle, eleven years old, he is described as "his handsome father in miniature, tall for eleven years old, dark-haired and pale" (*Prince* 252). We learn that already in his early childhood Tom Riddle displays disturbing behaviour, he likes to torture other children and steals trophies from his victims.[9] Tom tells Professor Dumbledore of his magical abilities: "I

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[9] Mrs Cole from the orphanage remembers: "There have been incidents … nasty things … […] Billy Stubbs's rabbit … well ,Tom *said* he didn't do it and I don't see how he could have done, but even so, it didn't hang itself from the rafters, did it? […] And then […] on the summer outing […] well, Amy Benson and Dennis Bishop were never quite right afterwards, and all we ever got out of them was that they'd gone into a cave with Tom

can make bad things happen to people who annoy me. I can make them hurt if I want to" (*Prince* 254). Already as a young boy he believes he is better than others: "I knew I was special. Always, I knew there was something" (*Prince* 254). At Hogwarts, Tom Riddle is placed in Slytherin (*Prince* 337). He is very magically gifted[10] and popular with his teachers; as Dumbledore tells Harry:

> "He showed no sign of outward arrogance or aggression at all. As an unusually talented and very good-looking orphan, he naturally drew attention and sympathy from the staff almost from the moment of his arrival. He seemed polite, quiet and thirsty for knowledge. Nearly all were most favourably impressed by him." (*Prince* 337)

Coincidentally, the fact that Tom Riddle was a gifted student is the only positive thing we ever learn about him, as Flotmann points out (134). During his time at Hogwarts Tom Riddle surrounds himself with a "group of dedicated friends", although he "undoubtedly felt no affection for any of them", as Dumbledore puts it (*Prince* 338). About these friends, Dumbledore says:

> "They were a motley collection; a mixture of the weak seeking protection, the ambitious seeking some shared glory, and the thuggish, gravitating towards a leader who could show them more refined forms of cruelty. In other words, they were the forerunners of the Death Eaters […]" (*Prince* 338-339)

Tom Riddle starts to be obsessed with his parentage and investigates his ancestry, as he never knew his parents (*Prince* 339). When he discovers that it was his mother, not his father, who had magical abilities, he is deeply disappointed and drops his name. As a teenager, he returns to the village his parents stem from and kills his Muggle father's entire family. Thus, he obliterates the last of the Riddle family line and takes revenge upon his father who never wanted him (*Prince* 343-344). At age sixteen he has committed his first murders and from then on, he only descends deeper into darkness. His obsession with immortality also develops during his time at school and he persuades Professor Horace Slughorn to tell him about how to create horcruxes – that is, how to split his soul and conceal parts in objects (*Prince* 469-471). Dumbledore says to Harry about this:

> "[What] he particularly wanted from Horace was an opinion on what would happen to the wizard who created more than one Horcrux, what would happen to the wizard so determined to evade death that he would be prepared to murder many times, rip his soul

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Riddle. He swore they'd just gone exploring, but *something* happened in there, I'm sure of it. And, well, there have been a lot of things, funny things …" (*Prince* 251, original emphasis).

[10] Dumbledore refers to him as "probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen" (*Chamber* 353).

repeatedly, so as to store it in many, separately concealed Horcruxes. No book would have given him that information. As far as I know – as far, I am sure, as Voldemort knew – no wizard had ever done more than tear his soul in two." (*Prince* 467)

Here we see again that Voldemort is a dark wizard who has gone further than anyone before him, as he himself says in *Goblet*. As Tom was such a brilliant student, people expect great things of him after he leaves school, and even offer to put him in touch with useful contacts (*Prince* 404). However, he starts to work as an antiques dealer at Borgin & Burkes, a shop for dark magical artefacts. As a young adult, this is what Voldemort looks like: "He was plainly dressed in a black suit; his hair was a little longer than it had been at school and his cheeks were hollowed, but all of this suited him: he looked more handsome than ever" (*Prince* 406). During his time at Borgin & Burkes he manages to get hold of two valuable magical artefacts that once belonged to the founders of Hogwarts. A woman named Hepzibah Smith shows them to him. When Voldemort sees the first item, a golden cup that once belonged to Helga Hufflepuff, there is a "red gleam in his dark eyes" and a "greedy expression" (*Prince* 408). When he sees the second item, Slytherin's locket that once belonged to his family, his eyes "flash […] scarlet" and his "knuckles whiten" (*Prince* 409). He murders Hepzibah Smith and steals the artefacts. As already mentioned, Voldemort showed this "magpie-like tendency" (*Prince* 260) already as a child.[11] This last section is interesting, because it is reminiscent of the tendency serial killers sometimes have of collecting trophies of their victims. Voldemort eventually uses these artefacts as containers for pieces of his soul when he creates his Horcruxes – but to do this, he has to commit a murder each time. He chooses these objects specifically, because he "could not resist something so steeped in the school's history – the place where he first felt at home and learned about magic" (Dumbledore's words; *Prince* 412). Voldemort creates not only one or two Horcruxes, but seven – something no wizard before him has ever attempted. As a student, when he asks Professor Slughorn about the creation of Horcruxes, he says: "Wouldn't it be better, make you stronger, to have your soul in more pieces? I mean, for instance, isn't seven the most powerfully magical number […]?" (*Prince* 465-466). This shows how far along the path to villainy and darkness he is, as creating even one Horcrux is already seen as a "supreme act of evil" (*Prince* 465). All these Horcruxes have to be destroyed before Voldemort can finally die, a task that is Harry's to fulfil. The side effects that creating these Horcruxes have on Voldemort physically as well as on the part of the soul remaining within himself are disastrous.

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[11] Dumbledore reminds Harry: "[T]he young Tom Riddle liked to collect trophies. You saw the box of stolen articles he had hidden in his room. These were taken from victims of his bullying behaviour, a souvenir, if you will, of particularly unpleasant bits of magic. Bear in mind this magpie-like tendency, for this, particularly, will be important later." (*Prince* 260)

It is during this time where he physically transforms so horribly. As Fenske writes, it is only now that Voldemort becomes the "personification of evil" (178). His fear of death and longing for immortality cause him to become the ugly, snake-like, deformed Voldemort we know. After he leaves his job at Borgin & Burkes, Voldemort disappears for a very long time, during which no one hears of him. When he returns, he applies for a teaching post at Hogwarts, which Dumbledore rejects. After this, we only see him as evil Lord Voldemort, bent on dominating the wizarding world and ruling over wizards and Muggles alike.

What is the reason for Voldemort being such an evil person? Is it ancestral inheritance (=nature) or nurture? There are arguments for both given in the text, but arguably 'nature' is the more fitting of the two. Both sides will be examined now, starting with the nurture argument. One crucial element that certainly contributed to Voldemort's evil is his hate and disregard for his Muggle father. In *Chamber*, he says to Harry: "You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name for ever?" (337). He also says that his father never cared for him, and thus, we can asssume that the absence of fatherly love and affection has contributed to the development of his beliefs. Tom Riddle's loathing of his Muggle father could be the source of one of Voldemort's core beliefs: pure-blood superiority. In *Harry Potter*, certain characters always question the 'purity' of someone's blood and that person's ancestry. This means that an elitist system with a superiority complex is striven for by those who consider themselves pure-blood and share Voldemort's beliefs. Voldemort hates the fact that he himself is a half-blood and not a pure-blood, blaming his Muggle father and wanting to distance himself from him. Also, Voldemort grew up in an orphanage without any family and never experienced love. As Rothman remarks, it is interesting that as a child Tom Riddle never tried to seek love then, or later in life wanted to work on this deficiency (204). Instead he tried to achieve dominance over other people, something which he already enjoyed doing as a child. As a child in the orphanage Tom Riddle never tried to befriend the other children, but rather tormented them. This is amplified by his lack of remorse when he hurts them and his extreme joy in manipulating others and getting his way (Rothman 204). Thus, if we were to argue on the side of 'nurture', Tom Riddle becoming Lord Voldemort originates in his loveless childhood in the orphanage. However, this argument seems rather thin and implausible. Flotmann convincingly argues:

> [T]he novels refute the notion that goodness and moral choice only depend on the upbringing and family background and they do so very notably in the figure of Severus Snape. And what claim could Voldemort have to be exculpated because of a miserable childhood when there are two figures, Harry and Snape, who make different choices under similar circumstances? (184)

This is a very convincing argument, because Voldemort, as well as Snape and Harry, were all raised in dysfunctional family environments and had anything but a pleasurable childhood. Nevertheless, Harry – and also Snape – do not turn out to be homicidal mega-villains set on dominating the world. Essentially, Tom Riddle was already an evil child, and thus never 'turned' evil. It would be great if we could say that no-one is actually born evil, but there is hardly any evidence in *Harry Potter* regarding the character of Voldemort that supports this. And do we really think that, had Tom Riddle been raised by his mother, he would have not been evil at all? There is an element of predestination or fate involved in his belonging to the dark side: he descends directly from Salazar Slytherin, is his last living heir and predisposed to opening the Chamber of Secrets (and control the basilisk, which kills Muggle-borns). Also, the Gaunt family provided him with a heritage that consists of pure-blood superiority and an interest in the Dark Arts. When Tom Riddle finds out about the Gaunts, he is disgusted by the squalor they live in, but essentially agrees with their ideas, as he has already cultivated his own interest in the Dark Arts while at Hogwarts. Rothman thus argues that it seems like Tom Riddle was fated to become the villain he is by his heritage (204). Even though Flotmann tries to lay out a different interpretation of the scenes in which we see a young Tom Riddle, also she has to admit that "Riddle is definitely intended to be established as villain without feeling early on" (136). So why do we find out so much about how difficult Tom Riddle's childhood was? It could be argued that these glimpses into his past serve to arouse some justification on why he became to be so evil; to arouse pity. But rather, Flotmann reasonably argues, this serves to show us that this is a villain who is truly beyond redemption, with whom no genuine sympathy is possible (141-142). Then, we have to ask ourselves whether Voldemort ever had a chance to be someone different than who he was (Flotmann 137) – if he was born like this, is it really his fault then, and can we really judge him? This is also something Jennifer Sattauer asks when it comes to the binary of good and evil: "Do underlying causes blur the definitions of good and evil?" (9). This point has already been touched on in an earlier chapter (*The question of free will and morality*). As Heit writes, Voldemort essentially has a deficiency which inhibits his ability to make a choice between good and evil. In the real world, underlying causes such as mental disorders are certainly relevant when it comes to judging, i.e. prosecuting, criminals. However, in a fantasy story for children and young adults such as *Harry Potter*, a simpler explanation is arguably applicable: the importance of the real *reason* for Voldemort being evil and unable to feel love is nothing compared to the chaos, destruction and mass murder he incites.

4.2 Severus Snape

4.2.1 Introduction

Professor Severus Snape is a teacher at Hogwarts and for most of the book series has the position of Potions Master, a position in which he notoriously acts in an unfair and prejudiced way against students he does not like. Snape originally is introduced as and soon labelled as an evil character. This is mainly because of his intensely negative and hateful attitude towards several characters, mainly Harry, Hermione, Neville, Remus Lupin, and Sirius Black – all of whom are coded as good characters. A defining feature of Snape character is his especially intense enmity to Harry Potter, as is summarised succinctly in *Goblet*: "Harry's loathing of Snape was matched only by Snape's loathing of him" (194). However, Snape is an ambivalent character for most of the book series, and the readers are kept in the dark about his true purpose and allegiance for a long time (Fenske 225). There is conflicting evidence that we are presented with: we know that Snape and Harry are always "wag[ing] a private battle" (Deavel and Deavel, *Redemption* 63), we learn that Snape is a former Death Eater who has supposedly renounced his old ways, he is a member of the Order of the Phoenix and saves Harry's life at several points, and in *Prince* we see Snape kill Professor Dumbledore (Fenske 225). Only at the end of *Hallows* do we find out about Snape's past and where his true loyalties lie. What can we make of this character? And, more importantly, can we label him a villain or an evil character?

4.2.2 Snivellus and the Half-Blood Prince: the meaning of Snape's names

If we look back to Kulik's proposition that a character's name can be an indicator of their allegiance to either the good or evil side (327), examining the meaning of Severus Snape's name could aid us in doing that. His first name *Severus* stems from Latin, meaning "severe", which seems to be a fitting name for this stern and serious character (Fenske 225). His last name Snape evokes a connotation with both "to snap" and the noun "snake", to which it is phonetically similar (Fenske 225). "Snap" evokes associations with the phrase "to snap at someone" which also fits his behaviour as a teacher towards his students (Flotmann 173-174). The fact that his last name is similar to "snake" is also telling, because snakes are often, and also specifically in *Harry Potter*, associated with evil. Snakes are furthermore the symbol of Slytherin house, of which Professor Snape is head teacher. Through his connection to Slytherin he is furthermore marked as "cunning" – in the words of the Sorting Hat – and he is also linked to Voldemort, who was a Slytherin student himself (Eccleshare 91). In *Order*, we learn of

another name that Snape was referred to when he himself was a student at Hogwarts, namely the rather unflattering nickname of "Snivellus". Fenske theorises that this could come from "to snivel" and thus identify him as a cowardly character (225). Of course, it is a nickname given to him by his bullies James Potter and Sirius Black, so we are right to question how reliable this information is. Nevertheless, "cowardice" is identified as a marker of evil by Kulik (293). There is still another name associated with Severus Snape, and this is one that he invented for himself: the "Half-Blood Prince". This is revealed to the reader towards the end of *Prince*, when Harry finds out that the schoolbook that has been helping him achieve outstanding marks in potions once belonged to, and was modified by, a young Severus Snape. Snape was born as the son of Eileen Prince, a witch, and Tobias Snape, a Muggle, which makes him a "half-blood" (*Prince* 594), i.e. he descends from a mixed bloodline of magical and Muggle ancestors (Deavel and Deavel, *Redemption* 55). In this, Snape shares similar origins as both Voldemort and Harry, who are also both 'half-bloods'[12]. Hermione theorises in *Prince*, that Snape "must have been proud of being 'half a Prince'" (594) and wanted to emphasise his magical origins. Flotmann argues that Snape wanted "to distance himself from his common name as a teenager and assume another one more richly associative and powerful" (173). Here we can see a more specific parallel to Voldemort, who has also invented a name for himself and is similarly concerned about his parentage. This parallel is also observed by Harry himself in *Prince*, when he says that Snape "[is] just like Voldemort. Pure-blood mother, Muggle father … ashamed of his parentage, trying to make himself feared using the Dark Arts, gave himself an impressive new name – *Lord* Voldemort – the Half-Blood *Prince* – how could Dumbledore have missed –?" (594, original emphasis). This parallel to Voldemort is remarkable, but unlike Voldemort, Snape did not continue using the moniker of 'Half-Blood Prince' as an adult anymore – he used it as a teenager to make himself feel more important (even though he only used it in secret). Flotmann argues that Snape shedding his aristocratic name that he gave himself marks him as different from Voldemort and already indicates that he is different from the Dark Lord and thus, does not (entirely) belong to the dark side (173). However, for the first five books of the series we do not know about the 'Half-Blood Prince', so we must explore further.

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[12] Even though Harry's father was a wizard and his mother a witch, he is not a pure-blood (as it is defined in the wizarding world), because he has Muggle ancestry. There are only a handful of pure-blood families 'left' in the wizarding world, because over time in most families someone married a Muggle. Of course, this distinction is only relevant for those wizards and witches for whom 'blood purity' is an important concept.

4.2.3 Like an overgrown bat: Snape's physical appearance

Snape is physically described in a way that makes it easy for the readers to see him as an evil person. Snape is described as follows: "[a] thin man with sallow skin, a hooked nose and greasy, shoulder-length black hair […]" (*Chamber* 87) and "uneven, yellowish teeth" (*Prisoner* 309). Here we can clearly see how ugliness is a defining feature of a character – and, because we know what this often means in literature, we quickly jump to the conclusion that he might be evil. Joyce Millman, for example, writes that Snape "looks like the quintessential pantomime villain" (41). When Snape speaks, he usually does so with a "cold voice" (*Prisoner* 385), which means that he fits into the semantic field of 'coldness'. Snape also often says things "curtly" (*Goblet* 465), "snarls" (*Goblet* 466) and "sneers" (*Prisoner* 385). There is an air of mystery and darkness even around the way he carries himself: "[H]e brushed past them, his long black cloak billowing out behind him (*Goblet* 466)". When Snape gets angry or upset, it is emphasised in the text how this changes his appearance even further towards the ugly: "His face was twisted, spit was flying from his mouth" (*Prisoner* 452) or "[he] had his wand out, and was blasting rose bushes apart, his expression most ill-natured" (*Goblet* 465). Of course, we have to keep in mind that everything we read about Professor Snape is filtered through Harry's perception of him, and as we know, the two of them never get along. The first time Harry ever sees Snape is at the start-of-term-banquet in the beginning of *Stone* where he looks up to the teachers' table to see this: "Professor Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin" (*Stone* 94). Soon afterwards, Harry has his first potions lesson with Professor Snape where the latter is described thus: "His eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels" (*Stone* 102). In these two instances Snape is described in contrast to another character, which further emphasises his dark and menacing physical appearance (Flotmann 174-175). First, Professor Quirrell is mentioned with his "absurd turban". Harry has already met Quirrell before in The Leaky Cauldron, where Quirrell was described as a "pale young man", nervous and with "one of his eyes […] twitching" (*Stone* 55). At another point, Quirrell "looked as though he was about to cry" (*Stone* 180). This is not exactly the way we imagine a villain would act and look like, it would be very unexpected (which is, of course, what Rowling wants us to believe, because Quirrell turns out to be the villain in *Stone*). In the second instance, Snape is contrasted with Hagrid, who has rescued Harry from the Dursleys and has quickly become a very important person and protector to Harry. We know this, because we have seen Hagrid's positive and supportive actions thus far. And even though Hagrid made an impressionable and arguably scary entrance when he first met Harry and the Dursleys, Harry still immediately

noticed how Hagrid's "beetle eyes were crinkled in a smile" (*Stone* 39). And so, we are led to believe, if Snape is described in a directly opposing way to Hagrid, this can mean nothing good for the former's character and morality. Furthermore, Flotmann points out that "the eyes are always an important hint at character in formula fiction because it is common ideology that they are linked to the soul" (176). Eccleshare actually calls Snape's physical attributes "an example of Rowling's sometimes clichéd use of expression which immediately casts Snape as a stereotyped villain" (92). But as we know, "in the Harry Potter series, looks are often deceiving" (Millman 41). Also, we cannot forget that there is a very basic and obvious misunderstanding here, namely "the notion that someone who does not like [Harry], or whom he does not like, necessarily has to be a bad person" (Flotmann 175). It thus comes as a shocking surprise to Harry, when he finds out at the end of *Stone* who the true villain was all along:

> "You!" gasped Harry. […] "But I thought – Snape –"
> "Severus?" Quirrell laughed and it wasn't his usual quivering treble, either, but cold and sharp. "Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn't he? So useful to have him swooping around like an overgrown bat. Next to him, who would suspect p-p-poor st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?" (*Stone* 209)

As Flotmann points out, "Quirrell's remark it meta-fictional since it draws attention to the way villains are usually constructed and placed in formula fiction. Furthermore, it holds up a mirror to the readers, raising their awareness of how easily they are prepared to accept the common stereotypical picture of the villain and make wrong judgements" (177). The readers also should note at this point how limited the information they receive is, because everything is filtered through Harry's perception of the events unfolding throughout the novels. And as it turns out, he is not an entirely reliable narrator, as evidenced by the fact that he continuously keeps suspecting Snape.

4.2.4 The Potions Master: Snape as a teacher

"Professor Severus Snape was Harry's least favourite teacher. Harry also happened to be Snape's least favourite student. Cruel, sarcastic and disliked by everybody except the students from his own house (Slytherin), Snape taught Potions." (*Chamber* 87)

This quote quite succinctly summarises many of the defining characteristics of Snape's teaching persona, as experienced by Harry. As soon as we meet Professor Snape in *Stone*, we learn that he is an incredibly unfair teacher and abuses his position of authority to torment students he

dislikes and favour students of his own house wherever he can. M'Balia, Russell, and Warren rightfully call Snape's pedagogy "ugly", explaining that "the 'ugliness' of Snape's disposition towards his students is reflected in the language he uses to talk about them" (190). Examples are words such as "dunderheads" (*Stone* 102) and "fools" (*Order* 473). In the first Potions lesson of Harry's fifth year, Snape tells the class the following:

> "I think it is appropriate to remind you that next June you will be sitting an important examination […] Moronic though some of this class undoubtedly are, I expect you to scrape an 'Acceptable' in your OWL, or suffer my … displeasure." (*Order* 209)

In his position as teacher Snape is cold, unfriendly, utterly unfair, and he intimidates and terrifies most of his students. Right from the start he favours the Slytherin students, most of all Draco Malfoy, who "had always been able to get away with anything in Snape's classes" (*Prisoner* 135). It is also mentioned how, because Snape is head of Slytherin house, he "generally favour[s] his own students before all others" (*Prisoner* 135). Snape is very openly biased against Gryffindor students and especially Harry, as well as Hermione and Ron. In *Stone*, we learn that "Potions lessons were turning into a sort of into weekly torture, Snape was so horrible to Harry" (*Stone* 162). Another one of his frequent victims is Neville, whom he bullies regularly. When Neville accidentally melts a cauldron during their first Potions class, Snape reacts as follows:

> "Idiot boy!" snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. […] Then he rounded on Harry and Ron, who had been working next to Neville. "You – Potter – why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got it wrong, did you? That's another point you've lost for Gryffindor. This was so unfair that Harry opened his mouth to argue, but Ron kicked him behind their cauldron. "Don't push it," he muttered. "I've heard Snape can turn very nasty." (*Stone* 103-104)

In another Potions class Snape talks so disdainfully about Neville's work that the latter "looked as though he was on the verge of tears. […] Snape moved away, leaving Neville breathless with fear" (*Prisoner* 138). At one point Snape threatens to try out a shrinking solution on Neville's toad Trevor (*Prisoner* 140), and in *Goblet* he insinuates that he will poison a student in order to try out the effectiveness of their antidotes (257). Furthermore, in *Prisoner* it is revealed during Defence Against the Dark Arts that Neville's Boggart[13] takes on the shape of Professor Snape. When the Boggart comes out of the wardrobe to face Neville, it is described as follows:

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[13] Boggarts are creatures that take the form of that which a person fears most in the world.

"Hook-nosed and menacing, Professor Snape stepped out, his eyes flashing at Neville" (*Prisoner* 149). Even though this scene is played for laughs in *Prisoner*, the fact that the one thing Neville fears most in the world is one of his teachers is quite disconcerting. As Hogwarts teachers can award and deduct house points, this is another area where Snape can unleash his negative emotions and, unsurprisingly, he acts in an incredibly biased and arbitrary way. He deducts Gryffindor points left and right for ridiculous and irrational reasons, awards Slytherins many house points but ignores when they would legitimately deserve losing points. In *Order*, after Snape has vanished Harry's potion because he has not prepared it correctly, ensuring he will receive zero marks, Hermione remarks: "That was really unfair […] Your potion wasn't nearly as bad as Goyle's; when he put it in his flagon the whole thing shattered and set his robes on fire" (212). During class in *Prisoner*, after Snape has repeatedly ignored Hermione's raised hand, he says to her: "That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger […] Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all" (186-187). As a result, "Hermione went very red, put down her hand and stared at the floor with her eyes full of tears" (187). Another example can be seen in *Prince*: "[T]en minutes into the lesson Hermione managed to repel Neville's muttered Jelly-Legs Jinx without uttering a single word, a feat that would surely have earned her twenty points for Gryffindor from any reasonable teacher, thought Harry bitterly, but which Snape ignored" (*Prince* 170). Snape is also very biased when he referees a Quidditch match in *Stone*: he constantly favours Team Hufflepuff very unfairly and when Harry catches the snitch and Gryffindor wins, "Snape spat bitterly on the ground" (*Stone* 164). What we can gather from all these examples is that Severus Snape is indeed a very socially cold person who does not show consideration for others' emotions but rather revels in belittling his students.

Snape has been teaching Potions for years, but it is an open secret at Hogwarts that he really is after the post for Defence Against the Dark Arts – a position which Dumbledore has always refused him. That is, up until *Prince*, when Snape's dream finally comes true. The announcement is met with starkly negative reactions from the Gryffindors and especially Harry:

> "No!" said Harry, so loudly that many heads turned in his direction. He did not care; he was staring up at the staff table, incensed. How could Snape be given the Defence Against the Dark Arts job after all this time? Hadn't it been widely known for years that Dumbledore did not trust him to do it? (*Prince* 159)

When the students have their first Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson with Snape, it is described as follows:

> "The Dark Arts," said Snape, "are many, varied, ever-changing and eternal. Fighting them is like fighting a many-headed monster, which, each time a neck is severed, sprouts a head even fiercer and cleverer than before. You are fighting that which is unfixed, mutating, indestructible." Harry stared at Snape. It was surely one thing to respect the Dark Arts as a dangerous enemy, another to speak of them, as Snape was doing, with a loving caress in his voice? (*Prince* 169)

Of course, it is insinuated here that Snape is fascinated by the Dark Arts themselves, a characteristic trait that would surely place him on the side of evil. After all, the Dark Arts are not taught at Hogwarts and they are only employed by dark wizards such as Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Another factor that casts doubts on where Snape's true loyalties lie throughout the books (before the final big revelation in *Hallows*) is the fact that he refers to Voldemort as "the Dark Lord", something which usually only Death Eaters do, and which is arguably also because of his fascination with the Dark Arts. During an Occlumency lesson Harry has with Professor Snape, this conversation ensues:

> "You are lazy and sloppy, Potter, it is a small wonder that the Dark Lord – "
> "Can you tell me something, *sir*?" said Harry, firing up again.
> "Why do you call Voldemort the Dark Lord? I've only ever heard Death Eaters call him that." (*Order* 523, original emphasis)

Unfortunately, Snape does not answer Harry's question and so we do not find out why he calls Voldemort the Dark Lord. Of course, we again have to remind ourselves that all we learn about Professor Snape – and about all other characters as well – is seen from Harry's perspective. At another point in the story, for example, also Mr Ollivander refers to Voldemort as "the Dark Lord" for some reason, which Harry does not comment on or react to negatively at all (*Hallows* 401). Harry's perspective is not entirely reliable, because "[h]is stories of teachers and practices are filtered through the lens of his personal and emotional experiences" (M'Balia, Russell, and Warren 187). Eccleshare also comments on this, praising the author by writing: "Rowling is highly successful in both implicating Snape in dark moments while also making sure that the judgments and interpretations of those moments come from Harry and his friends, not from any of the adults in authority" (92). Indeed, Professor Dumbledore always trusts Snape and through this vouching, Snape is accepted into the Order of the Phoenix and trusted, but not necessarily liked, by the other adults in the series. When Harry and Ron again go about suspecting Snape of having a sinister agenda, Hermione reminds them that "Dumbledore trusts him […] and if

we can't trust Dumbledore, we can't trust anyone" (*Order* 490). Nevertheless, Snape's horrible and malicious behaviour towards his students cannot be written off by merely chalking it up to Harry's subjective point of view. The continued hostility between Harry and Snape actually serves a purpose, especially in the first books of the series, namely to associate Snape with the evil side. As Eccleshare succinctly puts it: "[T]he enmity between Snape and Harry goes beyond simple house jealousies and divisions. Snape appears to hate Harry personally and by implication they are on opposing sides in the grander conflict between good and evil" (91-92).

4.2.5 Snape as a fan favourite

Considering Snape's horrible behaviour towards his students, it might seem surprising that he is actually a fan-favourite character of many readers. Many see him as a heroic but tragic person, who was treated very unfairly in life. Millman, writing about the character of Snape and fan fiction, remarks: "The transformation of Rowling's sneering antagonist into a hunky hero is almost as fascinating as the Potter series itself, demonstrating the intense relationship between readers and fictional characters […]" (40). After all, Snape is a malicious teacher as we have already established. Where does this fascination with this character come from? And does it perchance give us more arguments for or against his being a good or evil character? Millman tries to explain this by drawing a parallel between Snape and Gothic villains. She quotes the description of Schedoni, who is the enigmatic and charming villain in Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel *The Italian* (1797):

> Among his associates no one loved him, many disliked him and more feared him. His figure was striking … and as he stalked along, wrapped in the black garments of his order, there was something terrible in its air; something almost super-human…. An habitual gloom and severity prevailed over the deep lines of his countenance; and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate, at a single glance, into the hearts of men and to read their most secret thoughts. (Radcliffe ch. 2, qtd. in Millman 41-42)

As we can see, there are obvious parallels to how Snape is described in *Harry Potter*. Millman then adds that Gothic villains were beloved by readers, and so it is not surprising that a similar thing should happen with the character of Snape (42). When we "encounter [characters like Snape] on the page, our hearts fill with eternal foolish hope. Surely, these men are not bad, just sad and misunderstood […]" (Millman 42). In order to further understand where this love for Snape is coming from, and why it might even be supported by the text, we have to look into Snape's past and his moral development in the books.

4.2.6 Snape's past and moral development

Through the many examples that have already been discussed above, we are led to believe that Snape is an evil character. This culminates in *Prince*, when Snape murders Dumbledore, seemingly in cold blood, which is witnessed by Harry. Only in the last book of the series, *Hallows*, do we realise that Snape has been fighting for the good side these past few years. We find out that Snape only killed Dumbledore to finally and irrevocably gain Voldemort's trust – a plan that was hatched out by Dumbledore himself, who would have died of an injury soon anyway. But as the story is presented in *Prince*, we do not know of this plan and are thus led to believe that Snape has joined the evil side. As Ron puts it in *Order*: "He used to be a Death Eater […] and we've never seen proof that he *really* swapped sides" (490, original emphasis).

Through Harry's excursions in the Pensieve, we learn not only about where Snape's true loyalties lie, but also about his difficult childhood and time at Hogwarts. He grew up in a household where his parents' marriage was falling apart and as a child and teenager he was lonely:

> [A] hook-nosed man was shouting at a cowering woman, while a small dark-haired boy cried in the corner … A greasy-haired teenager sat alone in a dark bedroom, pointing his wand at the ceiling, shooting down flies … A girl was laughing as a scrawny boy tried to mount a bucking broomstick […] (*Order* 521-522)

Again similar to both Voldemort and Harry, Snape first felt at home when he came to Hogwarts (Deavel and Deavel, *Redemption* 56). Harry himself observes in *Hallows* that "[h]e and Voldemort and Snape, the abandoned boys, had all found a home here [at Hogwarts]" (558). As we learn in *Hallows*, Snape grew up near Lily Evans' house and soon fell in love with her. They were best friends for some time, something which became more difficult when Snape was sorted into Slytherin while Lily was sorted into Gryffindor. During his time at school, Snape was an outsider and was routinely bullied by James Potter, Sirius Black and their Gryffindor friends. While he gets mocked by them, it is remarked in the text that "[s]everal people watching laughed; Snape was clearly unpopular" (*Order* 569). Some of what we learn about teenaged Snape also supports an interpretation of him as evil: As a student, Snape became fascinated with the Dark Arts and belonged to a group of Slytherins who would later all become Death Eaters, as would Snape himself. Snape also believed in blood purity during his school years and at one time insulted Harry's mother Lily as a "filthy little Mudblood" (*Order* 571) – and this, even though Snape and Lily had been best friends since childhood. Unsurprisingly, Snape and Lily's friendship soon crumbled. Lily also did not appreciate his association with some of the

more extreme Slytherin students who subscribed to racist ideas. While Snape regretted having insulted Lily and having caused the end of their friendship, she did not forgive him – but Snape nevertheless continues to love Lily for the rest of his life. As a Death Eater, Snape spied on Dumbledore and ultimately relayed the contents of the prophecy to Voldemort, which in turn caused the death of Lily and James Potter and the attempted murder of baby Harry. When Harry finds out in *Prince* that it was Snape who informed Voldemort of this, he has an understandably extreme emotional reaction:

> Harry was standing stock-still as waves of shock crashed over him […] It was Snape who had carried the news of the prophecy to Voldemort. Snape and Peter Pettigrew together had sent Voldemort hunting after Lily and James and their son … Nothing else mattered to Harry right now. (*Prince* 509)

But, as we learn through Snape's memories, he did not know the prophecy applied to Harry. Snape then begged Voldemort to save his beloved Lily, but Voldemort did not listen – after all, Voldemort does not understand or value love. Snape, who still loved Lily, could not forgive himself and vowed to Dumbledore to help protect Lily's son Harry. Unbeknownst to Voldemort, this sequence of events caused Snape to change sides and turn away from his former master. The fact that Snape made a conscious decision to change sides means a lot. Peter Appelbaum puts it this way, as summarised by Aedon Young: "Snape is more admirable than Dumbledore [and other good characters] because Snape makes a moral dedication to the side of good that runs counter to his own upbringing and apprenticeship and is, therefore, more difficult" (203). Furthermore, Appelbaum argues in defence of Snape by writing that Snape consciously decides "to act in the name of love, even if, and especially if, no one but he knows" (90). If we think back to the question of morality and free choice – and the importance of the choices one makes seem emphasised in *Harry Potter* – we could agree with Young, who argues that "Snape would [thus] seen to be the decisive winner in terms of morality" (204). After all, Snape consciously chose the good side, even though it runs counter to his upbringing and socialization. As Flotmann puts it, "[Snape] is the character in the novels who can most clearly be allocated to the side of free will" (188). However, if we think back to the reason of Snape's change in morality it all comes back to his loving Lily. This love is not "pure", as Deavel and Deavel put it, because Snape only "desires Lily's good as it relates to him" (*Redemption*, 59). Deavel and Deavel explain this further: "If [Snape] had desired Lily's good for her own sake, he would want to protect those most precious to her, too" (*Redemption*, 59). Even Dumbledore, in uncharacteristically strong words, picks up on this, saying to Snape: "You disgust me […]

You do not care, then, about the deaths of her husband and child? They can die as long as you get what you want?" (*Hallows* 543-544). Only after Lily's death and when Dumbledore specifically asks Snape to help protect Harry once he comes to Hogwarts does Snape agree. And as we see in the books, the way Snape treats Lily's beloved son is anything but honourable. How would Lily, who Snape supposedly does all this for, feel about Snape's behaviour towards her son? Deavel and Deavel then argue that Snape's love for Lily over time becomes less selfish and brings out his "virtues" (*Redemption*, 60). However, Snape does not seem to embody many of these supposed virtues, or at least, he does not want to acknowledge them and is thus lying to himself. For example, during one of their private Occlumency classes in *Order*, Snape cruelly makes fun of Harry and admonishes him about "[f]ools who wear their hearts proudly on their sleeves, who cannot control their emotions, who wallow in sad memories and allow themselves to be provoked this easily […]" (*Order* 473). In this respect, Snape shares "Voldemort's false assessment that those who guide their actions by love are weak" (Deavel and Deavel, *Redemption* 61), even though Snape lets his love for Lily guide many of his actions. Another example of Snape's belief system is when he makes fun of Tonks' Patronus, which has changed form because of her love for Remus Lupin. All of this is rather ironic coming from Severus Snape, who his whole life cannot let go of the memory of his beloved Lily Potter. Also, even his own Patronus has changed its shape to Lily's Patronus, signifying his profound love for her. Snape thus comes across as hypocritical and as if he is ashamed of his own emotions. This is also evidenced by the fact that he made Dumbledore promise to never tell anyone about the fact that he loves Lily Potter, to which Dumbledore agrees but also says: "My word, Severus, that I shall never reveal the best of you?" (*Hallows* 545). Snape's character development in *Harry Potter* thus takes time and is mainly focused on his changing sides and his work for Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix, less so on becoming a more agreeable person. Ultimately, however, the moral development Snape underwent made him capable of working "towards the good of others and […] self-sacrifice" (Deavel and Deavel, *Redemption*, 60).

At the end of *Hallows*, Snape is murdered by Nagini on Voldemort's orders, because the latter believes that only Snape is standing between him and the Elder Wand. Harry witnesses this and then is given all relevant memories by Snape himself in order to understand what really happened. In Snape's last moments, he asks Harry to look him in the eyes, because Harry's eyes look exactly like his mother Lily's:

> When the flask was full to the brim, and Snape looked as though there was no blood left in him, his grip on Harry's robes slackened. 'Look … at … me" he whispered. The green eyes found the black, but after a second something in the depths of the dark pair seemed to vanish, leaving them fixed, blank and empty. The hand holding Harry thudded to the floor, and Snape moved no more. (*Hallows* 528)

When Harry watches the memories of Snape's past, he finally understands his motivations, his 'positive' aspects and the duality of his character. In fact, nineteen years later he tells his son, whom he has named Albus Severus Potter: "[Y]ou were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew" (*Hallows* 607). Fenske even refers to Snape as "[d]ying a martyr's death" (225). But is he really deserving of that title?

4.2.7 Hero or villain?

We learn in *Hallows* that Snape has actually been working alongside Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix for the past few years and, even if begrudgingly so, protected Harry from harm. He is a former Death Eater as well, having served Voldemort as a young man, but turned his back on Voldemort when he killed Lily Potter, whom Snape was in love with. All this would mean that we cannot seriously call him a villain, because he does receive a redemption arc. As early as 1999 fans were already speculating over a "redemptive pattern" concerning Snape in the books (Millman 46). This is remarkable, as only the first three books had been released by then, but as Millman notes, the notion that Snape could be redeemed at the end of *Harry Potter* is not pulled out of thin air – and "it's there in the books, if you want to see it" (Millman 46). However, from the time we encounter Snape first in *Stone* up until *Prince*, Snape is mostly portrayed as an unfair, horrible, and mean teacher. Can he be seen as a villain or an evil character during this time, at least? This is a difficult question, because also during this time he did "heroic" acts: he saved Harry's life in *Stone* when Quirrell was bewitching Harry's broom, he followed the trio into the Shrieking Shack in *Prisoner* when they were in danger, he instigated the rescue mission from the Ministry of Magic in *Order*, and did not betray Harry and Hermione's whereabouts to Lord Voldemort in *Hallows*. Many of Snape's past actions only become clear to us at the end of *Hallows*, when Snape's crude behaviour as a teacher and person is "contextualized within the details of his personal history and present experience" (M'Balia, Russell, and Warren 191). Even after Snape has killed Dumbledore, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione are understandably angry at Snape, we cannot call him a villain, because he only acted on Dumbledore's orders. M'Balia, Russell, and Warren write that "Snape is the one character who Rowling compels the reader to reexamine at the end of the series" (191). None

of these explanations really exonerate Snape's behaviour as a teacher though, because there is no legitimate reason why an adult would lash out on children like that. Unfortunately, because Snape dies, we cannot see whether his behaviour towards others would have changed. He is ultimately a morally grey character, an interpretation that is supported by several authors. Sarah Winters, for example, writes that "Snape is complicated, ambiguous, neither clearly good nor clearly evil […]" (Winters 86, qtd. in Kulik 319). Also Kulik comes to the conclusion that Snape is an ambivalent character and does not clearly define him as either good or evil (318). Because of his many morally grey actions and character traits, Fenske argues that Snape "may be considered the only real round character of the novels" (229). Eccleshare similarly expresses her opinion that "[i]n Dumbledore and Snape, Rowling shows her ability to create original and rounded characters who, though cast in particular roles, have depth and substance which puts them beyond the positions which they represent" (92). Thereby Eccleshare also comments on the school story genre, which *Harry Potter* fits in: even though Snape superficially fits into a stereotypical role, we learn that there is more to him. When we first meet him in *Stone*, he is only a stereotypically horrible and unfair teacher. The revelations towards the end of the first book then make him into a more interesting and three-dimensional character – and we see that Rowling has played with our expectations of what villains look like in fantasy literature. Nevertheless, his enduring love for Lily Potter does not automatically exonerate him: it seems more like a one-sided obsession that he cannot let go of even after her death. Furthermore, the fact that he treated Lily's only child, Harry, so horribly over the years that he taught him suggests that it was really a selfish kind of love. At the end of the day we have to ask ourselves whether we think that "[Snape's] morality outweighs his classroom cruelty" (Young 202). And to this question, there are really only subjective answers. Snape's defenders agree that it does, but I am not entirely convinced by the evidence they provide. Snape was unnecessarily horrible and abusive to his students, he hated Harry most of all because he reminded him of James Potter, Snape's bully at school, and because he could not get over his obsessive love for Lily. But the fact that Snape did change sides and turned against his former master Lord Voldemort means we also cannot paint him as a villain. Ultimately, he is just not as black-and-white as Voldemort or Umbridge, which makes him a more multi-faceted and interesting character. The character of Severus Snape teaches readers about the complexity of morality; as Schanoes puts it, he "complicate[s] a black and white moral schema" (135).

4.3 Dolores Umbridge

4.3.1 Introduction

"The gently smiling Dolores Umbridge, with her girlish voice, toadlike face, and clutching, stubby fingers, is the greatest make-believe villain to come along since Hannibal Lecter." (King, question 5[14])

Dolores Umbridge is introduced in *Order*, when she comes to work as Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts, while still being loyal to the Ministry of Magic and directly answering to the Minister. At Hogwarts, we quickly find out that she is an incredibly cruel person, abusing her power for her own gain and going as far as physically harming students to punish them. Dolores Umbridge is also characterised by her intense contempt and hatred of 'half-humans' or 'half-breeds', as she calls them. So for Umbridge, similar to Voldemort and his followers, blood status and pure-blood ancestry is very important. She also believes in an elitist system, which places wizards and witches above Muggles. Kulik refers to Dolores Umbridge as a figure of evil that is, crucially, independent from Voldemort (303). This is rather remarkable and one of the reasons why she has been chosen for this analysis. Most other evil characters can be seen at least somewhat in relation to Voldemort: for example, Severus Snape was once a Death Eater, and Draco Malfoy becomes a Death Eater in *Prince*. Since Voldemort is the main, archetypal villain of the book series, this is not surprising. And even though Umbridge is not a Death Eater herself, she is clearly defined as evil within the text. Umbridge is cruel and oppressive, she believes in pure-blood superiority and, worst of all, has her authority legitimised by the Ministry of Magic. However, her loyalty always lies with the Ministry of Magic and not with Voldemort. It is interesting, then, that she is often seen as one of the most hated characters in the whole *Harry Potter* series. Why is this? What makes this Ministry employee and Hogwarts teacher so despicable?

4.3.2 Umbridge's first appearance

The first time we meet Dolores Umbridge is in *Order*, when Harry is summoned to a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Magic for performing magic outside of Hogwarts. The Minister, who presides over the hearing, mentions the names of the interrogators at the hearing, and one of them is "Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister" (*Order*

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[14] This is part of Stephen King's answer to question 5 in a review of *Order* which reads: "What's the best thing about *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*?"

127). This is apparently an influential position, because Umbridge proudly mentions her title several times in the story; it is also suggested that she likes rules and hierarchy throughout the book. Umbridge's first physical description, as experienced by Harry, is worded as follows:

> [Harry] thought she looked just like a large, pale toad. She was rather squat with a broad, flabby face, as little neck as Uncle Vernon and a very wide, slack mouth. Her eyes were large, round and slightly bulging. Even the little black velvet bow perched on top of her short curly hair put him in mind of a large fly she was about to catch on a long sticky tongue. (*Order* 134)

This first description is already very negative, and the fact that she is in part compared to Vernon Dursley also marks her in a negative way, seeing as the Dursleys are anything but good people. At the end of the hearing, when the court votes on whether to expel Harry from Hogwarts or not, Minister Fudge as well as Dolores Umbridge, amongst others, raise their hands in favour. This is the first encounter we as readers have with this new character, and she is already positioned in a way that is opposing Harry – this, coupled with her unfavourable physical description, makes it clear to the reader that Umbridge is not a good character who we are supposed to sympathise with. During most of *Order*, however, we see Umbridge as a teacher at Hogwarts. At the start-of-term banquet Dumbledore announces in his welcoming speech that Umbridge is to be the new Professor for Defence Against the Dark Arts. While Dumbledore is talking, Umbridge interrupts him with her characteristic "*hem-hem*" (*Order* 191) because she wants to give a speech herself, an action that the students and other professors see as highly disrespectful. While she gives this speech, "Harry felt a powerful rush of dislike that he could not explain to himself; all he knew was that he loathed everything about her, from her stupid voice to her fluffy pink cardigan" (*Order* 191). It is now made explicit how Harry, and thus also we as the readers who experience everything through his lens, (are supposed to) feel towards Umbridge. All her appearances so far have been unpleasant; she voted to expel Harry from Hogwarts, then she interrupted the highly respected Headmaster during his yearly welcoming speech to insert herself. The speech she gives makes it clear that the Ministry of Magic is intervening at Hogwarts and is sending Dolores Umbridge to instigate and oversee the changes that are being made (*Order* 192-193). Umbridge's name also contributes to the impression we get of her as evil. Her first name is *Dolores* which means "pains" or "sorrows" in Spanish, which fits very well for this "school dictator", as Fenske describes her (260). The "pains" here can easily be interpreted as alluding to the physical torture Umbridge inflicts on her students (Fenske 260). The last name *Umbridge* is rooted in the English expression "to give or take umbrage", meaning "to insult someone or feel insulted" (Fenske 260).

4.3.3 Physical appearance

Next, we will look at some of the defining parts that make up Umbridge's physical appearance. Umbridge is described as a very short person (*Order* 586) and Fenske argues, that "[h]er short height represents a lack of inner qualities" (261). Fenske furthermore offers an interpretation of Umbridge's clothing style as reminiscent of a spinster (261). Umbridge's choices in clothing and accessories are a very defining feature of the character:

> She looked, Harry thought, like somebody's maiden aunt: squat, with short, curly, mouse-brown hair in which she had placed a horrible pink Alice band that matched the fluffy pink cardigan she wore over her robes. Then she turned her face slightly to take a sip from her goblet and he saw […] a pallid, toadlike face and a pair of prominent, pouchy eyes. (*Order* 183)

As with many other characters in *Harry Potter*, especially evil ones, Umbridge's voice is an important and telling feature. She has a "fluttery, girlish, high-pitched voice" and when she laughs it is described as "a silvery laugh that made the hairs on the back of Harry's neck stand up" (*Order* 134). Fenske argues that Umbridge's "high-pitched, breathy and little-girlish" (*Order* 191) voice "represents her falseness" (261), because she is anything but sweet and girlish in her actions. It is also, of course, an unexpected feature to attribute to a character that turns out to be very evil, because it goes against our expectations. Umbridge's eyes are, similarly to other villains in the books, "as cold as ever" (*Order* 134). Professor Umbridge's taste for pink and frilly items does not only affect her wardrobe but also extends to her office decoration. When Harry steps into Umbridge's office at the Ministry in *Hallows*, he finds that it is decorated exactly like it was at Hogwarts:

> […] lace-draperies, doilies and dried flowers covered every available surface. The walls bore the same ornamental plates, each featuring a highly coloured, beribboned kitten, gambolling and frisking with sickening cuteness. The desk was covered with a flouncy, flowered cloth. (*Hallows* 206-207)

All these descriptions of Umbridge make her seem like an over-the-top caricature of a stereotypically feminine woman who loves everything pink. Not only her clothing and home décor is described as such though, but also her voice. This is an integral part of the character and serves as an identifying characteristic – and because she is such a hated character, these attributes work almost like a trigger for Harry: "Umbridge laughed a soft, girlish laugh that made Harry want to attack her" (*Hallows* 214). What do all these things mean if we look at the character of Umbridge from a gender perspective? After all, she is one of the very few female

villains in Harry Potter (the other notable female villain being Bellatrix Lestrange, who is a loyal servant of Voldemort's). It could be argued that her being so overtly feminine *and* incredibly powerful – albeit ethically horrible – is "feminist" in a way. If not that, at the very least this combination serves to surprise readers, because it is unexpected. Feminine, pink-loving, kitten-adoring women with breathy, girlish voices rarely turn out to be "twisted, power-hungry racial supremacist[s]" like Umbridge is (Bassham ch. 15). Unquestionably, Rowling intended this combination of characteristics to surprise readers and remind everyone that looks do not correlate with our expectations of a character's personality. Although it has to be mentioned here that while Umbridge is described as feminine, she is never described as pretty or beautiful. Usually, she is compared to a toad (e.g. *Hallows* 182). So even in this situation we cannot say that the hypothesis about ugly physical characteristics equalling to an evil personality is disproved.

4.3.4 Umbridge indirectly helping Voldemort

"[…] Umbridge's relentless onslaught of rules, vicious detention measures, and Gestapo-like tactics for gaining and maintaining control might make us wonder why she was not in Voldemort's cohort, rather than the Ministry's." (Williams and Kellner, ch. 9)

Williams and Kellner bring up a very valid point here. While Umbridge believes in pure-blood and magical superiority, just like Voldemort, she never actually joins his ranks. This is even a point that Harry and his friends discuss in *Order*. At one point, Harry tells Sirius of his suspicion that Umbridge is a follower of Voldemort's:

> "I doubt it," said Sirius. "I know her by her reputation and I'm sure she's no Death Eater – "
> "She's foul enough to be one," said Harry darkly, and Ron and Hermione nodded vigorously in agreement.
> "Yes, but the world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters," said Sirius with a wry smile. "I know she's a nasty piece of work, though […]" (*Order* 271)

This is, in fact, an extremely important point Sirius brings up: the idea that "the world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters", i.e. there are grey areas and different kinds of evils in the world. This argument is also supported by Kulik's claim that there are figures of evil in the books that are separate from Voldemort (303). However, even though Umbridge is no Death Eater, her behaviour is still (unintentionally) beneficial to Voldemort. Umbridge, Fudge, and the Ministry of Magic are not followers of Lord Voldemort and his malicious agenda, but they

dedicate their resources to discrediting Dumbledore and Harry when the two of them want to warn everyone that Voldemort has returned. Fudge in particular is motivated by his fear that Dumbledore secretly wants to take over his position as the Minister of Magic. So while Umbridge and Fudge are not Death Eaters, they "indirectly support[…] the ideology of, and even pave[…] the way for further institutionalized oppression" (Davanzo 144-145). Chantel M. Lavoie argues:

> Rowling makes plain the argument that non-resistance, too, perpetuates violence. When countless 'good' wizards refuse to believe that Voldemort has returned, they become in some sense Death Eaters themselves; they swallow a lie that hearkens back to and foretells death. (80)

In order for Fudge to control order in the wizarding world he has "to assert the primacy of the Ministry's version of events and state control over public institutions" (Rangwala 133). This includes influencing branches of the Ministry such as the Wizengamot (the high court), the press (by controlling the biggest newspaper, the *Daily Prophet*) and of course the educational system (Davanzo 145). Because of the Ministry's high involvement and actions in these areas of wizarding life, Rangwala argues that the Ministry in *Order* is as dangerous as Voldemort himself (133). The most harmful of the Ministry's many manipulations happens at Hogwarts and is carried out by Dolores Umbridge, who enables direct institutionalized oppression (Davanzo 146). Although Umbridge was hired by Dumbledore as the new Defence Against the Dark Arts professor – for a lack of options – Umbridge shows her loyalty to the Ministry in her speech at the start-of-term-banquet. Hermione sums it up succinctly, saying that Umbridge's speech means "the Ministry's interfering at Hogwarts" (*Order* 193).

4.3.5 Umbridge's reign of oppression at Hogwarts

4.3.5.1 Power, censorship, and punishment

Dolores Umbridge "establishes her reign of oppression from the beginning of her first class" (Davanzo 147). During the students' first Defence Against the Dark Arts class with Professor Umbridge, she tells the students that they will not be practicing magic, rather, they will be "learning about defensive spells in a secure, risk-free way" (*Order* 2018), as Umbridge puts it. This means that the students will have no practice whatsoever, even though they will have to perform these spells at the final exam. When the students realise this, there is an uproar in the classroom, which Umbridge promptly shuts down. Umbridge explains this decision of only teaching magical theory as follows:

> "[…] It is the view of the Ministry that a theoretical knowledge will be more than
> sufficient to get you through your examination, which, after all, is what school is all
> about. […]" (*Order* 219)

While this is of course a horrible stance on education, we later learn the true reason for this pedagogical decision: the Ministry of Magic and especially Fudge himself are scared that the students at Hogwarts are forming a wizard army under Dumbledore's control to take down the Ministry (*Order* 272). Thus, the students should be as unpractised as possible. Harry in particular argues with Umbridge on this subject and tries to explain to her the importance of learning defensive spells, citing Voldemort's return and strengthening. Umbridge, however, flat-out denies that Lord Voldemort has returned ("*This is a lie.*" – *Order* 221) and in return gives Harry detention every day for a week for "spreading evil, nasty, attention-seeking stories" (*Order* 239). It becomes clear that Umbridge is in line with Fudge, the Ministry, and the lies the *Daily Prophet* prints about Harry and Dumbledore. Damour also offers an explanation why this scene is particular is so infuriating: we can see that "real teenagers and Rowling's teenagers share the misery of having to deal with adults who deny the reality, and risks, of that which lies plainly all around them" (Damour 3). Umbridge denies that Voldemort has returned and instead claims that "Cedric Diggory's death was a tragic accident" (*Order* 221). Winters, in contrast to Damour, argues that it is not Umbridge denying the risk that makes her so hateful in this scene, but rather "her belief in an illusory danger and her denial of the real one" (222). By not teaching her students practical magic, Umbridge "acts deliberately and ideologically to keep her students weak and unprepared" (Winters 221). Also, through her ignorance, she inadvertently contributes to Voldemort's rise in power and the establishment of his oppressive regime.

Umbridge's refusal to teach her students effectively and her denial of the truth is only the beginning. When Harry arrives at Umbridge's office for his first detention, we learn more about her true character – and it turns out she is even worse than Harry realised. Umbridge instructs him to write "*I must not tell lies*" on parchment, for "as long as it takes for the message to *sink in*" (*Order* 240, original emphasis). This punishment seems innocent enough, but we soon learn that *sink in* is meant quite literally:

> [Harry] let out a gasp of pain. The words had appeared on the parchment in what
> appeared to be shining red ink. At the same time, the words had appeared on the back
> of Harry's right hand, cut into his skin as though traced there by a scalpel—yet even as
> he stared at the shining cut, the skin healed over again, leaving the place where it had
> been slightly redder than before but quite smooth. (*Order* 240)

Harry spends a long time writing his lines in Umbridge's office, not wanting to show signs of weakness. Torturing Harry during detention shows us Umbridge at her darkest. She intentionally inflicts physical pain on a student who is meant to be under her protection, all with a smile on her face. However, it has to be mentioned that Umbridge genuinely believes that she is doing good, and that her rules and punishments are going to help. Davanzo summarises what we have seen of Umbridge's behaviour so far as "power, censorship and corporal punishment", which makes her "a perilous oppressor and enemy" (147).

The power Umbridge holds at Hogwarts is initially only that of a regular teacher, but soon Fudge makes her High Inquisitor of Hogwarts. The newspaper *Daily Prophet*, which is, as already mentioned, under the influence of the Ministry, writes that the High Inquisitor "will have powers to inspect her fellow educators and make sure they are coming up to scratch" (*Order* 275). Umbridge words this as follows: "The Ministry is determined to weed out unsatisfactory teachers […]" (*Order* 388). Umbridge then inspects all Hogwarts teachers' classes and assesses them. She is especially critical of Professor Trelawney who teaches Divination. Umbridge eventually decides that Professor Trelawney's teaching is not acceptable according to the standards set forth by the Ministry and fires as well as tries to evict her from Hogwarts. This causes Professor Trelawney to have a nervous breakdown in front of nearly the entire student body in the Entrance Hall. Umbridge clearly enjoys seeing the hurt she is causing, as evidenced by this section:

> "You c – can't!" howled Professor Trelawney, tears streaming down her face from behind her enormous lenses, "you c – can't sack me! I've b – been here sixteen years! H – Hogwarts is m – my h – home!"
> "It *was* your home," said Professor Umbridge, and Harry was revolted to see the enjoyment stretching her toadlike face as she watched Professor Trelawney sink, sobbing uncontrollably, on to one of her trunks, "until an hour ago, when the Minister for Magic countersigned your Order of Dismissal. Now kindly remove yourself from this Hall. You are embarrassing us."
> But she stood and watched, with an expression of gloating enjoyment, as Professor Trelawney shuddered and moaned, rocking backwards and forwards on her trunk in paroxysms of grief. (*Order* 524-525, original emphasis)

Davanzo comments on this moment in *Order*, writing that it "serves as an indicator of the malicious cruelty that drives Umbridge" (148). Apart from Professor Trelawney, Umbridge also has the desire to dismiss Hagrid from his teaching post. Davanzo points out that "[T]he two staff members with whom she finds fault, Sibyll Trelawney and Rubeus Hagrid, are significant in terms of Umbridge's rationale, her personal biases and willingness to oppress

[…]" (147) and when it comes to Hagrid specifically, Umbridge intends "to fire [him] based on his parentage and place in the magical beings hierarchical structure" (148). When Umbridge inspects Hagrid's Care of Magical Creatures class, her prejudices and racism clearly show. She gestures with her arms to make things clear to him and talks to him as if "addressing somebody both foreign and very slow" (*Order* 395) which naturally amuses Malfoy and his friends and greatly embarrasses and unnerves Hagrid in front of his class. Hermione is furious afterwards and says to Harry and Ron: "You see what she's up to? It's her thing about half-breeds all over again – she's trying to make out Hagrid's some kind of dimwitted troll, just because he had a giantess for a mother […] (*Order* 397-398).

Over the course of the school year, more and more "Educational Decrees", or school rules, are formulated and passed by High Inquisitor Umbridge. For example, Umbridge disbands all student clubs and organisations, which includes the Quidditch teams (*Order* 313). Here, we can again see that Umbridge is highly unfair – another marker of evil, as we have already established – because she does not allow the Gryffindor Quidditch team to form and play again, in contrast to the Slytherin team. Only the intervention of headmaster Dumbledore resolves this issue. Another educational decree grants Umbridge supreme authority over all punishments, sanctions and removal of privileges concerning the Hogwarts students (*Order* 368-369). With this rule specifically, Umbridge finds a loyal supporter in Hogwarts caretaker Argus Filch, who has always bemoaned that he is forbidden to discipline the students as he sees fit. At one point, he shuffles into Umbridge's office to get himself a paper which is an "Approval for Whipping", something he has wished to do to students for a long time (*Order* 593). At one point Filch says the following to Harry:

> "You filthy little beasts would never have dropped Stink Pellets if you'd known I had it in my power to whip you raw, would you, now? Nobody would have thought of throwing Fanged Frisbees down the corridors if I could've strung you up by the ankles in my offices, would they? But when Educational Decree Number Twenty-nine comes in, Potter, I'll be allowed to do them things […] oh, things are going to be very different around here with her in charge …" (*Order* 554)

While we never actually see students being "strung up by the ankles" or "whipped raw", there is another instance where we can witness the extreme lengths to which Umbridge is prepared to go in order to get what she wants. Near the end of *Order*, Umbridge catches Harry while he is trying to communicate with Sirius Black. She suspects he is doing something forbidden, maybe communicate with Dumbledore, who is on the run from the Ministry. Because she has

used up all supplies of the truth serum while interrogating students, she is prepared to go very far with alternative means:

> "You are forcing me, Potter … I do not want to […] but sometimes circumstances justify the use … I am sure the Minister will understand that I had no choice … […] The Cruciatus Curse ought to loosen your tongue," said Umbridge quietly.
> "No!" shrieked Hermione. "Professor Umbridge – it's illegal."
> But Umbridge took no notice. There was a nasty, eager, excited look on her face that Harry had never seen before. […]
> "What Cornelius doesn't know won't hurt him," said Umbridge, who was now panting slightly as she pointed her wand at different parts of Harry's body in turn, apparently deciding where it would hurt most. (*Order* 657-658)

In the end, she is interrupted before she can use the curse, but this section shows her character as an incredibly cold-hearted and cruel person who is not below torturing students to get what she wants. In fact, it becomes apparent that she delights in inflicting pain on others; she seems positively manic.

4.3.5.2 Resistance and the Inquisitorial Squad

As Umbridge's grip on Hogwarts grows tighter, a revolutionary sentiment is sparked among several students who wish to stand up to her. They are fed up with Umbridge's oppressive regime and with not learning anything useful and practical in Defence Against the Dark Arts. Hermione asks Harry to teach them practical defensive spells and thus 'Dumbledore's Army' is born. What the students learn in this group equips them with skills to protect themselves against the threat of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Dumbledore's Army also furthers resistance within Hogwarts against Umbridge. For example, also individuals like Fred and George Weasley resist by setting off magical fireworks in Hogwarts that are very difficult to get rid of. Even the teachers subtly resist by making life hard for Umbridge. When the Hogwarts professors are asked to help remove the enchanted fireworks, they "pretend[…] to require [Umbridge's] assistance in disposing of the fireworks, [thereby] extend[ing] to its most absurd implications Umbridge's power to oversee the other teachers" (Bealer 2009).

Meanwhile Umbridge seeks assistance from a few selected students who are later known as the 'Inquisitorial Squad'. They help control other students and check whether the new school rules are being followed. Unsurprisingly, the Inquisitorial Squad is made up of exclusively Slytherin students, who are all pure-bloods and whose families are also often loyal to Voldemort and follow his beliefs. Also Draco Malfoy and his Slytherin friends Crabbe and Goyle are members

of the Squad and enjoy flaunting and abusing their newly found power. By giving the Inquisitorial Squad authority, Umbridge reinforces the oppressive structure wherein pure-bloods have power over others (Davanzo 149). When Dumbledore has to flee Hogwarts to escape imprisonment after he took the blame for founding Dumbledore's Army, Umbridge becomes headmistress instead. With Dumbledore gone, "Umbridge uses her power and influence with hitherto unprecedented vigor and malice" (Davanzo 150). The Inquisitorial Squad is now issued more power by Umbridge. Davanzo writes: "In her tenure as headmistress, Umbridge's policies and student leadership assignments reinforce the belief that proud pure-blood wizards are superior to those who do not belong to this group" (150). While pure-blood superiority and racism against others, for example Muggle-borns or non-human magical creatures, already exist in the world outside of Hogwarts, Umbridge specifically enforces and institutionalizes oppression within the school and amongst students. Those who do not follow the new rules are punished – in unfair and extreme ways, as already exemplified with the corporal punishment not only Harry, but also many other students have to endure. Another example is the firing and evicting of Hagrid from Hogwarts: it is carried out in the middle of the night when Umbridge and five Aurors attack Hagrid with excessive force to try and take him down. However, Hagrid is too strong and manages to escape (*Order* 634-638). Bealer summarises Umbridge's reign at Hogwarts as follows: "the powers Umbridge methodically accumulates during her tenure suggest a totalitarian regime's commitment to single control of speech, action and even thought" (177).

4.3.5.3 Umbridge's downfall

Towards the end of *Order*, Umbridge loses control over her regime at Hogwarts. When she threatens to use the Cruciatus Curse on Harry to torture the information of Dumbledore's whereabouts out of him, Hermione stops her, pretending to give in. Harry and Hermione then trick Umbridge into following them into the Forbidden Forest, hoping to run into the herd of centaurs. Luck is on their side, and predictably things go awry for Umbridge when she insults the centaurs as "filthy half-breeds, beasts, [and] uncontrolled animals" with "near-human intelligence" (*Order* 665). This enrages them and they seize Umbridge and carry her off with them. It is poetic justice that Umbridge's downfall in *Order* is brought about by the very beings she hates so much: a Muggle-born witch – Hermione – and a herd of centaurs, who in Umbridge's views are only "filthy half-breeds". Umbridge is not dead, however, and she returns in the last two books of the series. In *Prince*, she is mentioned only briefly: while the Minister

for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, is trying to convince Harry to stand alongside the Ministry for publicity reasons. He mentions Umbridge in passing:

> "[…] Dolores Umbridge has told me that you cherish an ambition to become an Auror. Well, that could be arranged very easily …"
> Harry felt anger bubbling in the pit of his stomach; so Dolores Umbridge was still at the Ministry, was she? (*Prince* 324)

In *Hallows* we meet Umbridge again: she still works at the Ministry and has even risen in the ranks. She is 'Senior Undersecretary to the Minister' and 'Head of the Muggle-born Registration Commission'. There seem to have been no consequences whatsoever by the Ministry after Umbridge's behaviour at Hogwarts. Umbridge appears as a major character only in *Order*, though, and it is here where her role as a villain is established and cemented, which is why the focus is laid on this book in this analysis.

4.3.6 Characteristics and ideology

Elaine Ostry has identified the two major conflicts in the *Harry Potter* series as the "tensions between Muggle-born and pure-blood wizards, and between human wizards and nonhuman magical creatures" (92). It is within these conflicts that also the position of Dolores Umbridge as a person in power over others becomes highly relevant when looking at institutionalised oppression in *Harry Potter*. Umbridge herself is incredibly biased against Muggle-born wizards and witches as well as nonhuman magical creatures. Sirius tells the Harry that Umbridge loathes part-humans and 'half-breeds' like werewolves or merpeople. For example, in her work for the ministry, Umbridge has passed anti-werewolf legislation, which makes it almost impossible for werewolves like Remus Lupin to find work (*Order* 271). Similarly, she gets Hagrid sacked from his teaching post, trying to paint him as a dim-witted half-breed, because he had a giantess for a mother (*Order* 397-398). In fact, she refers to him as a "half-breed oaf" (*Order* 662). When she is in the Forbidden Forest with Harry and Hermione and they meet a herd of centaurs, she and the centaurs exchange strong words regarding the centaurs' sovereign use of the forest. A centaur fires an arrow very close to Umbridge's head and she is indignant, insulting the centaurs with "filthy half-breeds, beasts, uncontrolled animals" (*Order* 665). We learn more about just how far Umbridge's hatred of Muggle-born wizards and witches goes in *Hallows*. When the trio break into the Ministry of Magic to find the locket Horcrux, Harry sees hundreds of pamphlets being made right next to Umbridge's office. They are titled *'Mudbloods and the Dangers They Pose to a Peaceful Pure-Blood Society'* and it is heavily implied that Umbridge

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authored or commissioned these: "There was no author's name upon the pamphlet, but again, the scars on the back of his right hand seemed to tingle as he examined it" (*Hallows* 205). As already mentioned, Umbridge is now both Senior Undersecretary to the Minister as well as Head of the Muggle-Born Registration Commission (*Hallows* 206). We actually see Umbridge leading the hearings for the Muggle-Born Registration Commission. There, suspected Muggle-borns are rounded up, questioned, and if they cannot produce sufficient evidence that they are descended from wizards and witches, their wands will be taken away and they will be sent to the wizard prison Azkaban. What Harry sees is in the court room is horrible: Dementors are guarding the Muggle-borns, who are naturally feeling overwhelmed with despair and hopelessness because of their presence. However, there is a Patronus charm there to guard Umbridge and other Ministry employees from suffering the same feelings themselves. Harry thinks: "The Patronus, he was sure, was Umbridge's, and it glowed brightly because she was so happy here, in her element, upholding the twisted laws she had helped to write" (*Hallows* 214). Harry and Hermione see the Slytherin locket hanging around Umbridge's neck in the courtroom. When Hermione, in disguise, comments on how pretty it is, Umbridge says: "Oh yes – an old family heirloom […] The 'S' stands for Selwyn … I am related to the Selwyns […]" (*Hallows* 215). This makes Harry even angrier, the fact that Umbridge is using "the locket she had taken as a bribe […] to bolster her own pure-blood credentials" (*Hallows* 215). Umbridge is not actually related to the Selwyns, and one of Umbridge's parents is Muggle-born – so not even she herself is a pure-blood. The whole set-up of the Registration Commission is of course strongly reminiscent of a component of the Third Reich and the Nazis: Jewish people who had to register themselves in order to be easily identified, and later killed.

4.3.7 Umbridge's position as a villain in *Harry Potter*

Lastly, the question of what kind of villain Umbridge is poses itself. Where does she fit amongst other characters that have been analysed? And specifically, why is she such an intensely hated character, even more so than Lord Voldemort? A long discussion on whether Umbridge is evil or not is unnecessary here, because with all the evidence presented in this chapter, it is clear that she is. Her evilness is overtly referenced in the text by several characters, and also, there are situations like the following when the trio plan on stealing the locket Horcrux from Umbridge:

> "[…] The longer we put it off, the further away that locket could be. There's already a good chance Umbridge has chucked it away; the thing doesn't open."

> "Unless," said Ron, "she's found a way of opening it and she's now possessed."
>
> "Wouldn't make any difference to her, she was so evil in the first place," Harry shrugged. (*Hallows* 189)

Harry is quite right in saying that the locket wouldn't affect Umbridge much – it doesn't. Which is remarkable, because later, when Harry, Ron, and Hermione have got the locket, they have to take turns wearing it as it causes them to have extremely negative moods. So this is another marker with which we can see just how evil Umbridge has to be, that such a Dark magical artefact has no effect on her. When we look at how Umbridge's villainy ranks when compared to other characters in *Harry Potter*, there is one instance when Harry compares her to Snape. We have already seen how much Harry hates Snape, so Harry's thoughts on Umbridge in the following passage are telling. After several more detention sessions with Umbridge, this is what goes through Harry's mind:

> Harry had never before considered the possibility that there might be another teacher in the world he hated more than Snape, but as he walked back towards Gryffindor Tower he had to admit he had found a strong contender. She's evil, he thought, as he climbed a staircase to the seventh floor, she's an evil, twisted, mad old – " (*Order* 244)

The comparison to other villainous characters does not end here, though, because in several online voting contests and opinion pieces, Umbridge ranks as the most hated character.[15] In an informal online voting contest on the website *Floor8* Dolores Umbridge unsurprisingly ranked number one, by a rather large margin (Harrison, *Floor8*). The website *Screen Rant* also did a ranking of the most hated Harry Potter characters. They put Dolores Umbridge at number one, writing:

> Finally, we come to the one Harry Potter character we truly despise the most […]. There's a special level of hell waiting for Dolores Umbridge in her perfect pink wool suits, pillbox hats, and cute kitten plates on her office wall. All of that, as we know, is just a facade, hiding a truly sadistic soul who revels in cruel and abusive punishment for those who oppose her. Seriously, the 'pen' that carves words into your skin when you use it... that's just messed up. […] Umbridge's undoing as she is being dragged away by centaurs in the Forbidden Forest is definitely the most satisfying end to a villain in the whole *Harry Potter* lore. (Bowen, *Screen Rant*)

The readership's intense hatred of Umbridge does not end here either, though, because she is often compared to Voldemort and sometimes seen as even worse than him. Why is this? Here I would like to come back to Stephen King's review of *Order*, where he commented on Dolores

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[15] In most of these voting contests, only characters beside Voldemort – the obvious main villain of the story – were ranked.

Umbridge, as cited in the beginning of this chapter. In this review, King furthermore wrote that "[a] great fantasy novel can't exist without a great villain" and that main villain Voldemort "is a little too far out in the supernatural ozone to qualify, [but] the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts does just fine in this regard" (King, question 5). King went further and briefly summarised why he thinks Umbridge makes such a great villain:

> One needn't be a child to remember The Really Scary Teacher, the one who terrified us so badly that we dreaded the walk to school in the morning, and we turn the pages partly in fervent hopes that she will get her comeuppance… but also in growing fear of what she will get up to next. (King, question 5)

Compared to Voldemort, Umbridge's villainy is not as theatric. Her cruelty is not as apparent as Voldemort's clear-cut evilness, after all he simply murders whoever crosses him. Umbridge's "cruelty comes in frilly pink wrapping and is all too familiar for the audience for it is the kind of villainy that can easily exist in the real world" (Norman, *Screen Rant*). This is a similar sentiment that Stephen King touched on and one that is also echoed in other online reviews and opinion pieces. For example, an Internet user gave their opinion on precisely why Umbridge is such a hated character, even more so than Lord Voldemort. This particular post garnered a lot of attention and many users agreed with the argument. An excerpt from this post reads:

> "[T]he reason you hate her so much is because she is more of a real-life horror. […] I mean, look at Voldemort. He's basically Wizard Hitler, which is, obviously, an incredibly terrible thing to be. But most people – especially the younger people in Harry Potter's target audience – have not had their parents murdered by a xenophobic cult leader. Nor have they fought for their lives against giant snakes, been kidnapped for dark rituals, or watched numerous friends die in front of them. Voldemort's crimes are numerous, but they're distant and fantastical, like hearing about a serial killer on the news. But they have had that one teacher who inflicts extra punishments just because they don't like you. They've complained to parents and authorities only to be ignored. They've sat through pointless classes and been silenced when they criticize. Umbridge is the teacher we all hated because she made our lives miserable and we were powerless to stop her. […] Yes, torturing and killing numerous people is worse than terrorizing a handful of schoolchildren, but Voldemort is the bad guy in a fairy tale. Umbridge is personal." (9GAG user)

To give more ideas of what people hate about Umbridge precisely, the following Goodreads discussion provides several examples. A discussion was started by user Kirstin with the question "Who do you hate most?" about Umbridge and Voldemort. Most of the answers seem to be in favour of Umbridge as the most hateful character. Some of the reasons people gave for their choice are as follows (answers edited for clarity and conciseness):

- "I wanted [Umbridge] dead more than any villain in the history of fantasy. At least I felt a little pity/sympathy to Voldy when I heard his unfortunate life. He seemed like he's born evil." (Kristin)
- "Voldemort was typical evil, but Umbridge was crazy, evil teacher, unexpected evil" (Brianna)
- "Umbridge. Come on, who can forget her punishments toward harry? Like the writing with the quill thing." (Annie)
- "My main reason against umbridge is that she was against half breeds and other magical creatures (centaur, muggle borns, giants, etc.)" (Justin)
- "I actually don't hate Voldemort […] Yes he was pure evil and such. And his character was to be automatically hated. But the hate I felt for Umbridge was different, because unlike Voldy she wasn't the primary villain, she wasn't that feared […] What I hated the most was that she had authority." (Kristin)

Some factors of why Umbridge is hated so much I want to highlight here. One user mentioned Umbridge's hatred of 'half-breeds' and her pure-blood racism. This is certainly true, but racism is also a main feature of Voldemort, the Death Eaters and most Slytherin students. Arguably it feels worse coming from Umbridge because she is a Ministry official and has legitimised power. This is also what Kristin mentioned, "What I hated the most was that she had authority". Everything Umbridge does is legitimised by the power vested in her by the Ministry. Changing the school rules, not teaching practical magic and keeping them unprepared, even physically torturing students is okay. There is nothing the students can to about this, they have to acquiesce. Compared to Voldemort, this is very different. He is supposed to be the villain: all characters in the story know he is a villain, as do the readers. We are supposed to hate him, and what he does is morally reprehensible but at least it is condemned by the authorities within the story. Not so with Umbridge. Even though she gets dragged off by the centaurs at the end of *Order*, she is back in the Ministry during *Prince* and *Hallows*, and there are seemingly no consequences to her actions. This is a scary situation: to know there is something wrong and horrible being done, for example to Harry, but knowing there is nothing that can be done against it because the perpetrator has legitimised power by the government.

All of these examples make it easy to understand why Umbridge is such a hated character and why she is compared to Voldemort. One has to remember, though, that it is not only emotional

memories of the readers' own experiences with horrible teachers that makes Umbridge so hateful – she is really a terrible and scary person. To summarise this and end the chapter with Davanzo: "In her willingness to crush anyone who defies her, and in her prejudiced singlemindedness in terms of the superiority of wizards, Umbridge poses as much of a threat to freedom from oppression as Voldemort himself does" (150).

4.4 Draco Malfoy

4.4.1 Introduction

> "Harry Potter faces bullies on two levels. His supernatural rival is, of course, Voldemort, the Dark Lord, whom he battles because it is foredained he do so. In the school story that frames this epic conflict, Harry must also face his earthly rival, who is the school bully, Draco Malfoy. Accompanied by his two schoolboy goons, Crabbe and Goyle, Draco taunts adults and schoolchildren alike." (Manners Smith 75)

Draco is Harry's enemy from the beginning, and as soon as Harry learns about Draco's racist, supremacist, and arrogant behaviour and beliefs, he does not wish to associate himself with him. They are enemies for their entire time at Hogwarts and from *Prince* onwards, Draco also joins the Death Eaters and thus also becomes Harry's enemy in the grander conflict happening in the wizarding world. At school, Draco is a relentless bully who degrades people he does not deem worthy because of their blood status, amount of money, or even association with Harry Potter. All this will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter. First, let us analyse Draco Malfoy's name to see whether it is as telling as the characters' names we have looked at so far. Draco's first name refers to the Latin word 'draco' meaning either dragon or snake (Fenske 191). The last name 'Malfoy' is, according to Manners Smith, "an ancient Norman French name meaning 'bad faith'" (77). The whole Malfoy family, not just Draco, belongs to the evil rather than the good side and thus "[a]ll their malice is embodied by their name" (Fenske 191) and already the family name conveys their "baneful predispositions" (Manners Smith 77).

4.4.2 Immediate dislike

We are introduced to Draco Malfoy when Harry first meets him in Madam Malkin's shop in Diagon Alley in chapter five of *Stone*:

> "My father's next door buying my books and my mother's up the street looking at wands," said the boy. He had a bored, drawling voice. "Then I'm going to drag them off

to look a racing brooms. I don't see why first-years can't have their own. I think I'll
bully father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow."
Harry was strongly reminded of Dudley. (*Stone* 60)

Already at their first meeting, the fact that Draco reminds Harry of Dudley is a negative
observation and we get the impression of Draco Malfoy as an unlikeable boy. Later, when
Draco offers Harry his friendship, he says the following:

"My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles and more children than they
can afford. […] You'll soon find out some wizarding families are better than others,
Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there."
(*Stone* 81)

He then holds out his hand for Harry to shake, but Harry does not take it. By now it is clear to
Harry what kind of person Draco is, and he does not want to associate himself with him. As
they get to know each other better at Hogwarts, their relationship does not improve. Rather,
Harry and Draco quickly become enemies. After a short time at Hogwarts, Harry has formed
his opinion on Draco: "Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he hated more than
Dudley, but that was before he met Draco Malfoy" (*Stone* 107).

4.4.3 Physical appearance

Draco Malfoy has "white-blond hair" (*Goblet* 114), a "pale, pointed face" (*Stone* 59) as well as
pale eyes – attributes he has inherited from his father Lucius. Lucius Malfoy is initially
introduced as follows in *Chamber*: "The man who followed [Draco] could only be his father.
He had the same pale, pointed face and identical cold grey eyes" (*Chamber* 58). It seems that
Draco, with his blond hair, is one of the few characters coded as evil who is not "dark and
misshapen" (Ostry 95). While it is true that Draco is not ugly, his physical features are often
described in an unflattering way. For example, "[his] eyes were shining malevolently"
(*Prisoner* 139), "[his] thin mouth was curving in a mean smile" (*Prisoner* 139), "his pale eyes
narrowed" (*Prisoner* 139) or "a smirk quiver[ed] on his lips" (*Goblet* 790). The fact that he is
usually accompanied by his friends Crabbe and Goyle also means that Draco seems more
threatening than he would be on his own. For example, on the train ride back to King's Cross
at the end of *Goblet* we read the following: "Crabbe and Goyle were standing behind [Malfoy].
All three of them looked more pleased with themselves, more arrogant and more menacing,
than Harry had ever seen them" (*Goblet* 790). Both Crabbe and Goyle are described as
"[Malfoy's] enormous, thuggish cronies" (*Goblet* 186) and rather ugly in general, like most

Slytherin students. Commenting on Draco's technically decent looks for an antagonistic character, Rothman suggests that, were it not for Crabbe and Goyle's ugly and unpleasant looks, Draco Malfoy "would have needed lots of plastic surgery" (210). In other words, Draco is only decent-looking, because he is surrounded by displeasing looking Slytherins – otherwise, he would have to be portrayed as ugly, to make it clear to the reader that he is a bad character.

4.4.4 Characteristics and ideology

Similarly to Voldemort and other evil characters, Draco's character is connected to the semantic field of 'coldness', which has already been established as belonging to the evil side. For example, Draco and his father are described as having "identical cold grey eyes" (*Chamber* 58). Draco, much like his father Lucius, has an elitist self-image and displays arrogant, pretentious behaviour, which often results in his bullying of other students (Kulik 298). With Draco's character we can see other markers of evil that have already been established in the chapter on Voldemort. For example, he often acts cowardly, letting his brawny friends Crabbe and Goyle accompany him and protect him from others' potential retaliations – Draco is, however, the unquestioned leader of his friend group. This is also exemplified by his cowardly behaviour during the detention in the Forbidden Forest in *Stone*, and the "trace of panic in his voice" when a lesson of Care of Magical Creatures is supposed to take place in the Forbidden Forest in *Order* (392). As Kulik writes, Draco is not only a coward, he is also unfair (299). For example, in the duelling club in *Chamber* Draco attacks Harry before the fight has started, he also tries to attack Harry from behind in *Goblet*, and often plays unfairly when it comes to Quidditch.

Draco Malfoy values pure-blood wizards and witches above all others. This is something we find out the first time Harry meets Draco in *Stone*, when they are both only eleven years old. When Draco asks Harry about his parents, the following conversation ensues:

> "They're dead," said Harry shortly. He didn't feel much like going into the matter with the boy.
> "Oh, sorry," said the other, not sounding sorry at all. "But they were *our* kind, weren't they?"
> "They were a witch and wizard, if that's what you mean?"
> "I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you? They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families […]" (*Stone* 60-61, original emphasis)

Coincidentally, this is also the first time in *Harry Potter* where we find out about discrimination in the wizarding world. This ideology, which is essentially the magical equivalent to racism, plays a large role in Voldemort's ideology and that of his followers, the Death Eaters. The fact that Draco is the first person in *Harry Potter* to bring this topic up – and is supportive of this ideology – is telling and connects him more firmly to the evil side. Draco's loathing of Muggle-born witches and wizards is evident throughout the story. During their first years at Hogwarts he routinely insults Hermione for being Muggle-born but is at the same time embarrassed because she outperforms him at every exam (*Chamber* 60). He insults Hermione with offensive slurs: "'No one asked your opinion, you filthy little mudblood,' he spat" (*Chamber* 123). Ron later explains what the term means:

> "It's about the most insulting thing he could think of […] Mudblood's a really foul name for someone who was Muggle-born – you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards – like Malfoy's family – who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood." (*Chamber* 127)

Draco does not even shy back from using such insulting terms in public, or in the presence of his family. When the trio meet Draco and his mother in a shop in Diagon Alley in *Prince*, Draco says to her: "If you're wondering what the smell is, Mother, a Mudblood just walked in" (110). Draco even quite literally says he wishes people who he considers below him because of associations with Muggle-borns were dead: "They'll [Ron and Hermione] be the first to go, now the Dark Lord's back! Mudbloods and Muggle-lovers first!" (*Goblet* 790). All of this taken together means that Draco hangs onto the same racist ideology as Voldemort, which would classify his character as evil (Kulik 298). Draco does not stop at insulting Muggle-borns, however. Even though Ron comes from a family of pure-blood wizards and witches, Draco often makes fun of him for being poor. We can see an example of this in chapter four of *Chamber*, when the students run into each other in Diagon Alley while shopping for schoolbooks: "I am [surprised] to see you in a shop, Weasley," retorted Malfoy. "I suppose your parents will go hungry for a month to pay for that lot" (*Chamber* 70). Or in *Prisoner*, when Malfoy makes fun of Ron as they are standing in front of the Shrieking Shack: "Suppose you'd love to live here, wouldn't you, Weasley? Dreaming about having your own bedroom? I heard your family all sleep in one room, is that true?" (*Prisoner* 303). Draco was of course raised in a rich and privileged family and because of his feelings of superiority and arrogance looks down on others who are not so fortunate. If we ask ourselves how Draco came to be such an unpleasant person, it seems clear that it stems from his upbringing – he has essentially taken over his father's ideology. Lucius Malfoy is a firm believer in the supremacy of the old, pure-blood

wizarding families as well. And even though the Weasleys are one such family, he still despises them because they are poor and sympathise with muggles. With regard to the Weasleys sympathising with muggles, Lucius Malfoy says to Mr Weasley: "The company you keep, Weasley … and I thought your family could sink no lower –" (*Chamber* 71). For the Malfoys, everyone associating with Muggles in any way is "violating wizard pride" (Fenske 193). This is the man who Draco was raised by, and it seems inevitable that a child takes over such ideology.

4.4.5 Draco the school bully

The fact that the *Harry Potter* series also fits nicely into the genre of the boarding school story has already been discussed in an earlier chapter. Now, Draco Malfoy as the antagonist and bully in this school story set at Hogwarts will be analysed. Harry and Draco are enemies from the beginning, and the strong dislike between them is motivated on Draco's part by snobbery. At first, Draco wants to make friends with Harry, but when Harry says no to that offer, Draco decides to become unbearable to Harry, bullying him and his friends whenever he can. Draco is also obviously jealous of Harry and his famous status in the wizarding world. Some other people in the wizarding world are faced with even more intense bullying by Draco, though. This is then usually based on a class conflict or the person's blood status. Manners Smith writes that "Rowling is closely following the boarding school story tradition, in which class differences frequently provoke bigotry" (76). Draco himself was raised by the Malfoys, a pure-blood family who likes to think of themselves as a magical equivalent to aristocrats. At Hogwarts, there seems to be no one else of exactly Draco Malfoy's social and political milieu, so he makes friends with Crabbe and Goyle, two Slytherins whose family come from at least the same political background (Manners Smith 76). Draco makes use of his father's influential political position to cause trouble, for example in *Prisoner* when he tries to get Hagrid fire, which eventually results in the hippogriff Buckbeak being sentenced to death. At several points, Draco's bullying towards Harry goes further than just snobbery, though, for example when he tries to make Harry fall off his broomstick during Quidditch in *Prisoner*. Most notably, "Violence, vengefulness, and snobbery are only parts of Draco's character. His is also the schoolboy voice of racism and race purity in the Potter books" (Manners Smith 76). This is the type of bullying we see most often from Draco, namely when he is cruel to others because of their blood status. Steege writes that "Time and again Malfoy stresses the superiority of the old, wealthy wizarding families, those in whom the magic runs strong, while Harry befriends

Hermione, a Muggle-born girl, and Ron, who is not Muggle-born but is quite poor and of low social standing" (150). Draco's bullying that is fuelled by his racism is especially targeted at Hermione who is Muggle-born, and at Hagrid, who is part-human because he had a giantess for a mother. As we learn soon, Draco's belief in pure-blood magical superiority is something that he has imbibed from his parents. Manners Smith also points out, that "Draco's bigotry […] is similar to the kinds of prejudice frequently presented in British school stories as a problem for the hero or heroine to deal with" (76).

What happens if school bully Draco Malfoy is given even an ounce of power? We can see what happens in *Order* when Draco becomes a prefect. Before the school year even starts, Ron suspects that Draco will take advantage of his position, and he is right. Draco quickly abuses his authority to bully other students, for example we read that "Malfoy was being absolutely foul to a first-year back there" (*Order* 220). However, there is also the question why Draco was even made prefect. After all, Dumbledore should know how Draco acts, should know he would not be fair. So in a way, this is also reflective of Dumbledore, Hogwarts and the questionable pedagogy that goes on in this school. This also applies to Slytherin house and the house system in general. As mentioned above, putting all students who come from pure-blood families and many of which are already prejudiced together in one house is a recipe for disaster. However, we are not analysing the questionable pedagogy that goes on at Hogwarts but rather the villainous characters themselves. Either way, Draco's socialisation in Slytherin house does not have a mitigating effect on his pure-blood racism and superiority complex – and when given power in *Order*, he uses that just as Ron predicted. Later in *Order*, as Umbridge rises to power and eventually becomes headmistress, she appoints the Inquisitorial Squad, which consists of students she finds trustworthy. As far as we know, only Slytherin students such as Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle are accepted into the Squad. The Inquisitorial Squad is supposed to assist Umbridge and help her enforce the new school rules. They are even allowed to deduct house points as they see fit (*Order* 551). When Malfoy joins the Inquisitorial Squad, it becomes even more apparent how much Draco enjoys having power over others like this. As he and the other Slytherins in power are pure-bloods and most others – who did not join the Squad – are half-bloods or Muggle-borns, this quickly becomes an issue of institutional oppression based on blood status. And it turns out Malfoy has no hesitation to join in on this. Unsurprisingly, Malfoy abuses his new position of authority, and immediately upon meeting Harry and his friends Draco deducts them points for ludicrous reasons:

"The Inquisitorial Squad, Granger," said Malfoy, pointing toward a tiny silver 'I' on his robes just beneath his prefect's badge. "A select group of students who are supportive of the Ministry of Magic, hand-picked by Professor Umbridge. Anyway, members of the Inquisitorial Squad do have the power to dock points … so, Granger, I'll have five from you for being rude about our new Headmistress. Macmillan, five for contradicting me. Five because I don't like you, Potter. Weasley, your shirt's untucked, so I'll have another five for that. Oh yeah, I forgot, you're a Mudblood, Granger, so ten off for that..." (*Order* 551)

Here we can also see once more an open and unashamed display of Draco's loathing of Muggle-borns. Because Hermione as a Muggle-born is beneath Malfoy in this power structure, she has to quietly accept Malfoy's behaviour (Davanzo 150).

4.4.6 Draco as a Slytherin

Draco and his friends are all sorted into Slytherin. While Slytherin house is never explicitly identified as 'evil' by the extradiegetic narrator, it can still be regarded as such, as Kulik argues (299). This is mainly because all major evil characters were members of this house: Lord Voldemort himself, most Death Eaters, and the Malfoy family. Our impression of Slytherin as the 'bad' house is cultivated very early on in the story. Harry first hears about Slytherin from Draco in chapter five of *Stone*. He then asks Hagrid about the Hogwarts houses, who says the following: "Better Hufflepuff than Slytherin […] There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one" (*Stone* 61-62). Thus, Slytherin is painted as a house attracting bad people very early on so the readers know that Draco Malfoy and his friends, who all are in Slytherin, are the bad guys. The fact that Voldemort was in this house as well cements Slytherin House as the ultimate bad and dangerous house. In contrast, Gryffindor is the house where supposedly 'good' people are sorted into, such as Harry, Ron, and Hermione. The two houses of Gryffindor and Slytherin are depicted as opposites throughout the books, which is also done by mentioning how much the students dislike each other. For example, in *Prince* we read: "Gryffindor and Slytherin students loathed each other on principle" (137). Also, how Slytherin and Gryffindor students react to certain situations often shows clearly just how 'bad' the Slytherins are. For example, when Snape is about to try out a potentially poisonous substance on Neville's pet, the students react like this: "The Gryffindors watched fearfully. The Slytherins looked excited" (*Prisoner* 140) – very clear lines are being drawn between who is good and bad, even among thirteen-year-old students. Draco Malfoy being sorted into Slytherin thus associates him strongly with all these negative connotations that the house already has. Another point that is very relevant when discussing Slytherin house

and Draco Malfoy is the belief in pure-blood superiority. As we know, Draco and his family are firm believers in this, resulting in racism against Muggle-borns and nonhuman magical beings. This sentiment in Draco only gets encouraged when he is sorted into Slytherin, where many other students agree with him. The founder of the house, Salazar Slytherin, only wanted pure-blood wizards and witches to study at Hogwarts, which is why most Slytherin students are pure-bloods themselves. At one point in *Chamber*, the password to enter the Slytherin common room even is 'pure-blood'. Since many pure-blood families pride themselves on this fact, it seems a very bad decision to separate children this way, as many already come from households that believe in pure-blood superiority – such as Draco's family. Bassham laments the fact that this inherent problem in the house system is not addressed by the school or the headmaster. He writes: "Dumbledore does nothing to remedy the great festering source of militant purebloodism at Hogwarts, Slytherin House. Slytherin is a breeding ground for dark wizards" (Bassham ch. 15). Even if children come from a family that is not racist, the point still stands, "Because people – especially impressionable children – tend to become like those they associate with, Slytherin is a hothouse of racial intolerance" (Bassham ch. 15).

4.4.7 Torn between two sides

Harry grows increasingly suspicious about Draco's behaviour and early on in *Prince* suspects Draco has become a Death Eater, which Ron and Hermione find thoroughly unconvincing seeing as Draco is only sixteen years old (*Prince* 125). During the train ride to Hogwarts, Harry eavesdrops on Malfoy, where the latter talks about potentially not returning to Hogwarts for his seventh year because he might be moving on "to bigger and better things" (*Prince* 144). We learn that Draco has been given a task by Lord Voldemort. However, now that Draco's wish to join his family in serving the Dark Lord has been fulfilled, he gets scared at what is being asked of him, and he cannot go through with killing Dumbledore, which is what Voldemort told him to do. On one hand, Draco wants to join Voldemort because he shares the same ideology, but on the other hand, he cannot go through what is being asked of him because he is too cowardly – or he has moral concerns. At one point, Harry finds Draco crying in a bathroom because he is scared of what is being asked of him:

> "No one can help me," said Malfoy. His whole body was shaking. "I can't do it … I can't … it won't work … and unless I do it soon … he says he'll kill me …"
> And Harry realised, with a shock so huge it seemed to root him to the spot, that Malfoy was crying – actually crying – tears streaming down his pale face into the grimy basin. (*Prince* 488)

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However, right after Harry witnesses Draco crying pitifully like this, the latter tries to fire the Cruciatus Curse at him, again showing his cruelty. Eventually, it is Snape who kills Dumbledore, fulfilling Draco's task. Nevertheless, Draco joins the Death Eaters in *Hallows* and does not return to Hogwarts. When Harry and his friends are captured by Snatchers in *Hallows* and brought to Malfoy Manor, Draco is given the task of identifying them. Harry's face is disfigured by a jinx Hermione cast on him to obscure his features. However, for someone like Draco who has known him for years, Harry should be recognisable. Draco, however, says he is uncertain: "'I can't – I can't be sure,' said Draco. He was keeping his distance from Greyback, and seemed as scared of looking at Harry as Harry was of looking at him" (*Hallows* 371). It seems like Draco is by now a rather reluctant Death Eater, he is mainly still with them because of family pressure – his aunt Bellatrix, for example, is Voldemort's most ardent follower. Also, if Draco left, his parents would pay the price – and Voldemort is not forgiving. When it comes to identifying the other prisoners, Ron and Hermione, Draco is again asked for his opinion as he went to school with them for six years and knows their faces well. He says "maybe" and "it could be", meanwhile the other Death Eaters and Malfoy's parents are fairly convinced that it is them (*Hallows* 372). There seems to be a silent understanding between Harry and Draco, that results in Draco at least not selling him out to Voldemort (Fenske 197).

4.4.8 Draco's status as a villain

Draco Malfoy is obviously not on the same level as Voldemort, Umbridge, or even Snape. For one, he is a student and the same age as Harry, and therefore there is no age or authority-related[16] imbalance of power between them. Also, for most of the books Draco has the position of the school bully, Harry's antagonist on the school level, contrasted with Voldemort, who threatens the whole wizarding and Muggle worlds. However, Draco's character gets more complex and nuanced when we see him gravitate towards Voldemort, and we see his desire to become a Death Eater himself. His reasons for wanting to join the Death Eaters come from his upbringing, his socialization in a pure-blood household and in Slytherin, as well as his loyalty to his family who he does not wish to disappoint. However, we see Draco struggling significantly once he becomes a Death Eater. It seems that he has not entirely thought this through or knew what it would mean for him. Even when Draco is already a Death Eater and he seems to have clearly chosen a side in *Hallows*, his status as a villain is not that high. We

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[16] At least up until *Order*, when Draco becomes first prefect, and then a member of the Inquisitorial Squad.

can see this in the following excerpt, when Harry is held up by Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle during the Battle of Hogwarts:

> "So how come you three aren't with Voldemort?" asked Harry.
> "We're gonna be rewarded," said Crabbe […] Crabbe was smiling like a small child promised a large bag of sweets. "We 'ung back, Potter. We decided not to go. Decided to bring you to 'im."
> "Good plan," said Harry in mock admiration. He could not believe that he was this close, and was going to be thwarted by Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle. (*Hallows* 505)

This section implies that the trio made up of Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle is on the lower end of the scale of threat and danger, because Harry cannot believe he is going to be thwarted by *them* – like they are not worthy opponents. Especially when Harry has important things to deal with like defeating Voldemort, who is a 'worthy' villain and opponent – Malfoy and his friends are not nearly on the same level.

4.4.9 A redemption arc?

As already mentioned, *Harry Potter* fits well into the genre of the school story. Just how accurately it fits, though, becomes apparent in the following quote from Manners Smith. In 2003, she wrote down (while only books one through four had been published) what would have to happen to the character of Draco Malfoy *if* Rowling kept adhering to the school story genre:

> If Rowling remains faithful to the school story genre, it is likely the following will happen: Draco Malfoy will have to become reformed, since this is what happens to many school-story bullies after the hero has gained sufficient moral maturity to effect their conversions. Draco may have to save Harry' life, or Harry will save his, and they will reach an understanding, if not a friendship. (Manners Smith 84)

This is very interesting, because it is a quite accurate description of what happens with Draco Malfoy – thus showing just how faithful Rowling remained to the genre conventions. Harry ended up having to save Draco's life in *Hallows* when he and his friends got trapped in the Room of Requirement and they were nearly killed by the dangerous Fiend Fyre Crabbe let loose. Before this, Harry and Draco were still enemies, being on opposing sides of the wizarding war. After Harry saved Draco's life, there is not much interaction between the two of them anymore, but it is hinted at that Draco as well as his parents stopped actively fighting for Voldemort in the Battle of Hogwarts. How much this is due to Harry saving Draco's life is uncertain; but the main reason seems to be that the Malfoys simply cared more about their

family being together and safe than anything else. During the Battle of Hogwarts, we read that Lucius and Narcissa were simply running around, just screaming for their son (*Hallows* 589). Either way, the epilogue to *Hallows* shows that Harry and Draco have reached an understanding of sorts when they each bring their children to Platform 9 ¾ at King's Cross station. Draco acknowledges Harry with a curt nod and, keeping in mind what we know about Draco's behaviour towards Harry from his school days, this is a civilised greeting. However, Draco and Harry certainly did not, as Manners Smith speculated, reach a friendship. It could instead be best described as a truce. Concerning this ending Rothman writes that "[Draco's] redemption arc could have been made more clearly and shown in greater detail. We never really see Draco feeling intense remorse about the things he has done" (216). This is very true, which is exactly why the question of whether or not Draco really received a redemption arc is posed. After all, we are not sure what goes on in Draco's mind and what he thinks about what he has done in the past. As Rothman continues: "The way it is, we are left to wonder whether Draco Malfoy, like so many other former Death Eaters and supporters of Voldemort, would align themselves with the next powerful, villainous leader that comes along" (216).

5. Conclusion

Villains are essential to fantasy fiction in many ways: as a foil for the hero, an obstacle to be overcome, and as carriers of certain ideologies that are – through the villains' defeat – ultimately condemned. In this thesis, I analysed four characters of the popular book series Harry Potter in detail, to find out whether and how they can be described and evaluated as villains from a genre perspective.

To provide a basis of the subject matter, I first addressed the question of genre. More specifically, the Harry Potter series was evaluated from a genre perspective, with fantasy fiction, children's and young adult literature being defined first. Then I explored under what specific parts of fantasy fiction Harry Potter fits in best, and whether the books are children's or young adult literature. Other relevant genres Harry Potter could fit into were considered, most notably the school story.

In part two of this thesis, the chosen characters were analysed. I decided to focus on Lord Voldemort, Severus Snape, Dolores Umbridge, and Draco Malfoy. These characters are all associated with the evil side and oppose Harry and his friends, who belong to the good side.

There are several other villainous characters from *Harry Potter* I could have chosen for the analysis as well, some of them more obvious in their villainy and some more covert or 'unexpected'. For example, there are interesting individual characters among the Death Eaters such as Bellatrix Lestrange, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, Peter Pettigrew, Barty Crouch Jr., or Fenrir Greyback. The Death Eaters as a group were touched on in the Voldemort chapter, but only how they relate to Voldemort in the hierarchical power structure was explored. Other, maybe not so obvious, evil characters are also the Dursleys. They are arguably not taken seriously as villainous characters because they are Muggles and do not have much power in that sense. However, they did have power over Harry when he was a child and he depended on them – and they treated him horribly. The Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers could also be examined as villainous characters – with the exception of Remus Lupin – as each year there was another rather bad or evil person in charge of this class. Dolores Umbridge and Severus Snape were analysed in this thesis, yet also Professor Quirrell, Gilderoy Lockhart, Barty Crouch Jr. (disguised as Mad-Eye Moody), and the Death Eaters Amycus and Alecto Carrow would be interesting to analyse as evil characters. I ultimately had to limit myself because there is not enough space here to adequately analyse all evil characters in the Harry Potter books. The four characters I ultimately decided on were chosen for several reasons, as already mentioned in the introduction. Especially interesting in this thesis was to analyse the characters who are shown to have grey morality, where it is hard to assign them specifically to one side only – namely Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy. Severus Snape is a very morally grey character who, in the past, has moved from the evil to the good side, yet he is still an antagonist of Harry's. He is unquestionably horrible to his students and torments them without concern, but it turns out he worked for the good side all along in *Hallows*. This does not exonerate him of his cruel behaviour, though, which makes him more complex and three-dimensional – in contrast to Lord Voldemort or Dolores Umbridge. Draco Malfoy was interesting to analyse because of his role as the school bully, fitting in well with the conventions of the boarding school story genre that Rowling follows. Draco Malfoy also receives a redemption arc, although it "could have been made more clearly" (Rothman 216). While there seems to be a truce between Harry and Draco after Harry saved him in the Room of Requirement, we cannot be certain whether Draco has abandoned his racist beliefs. Throughout the books, Draco is a more low-level threat to Harry and his friends, he is his 'earthly rival' in contrast to Voldemort's supernatural and all-encompassing threat to the wizarding and Muggle worlds. While Voldemort is a rather static character and does not undergo any development in the series, what was interesting about him was working out the question of *why* he became so evil. The question of nature vs. nurture was

explored, and it turned out the nature argument has more substance with regard to Voldemort. He seems to have been born evil, which raises interesting questions of culpability. However, this also means he is not as complex or 'interesting' as some of the more multi-layered characters. Lastly, Dolores Umbridge as an evil character was explored because of the fact that she is often named as the most hated character. Of course, technically Voldemort is the worst character in *Harry Potter* – after all, he is a mass-murdering megalomaniac. Nevertheless, there is something about Professor Umbridge that really incites the readers' anger and hatred. Several possible explanations for this were given in this thesis, the most convincing one arguably being that Umbridge's power over others to do as she pleases is legitimised by the government. Dolores Umbridge is also an 'atypical' villain because her physical appearance goes counter to our expectations of what villains in fantasy or children's literature look like. Another interesting finding about Umbridge is that her evil is disconnected from Voldemort, even though they share the same ideology. This is therefore yet another instance where more 'diversity' in villainous characters is shown in *Harry Potter*. The book series warns readers that evil does not only exist in such obvious villains such as Lord Voldemort, but it can also manifest in ordinary people who act out as school bullies, unfair and threatening teachers, or government officials with power. As Sirius Black words it: "[T]he world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters" (*Order* 271).

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7. Appendix

Abstract (English)

This thesis aims to look at how selected characters from J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* can be described and evaluated as villains. In the theoretical part of this thesis, different genres *Harry Potter* belongs to, such as fantasy fiction and the school story, are defined and the villainous characters are later also analysed from this perspective. The question of what makes a villain is discussed, as well as how to distinguish between good and evil. In the analytical part of this thesis, four selected characters are analysed with regard to their physical appearance, characteristics, ideology, role in the narrative, and other features that could help in describing them as villains. The results of this analysis show that there are different kinds of villainous characters in *Harry Potter*, ranging from the stereotypical and static arch-villain Lord Voldemort, to school bully Draco Malfoy, cruel Potions teacher Severus Snape and power-hungry Ministry official Dolores Umbridge. They differ in many ways, such as level of threat, amount of power, and even how much they are hated by the readership. This thesis also shows that the world of the characters in *Harry Potter* cannot be split clearly into good and evil people, but a grey area exists as well.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, zu untersuchen wie ausgewählte Charaktere aus J.K. Rowlings *Harry Potter* als Bösewichte beschrieben und bewertet werden können. Im theoretischen Teil dieser Arbeit werden verschiedene Genres die *Harry Potter* zugeordnet werden können, wie zum Beispiel Fantasy und die Schulgeschichte, definiert und die ausgewählten Charaktere später auch aus dieser Perspektive analysiert. Die Frage was einen Bösewicht ausmacht wird diskutiert, ebenso die Frage wie man zwischen Gut und Böse unterscheiden kann. Im analytischen Teil dieser Arbeit werden vier ausgewählte Charaktere hinsichtlich ihres physischen Erscheinungsbilds, ihrer Eigenschaften, ihrer Ideologie, ihrer Rolle in der Geschichte und anderer Merkmale analysiert, die bei der Beschreibung als Bösewichte hilfreich sein könnten. Die Ergebnisse dieser Analyse zeigen, dass es in *Harry Potter* verschiedene Arten von bösartigen Charakteren gibt, angefangen vom stereotypen Erzschurken Lord Voldemort über den Mobber Draco Malfoy, den unfairen und gemeinen Zaubertranklehrer Severus Snape bis hin zur machtgierigen und grausamen Beamtin des Zaubereiministeriums, Dolores Umbridge. Diese Charaktere unterscheiden sich in vielerlei Hinsicht, wie zum Beispiel im

Ausmaß der Bedrohung, die sie darstellen, die Macht die sie haben und sogar, wie sehr sie von der Leserschaft gehasst werden. Diese Arbeit zeigt auch, dass die Welt der Charaktere in *Harry Potter* nicht klar in gute und böse Menschen aufgeteilt werden kann, sondern auch eine Grauzone existiert.