Horcrux or Hallow? Magical projections of the psyche in *Harry Potter*

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Twenty-five years after the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, after the wizarding world created by Joanne Rowling has spawned not only books, but films, websites, plays, a huge readership and a whole entertainment industry, and Rowling herself has moved to writing different sorts of fiction, it is possible to look back at the original seven novels and consider how they progress from children's school stories to young adults' spy stories, and how in this progress the role of magic develops and transforms. The present article charts this progress, starting from the hypothesis that the development of magic and the changes in its use are revelatory in narrative and psychological terms. It is only once Rowling makes magic fully part of the characters themselves that it becomes structurally, and not just superficially, satisfying. In the second part of the series magic becomes at last a fundamental element of the story, while hitherto it had been used, in what had been first and foremost a boarding school narrative setting, as an element of entertaining but almost superfluous decoration. The dichotomy between Horcruxes and Hallows, highlighted in the final volume of the series, becomes an articulate metaphor of the ways in which good and evil are reflected in the individual psyche; the very ambiguity of the magical objects highlights the impossibility of a Manichean approach to such a dichotomy. Within this perspective, the fourth volume of the series was a turning point, as highlighted by Rowling herself, who in an interview shortly following the

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publication of the book declared, “This book was the culmination of 10 years’ work, and something very big in terms of my ongoing plot happens at the end, and it rounds off an era; the remaining three books are a different era in Harry’s life” (Jensen online).

To those excited readers queuing in bookshops on 8 July 2000, the opening pages of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* reserved a surprise, clearly showing that the tone had changed. Earlier volumes had dutifully opened with the Roald-Dahl-like atmosphere of the Dursley household and the familiar and domestic horrors attached to it, with Harry being mistreated and patiently awaiting the first of September and the beginning of school: a device that had become predictable by the third volume of the series. *Goblet of Fire*, instead, introduced us to a totally new dimension: the action began no longer in Little Whinging, Surrey, but in the more sinisterly named Little Hangleton; the class setting moved from stolid middle class to what is supposedly minor aristocracy; and the reader’s attention was focussed not upon a boring present made of lawns to be mowed and houses to be cleaned, but on a horrific tragedy. Fifty years earlier, in the village manor, once beautiful and imposing and now “damp, derelict and unoccupied” (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* 7), the Riddle family had been mysteriously killed. Readers at this point were already familiar with Voldemort, his untraceable killing methods and his murderous past, and no-one liked the Riddle family anyway, but the tale of this mass murder was chilling in its cold detail.

Readers, on the other hand, could enjoy an advantage over the bemused Hangletonians for whom the tragedy had remained inexplicable, and there was a certain intellectual satisfaction in re-tracing Voldemort’s early career in crime. What was really surprising was the section immediately following this flashback, which saw Voldemort, in the present time of the novel, re-visiting the scene and choosing the decayed manor as his temporary home. The scene was set from the point of view of a marginal and hitherto unknown character, Frank Bryce, the old gardener of Riddle House, and it concluded suddenly with his unnecessary, casual murder. Death had always been present in the Harry Potter series, evoked or narrowly escaped in the adventures of the hero, but what we were faced with at this point was the actual brutality of dismissive assassination.

By inserting this scene Rowling played deliberate havoc with readers’ expectations: having announced in interviews preceding the publication of *Goblet of Fire* that a character would be killed, she introduced in the opening

pages this murder, which might have been seen as the answer to her hint. But at the conclusion of the book there is another grim surprise: an equally casual and sudden killing, though this time of a better known and loved, if still secondary, character, Cedric Diggory. Opening and closing the book, the two acts of violence mirror each other, targeting the defenceless and the potentially lovable (Bryce and Diggory are slightly humorous, harmless and occasionally comic but endearing in their integrity) and enclosing a narrative in which danger and deceit may visit any place and lurk even in the sanctuary of Hogwarts. By the time we reach the climax of the story, one of Harry's mentors and his possible role-model, Mad-Eye Moody, is revealed as an impostor – in fact, as Voldemort's most faithful servant: a pattern reversing the bad-guy-revealed-to-be-good at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban* (and even in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*), and teaching a lesson of mistrust to the trio of protagonists. After *Goblet of Fire*, the world is no longer innocent.

The move was not unexpected, since Rowling had always maintained that her central characters would be growing in the course of the novels and leaving childhood, accompanying their readers through the rites of passage towards maturity (Jones 56-60); it has been easy for literary critics to highlight this change in their analysis of characters and interpersonal relations. Typical themes of adolescent narrative were introduced, such as a growing interest in sex, the thuggish behaviour of organised gangs, the early pulls towards the choice of a career or the increasing need for financial independence. Though some themes (such as the experimenting with drugs) were rather improbably ignored, and others introduced at surprisingly late stages, it was clear that Harry, together with his friends, was at long last growing up: his world was no longer the wide-eyed world of childhood but the grimmer and more confused world of adolescence; adulthood was looming near.

Of course, positing this change inevitably introduces the delicate issue of what we mean when we talk of children's literature. The issue is complicated by recent developments in the marketing of books – especially when, as in the case of the Harry Potter novels, they command an extraordinarily large audience. The demands of the reading (and buying) public extend also to the external appearance of the volumes, as shown by the proliferation of "adult" dust jackets that highlight the "crossover" quality of novels ranging from C.S. Lewis's Narnia books to Terry Pratchett's *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents* (Falconer 1-2). Recent

discussions on “crossover fiction”, partly prompted by the very popularity of Rowling’s works, show critical awareness of the matter, and testify to the difficulty of categorizing very recent and very successful literature, since immediate resonance may interfere with critical assessment. Sandra L. Beckett’s excellent introduction to her *Crossover Fiction* highlights the problem when, after stating that “crossover literature is generally seen as a new trend” (Beckett 1), she correctly notes that there are older examples of fiction appealing to different age groups, and cites the playwright John Gay saying of his friend Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver Travels* that “it is universally read, from the Cabinet-council to the Nursery” (Beckett 2). She might have gone further back and cited Philip Sidney, referring to a tale “which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner” (Sidney 113).

The risk, however, is to confuse description with prescription. Trying to define children’s fiction is especially difficult at a time in which it is enjoying such renown, and the Harry Potter novels, immensely successful in spite of their disobeying prescriptive norms such as the required brevity and simplicity, were setting the rules rather than obeying them. Structuring the novels as a continuum rather than as single episodes in a similar setting obviously had great implications on the saga as a whole, and it evidently cost Rowling some pains in overall organization. Early on in the series she tried to make each new volume independent, giving a short summary of Harry’s peculiarity and of the unique nature of the double world in which he lives, and implicitly asking readers to focus on this single adventure. But the attempt was abandoned in the later books, and indeed it would have been impossible to consider each book as a single adventure story, given the presence of so much narrative material. Readers’ and critics’ response to this structural choice has generally been favourable: writing in 1999, after the appearance of the first three novels had appeared, Nicholas Tucker observed: “The decision to make him grow older with every book, and coping with the problems that will arise while still trying to satisfy younger readers, suggests a serious and committed novelist who deserves respect and, so far, the benefit of any doubt” (Tucker 230). The choice had also a deep impact on the audience’s reception and expectations: as Harry Potter and his friends grow, so do the intended readers, who supposedly mirror the protagonist’s age and expectations (if we believe that the age group of fictional protagonists mirrors the ideal readers’). No longer children eager for amusing, occasionally even gratuitous, bits of magic, they are adolescents who set their own experience in the context of a wider

perspective, absorbing everyday reality through the news and the media. This is clearly underlined by the spatial dimension: if initially Hogwarts is all the parallel world Harry knows and needs to know, by degrees the world widens, including a village, a state prison, a sports ground, a hospital, a ministry, London itself. Harry explicitly muses on this widening horizon during the Quidditch World Cup: "it was only just dawning on Harry how many witches and wizards there must be in the world; he had never really thought much about those in other countries" (*Goblet of Fire* 75).

Rowling's consciousness of the shift, furthermore, is underlined by a greater stress on events set in the non-magical world in the opening pages of the volumes following *Goblet of Fire*. For instance, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* deceptively opens in the somnolent atmosphere of the Dursley home, as in earlier instalments, but this time Harry is punished by the exasperated Dursleys not for trying to do his homework or to operate magic, but for his attempt to listen to the (non-magical) news on television: since Vernon Dursley condemns the attempt as an instance of odd behaviour (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* 9), the reader should suppose that this is indeed the right thing to do. It is as if the book was signalling the importance not to enclose oneself in the (childish?) magical world, and to explore the adult world of non-Magical news and international events. As for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, its opening pages feature the even more surprising apparition of the British Prime Minister, a sort of clueless Tony Blair, thus forcing the readers to realise the implication of the narrated events to the wider world, and mirroring Rowling's own troubled take on contemporary Britain (Westman 306-08).

The radical change of tone imposed by the decision to introduce a growing body of reference to actual reality in the Harry Potter saga cannot but bear deep implications for a number of factors in the narrative, from the development of the characters to the relation between events far apart in time; and since one of the most important factors in the novels is magic, it is interesting to explore what happens to it in this pattern of change that entails the abandonment of illusions. We may consider *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* the central book in more ways than one: it represents a pivotal moment, transforming our expectations as concerns the following volumes of the series, and turning us from child readers into adult readers. Magic, one of the key features of the series, cannot be uninfluenced. Rowling's departure within a well-established genre from the imaginary

into the real, first observed in her decision to set her novels in contemporary England though focussing on a fantastical setting (Cockrell 15-26), makes her handling of magic an extremely delicate matter. Magic may simply be another name for technology: in both cases we use what we cannot explain. Harry or Ron then cannot mend their broken wands just as we (with few exceptions) cannot repair our run-down smartphone. Owls are possibly more reliable but certainly less fast than email (not to mention the fact that they do leave bird-droppings everywhere), and microwave dinners could certainly help solve Mrs Weasley's eternal struggle with a perpetually hungry family (Oakes 117-28; Petrina 161-82; Sheltrown 47-64). All things considered, and in spite of the strenuous defence of some *Harry Potter* readers, magic remains an unsatisfactory substitute for technology, though its novelty and unexpectedness makes it much more entertaining.

Therefore, the early books of the *Harry Potter* series often present magic as the innocent transformation of objects for the purpose of amusement: a tap-dancing pineapple or a self-shuffling pack of cards are delightful inventions, though they may not help the progress of the narrative or solve the challenges of everyday life. But, Rowling seems to say, they certainly help the development of the characters: a computer eternally spewing forth video-games and cyber-wars may be what is turning Dudley Dursley from a spoilt brat to a dangerous bully, while animated chess and moving posters of the Chudley Cannons keep Ron lovable and imaginative, in spite of his frequent mood changes. There is a constant playful element in the bizarre outcome of wand-waving: and it is significant that *Goblet of Fire* first broaches the idea that playing with magic may be a respectable way of making a living, and that the two pranksters of the story, the Weasley twins, might be saved by eternal childishness by using magic as the central concern of consumerist production and trade – two very adult pursuits. Though Fred and George Weasley dutifully appear at the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* to help Harry in the final Hogwarts battle, and pay dearly for their loyalty; and though some of their inventions prove crucial at various narrative points, yet their efforts are clearly directed towards entertainment: their trademark shop, Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, is a creation of well-engineered fun, and fits well in the shopping mall that is Diagon Alley. As Harry says when materially helping the twins to realise their project, "I could do with a few laughs. We could all do with a few laughs" (*Goblet of Fire* 635). The importance of magic at this level is psychological rather than structural, and it is certainly far from metaphysical.

The products of technology (constantly called "Muggle artifacts" in the books) follow a slightly different course: if it is true that "the classics of children's fantasy literature are Luddite, or at best ambivalent, in their attitudes toward modern community culture" (Teare 329), it might be argued that Rowling follows the trend by focussing on the products of twentieth-century technology only as ugly junk (while the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the steam-powered train which takes the students to Hogwarts, is reserved a more favourable treatment), or as comic props: the broken toys in Dudley's bedroom, the useless plugs obsessively collected by Arthur Weasley, and the squalid Portkeys disseminated all over England in preparation for the Quidditch World Cup Final are all evidence of a contemporary landscape transformed into a gigantic rubbish dump by rampant materialism (Westman 308), a landscape in which children, magicians and pranksters can find the means for further entertainment – for themselves as well as the readers – by breaking, misusing or endlessly reinventing the products of technology: the transformation of the debris of technological progress is also a very effective means of escape. Astutely, Rowling dwells on electricity (a word lovingly used, if mispronounced, by Arthur Weasley) but ignores electronics, the readiest substitute for magic in the contemporary world, and the element that arguably has contributed most to changing the *Weltanschauung* of the younger generations.

If we consider magic a narrative device to track psychological development and change, then some of the recurring elements in the novels are more interesting than simply self-serving magical objects: even in the early volumes of the series we are presented not only with tools, such as the wand, and with means, such as the charms, but also with ghostly emanations of the wizards themselves, that is, Dementors and Patronuses. It is not by chance that these contrasting forces suggest a symmetry partly replicated by Horcruxes and Hallows in the last two novels. Closely associated to, and possibly echoing, the spectres and dæmons created by Philip Pullman in *His Dark Materials*, these apparitions are explained immediately as closely connected with the personality and state of mind of the wizard (Langford 156-57). This is Remus Lupin's description of Dementors: "Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them [...] Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory, will be sucked out of you" (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* 140). It is unsurprising that

Sirius Black managed to escape them, and by implication the prison they guard: the fight against this particular brand of magic is a question not of wizarding ability but of strength of mind, the same strength that enables him to transform into a dog at will, without using a wand. Even more clearly, Patronuses are described as a projection of the magician's personality: concentrating on "a single, very happy memory" (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* 176), each wizard produces a unique Patronus – reflecting one's love, desire, aspirations.

Following this line of reasoning, it might be argued that the real magic of the early books resided not so much in single inventions and objects, but in the setting, a setting so constructed that the opposition between magic and technology is mirrored by an implicit opposition between the magical, beguiling past and the technological, repellent present. The point is highlighted by the fact that an archaic, traditionally magical place which has no connection with technology and human development but only with natural forces, such as the Forbidden Forest, turns out to be among Rowling's least interesting creations. It is what mankind has built over the centuries that lends itself more easily to the writer's power of transformation. The Harry Potter novels by now have established a vogue in children's and young adults' fiction; but as noted by Julia Eccleshare in one of the best early discussions on the series, the real oddity of the *Harry Potter* series was, at least initially, the fact that a boarding-school setting could appeal to such a wide, international readership: "To set a book in such an institution runs strongly against the current vogue for social realism" (47). The odd setting, and the sort of old-world magic it projects, is exactly echoed by Diagon Alley, which provides Harry (and the reader) with the first glimpse of the magical world, and which has been rightly described as having a "Dickensian quaintness" (Eccleshare 52): what the early books evoke is a sort of magic of nostalgia, which allows the readers to be transported back in time to a world of imperfectly known medievalism, made of quill pens and mullioned windows. Not so much Wizardland as Merry Old England, the world created by Rowling is the result of an adaptation of the familiar "into something magical and unusual [which] highlights her invention while ensuring that its basis is secure" (Eccleshare 67).

So, as Harry's fight against Voldemort progresses from child's adventure to young man's drama, the reader may suspect that the employment of magic, together with the magical community's steady rejection of technology, actually puts obstacles in our hero's path, distracting him with

useless details just as technology does. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is once more central to this argument, since it is here that the most jarring discrepancies between the magical and the Muggle worlds are highlighted, only to be smoothed out with somewhat clumsy devices. In the close connection created between Muggles and wizards during the Quidditch Cup Final, memory charms multiply in frequency, since they are increasingly (and embarrassingly) necessary to cover up the narrative discrepancies. By the same token, halfway through the Triwizard Tournament we are treated to an explanation on why technology could not work in Hogwarts: "All those substitutes for magic Muggles use – electricity, and computers and radar, and all those things – they all go haywire around Hogwarts, there's too much magic in the air" (*Goblet of Fire* 475-76). This rather lame explanation completes what had been said earlier in the same book, on the problem of congregating a hundred thousand wizards in a Muggle-free site for the Cup Final, or on the difficulty of public transport (65-66). The very problem of the coexistence of two communities in England, apparently bent on ignoring each other, is solved at the beginning of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* in the very funny chapter titled "The Other Minister," in which, as noted above, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is presented and given a darkly comic meeting with the Minister for Magic. But the semi-adult world of *Order of the Phoenix*, *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows*, magic needs to take on a different role if it is to remain a central part of the narrative.

The very focus hitherto maintained on *Goblet of Fire* in this analysis shows how this novel, chosen by Rowling as the major turning point of her narrative construction, should also reveal all the narrative shortcoming the change entails. What will happen in the three final volumes of the saga is not simply a transformation in genre – from boarding school novel to spy story, or, as some scholars maintain, from fairy tale to mythological quest tale (Pond 184) – or in the characters' psychology; our view of magic is also transformed, allowing the writer to use it less as entertainment, or as a means to solve a contingent problem, and more and more as an essential part of the development of the story and its characters. The Harry Potter saga, for all its insistence on enchanted castles and scarlet steam engines, is in fact a study in *Bildungsroman,* and the characters' psychology maintains primary importance in spite of the richness of details in the settings. It is only once Rowling makes magic part of the characters themselves that it becomes structurally, and not only superficially, satisfying. I would

contend that in the second part of the series magic becomes at last part of the story, while hitherto it had been used, in what had been first and foremost a boarding school narrative setting, as an element of entertaining but almost superfluous decoration.

The definite shift in tone can be found between book 4 and 5, and it strongly influences the reader's perception of magical objects. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* closes with an unparalleled display of highly entertaining but also problematic magic – the duel between Harry and Voldemort generates a parallel world of geometric shapes and *revenants*, a triumph of visual artifice and wonder. Everything has been triggered by the two wands meeting with similar and opposite force, and in its development the duel becomes no longer a question of skill or speed, but a battle of wills, as shown by this long insight into Harry's mind:

> *Don't break the connection.*
> I know, Harry told the music, I know I mustn't... but no sooner had he thought it, than the thing became much harder to do [...] He concentrated every last particle of his mind upon forcing the beads backwards towards Voldemort, his ears full of phoenix song, his eyes furious, fixated... and slowly, very slowly, the beads quivered to a halt, and then, just as slowly, they began to move the other way... and it was Voldemort's wand that was vibrating extra-hard now... Voldemort who looked astonished, and almost fearful...
> One of the beads of light was quivering, inches from the tip of Voldemort's wand. Harry didn't understand why he was doing it, didn't know what it might achieve... but he now concentrated as he had never done in his life, on forcing that bead of light right back into Voldemort's wand... and slowly... very slowly... it moved along the golden thread... it trembled for a moment... and then it connected... (576-77)

Harry's effort triggers an effect that surprises both duelling wizards: the momentary resurrection of all the people Voldemort has killed. It is a moment of fear and pain for the villain, but of joy and love for Harry, who is for the first time re-united with his parents, if only very briefly. Magic has become the projection of the innermost fears and desires of the two characters; winning here depends on the power of the mind not only to concentrate, but to feel the appropriate emotions. The scene enacts what Dumbledore had stated at the conclusion of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*: "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (245).

By contrast, the opening episode of the following book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, shows the development of the narrative use of magic from a totally different angle. As noted above, we are back in Little Whinging, among well-mowed lawns and mean relatives, but this time Harry has little time to feel bored or exasperated, as he is threatened by far more than Dudley's bullying: just as their constant bickering is degenerating into a fight, Dementors invade their space, and it is only by thinking of his true, if absent, friends, Ron and Hermione, that Harry is able to drive them away, saving not only himself, but Dudley, a character hitherto viewed in a purely negative light, who from this point will begin, although in a minor key, to walk his own path of redemption. The two scenes, at the end of one book and at the beginning of the next, are obviously meant to be juxtaposed: Harry's victory over Voldemort is the result of his feelings of hope and love, while the apparition of the Dementors comes out of his frustration and despair; the Dementors themselves will be vanquished by loyalty and love. In the space marking the development between the two novels, a clear message is given the reader: magic is part of ourselves, inextricably linked with our deepest feelings of love and hate, as well as with our willingness to self-sacrifice. This process entails a gradual detachment from magical objects, whose function changes radically.

One of the most striking casualties of the development traced here is a magical object very dear to the reader, and much mentioned in the early volumes of the series: Harry's broomstick, the Firebolt. The broomstick is an object of perpetual desire and renewed negotiations throughout the first three volumes; it is also a fundamental accessory to Harry's victory of the Triwizard Tournament in *Goblet of Fire*. But once we abandon the world of games and enter a real struggle, at the end of the novel, the broomstick is silently discarded. As we progress through the following books, what emerges is another means of transportation: Apparition. Though Harry still professes to prefer the former after his first Apparition experience (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* 60), broomsticks practically disappear in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, and even Harry's own Firebolt disappears unobtrusively in the opening pages; instead, people apparate and disapparate together and separately, a performance reflecting their state of mind or situation. The broomstick is a magical object essentially external to the magician: it can be bought, sold and advertised, it may even possess a will of its own or be manipulated by others, as shown in some of the Quidditch accidents Harry is victim of. Apparition, on the other hand,

is especially difficult for children because it requires unusual focus and willpower (mockingly underlined by the instructor's mantra, "Destination, Determination, Deliberation," *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* 360), but needs no wand or other instrument. In a way, magicians have to become their own wands in order to perform this particular spell, putting their whole body at the service of their mind; it is significant that *splinching*, the separation of a part of the body during the Apparition process, seems to be the most obvious risk, reflecting a split or unfocussed will. The progression is part of a deliberate strategy on Rowling's part, as shown by other magical objects, less central to the story and therefore appearing more rarely: it is the case of Dumbledore's Deluminator, a harmless and amusing "universal lighter" in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and a guide to Ron's own soul in the last book of the series (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* 391). Objects by themselves are no longer the centre of attention: they simply work as litmus paper for the soul, and in this function are essential to the narrative development.

More and more, as the saga proceeds, magical objects are made to focus on one main function, that of projecting the psyche of the user. This theme is indeed present from the beginning, and as usual in Hogwarts, it is the headmaster that guides us in this realisation. From the first volume, Dumbledore seems the least serious about the power of enchantments – his references to magic, something which he never actually teaches, always allude to something far beyond its power, whether it be music or love. Harry (and with him the reader) understands this lesson only slowly, but Dumbledore's purpose is clear, and becomes even clearer when he starts giving Harry private lessons in *Half-Blood Prince*: while Harry and his friends anticipate "really advanced defensive magic, probably... powerful counter-curses... anti-jinxes" (97) what Dumbledore actually gives Harry is knowledge and a key to a new object: the Horcrux. The crucial moment of transformation occurs during these lessons, as Harry immerses himself in Voldemort's past life: Tom Riddle's obsession with objects ("this magpie-like tendency," *Half-Blood Prince* 260) induces him to transfer his very soul into a number of prized artefacts, which he collects by resorting to the most extreme means. Harry's task from then on will be to destroy the objects, reversing this tendency towards acquisition, achieving an almost ascetic status of freedom from material possessions – the same material possessions that are reduced to very bare necessities in the first half of *Deathly Hallows*, when Harry and his friends, travelling across England

in search of Horcruxes, have to fight a much more basic and daily struggle for food and fire. Revealingly, it is at this point that Rowling introduces one of the basic rules about the magical world: Hermione notes that “Food is the first of the five Principal Exceptions to Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfigur[ation]”, and when Ron urges her to “speak English”, she flatly states, “It’s impossible to make good food out of nothing” (241). It is a stark instance of the real world intruding in the magical one. The material possessions that do count are those that enable you to survive.

Horcruxes – together with their counterparts, Hallows – are the focus of the last two novels, and among the most significant markers of change. Although they appear very late in the story, there were interesting anticipations already in the early volumes of the series, the most important probably being the Sorting Hat. Initially presented in its main function of directing students to the most suitable House, the Sorting Hat reappears at the end of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* with a completely different task: it produces for Harry, at the moment of his most desperate need, the sword of Gryffindor. This is a supposedly magical object which, however, never operates on its own: it is simply a very good sword that will obey not superior skill on the part of the swordsman but superior loyalty to the house it represents. Interestingly, the sword is connected with the whole question of Horcruxes, since it is associated with Tom Riddle’s diary and later believed to be a possible Horcrux itself, as part of the series we might call founders’ objects: magical objects that represent the four mythical founders of Hogwarts. Besides, it is with reference to the sword at the end of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* that Dumbledore delivers his subtle disquisition on the difference between our talents and our decisions – a key theme in the later books, and crucial to our understanding of Horcruxes and Hallows.

Though Horcruxes and Hallows are obviously magical objects, their power is different from anything we saw before. They do not help people to accomplish something; they are not a magical extension of the wizard’s arm as in the case of wands, they do not transform (at least outwardly) and they do not seem to project any energy towards their surroundings; they do not allow travel in time or space, do not put on or off lights. They can even be organic, living beings, as in the case of the snake Nagini, but even Nagini is curiously passive, simply obeying its master’s orders. The only one among the Horcruxes which shows some sign of animation is the locket, which springs to life the moment it is threatened by destruction. This is something

that is not shared by other Horcruxes, but Rowling makes it clear that the animation has little to do with the object itself (or even the fragment of soul it incorporates), and more to do with the moral battle fought by the person who is entrusted with its destruction, Ronald Weasley. What Ronald sees in the "living eye" inside the locket is simply a projection of his fears of betrayal, of his sense of inferiority, or of his resentment. The ability to destroy the locket then will not depend on skill or knowledge, or even on magical power, but simply on moral strength (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* 305-07). It is therefore not surprising that, once Ron has passed this test, the destruction of the remaining Horcruxes, confided in turn to Harry, Ron, Hermione, and finally to Neville Longbottom, will present no difficulties.

Horcruxes seem to exist only in order to be found and destroyed: in an early review of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* they were described as "wizardly plot tokens – embedded correlatives for knowledge of morality and the past" (Kaveney 19). But though the definition is striking, it leaves a false impression: these plot tokens are not to be collected, like most magical objects in fairy tales, but to be eliminated. Conversely, for each Horcrux we have an image of Voldemort collecting it – often by murderous means. Turning an object into a Horcrux can only be done through murder: the magician destroys a life in order to animate an artefact. Collecting is therefore equated with evil: true, beneficial knowledge and power can be achieved only by discarding objects. Rowling is even careful to make some of them aesthetically appealing, as in the case of Hufflepuff's cup or Ravenclaw's diadem, so that there is an added pang of regret to their destruction. Finding them is difficult and often very dangerous, but there can be no satisfaction in the possession: the physical or intellectual challenge of acquisition is accompanied by the moral challenge of renunciation. For those who do not pass this supreme test, the final punishment is extreme: the King's Cross scene at the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, while freeing Harry from his role as Dumbledore's lethal weapon, also shows us the ultimate fate of Voldemort, finally deprived of his material supports. He now appears as a repellent, naked creature, "its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking [...] unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath" (566); having confided his whole being, even his soul, to material culture, once he is deprived of objects he is left, inevitably, gasping for breath. In the same scene, Harry is also naked, but unscathed, without the need of glasses, in a sort of pre-lapsarian state (565-66). As with the lilies

of the field in the Gospel according to Luke, which need neither spinning not toiling, yet are splendidly arrayed (Luke 12.27), so Harry may find warm, clean robes the moments he wishes for them: having renounced possessions earlier, he will now find that they are freely given to him.

A Horcrux is described early on as an object that will possess its owner, the moment it is truly possessed: this is shown in an interesting scene at the beginning of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Here Harry is discussing the properties of these objects together with his two friends, and Hermione points out that, while a human body can be killed without harming the soul within, "the fragment of soul inside [the Horcrux] depends on its container, its enchanted body, for survival" (90). This leads to a recollection of what happened in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, when Ginny Weasley was temporarily possessed by one of the earliest Horcruxes, Riddle's diary. Can then an object invade another soul? Once again Hermione provides an answer, remembering how close (emotionally as well as physically) Ginny was to the diary: "You're in trouble if you get too fond of or dependent on the Horcrux" is her conclusion (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* 91). This anticipates what will happen to Ron with Slytherin's locket (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* 251-54). This episode clears the way for the destruction of the subsequent Horcruxes – the battle seems to be between the cursed objects and the strength of Harry's friendship with Ron and Hermione, so that the reader is never left in any real doubt as to the outcome. Once more, though the objects themselves and their search provide narrative suspense, the burden of the story is on the battle between souls – the evil souls encased in the Horcrux, and the pure soul required to destroy it. Rather than the object themselves, it is the proto-capitalist love of objects that is the basis of evil.

On the other hand, though Harry is entrusted with the mission of destroying the Horcruxes, and relentlessly pursues it throughout the last novel, he is also enticed by the possession of other objects – the Hallows. It is here that true temptation resides: a temptation that made even Dumbledore fall. Resisting the lure of the Hallows makes Harry a true hero, far above his former master and mentor, given how desirable these objects are: not connected with evil, but rather with Harry's own ancestry and with the mythology of fairy tales, the Hallows seem to represent both the solution to the ongoing battle with Voldemort and the answer to Harry's never-extinguished desire to be re-united with his parents. Though explicitly contrasted with the Horcruxes in Harry's quest (as shown by the recurring

Horcrux-or-Hallow dilemma in the chapter headed "The Wandmaker," *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* 386-92), they actually appear to represent a move in the right direction: they have positive associations, and are evidently desirable since they would allow Harry to fulfil his dearest wish, that of being re-united with his family. For all these reasons, it will take great courage on Harry's part to abandon them; and while in the case of the Horcruxes the three friends help each other in the effort to destroy them, in this case their eventual destiny will generate a great deal of dissension, and Ron at least will try to contrast the decision to discard them to the very end. In this perspective, Hallows had been foreshadowed by an object that appears very early in the series, the Mirror of Erised: showing the viewers their innermost desire, it could lead to madness or to self-knowledge – a bifurcation that anticipates the dichotomy between obsessed, evil Voldemort and self-sacrificing, good Harry.

What is even more confusing for the reader is that these objects may be associated with the everyday concerns of the magical world (already populated with wands and invisibility cloaks) or even be already in Harry's possession: *per se*, they do not express any evil force or purpose. Their relations with their owners are complex, and in the case of wands allow us a further exploration into the moral dimension of the characters. Wands, like other magical objects of everyday use, pass through phases: initially they are described as powerful objects determining the fate of their owners ("the wand chooses the wizard," *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* 65); by the end of the saga, they will obey a mature and self-aware magician even in preference to their original owner. As has been observed, the seventh and final volume of the saga "is not literally a story about casting youth and magic aside and breaking your wand; it is, however, a book about moving beyond parents, mentors and their expectations, about fighting your own battles, not the wars of earlier generations" (Kaveney 19). The intricate story of the Elder Wand creates the wrong expectations in the reader about its relevance – in the end, this wand is not only discarded, but turns out to be useless, and the whole *peripeteia* of this magical object, which the reader has followed with some difficulty, turns out to be irrelevant in comparison with the moral development of the hero. It is a nice touch: the readers themselves must learn to discard facile narrative pleasures in exchange for sterner moral lessons.

"[The conjurer] shakes up the solidity and smugness of objects, conquering the reality of the material world by impregnating it with

the nimbleness and effervescence of wit and skill" (Bhownagary 32). Nimbleness and effervescence were indeed the characteristics of the first volumes of the series, imbued with the light magic of children's literature. The quasi-adult world of the last volumes has lost this lightness of touch, and though carefully eschewing metaphysical overtones, introduces a moral dimension that weighs on the readers and imposes on them the burden of choice and judgement. In view of Rowling's own involvement with the commodification of intellectual culture, the changing relation with magical objects she develops gives us a useful insight into the narrative sequence. It has been made clear by the writer, in a number of interviews and through her website, that she is occasionally uneasy with the mass-marketing of her creation. Ironically, one of the effects of the success of the Harry Potter books, the proliferation of objects and gadgets connected with them, runs directly counter to Rowling's own teaching in the novels, which underlines individual will and personality rather than external possession. The definitive evaluation on Rowling's very human brand of magic comes, unexpectedly, from one of the least loved characters of the books, Bellatrix Lestrange: you can't do magic just like that. You need to mean it (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* 715).

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