

EXTENDED ESSAY

English B

(Category 3)

Love and magic shown in Joanne Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

To what extent do the *Harry Potter* novels support the statement that 'love is the most powerful form of magic'?

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Abstract

The main purpose of this essay is to analyse the problem of love as presented in the Harry Potter series. This theme is explored by the author as a manifestation of magic, which as a motif plays a crucial role throughout the novels. Specifically, this paper investigates the question: **To what extent do the *Harry Potter* novels support the statement that ‘love is the most powerful form of magic’?**

To fully address the topic, I will examine the primary sources in detailed analysis, focusing mainly on what enable the characters to triumph in the end of the main conflict, as well as on their relationships and how they influence their life and their choices. Analysing the main instances where love is depicted in the series, such as the Patronus Spell, Harry, Ron and Hermione’s friendship, Dumbledore and Snape’s transformation through their feelings and, finally, Harry’s altruistic sacrifice, will enable me to evaluate the statement clearly. Moreover, a variety of secondary sources will be consulted to support the findings of my reading.

The conclusion that is reached is that the love presented in the novels has truly proven to be the strongest force in the wizarding world. As emphasised by Rowling, deep, honest relations with loved ones are worth much more than any kind of sole power, no matter in which world we live.

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Introduction

It is quite hard to determine the topic on which the Harry Potter series are constructed, the one most important, ultimate message of the books. Interpretation tends to depend heavily on the person reading them; children usually deduce a different meaning than adults, and even grown-ups can come up with a rich variety of themes, motifs and morals. One of the examples of many possible readings of the books is that, while some believe that they promote basic positive ethical values and provide good models of behaviour for children, others, for instance Pope Benedict XVI, state that “these are subtle seductions which act imperceptibly and thereby deeply, and dissolve Christianity in the soul before it can grow properly” (Kuby 128).

There is no denying, however, that magic is one of the dominant themes in the Harry Potter series. As fantasy novels, they introduce it as an unreal factor shaping the lives of characters, mainly those who are witches and wizards. Magic is virtually omnipresent in their society, whether it is the ‘good’ forms of it, used to help, heal or amuse, or the dark magic with the power of causing pain and death. But magic in the series is presented as not only different spells and elixirs, but also a variety of more complicated ideas, including time, mind, fate, debt, death and, above all, love. One of the most noticeable motifs that are reappearing throughout the course of the series is the extreme power of love, its ability to overcome all life obstacles, involving even death. Therefore, the following question arose: **To what extent do the Harry Potter novels support the statement that ‘love is the most powerful form of magic’?**

As I have been a fan of these books for many years, and I have read each of them multiple times, I could not help but ponder about implications of the thesis presented in the series. The problem of the power of love was especially intriguing, as it is crucial to the plot of the novels and hugely philosophical in its nature. Also, I have decided to work with the series as a whole, as the motif is one of the most crucial and reappearing the most often throughout the novels and it would be impossible to consider it on the basis of one of the books only.

Voldemort, the greatest villain of the series, is described as a dark wizard of incredible power, with a large group of loyal followers and no scruples about hurting, torturing, using or killing anything or anyone in his way. If that was not enough, the readers eventually find out that he is extremely hard to kill, due to his horcruxes, magical artefacts that allow him to stay

alive even after receiving mortal wounds. He seems to be truly unbeatable, and indeed believes it himself, until the prophecy concerning him and Harry is revealed to the readers. The young boy is described to “have power the Dark Lord knows not...” (Order 741). When Dumbledore finally discloses what is this mysterious power Harry possesses, the boy cannot help but feel disappointed. Love? It hardly seems like a good weapon. Is he really supposed to defeat the greatest Dark Wizard of all times using love? It sounds very naive and sentimental, especially from such a great and wise wizard the headmaster is. Can it possibly, in any way, contain a grain of truth? Is it indeed another one of great messages of wisdom coming from Dumbledore, even though at first difficult to explain?

Patronuses as manifestation of love

One of the ways in which love is present in the series in the form of magic is the Patronus Charm. The spell is used as a means of protection against dementors, which are described as the most horrible and foul creatures existing: made of nothing but despair, feeding on positive emotions and able to consume a person’s soul, leaving them in a permanent vegetative state. The spell is the only means of defence against them, as it is made of positive emotions only. Moreover, for casting a Patronus Charm, one needs a very powerful happy memory, which is usually somehow connected with one’s loved ones. Harry’s memories often include Ron and Hermione, as well as Sirius.

Additionally, the spell, being closely tied with wizard’s emotions, is also subject to transformation as the feelings change. The visual form of the charm, which usually is an animal, varies with the caster. Whereas the shape is in the majority of cases stable during wizard’s life, it can be altered after undergoing profound life situations. The most frequent instance of change is when the wizard experiences a deep infatuation, in which case it transforms into the form of the beloved’s Patronus.

In one of the battle of Hogwarts scenes, shortly after Fred’s death and Hagrid being taken captive by the Death Eaters, the Trio face a throng of dementors. Feeling morose, Harry is close to abandoning hope and does not even try to conjure a Patronus. They are saved in the

last moment by their friends from the Dumbledore's Army, one of them being Luna. She encourages Harry not to give up by telling him: "We're all still here, we're still fighting" (Hallows 522). Finally, the Boy Who Lived does indeed produce a Patronus, and this single act is described as "the greatest effort it had ever cost him" (Hallows 522), which suggests that not yielding to the temptation of surrender is the hardest struggle yet in his life. It can be, therefore, claimed, that Luna's inspiration and support is what later enabled Harry to sacrifice himself to destroy the horcrux within him.

Therefore, the only means of defence against the world's foulest creatures is, indeed, love.

Friendship

The most obvious and most important relationship of the books is surely the friendship between Harry, Ron and Hermione (customarily termed simply "the Trio" by the fans). It is forged early in the first book and only grows in strength throughout the course of the novels. At first they are not too fond of each other, as Harry and Ron get a rather negative impression of Hermione as arrogant and annoying. Later, however, when one evening a troll is at large at Hogwarts, they immediately rush to help the girl without much hesitation when they realise she does not know about the danger. Moreover, when afterwards explaining themselves to their teacher, Hermione, out of gratitude, takes the blame for the accident on herself. This event ultimately seals their bonds of friendship. Despite the fact that they are not close to each other, all of them decide to work together in the face of danger. It is an example of true love, unconditional and sacrificial in its nature, directed even towards people who are not our friends or family.

Their support and love for each other is extraordinary. For Harry, who was neglected and barely accepted in his childhood home, his friends are a substitute of a family he has never had. Spending his early years alone, he was used to having to deal with his problems on his own. Indeed, when he decides to go to and find the Philosopher's Stone, at first he does not even consider taking his friends with him and is truly surprised when they expressed their desire to go: "'I'll use the invisibility cloak,' said Harry. 'It's just lucky I got it back.' 'But

will it cover all three of us?’ said Ron. ‘All—all three of us?’ ‘Oh, come off it, you don’t think we’d let you go alone?’” (Stone 197). In spite of being just young students, together they are able to face the biggest of dangers and overcome all sorts of obstacles.

This motif is reappearing throughout the whole series - in the Chamber of Secrets, Harry and Ron walk into the Forbidden Forest to find some information on how to help Hermione and other students, and later wander into the Chamber to save Ron’s little sister. The third book features Harry and Hermione time travelling to save both Buckbeak, the hippogriff, and Sirius Black, an innocent man charged with murder he did not commit. In their fifth year, when Harry goes to rescue Sirius, at first he is annoyed with his friends, who are determined to accompany him in this possibly dangerous endeavour. Only later does he realise how helpful their company is, and that he would not manage on his own with the Death Eaters in the Ministry of Magic. Finally, without the help of Hermione and Ron, Harry certainly would not succeed in his quest to destroy all the horcruxes. Together they are able to face extreme dangers, even the most terrifying ones. They do not only keep each other’s company: their unique skills and character traits allow them to support each other in their harder moments. When cooperating, there is indeed little the Trio would not eventually manage to achieve.

It is emphasised many times: Harry can always rely on his friends, which is a huge contrast to the independent and lonely figure Voldemort remains, as Dumbledore stated: “Lord Voldemort has never had a friend, nor do I believe that he has ever wanted one” (Prince 260). His strong, meaningful relationships with people who are ready to sacrifice themselves teaches him to remain loyal and faithful, and take a lot of burden off his arms. Sacrificing oneself for the sake of one’s friends is claimed to be one of the most noble deeds of men; as the Bible says, „Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13), and it is certainly the most true in the context of the Harry Potter series.

Love inspiring transformation

Dumbledore is one of the most important characters in the novels, and also is one of the characters who undergo the biggest change in their perception by the readers. Throughout

most of the series, the headmaster is both a wise and amusing old man with a soft spot for Muggle sweets. It is the seventh book which changes everything about how we perceive his words and actions. Even though he dies by the end of the Half-Blood Prince, he has perhaps the most influence on other characters in the last book, his past decisions continuing to shape the present situation of our main heroes.

It is the last novel of the series when we finally get to know about his family and past, as well as his biggest, well-hidden secrets. One of the most important problems in the book is Harry's uncertainty and doubts about whether he can trust Dumbledore, in the light of what he has gotten to know about him.

As it appears to the readers, the future headmaster was not always as benevolent as we believed him to be – he was once a close friend of Grindelwald, a Dark wizard, and together they created a plan of disclosing the presence of wizards in the society, forcing Muggles into obedience to magic. However, when in a battle between him, Grindelwald and his brother, Dumbledore's sister, Ariana, dies, he finally understands the mistakes he has made and how misplaced was his trust in Grindelwald. What is even more important, he gains knowledge about himself, as he later reveals to Harry: "I had proven, as a very young man, that power was my weakness and my temptation" (Hallows 575). This moment was a great U-turn of his character, which eventually makes him the wise wizard we know, and enabled him to both guide Harry on his journey and sacrifice his life for the sake of overcoming Voldemort's terror. Dumbledore chose love over dominance, and personally demonstrated the perspicacity of this decision.

Romantic love

Without doubt, the biggest surprise of the series is the evolution of Severus Snape, the hated teacher, into one of the most important and deepest characters. In fact, taking into consideration the fact that it was Snape who both informed You-Know-Who of the prophecy and begged him to spare Lily, he allowed her to sacrifice herself for Harry and caused the loss of one's of Voldemort's horcruxes (even if accidentally and involuntary). It can be said,

therefore, that he was the catalyst for the whole series. Indeed, without his presence Riddle may not have had known about the prophecy, or he would not had considered sparing Lily's life - either way, every event that is to occur later might not have happened.

One may say that since he only loved Lily, he is not a good example of love. How does his devotion to Harry's mother change him? He still gains a lot of satisfaction from his unfair dealing with students, despises both Harry and his father, as well as never loses an occasion to taunt Sirius or express his disdain for Lupin. He also has little to no warm feelings for other members of the Order of the Phoenix; in fact, while he definitely has a grudging respect for Dumbledore, he does not even seem to like him. But, despite all of that, the headmaster still chose to trust him and believes him without a doubt. Is that an example of Dumbledore's naivety? Why is Snape's love for Lily Evans enough to trust him?

The answer is: because his feelings towards Harry's mother cause him to act. Not only his change of heart, but nearly all of his life was shaped by his love for Lily Evans. He was quite egoistic in his feelings at first, dreaming about her in the same way he dreamed about Hogwarts - a place where he would finally be accepted. However, his extreme mistake in calling her a Mudblood and later losing her caused by his previous master inspires a big change in his character. His love for her becomes less of a whim and more of a choice. Snape agrees to help Dumbledore, protect the newborn son of the love of his life and change his allegiance in spite of his hatred towards James and Harry, as well as many other members of the Order. The decision of switching sides of the conflict was the first step he takes towards abandoning his egoism: he decides to act in the name of Lily, despite little to no positive emotions towards the people he would be working with.

Taking this into consideration, his life can be even considered heroic: he is constantly risking his life, lying to Voldemort and playing the role of a double agent to help people he hated. It can be compared to Christ's words, who said: "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5, 44). Even though Snape is still vindictive and bitter, he has become a better person thanks to Lily.

Of course, the change is not immediate: as doing good or bad can become a habit, the changes occurring in the character of Snape are rather slow and steady than instantaneous. The most noticeable conviction that he shares with his old master, He Who Must Not Be Named, is that one who openly shows his love is showing his weakness. It is easily noticeable when he teaches Occlumency to Harry: he says that „Fools who wear their hearts proudly on

their sleeves, who cannot control their emotions, who wallow in sad memories and allow themselves to be provoked so easily - weak people, in other words – they stand no chance against his [Voldemort's] powers!" (Order 473). He holds the boy in contempt, because Harry as a highly emotional person he is unable to put his feelings aside. As it was put by Catherine and David Deavel, "Snape's skill at Occlumency reveals both his strength and his weakness of character" (76). This trait of Severus, which allows him to excel at Occlumency and enables to lie to Voldemort, the master of reading people's minds, also renders him unable to form deeper relationships with people, such as friendship. It is also the reason behind his desire to keep his true motivation in secret. Yet, his behaviour is a complete antithesis of what he believes to be true: his own Patronus is a doe, reflecting his lifelong love for Lily, and most of his life is a conscious decision to let this love change him and shape his actions.

Unconditional love

In the *Philosopher's Stone*, Harry faces the Dark Lord, in Quirrell's body, for the first time, being as young as only eleven years old. He does not even dare to think about victory; how can he defeat a full-grown wizard, more, his teacher, who is also using Voldemort's powers? However, when he has almost lost his hope, he discovers that the contact with his skin causes unbearable pain to his enemy. He manages to use this to his aid and this newly found ability saves his life. Eventually in the book Dumbledore explains what the source of this force was: as Harry's mother, Lily, gave up her life to save him, her sacrifice gave him a protection better than any other. "Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign...to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever." (Stone 216). Moreover, according to the headmaster, it is the most ancient kind of magic, which You-Know-Who knows nothing of. It was the unconditional love of his mother that saved Harry's life not only that day, but also ten years before, when he was a child. Those instances clearly indicate how much power Lily's love has: it has protected her son from an Unforgivable Curse, rendering

him the first person ever to survive the Killing Spell, and has continued to shield him even so many years after her death.

It is worth noticing that love, however profoundly strong in its nature, is never consciously used by Harry as a weapon or a shield against Voldemort. It is rather a personal quality of many characters, among which the Chosen One presents it the most often. The scene presented in the Order of the Phoenix, when You-Know-Who has almost completely taken control over the boy, is one of the most meaningful examples: „And I'll see Sirius again... And as Harry's heart filled with emotion, the creature's coils loosened, the pain was gone” (Order 720). Harry's love for his godfather is a feeling that Voldemort cannot bear, hence it is what saves Harry from death; yet, it is not his decision to use it against him. Love is so natural for Harry that he does not need to be aware of its strength: he is already full of it. It does not even fight evil directly - it defeats it by simply existing. It is clearly exhibited that in the world created by Rowling, love to be truly pure cannot be viewed as a mean of achieving one's goals, cannot be used aggressively. When it is, however, honest in its nature, it is capable of demonstrating extraordinary power.

In the end, the final example of the exceptional might of love are the final scenes of the Deathly Hallows, when Harry finds out that he is the last horcrux and in order to defeat Voldemort once and for all, he needs to die first, and it needs to be executed by the Dark Lord. And even though that is possibly the hardest decision one can make, he decides to give up his life for others to live. This truly selfless and eminently courageous act makes him a Christ figure, comparable to Aslan in Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia - he puts the wellbeing and happiness of the whole human race above his own life. This is the ultimate instance of love: sacrificing yourself for not only your loved ones, but also enemies, as well as huge numbers of people you do not know and you never will. As the novels claim, therefore, is that there is no greater good than putting something bigger than yourself above your own existence.

Moreover, his sacrifice does not only destroy one of Voldemort's horcruxes: just like his mother's death, it also workes as a protection for his loved ones. Yet, whereas Lily's love shielded only Harry, her son's establishes a protection for all the people who he gave up his life for, which is every person fighting in the Battle of Hogwarts. There are also theories that the shield does not extend just to his allies: some claim that it protects everyone in Great Britain, or even in the whole world, wizards and Muggles alike. “For whoever wants to save

their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.” (Luke 9, 24), said Jesus Christ, and these words also extend to Rowling’s series: Harry regains his life after being hit with the Killing Curse by Voldemort, because he allows it to happen in order to save other people’s lives. This strongly highlights the Christian undertone of the novels.

Conclusion

During the consideration of the arguments presented in this essay, I had no doubt that Rowling’s series do support the statement that love is the most powerful form of magic. After examining carefully each of the instances when love was mentioned in the novels, it becomes clear that the power of this feeling was established as the main motif and simultaneously the greatest factor by which we can define the characters. The central conflict - main heroes against Voldemort - is also a fight between the two natures and uses of magical powers, which eventually becomes a clash between two contradictory life views. In the end, though, it has been shown that You-Know-Who’s firm belief in his own power was the reason of his defeat, as he could not understand the value of friendship and devotion. This final conclusion is not only stated in the books, but also shown, and it is done so multiple times in various moments of the novel.

Moreover, the motif of love reappears in the series under many forms: from family affection to romantic love to friendship to, finally, absolute unconditional love, Christ-like in its nature. Each one of those is shown to be holding great potential and ability to influence change in people, save lives and overcome extreme obstacles. All of these are presented either through the example of Harry himself or through people and phenomena around him, be it in the form of the Patronus spell, his friendship with Ron and Hermione, Dumbledore’s, his mentor’s, transformation, the life of his hated teacher, Severus Snape, and ultimately through Harry’s altruistic sacrifice – and that’s only to name a few of the instances.

It is finally emphasised by Rowling in one of her interviews: “Magic does not make his [Harry’s] world better significantly. The relationships make his world better” (Grossman),

which is the final proof that deep, honest relations with loved ones are worth much more than any kind of sole power, no matter in which world we live.

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