A Trinity of Choices:
A Theoretical Analysis of the *Harry Potter* Series

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By

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who, at some point in my life, encouraged me to think and analyze life and the incredible world of literature. Specifically, I’d like to dedicate this thesis to four women: to my 7th grade English teacher, Ms. Ott, for discovering my talent as a writer; to my high school English teacher, Ms. Hall, for prompting my love affair with literature and for teaching me to analyze, explore, and question everything about a text (and life in general); to my critical and literary theory professor, Dr. Chatterjee, for not only igniting within me a passion toward theory but for expecting nothing short of perfection from me during the writing process of this thesis; and lastly, and most importantly, to my mother, who taught me how to read and the importance of being well-read, who absolved me from all responsibility so that I could focus on my education, and who always believed that I could achieve anything I wanted and encouraged me to do so.
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is concerned with analyzing the characters of Harry Potter, Lord Voldemort, and Professor Severus Snape from the sensational children's book series, *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling through the perspective of literary and critical theory. Although I explain and expand upon the underlying connection between these three characters, who ultimately create a trinity of sorts within the books, I focus mostly on evaluating each character as an individual, as well as within the trinity, through theories of gender, identity formation and development, sexuality, hybridity, language, psychoanalysis, abjection, and others. These theories are described not only as they pertain to the specific characters, but are contextualized in the larger scope of the novels, touching upon lucid central issues as well as veiled trivial issues.
A Trinity of Choices:

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A sweeping success story world-wide, J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* book series encompasses the child-like thrill of magical worlds and the duality and hardship of life. Readers are mesmerized by the fantastic and culturally diverse storylines, which deal with serious issues, philosophical binaries, and character relationships. Perhaps the most important symbolic and meaningful relationship within the context of the story is the trinity of Harry Potter, Severus Snape, and Lord Voldemort/Tom Riddle, in which one is apparently wholly good (Harry), one is wholly evil (Voldemort), and one acts as the catalyst that allows for the relationships to co-exist (Snape). Yet when examined closely, one can see how these characters’ personalities, identities, and missions in life are intertwined, and that without the existence of one, there would be no reason for the existence of the others. Seemingly polar opposites, at first glance these three central characters share more than a mission: they all share an existence as an “other” because of their childhoods, linguistic abilities, and hybrid identities. By “other” I mean that each man is ostracized from the main group or society in which he exists, whether in the Muggle/human or wizard world. In addition to this, Harry, Snape, and Voldemort are essential to one another’s existence: Voldemort needs Harry in order to become a full entity once again, while Harry, unknowingly, needs Snape to protect him from Voldemort and others who wish for Harry’s demise. Furthermore, each character’s existence stems from the critical role played by Harry’s mother Lily, whose presence in the book is a driving force, albeit not physical or frequent. It is Lily’s blood that protects Harry from Voldemort until he is seventeen; it is Lily’s blood that Voldemort needs in
order to be able to touch Harry and to resurrect himself; and it is Lily’s blood running through Harry that reminds Snape of his one and only love and enables him to protect Harry. The intimate connection with Lily’s blood and their respective failures to perform certain roles in either the Muggle or wizarding worlds because of their hybrid identity is what isolates each of these men in their distinct communities. Their simultaneously striking similarities and differences are what connect and set these three characters apart, but it is ultimately their choices in life that establish each as an individual.

Surprisingly, there is very little scholarship on these complex relationships. For the most part, scholarship consists of reviews of the books and films. In fact, since the books were first released, the biggest and most deafening debate has concerned their “anti-Christian” tone. Religious parents were outraged at Rowling’s (supposed) outrageously blatant call for children to practice witchcraft. Interestingly, while they promoted the banning of the books, these parents and their supporters openly confessed to not having read the books because they deemed them amoral, blasphemous, and a testament to the degradation of our society. However, Peter Ciaccio, in “Harry Potter and Christian Theology,” suggests that the Harry Potter books actually take a great deal from Christianity and the Bible, and that all it takes is a little insight and patience to see how similar and intertwined they really are. Ciaccio explains that children’s books are “generally morality tales explaining real issues and unpleasant realities in a symbolic or metaphorical way,” much like the stories and proverbs of the Bible (34). He makes the point that “Harry Potter offers a complex understanding of life: death and grief play an important part; loyal and critical friends are preferable to noncritical servants; and love, trust, and honesty are always preferable, even if they bring danger” (35). The examples
provided in the article demonstrate how the *Harry Potter* books focus on ordinary, important, Judeo-Christian topics such as being loyal to one's friends; caring for and protecting others; keeping one's heart, soul, and thoughts pure; not participating in acts of evil; not being tempted by money or power; not sinning, and so on. Most importantly, though, the series teaches children not how to do magic, but rather that "love is a means of redemption and ultimate victory" (Ciaccio 45). Moreover, the books imply that being moral, honest, and caring are highly-esteemed traits in any individual, a message strikingly similar to that of the Holy Book.

Other limited scholarship on this series focuses on the effects that the books have on adolescents and on the "Pottermania" phenomenon in general. A fresh perspective is provided by Meredith Cherland in her article, "Harry's Girls: Harry Potter and the Discourse of Gender," which discusses the different female characters and their roles in the books. The article also investigates the principle elements of humanism and poststructuralist theory as they pertain to the construction of the book series. For example, Cherland states that "in humanism, language is a tool for naming and describing a reality that already exists in the world," while poststructuralist theory considers that the "meaning of language shifts according to social context [...because] language is the site where reality and the social order are created" (275). This is relevant to the *Harry Potter* series since language plays a vital role both in Harry's estrangement from his Muggle family and the wizarding community at Hogwarts, and in his connection to Lord Voldemort through Parseltongue. It is the fluency or lack thereof in a particular language that deems Harry either "normal" or an outcast in the corresponding group. Another important point Cherland makes is that of the role of desire which, according to
humanism, is "a feeling that is a part of who a person really is," something that is clearly represented by Harry’s desire for a family and home. According to poststructuralist theories, however, "we come to desire what we believe to be normal," and as Cherland infers, this is how the books "work to organize our [the readers’] desires" (276). Cherland claims that from a humanist perspective Harry is "an individual who makes choices and acts as a free and worthy moral agent, in accordance with truth"; yet, from a poststructuralist standpoint, Harry is "caught up in desire [...] and troubles the binaries of good and evil" (277). I shall argue that although Harry, Snape, and Voldemort share striking similarities, it is choices that make each character unique and exceptional. By exceptional I mean both as an exception to the norm, thereby making them "others," as well as exceptional in the sense that each of the characters is unlike the others because of a particular attribute or skill.

Surprisingly, after thirteen years since the publication of the first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (retitled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in the United States), there is still no scholarship that explores the relationship between Harry, Snape, and Voldemort, arguably the three most important and intriguing characters in the series. Harry, Snape, and Voldemort may be seen as opposite sides of a triangle because of the similarities they share. Because of their particular identity formation, their specific linguistic abilities, and their inability to fully perform their expected role at various points in the novel, Harry, Snape, and Voldemort are constructed as "others." Indeed, these three characters are "others": orphaned half-bloods (a mix of human and wizard), who are connected to each other through specific blood ties. Yet, perhaps the most important element that connects these three seemingly
unrelated characters is the particular choices they make. As Dumbledore explains to Harry in *The Chamber of Secrets*, “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (Rowling 333). The two crucial subjects to be explored in this paper are how Harry, Snape, and Voldemort are “othered” in the wizarding community because of their skills and ties; and how, while they share many characteristics, it is ultimately their choices that make them both exceptional and different from one another. All three characters have choices, and their choices lead each of them down his corresponding path, making one good, one bad, and one conflicted. For example, all three participate in death or killing, but each chooses how to do this. Harry and Snape both fight evil in order to rid the world of Voldemort and to save those they love, while Voldemort kills out of the sheer pleasure of inflicting pain and suffering, and for his selfish reasons of fulfilling his quest for immortality. Both Harry and Snape also choose to make significant sacrifices: they sacrifice their lives in order to conquer Voldemort. Ultimately, it is the choices of each man that separate him from his social group and make him an “other.”

This concept of “the other” is one of the key factors among these three characters because it is what sets them apart from everyone else, while ultimately associating them more closely with one another. In his “Introduction” to *Orientalism*, Edward Said discusses the phenomenon of Orientalism in which the Occident projects onto the Orient images of barbarity, exoticism, mysticism, magic, sensuality, and so on. In other words, Orientalism is the process whereby the Occident creates a negative image of the Orient with the purpose of developing clear distinctions between the two in order to maintain the “relationship of power, of domination, [and] of varying degrees of a complex hegemony”
Said concludes that “Orientalism is— and does not simply represent— a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (221). Moreover, this “other” is regarded as incapable of communicating and, therefore, must be spoken for by a more civilized and qualified being. This argument is anticipated by Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (qtd. in Said 227). This is the notion of an “us” versus “them” world to which Said also refers, in which one group or individual ostracizes another group or individual because of differences in traits, ideology, societal structure, and/or inherent characteristics, such as color or gender, among other factors. Though Said’s theory of the “other” has been applied to the categories of gender, age, childhood, race, and religion, as a way to explain how an ostracized person or group may be viewed as exotic, strange, or foreign, I suggest that one can also focus on linguistic and magical abilities to discuss how our three male characters are otherized.

One reason why these three characters are “others” is because they are incapable of performing their correct gender roles as males according to society’s standards, whatever society that may be at the time. Put simply: Harry is too child-like, Snape is too androgynous, and Voldemort is too creature-like. In her “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Judith Butler argues that performativity is a key factor in defining gender and identity because:

There is no “proper” gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another [...] but rather] *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original* [...] and thus] the “reality” of heterosexual identities is
Gender is determined instead by one’s performance of a certain gender or gender-associated role. Butler emphasizes that “gender is a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core” (376). The success or failure with which we perform our gender dictates whether we are seen and labeled as “normal” or “abnormal” by society. This exploration of normal and abnormal behaviors in a given context is something that Gayle Rubin discusses in her theory of normativity in “Thinking Sex: Notes Towards a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality.” Rubin declares that every society and specific circumstance has its guidelines for what is considered normal and abnormal, and that a person who does not respect these boundaries is punished. This is the reason why Harry fails to assimilate in both the Muggle and wizarding world: he fails to correctly perform his identity in each and does not act in a way that is considered normal for that given context. Harry is inadequate because of his unfamiliarity with the wizarding world and its ways, and at the same time in the Muggle world, Harry is a timid and frail adolescent in comparison to his over-sized and intimidating cousin Dudley. His inadequacy in performing his gender roles can be considered a result of his inexperience in either world. He does not perform the Muggle expectations of masculinity and lacks the competence in magic to be up to par with his peers in the wizarding world. Thus, his failure makes him abnormal, which, as a result, prevents him from properly performing in either world, creating a vicious cycle of regulation.
In Franz Fanon’s words, Harry inhabits the “history that others have compiled” for him (69) in both the Muggle and wizard worlds. As a wizard, Harry is considered by the other wizards and witches to be dim-witted and behind on magical information, such as Quidditch, a game similar to football played by two teams of seven witches and wizards on broomsticks, using four balls and six elevated ring-shaped goals. It takes time for him to be accepted by the other students, but even that acceptance is overshadowed by the fate of which he is unaware. His lightning-shaped scar acts as a constant reminder of his special or “chosen” status among wizards and will later be the means by which Harry connects with Voldemort’s mind. The prophecy made about Harry—his legendary escape and destruction of Voldemort, and, therefore, his duty to lead the war against Voldemort when he returns—pre-determines Harry’s fate: to either kill Voldemort or be killed by him. The story is written before he is a conscious being, thereby leaving him no choice but to follow unconsciously in its footsteps as he grows up. Similarly, by his Muggle family, everything associated with magic and the wizarding world is considered to be bizarre, infantile and abnormal, a category that Harry immediately falls into when his Hogwarts acceptance letter arrives. In this way, Rowling’s books depict the internal struggle that takes place within Harry for his right to discover and live through his hybrid consciousness. He must reach his own conclusions about life and his role within it, and he must formulate his own meaning of it all, instead of merely existing within a “meaning that was already there, pre-existing, [and] waiting” for him (Fanon 77).

The same can be said about Snape, who is also considered a misfit in his respective circle. As an adolescent, Snape is ostracized and publicly humiliated by the other students at Hogwarts for being dirty, melancholy, and anti-social. When observing
Snape’s worst memory as a teenager at Hogwarts, Harry notes that “Snape was clearly unpopular” (Rowling, *Order* 646), and mentions that Snape isolates himself “on the grass in the dense shadows of a clump of bushes” (644), as a crowd gathers to watch and laugh while James humiliates and tortures him. The scene of humiliation itself is cruel and demeaning. After taunting him verbally, James Potter uses the “Scourgify” spell and Harry watches as “Pink soap bubbles streamed from Snape’s mouth […] covering his lips, making him gag, choking him—” (646). Then, after a short scuffle with Lily Evans, James again directs his wand at Snape, and in the next moment, Snape is “hanging upside down in the air, his robes falling over his head to reveal skinny, pallid legs and a pair of graying underpants” (647). As a student at Hogwarts, Snape was similar to Harry as a Muggle because he, too, was weak and introverted beside Harry’s tough and quick-to-bully father, James. When he returns to Hogwarts as a teacher, Snape is cold and mechanical, almost non-human, especially in comparison to the warm and compassionate personalities of the other teachers. Even his name, Severus, exemplifies his nature, since “severus” translated from Latin means “serious, strict.” Hence, Snape continues to be placed in the “abnormal” category by his classmates as a student and by his colleagues as a professor because of his inadequacy and inability to perform his role correctly in the social context of Hogwarts.

Tom Riddle, too, retreats to the fabricated dark world of his mind and is later hated and fought against as Lord Voldemort. Tom Riddle is the quintessential male, performing his role as a student at Hogwarts perfectly. Although he may not have had many friends, he was admired and respected by Dumbledore and other professors. This almost universal admiration and respect for his pleasant demeanor, courteous attitude,
and intelligence, are what allow Tom to get everything he wants, such as the information on Horcruxes that he seeks from Professor Slughorn. However, after a series of choices and negative changes to his personality, as well as the damage sustained by his soul through the creation of Horcruxes, Tom transforms into a creature-like being known as Voldemort. His serpentine features and devilish attributes make Voldemort inhuman and, therefore, leave him unable to perform his correct role. Consequently, his inability to do so makes him inadequate and “abnormal” in Rubin’s analysis of normative behavior in a given context.

Moreover, I suggest that Harry, Snape, and Voldemort are not regarded as normal males by the social circles at Hogwarts. It is important to note that the characteristics of normality which I discuss are interlaced in different modes, such as gender, age, and humanity. It should not be mistakenly assumed that I mean to equate these different modes, but rather should be understood that they are meant to fill out the rough edges of comparison amongst these three very different characters. And so, Snape is considered to be less than human because of his cold and mechanical nature and characteristics, while Voldemort is presented as creature-like throughout most of the books. Harry, too, is never portrayed as a man. At first he is depicted as more than human, an almost god-like character who can withstand all of fate’s tests and trials. Known as the famous “boy-who-lived,” Harry continues to be perceived by readers and his social circles as only a boy, partly because of his lack of a sexual relationship, which maintains his child-like identity. As Maria Nikolajeva states in her article “Harry Potter and the Secrets of Children’s Literature,” “Sexually, Harry is eternally pre-pubertal” and “is amazingly infantile and immature for his age, both emotionally and psychologically” (237). Unlike with Ron,
readers are never told that Harry’s voice deepens, or that he has facial hair, or that his hormones affect him in any way. It is this inability to perform as a man that keeps Harry’s character in the state of an inadequate adult and childish boy. Even in comparison to Hermione, who is portrayed as having blossomed into a beautiful young woman when she is described in her ball gown, elegant hair do, and make-up at the Yule Ball in *The Goblet of Fire*, Harry lacks any significant and noticeable physical changes to his male physique. Yet although Harry lacks any significant kind of sexuality (the exception being Ginny toward the end of the series), he is the only one of the three characters who has any type of conventional masculine traits, such as heroism and courage.

Voldemort, on the other hand, can’t even be considered an androgynous character due to his lack of a body in the first book, his snake-like features, and almost asexual body. At the beginning of the series, Voldemort exists as an almost ethereal or spiritual character because he commands the body of Professor Quirrell, a character who, in himself, is questionably masculine because of his cowardice and inadequacy as a Dark Arts teacher. When Voldemort begins to obtain a body and, therefore, a sense of self, his features are described as being “flat and snake-like, with gleaming red eyes” (Rowling, *Goblet* 640) on a white, hairless, and frail body. All of these snake-like characteristics make Voldemort less than human.

Aside from their inability to perform their gender roles, Harry, Snape, and Voldemort also exhibit hybrid identities. Because Harry’s parents are murdered by Lord Voldemort when Harry is only a baby, the vital maternal connection for identity formation between Harry and his mother, Lily, is severed. As a result, this leaves Harry
without a means of understanding the world around him or of developing his skills as both an individual and as a wizard. When the wizarding community discovers Harry’s miraculous survival, despite Voldemort’s killing curse “Avada Kedavra,” Dumbledore decides to bring Harry to his only remaining living relatives, the Dursleys. The Dursleys’ treatment of Harry is anything but familial: they speak about him “as though he wasn’t there— or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn’t understand them, like a slug” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 22). They lock him in his cupboard, exclude him from family activities, and withhold the truth about his parents and his identity from him. The animosity and loneliness that their treatment generates within Harry changes when he attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a place that quickly becomes “the first and best home he had known” (Rowling, *Deathly Hollows* 697). Harry, like Tom Riddle in his time, gravitates toward Hogwarts because of his isolation in his own family and his lack of friends. As John Kornfeld and Laurie Prothro discuss in their article, “Comedy, Quest, and Community,” because of the several family units that Harry has at Hogwarts— the larger community of Hogwarts, the smaller community of Gryffindor, and his intimate friendship with Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger— “for the first time in his life, Harry knows what it means to belong” (125). Kornfeld and Prothro argue that Harry’s “journey of self-discovery” (131) only begins when he must leave his home in order to find a home and himself. Incidents such as his discovery of “The Mirror of Erised,” a mirror which shows men the true desire of their hearts and happens to show Harry his deceased parents, and his willful acknowledgement of his necessary sacrifice, are examples of his “solitary search for his true family […] and for his
own identity" (135). This lack of an original family and home is what triggers Harry’s search for identity and fosters his hybrid identity as both a Muggle and a Wizard.

Severus Snape’s identity is also marred despite the fact that he has a constant family and home. Like Harry, Snape is a half-blood: a Muggle from his father, Tobias Snape’s side, and a Wizard from his mother, Eileen Prince’s side. He gravitates toward his mother’s side because of her magical powers associated with the wizarding world. However, unlike Harry, who is involuntarily made an orphan because of the death of his parents, Snape is more of a metaphorical orphan, neglected by his parents and shunned by his peers. Although the books do not provide readers with much information about Snape’s family or childhood, one can go back to the memories that Snape imparts to Harry in *The Half Blood Prince*, in which the absence of a parent figure is quite clear. In one of these memories, Snape recalls his father verbally abusing his mother while he cries in a corner. This scene illustrates an abusive and hostile environment, which explains why his mother failed to care for Snape, thereby leaving him to fend for himself. This lack of a role model or adult authority figure to guide him through the depression of his teenage years is what prompts his identity crisis. In fact, it is most likely that this crisis and his desire to feel wanted and needed in a group or community that makes him join Lord Voldemort’s Death Eaters. His dysfunctional family life follows him to Hogwarts where he is again bullied. Snape may not have naturally been a troubled or angry child, but he was certainly bullied and teased for not fitting in because of his greasy black hair, dark clothes, and somber attitude: “Snape-the-teenager had a stringy pallid look about him, like a plant kept in the dark. His hair was lank and greasy and was flopping onto the table, his hooked nose barely half an inch from the parchment”
(Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 640-641). Like Harry and Tom Riddle, Snape searches for and hopes to find a new home at Hogwarts in order to feel a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, here, too, he is left to himself. He joins the Death Eaters who don’t need him to change anything about himself. However, as a Death Eater, he loses his friend Lily Evans, a Muggle wizard at Hogwarts for whom he secretly cared. His hybrid identity and its subsequent identity crisis is, thus, a product of parental neglect and teasing at Hogwarts. Though being a Death Eater makes him feel part of a whole, this identity also contradicts the desires of his heart, namely, loving and living with the Muggle wizard Lily in peace and isolation.

The third orphan in this trinity, though made an orphan by his own choice, is Tom Marvolo Riddle, the boy who would later become Lord Voldemort. Like both Harry and Snape, Voldemort is a half-blood. Tom’s mother is a pureblood witch, Merope Gaunt, and his father, Tom Riddle, is a Muggle who abandons his mother before Tom is born. Tom Riddle, Jr. (Voldemort) hates his Muggle father and tells Harry in the chamber of secrets that he “was [not] going to use his filthy Muggle father’s name forever” because “the blood of Salazar Slytherin, himself” runs through Tom’s veins on his mother’s side (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 314). Tom’s mother “died giving birth to [him], leaving [him] to be raised in a Muggle orphanage” (Rowling, *The Goblet of Fire* 646), after which he vowed to avenge his mother’s death by killing his father and his paternal grandparents. This is when Tom creates his second Horcrux (an object into which one projects a piece of one’s soul through dark magic and murder), Marvolo’s ring, in his maternal grandfather’s ring. Even though Tom identifies with his mother’s wizard side, the fact that she died in childbirth prevents him from developing an emotional
attachment. One might argue that this lack of a mother-son bond stunts Tom’s development. Because he is an orphan, Tom’s identity formation is very similar to Harry’s, even though Harry’s was involuntary and Tom’s was intentional. With all of this pent-up anger, hatred, and loneliness, Tom Riddle begins to seek ways in which he can become powerful, respected, and feared. Tom states, “I’ve always been able to charm the people I needed” (Rowling, Chamber 310), which explains why he is favored by Dumbledore and the other professors at Hogwarts. Tom becomes fascinated with dark magic and, after learning about Horcruxes, initiates his plan and works on his goal to transform into the most powerful dark wizard known to the wizarding world: Lord Voldemort.

Their hybrid identity ultimately makes all three characters “others” in their surrounding groups as well. As Jayetta Slawson states in her article, “Harry Potter Books as Indexes of American Culture,” “the Harry Potter books speak to issues of hybridity and pluralism in global contexts, and to the conflicting ideologies between groups of people” (72) in the magical world as well as in the Muggle world. Although Slawson specifically refers to the violence and hatred expressed by the pureblood wizards toward the Muggle wizards or “Mudbloods,” a derogatory word used in the wizarding world to refer to wizards of human descent, her idea may be used to argue for the “othering” of Muggles by wizards, and vice versa. Thus, Harry as a Muggle is “othered” both by Muggles, for not being “normal,” and by wizards, for having been brought up by Muggles. In the same way, Harry the wizard is also “othered” by the wizarding community for both not being pureblood and, at the same time, for having a magical connection with Voldemort, something none of the other wizards possesses.
As a Muggle raised by the Dursleys for eleven years, Harry never fits into the human world because of his inability to control his magic and his ignorance about the involuntary magic he can perform. Moreover, because the Dursleys know of his origins, they regard him as a freak. When Hagrid, the Hogwarts’ groundskeeper, arrives with news of Harry’s acceptance to Hogwarts and explains to him who he is, who his parents were, and what kind of world he belongs to, Harry realizes that he is not a freak, and that he has merely been living in the wrong place with the wrong kinds of people. Although such a discovery should make Harry feel more complete and at home, he continues to feel inadequate and out of place in the wizarding world because he doesn’t know how to be a wizard. It is this hybridity, this inability to belong solely to one specific group, which makes Harry an “other” in both worlds.

According to Roni Natov’s “Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary,” “magical [characters] are defined by their human as well as their magical traits” (317), and even though Harry “embodies both the ordinary and the extraordinary” (Natov 315), Harry doesn’t fit in either world. At first, everyone is shocked and excited to meet him because of his legendary survival of the killing curse. By his second year at Hogwarts, his actions, such as losing points for Gryffindor, and his abilities, such as connecting with Voldemort’s mind, alienate him from his fellow students. Besides his closest friends, who also have their doubts at one point, not one of the other students wants to associate with him: “everywhere Harry went, people pointed and didn’t trouble to lower their voices as they insulted him” (Rowling, Sorcerer’s Stone 244-245). The students at Hogwarts, like the Dursleys, begin to see him as a narcissistic and eccentric misfit.
In an earlier generation, as a student at Hogwarts, Snape, too, is seen as an “other,” because of his appearance and demeanor. He is not accepted by the other students partly because of his own anti-social behavior, but partly also because he makes them uncomfortable. The only person who befriends him is Lily, Harry’s mother, but even she severs their friendship when Snape insults her by saying that she’s just like everyone else. As he grows older, Snape appears to stay the same introverted and “weird” individual he was before. He continues to be shunned by both the students and the faculty at Hogwarts, with the exception of Dumbledore. At Hogwarts, students and faculty do not fully trust him because they find him rude and condescending and because of his apparent association with Voldemort. Harry is determined to prove this evil connection throughout the series because of Snape’s rough treatment of him. As with Said’s “other,” everyone projects his/her insecurities onto Snape. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Snape’s sincerity and loyalty to the mission and the Order are questioned by the Order’s various members because of his dubious behavior and questionable intentions. Throughout several books, Harry is convinced that Snape is conspiring with Draco Malfoy, whose father and family pledge loyalty to Voldemort, and the Death Eaters to get rid of Harry and to help Voldemort return. These beliefs are only intensified when Harry witnesses Dumbledore’s murder (Draco’s inability to complete the task and Snape’s swift and heartless fulfillment of it). Moreover, Snape’s loyalty to Voldemort is questioned by his former fellow Death Eaters, particularly when he doesn’t aid in the search and revival of Lord Voldemort. No one except Dumbledore knows, however, that his sudden distance is due to the fact that Snape renounced his participation with the Death Eaters after Voldemort killed Lily, the love of Snape’s life, and that he is really acting as a double agent for Dumbledore when
he returns to work for him at Hogwarts. Snape’s image as a snide and malicious teacher casts him as an antagonist, though he is really successfully working for Dumbledore. Unfortunately, readers and characters alike only discover his loyalty and virtuous nature at the end of the series, when the truth about his mission is unveiled. But because he is seen as an antagonist until the end, Snape remains isolated in all the groups, and like Harry, he must continue to prove himself to each group in order to accomplish his higher goal of protecting Harry.

The third misfit, Tom Riddle, also has problems fitting in, mostly during his experience in the Muggle world. As readers are shown through Dumbledore’s memory of visiting the orphanage, Tom, like Snape, is an anti-social child. He does not care much for friends and seems to want to control others. The rage that he has contained within himself for years manifests itself through manipulation, feelings of abhorrence toward Muggles, and the intense desire to exert the inexplicable power he feels inside himself. Tom terrorizes the other orphans; for example, Mrs. Cole, the matron at the orphanage, tells Dumbledore that after Tom got into an argument with one of the orphans, Billy Stubb, Billy’s rabbit was found hanging from the rafters (Rowling, The Half-Blood Prince 267). This illustrates Tom’s cold-heartedness and foreshadows his desire to exert his will and domination over others. However, after he decides to transform into the powerful dark wizard Lord Voldemort, Tom Riddle doesn’t seem to have any problem fitting in to a particular group, mostly due to the fact that he makes his own group. His insatiable desire to be immortal and to be the most powerful dark wizard in the world leads him to create a group of disciple-like followers called the Death Eaters. Once Tom Riddle is transformed into Lord Voldemort, with a community of obedient followers
ready and willing to do his bidding, he is no longer an ostracized “other.” The Death Eaters become an extension of Lord Voldemort. Their faith and loyalty to him are unwavering even when the consequences may be prison or death. Lord Voldemort finally achieves the control and authority that he had always wanted, and the only goal left for him is to be in complete control of the entire wizarding world.

Although throughout the series Harry is compared to Voldemort because of his ability to speak Parseltongue (the language of the Dark Lord) and because of his mind/dream connection with Voldemort later in the series, Harry has many other male figures in his life. Each of these figures contributes to the development of Harry as a character and as a person, and each appends Harry’s decision-making process in some way. Indeed, Harry’s identity, while connected to Voldemort, develops through his relationships with various father figures: James Potter, Severus Snape, Albus Dumbledore, and Sirius Black. Although his father is dead, he still has a presence in Harry’s life because of the “constant reminders of his heritage—the fact that he has his mother’s eyes, or his father’s athletic skills” (Kornfeld and Prothro 129). His father’s presence is also evident every time Harry conjures a Patronus, which is described by Professor Lupin as a unique, silvery-white “guardian that acts as a shield between [a wizard] and a dementor” and is conjured “with an incantation, which will only work if [one concentrates] with all [one’s] might, on a single, very happy memory” (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban* 237). “Coincidentally,” the Patronus has the Latin root word for ‘father,’ which, in Harry’s case, is more than “coincidental” since his Patronus is a stag, just like his father’s. Furthermore, his parents protect Harry at crucial points throughout the books, as illustrated by their appearance as ghosts during Harry’s discovery of the
Mirror of Erised, and later again during his wand’s connection with Voldemort’s wand in *The Goblet of Fire*, when he sees the ghosts of all the people Voldemort’s wand has killed. Yet Harry’s image of his father as being noble, smart, and kind is drastically altered when he sees Snape’s schoolboy memory of James being an arrogant bully and teasing Snape. Although Harry’s idealization of his father is compromised when Harry unwillingly re-evaluates the image that he has created in his mind of his father, he cannot seem to fully empathize with Snape until Snape’s true identity is unveiled. Even though Harry distrusts him and thinks his alliance lies with Voldemort, Snape is a father figure to Harry because he actually protects and defends Harry, which Harry later discovers is due to his eternal love for Harry’s mother Lily. After proving him innocent, Sirius Black also becomes an important father figure to Harry because he is Harry’s godfather and James’ best friend. Like Snape, Sirius, too, risks his life and risks being recaptured to help or save Harry in specific situations, thereby “fulfilling [his] duty as godfather” (Rowling, *Goblet* 522). Because Sirius is the only real family Harry has ever known, his death in *The Order of the Phoenix* devastates Harry, making his life seem even more unfair and unjust than it already is.

For both Snape and Voldemort, whose fathers were Muggles neither one admired, their identities are formed in relation to their mothers. As readers discover in *The Half-Blood Prince*, Snape always had a stronger emotional connection with his mother and took her unmarried last name, Prince, for his new title. Voldemort, too, tried to rid himself of everything relating to his father, not only by killing his family and declaring war on Mudbloods, but also by changing his name. I suggest that their lack of a father figure and lack of connection with such a figure is what keeps them from wholly entering
what Jacques Lacan calls the symbolic order, or linguistic sign system of power; that is, they remain marginal “others” in the wizarding world. However, despite their attempts to drown out the masculine and their own patriarchal associations, an important tie remains: the name. “Snape” is the last name of Severus’ father, while “Lord Voldemort” is merely the rearranged letters of Tom Marvolo Riddle, the first and last name of Tom’s father. In other words, their names, one of the preeminent signs with which we are associated in the symbolic order, remain patriarchal.

Both characters are, then, what I call troubled hybrids, identified with their hated Muggle fathers but longing for their wizarding mothers. Both characters seem to seek the feminine. Throughout the books, Snape acts because of his idealization of his love for Lily, while Voldemort seeks Harry’s blood, precisely because it is Lily’s blood which can overcome the spell that Lily’s love and sacrifice placed upon her son. What is interesting about these links to the feminine is their specific association to Lily. Although never present as more than a spirit throughout the books, Harry’s mother Lily plays an incredibly important role for this trio of male characters. As mentioned earlier, all of Snape’s actions are dictated by his undying love for Lily. As much as he loathes Harry for being the son of James Potter, he chooses to protect Harry and to keep an eye on him because he is Lily’s son as well. Seconds before his death in the last book, Snape asks Harry to look at him so that the last thing he sees is Lily’s eyes (since Harry was often told that he looked like his father but had his mother’s eyes). Taking with him the one thing he had wanted throughout his life, Snape can finally die in peace. But aside from physical attributes, Lily’s blood itself is crucial to both Harry and Voldemort. By sacrificing herself to save the life of her child, Lily’s maternal love places a protective
spell over Harry that would not allow Voldemort to touch him until his seventeenth birthday. Her sacrificial love is so strong that when Voldemort turns on baby Harry to kill him, the “Avada Kedavra,” or killing curse, backfires, killing Voldemort as a physical form and forcing him to spend years in hiding and recuperation. Lily’s blood is so important that Voldemort needs it to regain his form and power. This is why Harry is transported to the Riddle family gravesite at the end of his third task in the Triwizard Tournament: Voldemort must have “‘B-blood of the enemy . . . forcibly taken . . .’” (Rowling Goblet 642) in order to resurrect and restore himself to full power. That having been said, both Snape and Voldemort continue to act as exceptional examples of Lacan’s symbolic order (which is associated with the father) gone wrong, precisely because of their intense dependence on the feminine.

The only two constant father figures that Harry has throughout the series are Hagrid, the groundskeeper at Hogwarts, and Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster. Hagrid is one of the most important and constant father figures in Harry’s life because it is Hagrid whom Harry seeks out for advice and comfort. In fact, according to the Lacanian symbolic order, Hagrid is the most fitting father figure because it is he who introduces Harry to the wizarding world, and he does so through the written form of a letter. It is also Hagrid who carries Harry’s lifeless body from the final battle scene in the last book, symbolically removing him from the symbolic order and the world to which he was brought. Dumbledore is also a constant father figure because it is his continual presence and devotion to Harry’s safety and success that spares Harry punishment, humility, and even death. However, in The Order of the Phoenix, Dumbledore mysteriously stops talking and looking at Harry, which later is revealed to be for Harry’s protection, and
then in *The Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore follows the fate of Harry’s other father figures (all except Hagrid) and dies. Interestingly, both Dumbledore and Hagrid are made similarly incompetent by their love for their “child” – Harry – causing them to overlook certain offenses and mistakes he makes, such as sneaking around Hogwarts at night, visiting Hagrid when leaving the campus is forbidden, and getting into all sorts of trouble that, in the end, makes him a hero. While this pattern of disappearing father figures hinders Harry’s character, it is also the presence of multiple father figures, and their eventual death, that helps Harry become an individual, because he learns that he must develop his own strengths and not depend on older males. Harry becomes a fully mature man because of the influence of such different men and their experiences. It is the presence and then disappearance of these father figures that helps Harry realize his identity.

Harry’s hybridity is displayed not only through his actions and double identity as a Muggle and Wizard, but also through his ability to speak different languages. As Gloria Anzaldúa states in her article, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (360), indicating that one’s culture, ethnicity, and language are not only intricately interwoven in a complex pattern of co-existence and co-dependency, but are together what comprise the identity of a person. As Anzaldúa explains, there are variations in Spanish, such as Spanglish and Chicano Spanish, with Spanish speakers in America versus Spanish speakers in Mexico. Despite these variations, the shift from one variation to another happens gradually and unnoticeably, and the shift itself changes the way one is perceived. As Harry’s identity changes with his shifting from the Muggle to Wizarding world, so do his linguistic skills. English is spoken in both the Muggle and
Wizarding world, but the diction and signs that are associated with each word play a major role in one’s ability to be understood. For example, Muggle Harry is not going to talk about “Knuts,” “Howlers,” or “Animagi” to the Dursleys, since he knows that he would not be understood, just as he would not talk about “television,” “ballpoint pens,” or “rollerblades” to Ron or Hagrid. Harry shifts his English lexicon accordingly, depending on his location and needs, allowing him to separate and distinguish between his Muggle English-Muggle identity and Wizard English-Wizard identity. And even though no one from either world ever catches Harry speaking the language of the other, the fact that he can shift between worlds and languages makes him an “other” in that respect.

During Voldemort’s attempt to murder Harry, Voldemort unknowingly transfers a part of himself unto Harry, not only opening a connection between them, but passing on such traits as the ability to hear, speak, and understand Parseltongue, the language of snakes. Earlier in the series, in the Muggle world, Harry speaks to a Brazilian boa constrictor at a zoo, and when he sets it free, he says that he “could have sworn a low, hissing voice said, ‘Brazil, here I come…. Thankssss, amigo’” (Rowling, Stone 28). Because he does not possess knowledge of his wizard abilities, he accepts the situation as being a fantastical stretch of his imagination. In the second book, Harry tells Ron and Hermione that he hears voices within the walls, but their inability to hear the voice makes them think that Harry has gone mad, until he speaks to a conjured snake during the duel between him and Draco Malfoy. At that point, Ron and Hermione realize that Harry has the gift of Parseltongue, and their explanation of its association with dark wizards, like Voldemort, clarifies for Harry why the other students are now afraid of him. Throughout
the series, Harry learns to use this gift as a tool to expand his knowledge about Voldemort’s whereabouts and actions, ultimately using it for good. Yet the mere fact that he can speak a language that only he and Voldemort share “otherizes” him in the eyes of the other students because it straddles the lines between good and bad—being a good guy but speaking the language of the enemy. Partly because of jealousy, but mostly because of their insufficient information about both Harry and Voldemort, the other students consider Harry’s ability to speak Parseltongue a freakish quality, something that links him to dark magic, and therefore, dark wizards. This is something Harry spends six books trying to contest. Rubin’s and Butler’s theories of sexuality and normality are relevant in this situation as well because it is due to Harry’s label as freakish (abnormal) that he cannot fully perform as an individual in either world. In other words, because both worlds consider his linguistic abilities to be sinister, he cannot adequately perform as a male in the Muggle world or as a wizard in the wizarding world. According to structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure, who believed that language was a system of arbitrary signs that express ideas (17), our linguistic sign systems construct our reality; therefore, the more languages one knows, the broader and more colorful one’s perception is of reality. Thus, because of Harry’s ability to speak Muggle English, Wizard English, and Parseltongue, his knowledge and perspective on life and reality differs from those unable to adjust in the same way, something that is exemplified in his unique telepathic connection with Voldemort.

Saussure’s notion of the sign is also an important way to explain why Harry, Snape, and Voldemort are “others,” since it is a sign that demarcates their identities. Harry is physically marked as an “other” because when Voldemort attempted to kill
Harry as a baby, his curse marked Harry with “a very thin scar on his forehead that was shaped like a bolt of lighting” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 20). That scar is like a Saussurian signifier that associates Harry with Voldemort throughout the series, both literally, through the connection that later develops, and historically, as a symbol of proof that Harry is indeed the “boy who lived.” Because of this physical attribute, Harry is first made into a positive “other,” a celebrity because of his unconscious accomplishment of defeating Voldemort, and then into an negative “other,” when students begin to suspect him of using dark magic to open the chamber of secrets. His scar becomes an actual character: “the sign not only of the dark forces which have tried to kill him since birth, but of his survival and the reason for that survival […] the love of his parents” (Deavel & Deavel 50).

In addition to this signifier, Harry is made into a Horcrux when Voldemort’s spell backfires and he involuntarily transfers powers and skills to Harry, “mark[ing] him as his equal” (Rowling, *Order* 841). Their connection is later intensified when Harry’s scar begins to burn as the Dark Lord gets stronger and closer. And even though the other students don’t have this information, it adds to Harry’s “otherness” because it physically, mentally, and spiritually prevents Harry from discovering his true identity and performing it. At one point, Harry, too, begins to doubt his distinction from Voldemort, remembering the Sorting Hat’s indecision about whether to place him in the house of Slytherin—the house Voldemort was in as the student Tom Riddle—or Gryffindor. As he realizes just how much he and Voldemort have in common, Harry begins to think that he “should be in Slytherin […] the Sorting Hat could see Slytherin’s power in me” (Rowling, *Chamber* 333). But Dumbledore explains that “It is our choices, Harry, that
show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (333), and that, because Harry “asked not to go in Slytherin” (333), his choice makes him “very different from Tom Riddle” (333). In their article, Catherine and David Deavel claim that “character is [...] the mark that is left on the world by a person’s chosen actions, [...] his way of being in the world. It is the stuff of the moral judgment of a person” (50). Nevertheless, Harry’s connection with Voldemort through Legilimency (“mind-reading”), his scar, and the fact that he exists as Voldemort’s Horcrux, prevents Harry from escaping his image as an “other” until the epilogue of *Deathly Hallows*, when his scar ceases to play a definitive role in connecting him to Voldemort.

Snape and Voldemort are also demarcated by signs, yet unlike Harry, whose sign was imprinted on him, Snape and Voldemort consciously choose to adopt their signs. Consequently, these signs become a part of each, acting as a reminder of a particular choice, as well as overshadowing further choices of each man. After choosing to become a part of Voldemort’s Death Eaters, Snape receives the mark of the Death Eater on his inner arm. The Dark Mark is the image of a snake protruding from the open mouth of a skull that burns when Voldemort calls his followers to do his bidding. After Snape leaves the Death Eaters and comes back to work for Dumbledore at Hogwarts, it is the possession of this mark that allows Snape to stay in contact with Voldemort and to inform Dumbledore of important decisions Voldemort has made or is about to make. Voldemort, too, has a signifier. He carries the inherent sign of Slytherin in his veins, which allows him to speak Parseltongue, while at the same time being marked by his Muggle father by means of his name. The Dark Mark itself also has various interpretations. The logical interpretation can be that of the skull of Salazar Slytherin, the
founder of the Slytherin House, and the snake as his sign. On the other hand, a more analytical reading can suggest Voldemort as the skull, signifying his death as a mortal, but his immortality through the image of the snake, which throughout the centuries has been known in various cultures, myths, and stories to represent fertility because of its phallic symbolism, and immortality because of its biological ability to shed its skin and begin anew.

According to Alice Mills in her article on “Harry Potter and the Horrors of the Oresteia,” Voldemort’s name is also a combination of signs. Derived from Latin via French, his name may be broken down as vol signifying “wish” and mort signifying “death” (244). Thus, the result is one who wishes for death. At first glance, this might appear to be inconsistent with the fact that Voldemort actually seeks immortality, however, in order to achieve immortality, his physical self must die and, consequently, his being and soul must “die.” The snake part of the Dark Mark is rather interesting to analyze, not only because of all the different meanings snakes can have, but also because of the ways in which those meanings connect with Voldemort. It is quite odd that someone who is asexual, androgynous, and revolted by his mother for involving herself with a Muggle, would choose a female snake as not only one of his Horcruxes, but also as his closest companion. The name of Voldemort’s snake, Nagini, is not a mere fabrication of J.K. Rowling’s imagination either. This is one of the names of the female specimen of Nagas, “a race of semi-divine serpent creatures in Hindu and Buddhist mythology [...] that are known for their strength, supernatural wisdom, and good looks, [...] are immortal and potentially dangerous [...] and serve as protectors and guardians of treasure—both material riches and spiritual wealth” (MythEncyclopedia). This, as well as the mysterious
fact that Nagini is a female embodied in the phallic body of a snake which, in turn, encapsulates Voldemort’s soul, acts as a symbolic explanation for Voldemort as an entity being a sign. If one takes into account Voldemort’s snake-like features and the fact that he is a male while Nagini is a female, there even appears to be a perverse sexual connection between them. For instance, Voldemort can see through Nagini’s eyes when Harry and Hermione visit Bathilda Bagshot, which means that he, the male “snake” is inside the female snake. For that reason, the Death Mark may also be viewed as Voldemort (the snake) being inside Nagini (the host/skull).

The shedding of one identity for another, which Voldemort seems to do as he becomes more and more snake-like, is also exemplified by Harry. Theorist Julia Kristeva explains a process she calls abjection, whereby an individual disposes of pieces of himself, such as nail clippings, cut hair, or excrement, in order to reassert his boundaries. There are several instances of Harry abjecting himself throughout the novels, one of which is a reverse abjection and occurs unconsciously in the first book. Harry states that his Aunt Petunia would constantly make him get haircuts because of the unruly nature of his hair, but overnight the hair would grow back. As Hagrid later explains to Harry, this is because of Harry’s unconscious use of magic through emotions of anger or frustration. This is a form of reverse abjection because through his re-growing of his hair, as opposed to cutting it, Harry reasserts his magical boundaries as an individual in the Dursley house. But Harry’s identity is not concrete enough to be reasserted according to some critics; they argue that Harry doesn’t develop emotionally or mature sexually within the series. Although these critics may have a strong case because of minimal emphasis placed on his sexuality by Rowling, his emotional development is difficult to argue against. An
exceptional example of his emotional development is in the seventh book, *Deathly Hallows*, in which Harry and Ginny break up because of the dangerous and uncertain circumstances that Harry must face in his fight against Voldemort. Not wanting Ginny to grieve too hard in case anything happens to him on his mission, Harry breaks up with her, which is an abjection of his desire for her. He is abjecting a strong undercurrent of emotion in order to save her and to reassert his boundaries as a self-sacrificing and decision-making male.

However, the strongest example of Kristeva’s theoretical idea is Harry’s discovery and, at the same time, abjection of the desire for a home. In addition to Kornfeld’s and Prothro’s earlier argument about the necessity for Harry’s departure from home (Hogwarts) in order to truly find both a home and himself, is the sacrifice of Harry’s utmost desire— to belong to a family. Even though the Weasleys become Harry’s surrogate family, and he clearly has no lack of father figures (one of whom is his appointed godfather), no one can take the place of his biological parents and fill the emptiness he has because of their absence. And yet, Harry abjects this desire for a family when he discovers the prophecy about himself, which states that “neither [Voldemort nor Harry] can live while the other survives” (Rowling, *Order* 841). He does this in anticipation of the final battle, thinking that since his fate has been chosen for him, he has no other choice but to fulfill his mission: either defeat Voldemort or be defeated. Not only does this sacrifice show maturation of character, but it also displays Harry’s ripened thought process. In order to fully devote himself to killing Voldemort, he must discard, abject, everything else in his life: his love for Ginny, his desire for a family, his desire to be normal, and so on. Harry’s desires are what help him discover his identity, especially
his difference from Voldemort. Thus, even Harry’s abjection keeps him an “other,” physically separating him from his peers and loved ones. In addition to that, when Harry discovers that he is Voldemort’s seventh Horcrux, he decides that, if need be, he will commit suicide in order to defeat Voldemort.

Snape, too, sacrifices his life, a choice that acts as a testament to his character’s true nature. After being neglected by his parents, shunned by his classmates, and losing the one girl he has ever loved to his bully and enemy, Snape seems to crawl into a dark and lonely place deep within himself, shutting out the rest of the world. In fact, readers fall in love with him toward the end of the series, and feel more remorse and sympathy toward him when they discover the hardships he’s been through in life. That sympathy is further intensified when it is exposed that his true allegiance was to Dumbledore, that all along he was trying to protect Harry, and that he has the same Patronus as Lily’s (an expression of his undying love for her). Yet his intentional blockade of feelings and vivacity of life are a form of abjection for Snape, a way to preserve his melancholic identity. Again we see the important role of Lily who, at one time, was Snape’s closest and only friend, and with whom Snape fell secretly in love for his entire life. When Voldemort kills Lily in order to kill Harry and thereby save himself from demise, Snape is so tormented that he breaks off his allegiance to Voldemort and the Death Eaters and becomes a double agent for Dumbledore. Everything loses its importance for Snape once Lily is out of his life. He gives up his will to live and, as a result, dies in spirit. His anger and feigned loathing for Harry serve as an abjection of his past desire to be with Lily and his present desire to be wanted and accepted. Snape abjects life from himself and maintains a cold, dark, and reserved demeanor and attire in order to repress his fear of
failure: failing Dumbeldore in the secret assignment of being a double agent and failing Lily’s memory of protecting her son. Snape doesn’t allow himself any frivolity, happiness, excessiveness, materialism, or amusement; he abjicts all the joy associated with Lily and his life when she was alive. He broods in his inner world, almost as if he’s punishing himself for the decisions he had made in life. But Snape’s ultimate abjection comes in the form of suicide. Snape willfully abjicts himself as a whole by giving up his life for the greater good, a heroic action regardless of the fact that he has a miserable existence and nothing to live for since Lily died. He chooses death to escape from his unhappy life and tormented soul, and in a Christian context, he chooses death as the only way for his spirit to again be close to Lily’s.

Voldemort, on the other hand, sees no reason to brood or lock himself away. Completely content with his choices and ambitions, one form of his abjection occurs involuntarily through his own curse. After his killing curse rebounds off baby Harry, Voldemort disappears, only to reemerge as “He-Who- Shall-Not-Be-Named.” His blinding ambition to become immortal and all-powerful leads him to create his seven Horcruxes, which are defined by Professor Slughorn as being “‘object[s] in which a person has concealed part of their soul’” (Rowling, Half-Blood Prince 497). Slughorn further explains that a person must split the soul “‘and hide part of it in an object outside the body [so that] even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged’” (497). He states that such splitting is “‘an act of violation [and] is against nature’” and can only be achieved “‘By an act of evil – the supreme act of evil. By committing murder. Killing rips the soul apart’” (498). As a result, readers and wizards are presented not only with a body-less and identity-less
Voldemort, but with a soul-less Voldemort, in both the literal and figurative sense of the word. However, unlike abjection in theory, which is supposed to re-instate and reassert one’s boundaries and identity, the abjection readers are presented with here has the opposite effect. For although the Horcruxes are the means by which Voldemort can become immortal, the existence in such a form, after the act of splitting the soul, makes him weaker and a fragmented individual.

For fans, discussion of the Horcruxes and Voldemort is often what problematizes a clear distinction between characters who are purely good, as Harry seems to be, and purely evil, such as Voldemort. However, if there is one lesson that the *Harry Potter* series teaches us it is that there is no such thing as a purely good or purely evil existence. Snape’s character is an excellent example of this because he is believed to be an evil character until the last book, when it is revealed that he was working under Dumbledore’s orders to help defeat Voldemort and protect Harry. Immediately, Snape becomes a character with whom readers empathize and for whom they even grieve when he is killed because of his *conscious* decision to serve Dumbledore and to protect Harry. The fact that Snape *chose* to serve Dumbledore and fight against Voldemort shows that his true character is good, even if his behavior and physical features suggest otherwise.

Similarly, Harry’s innocent, naïve, and child-like character also has moments of “evil.” Harry comes very close to becoming like Voldemort in *The Order of the Phoenix* because of his anger and resentment toward those he thought he could trust, simply because he was isolated from everyone for his own protection. A mental connection develops between Harry and Voldemort, allowing Voldemort to read Harry’s thoughts and Harry to “see” Voldemort’s actions. He is forced to take Legilimency classes from
Snape in order to learn to close down his mind when he feels Voldemort trying to access it. In fact, Harry and Voldemort are more alike than at first they appear to be because of their lineage. Harry’s father, James, is a pureblood who is a mean bully, while his mother, Lily, is a Muggle wizard of angelic purity and kindness, making Harry a half good, half bad, half-blood. Tom Riddle’s mother, Merope, comes from an evil pureblood family, but she herself is considered to be a “good” pureblood witch and a victim of circumstance, while Tom’s father, Tom Riddle, is a Muggle who is considered to be “good” but actually acts badly, thereby making Tom Jr. also a half good, half bad, half-blood. While these similarities may explain certain qualities shared by Harry and Voldemort, what essentially establishes them as opposites are their choices. Although one could argue that Voldemort comes from an evil family and by nature is evil himself, when one discusses the three male characters and realizes that both he and Harry are portrayed as having “evil” influences in their lives, it becomes clear that nurture plays just as important a role in the development of a human being as his/her nature does. Both Harry and Tom are raised as orphans in disheartening circumstances and are taken under Dumbeldore’s wing for care, education, and protection. Both have the potential to be powerful and evil, but it is their choices that make them different. It is nurture and one’s choices that mold a person into who he is. Tom chose the dark path and chose to let his unhealthy ambitions of being ruler of the wizarding world lead him in life; whereas, Harry, who had plenty of opportunities to choose the same goals as Voldemort, chose to stay true to the calling of his heart. Furthermore, such character developments illustrate that anyone can become evil, as seen with Dumbeldore’s youthful desires to purify the wizarding world of Muggle wizards.
As mentioned several times throughout my essay, there is a trinity created between Harry, Snape, and Voldemort within the books; I use the word “trinity” intentionally. Aside from their given names, these three characters all have nicknames that they adopt, that when analyzed draw a clear picture of their connections. Harry is known as “the boy-who-lived” because of his miraculous evasion of Voldemort’s killing curse. This nickname distinguishes Harry from all the other students at Hogwarts, and along with his other nickname, “the chosen one,” labels him as unique and special. The fact that Harry was the only one to have ever escaped the killing curse presents him as a god-like figure in the wizarding community. His lightning-bolt-shaped scar can be read as an indication of his godliness as well, since in Greek mythology the symbol for Zeus, the god of all gods, was a lightning bolt. Additionally, from a Christian perspective, Harry’s sacrifice at the end of the series only further upholds his god-like reputation, portraying him as a Christ-like figure whose sacrifice saves the world. Thus, Harry is arguably deified as Christ. If we continue with the Christian analysis, the role of the fallen angel is played by Tom Riddle. At one time a seemingly lost and lonely boy with much potential, Tom mutates into Lord Voldemort, known in the wizarding world as “He-Who- Shall-Not-Be-Named.” Voldemort is so evil that even his name incites fear in people, similar to some religious people’s avoidance of the words “Satan,” “Lucifer,” and “devil.” The potency of the name itself is believed to summon the evil spirits, and so is avoided at all costs. Voldemort is also called “the Dark Lord,” which places him in direct opposition to the good Lord, who in this case is Harry Potter. Thus far, we have created a picture of the shepherd/ Lord God of light and goodness in the face of Harry, and opposite him Lucifer the fallen angel/ the Dark Lord (the devil) in the face of Voldemort.
Both characters are deified, albeit in contrary respects, and made more than human. Lastly, there is Snape, who crowns himself the “half-blood Prince.” As discussed earlier, “Prince” here is in reference to Snape’s conscious decision as an adolescent to associate more with his mother, Eileen Prince. However, in the context of our newfound line of reasoning, Snape takes the role of a human being caught between God and Satan (Harry and Voldemort). Just as Snape the character acts as a catalyst for the relationship between Harry and Voldemort, so does Snape the human find himself caught between the forces of good (Harry and Dumbeldore) and evil (Voldemort). Snape serves Harry’s mission and is Harry’s ultimate father figure, protecting him regardless of the circumstances and, as a father would, helping Lily (albeit not physically) raise her child. All of this in conjunction with his self-sacrifice at the end of the series makes Snape the unsung hero of the story. As we take a step back, we see the picture of a god, a devil, and a man: a trinity, created solely by the choices of each.

At the end of the series, Harry sacrifices himself and is killed by Voldemort. But his death is merely figurative, for Voldemort does not kill Harry the person, but rather kills Harry the horcrux. Voldemort kills within Harry the part of himself that was transferred during his first attempt to murder Harry as a baby. In fact, when Harry “dies,” readers are presented with a heaven-like scene in which Harry meets with Dumbeldore on Platform 9 ¾ and has a brief discussion in the presence of a crying baby in the background. According to some theological theories, heaven represents the most special place for the deceased and, therefore, looks different for everyone. If such a theory is to be accepted, then the limbo-like heavenly state to which Harry’s soul travels after his physical death should, indeed, be Platform 9 ¾, since it is here that Harry’s journey...
began, and from here that Harry’s journey must begin anew, no longer as Voldemort’s horcrux. On another note, the crying baby almost certainly represents the part of Voldemort’s soul that had been living within Harry, for Harry was a baby when Voldemort tried to kill him, mistakenly and unknowingly making him into a horcrux.

And, if readers recall, Dumbledore tells Harry to ignore the screaming infant. Over time the sound gets fainter, and when Harry returns to life his scar no longer pains him. Having ignored the crying baby in the limbo-heaven state, Harry abjures the part of himself that belonged to Voldemort, thereby freeing himself from Voldemort’s grasp while simultaneously destroying Voldemort (since Harry was the last horcrux that needed to be destroyed). When he returns to life, Harry can begin to live his life as Harry Potter—no nicknames, no prophecies, and no strings attached.

In the epilogue, readers are given descriptions of the future lives of the protagonists. We are told that Ron and Hermione get married, the wizarding world is at peace, Harry’s scar no longer bothers him, Harry is no longer singled out as “the chosen one,” and that Harry and Ginny get married and have three children named James, Albus Severus, and Lily. Harry’s choice to name his second son after Dumbledore and Snape illustrates not only his immeasurable gratitude and understanding for their actions toward him, but also his deep love and appreciation for both of them. His sense of debt prompts Harry to bestow these two names upon his son. But, as I have claimed, everything comes down to choice. In response to Albus Severus’ worries about the possibility of being placed into Slytherin instead of Gryffindor, Harry tells his son that “if it matters to you, you’ll be able to choose Gryffindor over Slytherin” (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 758).

With this, Harry reiterates Dumbledore’s words about the power of choice, and leaves
readers with the notion that no matter what one is fated to do or is presented with in life, a person always has a choice and it is that choice that will distinguish him from all others. As it was Harry’s choice to fight for good, so was it Voldemort’s choice to reign with evil, and Snape’s choice to sacrifice his life for a greater cause. While they were elements that linked them were many, the difference between these three men was indeed one thing: choice. Their lives and intricate connections illustrate one simple truth: it truly is our choices that make us.
Works Cited


