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**Kandidat 6509**

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# Seksjon 1

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EN-212 – Bachelor's Thesis

Spring 2016

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## GOTHIC IN SCIENCE FICTION: A Contemporary Perspective

### Brief Statement

An investigation of whether the phenome that is Harry Potter contains any Gothic features, and how these effects the story and the reader.

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### Introduction:

The famous *Harry Potter* books include places such as the haunted Shrieking Shack and the dreary Forbidden Forest as well as various supernatural entities like ghosts, werewolves, and dragons. In *Game of Thrones*, the international bestsellers from George R.R. Martin, one can read about incestuous relationships, dangerous secrets, horrifying undead, death and resurrection, and complex and engaging villains with whom the reader loves to hate. These elements are closely related to the conventions and literary instruments used in the Gothic novel. The Gothic was a result of several different processes in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and though it has gone through many transformations both in style, setting, and topics its inheritance can still be found in contemporary literature where it appears so natural that one almost fails to notice its influence. Thus, it is instrumental to gain an understanding of the intricate fabric of the Gothic novel and its impact on other genres.

The first part of the thesis will therefore be a thorough account of the Gothic history and its most frequently used conventions and terminology. Leading up to part two will be an account of Science Fiction, hereafter shortened to SF, with a brief look into Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and an argument for interpreting *Harry Potter* as SF. Part two will contain the body of the dissertation, and will be an analysis of how Gothic elements are used throughout the *Harry Potter* and how these features are used in the books to create emotional reactions in the reader. *The Castle of Otranto*, *Frankenstein*, and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* will be alluded to for the sake of comparison of differences and similarities to the *Harry Potter* books against the most known Gothic novels.

The aim for this dissertation is to explore the relationship between Science Fiction, or Science Fantasy in this particular case, represented by the *Harry Potter* universe, and Gothic literary conventions. Furthermore, how these conventions are being used and have been used in contemporary literature, intended for both the adult and child reader, to create powerful feelings of suspense, terror, anxiety, awe, contempt, and excitement to engage the reader's imagination. By using Rowling's popular *Harry Potter* franchise this thesis will argue that the Gothic and its conventions have been naturalized into other literary genres. However, as will be demonstrated, the Gothic practice of challenging sociocultural traditions are still very much alive, even in children's literature such as *Harry Potter*.

Part one:The Gothic

Fred Botting claims that The Enlightenment invented the Gothic by serving as a counterpoint to the neoclassical values recovered from the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Although The Enlightenment certainly initiated irreversible historical processes with a new scientific and philosophical mentality, individuality, and reason that perpetually changed the political, social and geographical landscape, it must be pointed out that the Gothic tendencies were already present in society and the minds of people.

The term 'Gothic' initially began with a Germanic tribe called 'the Goths' by Pliny the Elder. They have been seen historically as instrumental to the fall of Rome and have been connected with barbarism in derogatory terms against the classical Roman understanding which have held a higher status.<sup>2</sup> Gothic evolved to represent a style of architecture that was a reaction against the classical style preceding it, and, as David S. Miall writes, Gothic architecture was appealing to vastness, power, obscurity, and terror – the sublime.<sup>3</sup> The grand constructions inspired feelings that were used to induce psychological states, and as such, the feelings of suspense and terror that define the Gothic novel was gradually introduced as a literary genre.

When exploring the Gothic it is impossible not to mention the influence from the two persons who are credited with being the first authors who wrote in the gothic style: Horace Walpole, known for the historical Gothic and the acceptance of supernatural elements as supernatural, and Ann Radcliffe, known for the school of terror and the logical explanation of supposed supernatural elements. Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* is considered the first gothic novel and it includes many of the conventions now attributed to the early Gothic novel: a return to the past represented by a dark, mysterious, and crumbling castle, wild and untamed nature, hidden rooms, subterranean dungeons, a pursued girl, revenge, and a tormented villainous figure. These elements were part of an elaborate new style of writing which went against preceding literature's focus on harmony, order, and a didactic function to teach proper behaviour and social morals to the reader. Emotions such as awe, terror, and excitement generated by using a monster or a villain to symbolize a certain vice or group of vices in a not unequivocally manner were thus seen to be a distraction and a possible way of corrupting youths. The Gothic novel was for this reason viewed as dangerous and a threat to a society

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<sup>1</sup> David Punter, red., *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ancient History Encyclopedia, "The Goths" Published: 12.10.2014 URL: <http://www.ancient.eu/Goths/>

<sup>3</sup> David S. Miall, "Gothic Fiction", in *A Companion to Romanticism*, red. Duncan Wu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). p. 345.

who valued aesthetics, virtue, and cohesion amongst the population. The interest for this type of novel coincided with an increase in the number of people, many women among them, which both could and had the time to read in the newly emerging middle-classes. Walpole wrote that his Gothic story was a combination of old and new romance; the old romance being the supernatural and fantastical elements and the new romance, or modern, as Jerrold E. Hogle refers to it, was the rising middle-class with ideas of nature and rules of probability governing the motivation and behaviour of the characters.<sup>4</sup> The combination of supernatural, or uncanny, elements fused with ordinary people made a genre that the public found fascinating and more relatable than previous literature that usually had a member of the noble class as the protagonist.

Trying to define Gothic in a vacuum can be thought of as an exercise in futility as the sociocultural context has always been one of the incentives to write in this particular genre. However, Merriam-Webster makes an admirable attempt when they say that Gothic is:

*“of or relating to a style of writing that describes strange or frightening events that take place in mysterious places.”<sup>5</sup>*

What they accomplish, however, is demonstrating that it is simultaneously both easy and difficult to interpret the Gothic literary style. This definition lacks the aspects of the transgressive, the sublime, and the relationship between horror and terror. But, if one was to ask a random person about the characterization of The Gothic that might include supernatural entities, castles, and ominous atmosphere. While these features certainly apply to many Gothic novels, one could also say that one of the most decisive features of the Gothic is that it both affirm and challenge the norms and boundaries of society. More specifically, it is a transgression of the sociocultural systems by making certain questionable acts such as criminal activities, superstitious beliefs, and lustful demeanor central to the plot. Fred Botting argues that the terrors of transgression in Gothic writing could be said to reassert the values of society by crossing the limits of society to validate the necessity of said limits.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, the Gothic is ambivalent in its relationship to limits, which means that it is playing a provocative back and forth game with transgression and limitation. Botting continues to say that Gothic is located in the cracks between good and bad, light and darkness, rational and irrational, supernatural and natural. This can be taken a step further to include emotional responses in the reader as well. Gothic fiction maneuvers between opposites that could be disgusting and revolting while also intriguing and engaging. The narrative is

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<sup>4</sup> Hogle, Jerrold E. Hogle, red. *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Gothic” Accessed: 26.05.2016 URL: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gothic>

<sup>6</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996). p. 7.



attempting to externalize the human fear through a temporary increase of sublime terror, and then a release as the reader is given an outlet through the dramatic scenes unfolding.

An example of affirmation of the rules of society can be seen at the end of *Castle of Otranto* when Manfred, the usurper, is forced to step down and Theodore is given Otranto. Walpole, the son of Sir Robert Walpole, the first prime minister, is here giving the position of power back to its true hereditary ruler, which could be extrapolated to represent the continuation of status quo in the English society. An example of a provocation to society can be seen in the rewritten 1831 version of *Frankenstein* when Victor Frankenstein is marrying his cousin, Elizabeth Lavenza, as well as the monster's embodiment of the anxieties of unchecked scientific progress in that time. Indeed, even the monster is questioning Frankenstein's contempt for life, echoing the religious belief that only God could create life through a woman's body. This ties into the general attitude at the time that nature had been forgotten by the advancements in technology shared by many authors. In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, one can observe how the sublimity of nature is having a calming effect on both the monster and Frankenstein in times of agony.<sup>7</sup>

The Gothic novel is frequently exploring the limits of society as previously mentioned. Part of the appeal of the Gothic was the textual questions surrounding taboos, norms, morals, and practices that were excluded from the public debate. The populace was delighted with a new type of text that was meant to entertain, please, and revolt the reader than simply a text with didactic purposes. To take this aspect a bit further, the Gothic novel has been focusing less on reason and order, and more upon emotions of suspense, imagination, and terror. The introduction of the Gothic novel has thus many similarities with the Romantic movement; they both depend heavily on the imaginative powers of the human brain through terror and the sublime and the rejection of the purely logical, scientific, and philosophical system of thinking. Additionally, the experiences, inner thoughts, and dreams of the individual was emphasized. This leads to two of the most important terms when speaking about Gothic fiction: the sublime and the uncanny.

The sublime is an expression made famous by Edmund Burke in his treaty '*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*'.<sup>8</sup> He argues that the sublime is the term for the feelings of terror or fear and that these feelings can occur when looking at something extraordinary or uncanny that makes us feel small and insignificant. An example could be the powerful feeling of awe when looking at the world

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, 2003). Chapter 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Nicola Trott, "The Picturesque, the Beautiful and the Sublime", in *A Companion to Romanticism*, red. Duncan Wu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). p. 72-79.

from a top of a mountain or looking at a building of immense proportion. Arguing that humanity is unable to fully grasp the magnitude of such a feat of nature was an attempt to demonstrate the weaknesses of scientific inquiry. In contrast, beautiful is the small, delicate things that gradually change. Merriam-Webster's dictionary uses two definitions to describe the uncanny: "*seeming to have a supernatural character or origin*" and "*being beyond what is normal or expected*".<sup>9</sup> What one can take from these descriptions are the feeling one experiences when an ordinary event or object is manifested in an unusual circumstance where one would not expect. As such, a typical object or situation can construct feelings of terror and fear because they might have been manipulated by an entity of supernatural origin.

The most common supernatural element in Gothic fiction is the monster, usually represented by intimidating creatures, malevolent spiritual beings, or undead figures. Examples of monsters that has come from Gothic novels are Count Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, and Mr. Hyde. Ashley Craig Lancaster suggests that monsters in Gothic fiction are embodiments of symbolism. They are bearers of meaning and the fears and suspicions of society. The Gothic monster is thus functioning as the Other wanting to experience human interaction.<sup>10</sup> This can be seen in *Frankenstein* when the monster wishes to connect with the community but is shunned because of his physical appearance, unnatural creation, and lack of identity. Furthermore, Count Dracula can be interpreted as, amongst many things, a homosexual and a foreign invader. Both of these within human characteristics, but with his overt use of sexuality he is firmly on the outside of Victorian England. He is trying to penetrate the English community and beguile English girls to create more of his kind, but his invasion is blocked by the efforts of Jonathan Harker, Van Helsing, and Englishmen wanting to protect their interests. Dracula could then be counted within the category of the Other as well.

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<sup>9</sup> Merriam-Webster, "Uncanny" Accessed: 26.05.2016 URL: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/uncanny>

<sup>10</sup> Ashley Craig Lancaster, "*From Frankenstein's Monster to Lester Ballard: The Evolving Gothic Monster.*" The Midwest Quarterly no. 2 (2008): 132. Academic OneFile.

### Science Fiction

People tend to link SF with space travel, curiously shaped aliens, utopian/dystopian societies with peculiar philosophies, and the story unfolding in an alternate reality or several years in the past or future. These commonly held beliefs regarding SF is usually represented in popular culture by the well-established franchises of Star Wars and Star Trek. Hard-sf enthusiasts have contested the inclusion of Star Wars in SF, however, as Star Wars includes magic (the force) and ghosts, both of which are usually associated with the fantasy genre. On the other hand, SF is a genre with many sub-genres: hard-sf, space opera, and Science Fantasy are just three examples of the diversity within this genre. Hard-sf is built upon a strong scientific backbone, meaning that it can be considered more science than fiction. Science Fantasy is treated as the hybrid of SF and fantasy, and it is on the other side of the scale from hard-sf. Its components are consistently transcending the genre borders making this genre open for interpretation. All of these sub-genres and the complex nature of SF itself makes it difficult to give a fixed characterization. Additionally, as Nicholls suggests, what starts as SF could be interpreted as fantasy when/if scientific evidence disproves the assertion.<sup>11</sup>

While there are many different definitions concerning science fiction, hereafter shortened to SF, such as Edward James' statement that 'SF is what is marketed as SF'<sup>12</sup>, Adam Roberts suggests that the earliest starting point of SF can be found in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Roberts argues that one can find stories of space travelling preceding 1634, but the focus of the time were largely how the universe was a pure and divine place where only earth's sphere was subject to change, not the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is through Johann Kepler's *Somnium* which truly began the scientific aspect of SF (though some argue against this notion). In Kepler's exploration of space, he made use of the knowledge he had gained by astronomy and science to create a story and a narrative with scientific observations at the core. The pureness of the universe became a secondary priority to creatively exploring the wonders of the universe.

The tendency to shift towards a more scientific perspective was an indicator that society was slowly embracing a new way of thinking about nature and the vast potential of the universe. The intriguing premise of exploring a different world than our own quickly became a popular enterprise when many realized its value and potential, and as such, the number of authors writing in this early form of SF increased substantially in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the vast majority of texts being produced in this period has not been fortunate enough to be included in what Roberts calls the 'Science Fiction megatext'. Megatext is a

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<sup>11</sup> Science Fiction Encyclopedia, "Fantasy" Last edited: 09.04.2015 URL: <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/fantasy>

<sup>12</sup> Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006). p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Roberts, *Science Fiction*: p. 39.

term used for describing certain key features or literary devices often included in an SF novel. Peter Nicholls claims that the most frequently used elements of an SF novel are: a fantastic voyage, the utopian/dystopian society, philosophical fiction, the gothic, and the technological aspect.<sup>14</sup> Although Kepler's *Somnium* may have begun the mentality amongst different writers of producing literary entertainment for the reading public, the first true popular SF novel that has withstood the test of time and criticism is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Mary Shelley was born in 1797 into a family of prominent figures; her father was William Godwin, a political philosopher, and her mother was Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous writer and feminist. As such, she was born into a period of history with much upheaval and instability. The post-revolutionary period was a turbulent time for many as Britain was dealing with the technological and scientific advancements of the Industrial Revolution as well as the circulation of ideals and principles from The French Revolution, which were seen as a threat. These historical developments had an immense effect on the intellectual, political, social, and creative environment in England. By enforcing strong censure, striking down on supporters of the revolution, and removing habeas corpus the government was trying to keep radicalization to a minimum. Many of the authors at the time felt the pressure from the government to write in a certain way to prevent radicalization amongst the public. Meanwhile, the scientific, industrial, and intellectual progress during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a motivation to many authors who found it to be a move away from nature. They thought that science was developing too fast and too recklessly and that the new environment with factories and urbanization neglected the sublimity nature had to offer humanity. *Frankenstein* is Shelley's response to the coldness and overachieving ambition of the scientific mind, and its influence on both Gothic and SF literature has been considerable.

One question must be answered before commencing with the analysis of Gothic elements in Harry Potter. Can Harry Potter be categorized into a scientific, literary genre? Many would claim that Harry Potter is children's fantasy, not SF. Farah Mendlesohn suggests that SF is a discussion or a mode regarding content, themes, and presentation instead of closely following a set of genre conventions.<sup>15</sup> Working with this abstract definition makes it more difficult to state something absolute about what is and what is not SF. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, there are certain features that frequently occur in an SF novel; placing the setting of the story in a different or parallel world, non-human creatures, and time travel being three examples. These can also be observed in the Harry Potter universe. An example of time

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<sup>14</sup> Science Fiction Encyclopedia, "History of SF" Last edited: 05.04.2016 URL: [http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/history\\_of\\_sf](http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/history_of_sf)

<sup>15</sup> Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn, red. *The Cambridge Companion to: Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). p. 2.

travel can be found in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* when Harry and Hermione use a Time-Turner to go back in time to change a series of unfortunate events and consequently the timeline of future incidents are affected by this decision.<sup>16</sup> If one applies a scientific understanding to this circumstance, one could see a cause and effect principle that denotes that the Harry Potter universe is simultaneously using both magic and science in its narrative. Magic is also quantified and measured using pseudo-scientific methods in subjects at Hogwarts such as Potions, Astronomy, Arithmancy (the study of magical properties of numbers), and Herbology. Another example is the voyage that Harry undertakes to get to Hogwarts in all but the last book. The train goes from civilized King's Cross towards a more and more untamed and wild landscape before ending up at the grand castle of Hogwarts. Lastly, discussions between Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore regarding morals, the importance of choices, responsibility, and hope occurs in every book (except the last one) could be viewed as philosophical fiction. One of the most notable quotes in Harry Potter is Dumbledore's remark that: "...there will be a time when we must choose between what is easy and what is right"<sup>17</sup>, is certainly a moral statement that Harry absorbs wholeheartedly.

On the other hand, some crucial differences exist between SF and fantasy. It is true that both SF and fantasy deal with imaginary realities that are equally unreal, but SF is portrayed to be within the realm of possibility by using scientific arguments while fantasy is firmly situated in a setting that means that it could never happen. There are certainly many elements of fantasy in Harry Potter: the aforementioned magic plays an essential part, there are supernatural creatures and uncanny elements such as talking portraits. Furthermore, as Maria Nikolajeva states in her chapter *Harry Potter – A Return to the Romantic Hero*, Harry is in a direct conflict with Voldemort, the evil antagonist appearing consistently throughout the books.<sup>18</sup> Such a clearly defined good and evil is a trademark of fantasy, and, with all of these arguments in mind, one could classify *Harry Potter* within the fantasy genre. With the mix of features from both genres, however, it is within reason to argue that *Harry Potter* could be considered Science Fantasy, a sub-genre within Science Fiction.

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<sup>16</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997-2007). p. 394.

<sup>17</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*: p. 460.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Heilman, red., *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003). p. 135.

Part two:

## Harry Potter and the Gothic

Harry Potter is a fictional character living in a semi-fictional world created by Joanne Rowling, hereafter shortened to J.K. Rowling, in contemporary Britain. The story of Harry Potter, which spanned seven books (approximately 450 million sold worldwide<sup>19</sup>), eight movies (which has been a huge financial success only beaten by Star Wars and the Marvel Cinematic Universe<sup>20</sup>), and has influenced countless people, both children and adults, across the world, includes several interesting elements and different genres within the 3407 pages long story of a boy who lived.

Some would argue that Harry Potter is a book for children, citing the simplified language and the lack of sophisticated themes such as, but not limited to, sexuality, politics, and social critique. However, while it is true that Rowling wrote Harry Potter in a language that young people should be able to comprehend, she also wrote with no specific age group in mind.<sup>21</sup> The themes that are explored in the books are quite mature as well. Throughout the books, Harry is challenged by issues regarding death and mortality, love, friendship, betrayal, identity, and power. Additionally, the inclusion of the slavery of house elves, the homosexuality of Albus Dumbledore, which has been confirmed by Rowling<sup>22</sup>, and the prejudice and racism within the magical community towards Muggles, non-magical people, and the magical purity of one's blood is another aspect in favor of interpreting the series as a transgression of the norms of societies both past and present. One could translate the issue of blood status in *Harry Potter* into the real world through Adolf Hitler's obsession with racial qualities, giving the concept of blood more meaning. The quote below by Dumbledore in *The Goblet of Fire* addressing Cornelius Fudge's bias is perhaps Rowling's way of criticizing the notion that one cannot transcend their class, and the inability of United Kingdom's prime ministers to address social inequality:

*"You place too much importance, and you always have done, on the so-called purity of blood! You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!"*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> USA Today, "J.K. Rowling by the numbers" Last edited: 25.09.2012 URL: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/books/2012/09/25/j-k-rowling-harry-potter-the-casual-vacancy/1582921/>

<sup>20</sup> Box Office Mojo, "Franchise Index". Accessed: 26.05.2016 URL: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/franchises/?view=Franchise&sort=sumgross&order=DESC&p=.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia, "Harry Potter". Last edited: 26.05.2016 URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry\\_Potter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Potter)

<sup>22</sup> Los Angeles Times, "Seven clues that 'Potter's' Dumbledore was gay" Published: 23.10.2007 URL: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-showbiz7-23oct23-story.html>

<sup>23</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*: p. 708.

The themes above can be considered universal, and thus applicable to readers of various age, ethnicity, cultural, and religious backgrounds; which is why some adults have kept on reading chapter after chapter after finishing the nightly bedtime story to their children.

J.K. Rowling comes from a traditional understanding of English literature. Thus, she is well acquainted with classics from authors such as Shakespeare, C.S. Lewis, and Jane Austen, the latter being Rowling's favorite author.<sup>24</sup> Being introduced to a wide array of different styles, genres, and topics obviously influenced her process of writing, and this is evident in the creation of the Harry Potter universe. Philip Hel suggests that *Harry Potter* contain multiple genres such as fantasy, [Science Fantasy], coming of age (Bildungsroman), mystery, drama, and the British children's boarding school genre.<sup>25</sup> Rowling uses all of these genres to create a dynamic and engaging story that advance in maturity for each consecutive book as the main protagonist grows older and have to struggle with new issues relating to love, friendship, and tragedy amongst other things.

As previously mentioned, the features that constitute a Gothic novel has gone through several stages from its birth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to its post-modernistic version. The contemporary Gothic has been known to internalize the common Gothic features, meaning that instead of the events happening in a specific environment or fashion, it is happening inside the head of the protagonist.<sup>26</sup> Meaning that it was the psychological drama unfolding inside one's head that was feeding the uncanny. Humanity had thus began to exploit their own nature for literary devices. However, in *Harry Potter*, the tendency has been reversed yet again. One can observe many of the same elements that were hugely criticized for indulging romances, vices, and immoral behaviour in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in popular books such as *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*. A quote by Anne Jackson briefly summarizes the current trend: "In children's literature today, the Gothic is mainstream."<sup>27</sup> Many children heard scary stories from a talkative member of the family and preferred a terrifying tale of monsters and heroics, implying that children always have had a predisposition for the Gothic. However, the texts that were available for children were instructional and didactic books about proper etiquette and how-to manuals for crafts. Jackson proposes, by showing to examples of murder and body focus, that society has begun to view children differently. As a result of this, we have started to treat them with more complexity, giving them more credibility and

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<sup>24</sup> Oprah, "What's on J.K. Rowling's Bookshelf?" Published: 05.19.2014 URL:

<http://www.oprah.com/oprahbookclub/JK-Rowlings-Favorite-Books>

<sup>25</sup> Philip Nel, *JK Rowling's Harry Potter Novels* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001). p. 28 [my inclusion].

<sup>26</sup> Botting, *Gothic*: p. 104.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Jackson & Karen Coats & Roderick McGillis, red., *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (New York: Routledge, 2008). p. 1.



responsibility. Jackson goes on to say that children are no longer viewed simply as victims, but they are starting to know about their own dark and ambiguous sides of the self.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, many of the Gothic features in children's literature are used seamless and naturally included in the story as well as treated relatively maturely in the same fashion with much of the same effects on the reader. In Harry Potter, perhaps the most read books amongst children, one can see many Gothic features treated in a sophisticated manner as the next paragraphs will demonstrate.

J.K. Rowling has been quoted saying that Harry Potter was a way of dealing with her mother's death, and by giving Harry the same issues as herself, they were healing together throughout the seven books.<sup>29</sup> Death is an essential part of *Harry Potter*, and the reader is often reminded of Harry's deep longing for the love and affection of his parents. Through what can be classified as mild necromancy, Harry is able to see or speak to his parents and loved ones through the Mirror of Erised, *priori incantato* (a spell that enables one to see the 'spell history' of a wand), and the Resurrection Stone culminating in an emotional scene in *The Deathly Hallows* where Harry is finally able to find some closure.<sup>30</sup> The problematic aspect of death in a book with a reading audience consisting of children has been controversial, as was the magical, or occult, influence according to some religious groups who believed that reading Harry Potter would turn their children into Satanists or occultists trying to reenact some of the events in the book.<sup>31</sup> While there are many events in *Harry Potter* that might be considered both scary and shocking, such as when Voldemort drinks the blood from a unicorn in *The Philosopher's Stone*, which is described in a manner resembling an attack from a vampire, and the occult ritual in *The Goblet of Fire* which brings Voldemort back to physical life involving bones, blood, and flesh, the majority of Christians believe the books to be relatively innocent for kids. Even J.K Rowling admits that Christianity inspired *Harry Potter*, a fact that is clearly visible when Harry is killed by Voldemort in *The Deathly Hallows*, but brought back by Dumbledore in a manner that has close parallels with the resurrection of Jesus in Christian mythology.<sup>32</sup>

The religious aspect is one interesting aspect of Gothic fiction. Religion, most often expressed in the form of Christianity, worked as a system of belief that enforced morality and

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<sup>28</sup> Jackson, Coats, and McGillis, *Haunting the Borders*: p. 7-8.

<sup>29</sup> Nel, *Harry Potter Novels*: p. 18-19.

<sup>30</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: p. 698-700.

<sup>31</sup> CBN, "Harry Potter: Harmless Christian Novel or Doorway to the Occult?" Accessed: 26.05.2016 URL: <http://www1.cbn.com/onlinediscipleship/harry-potter%3A-harmless-christian-novel-or-doorway-to-the-occult%3F>

<sup>32</sup> The Telegraph, "J K Rowling: 'Christianity inspired Harry Potter'" Published: 20.10.2007 URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/fictionreviews/3668658/J-K-Rowling-Christianity-inspired-Harry-Potter.html>



cohesion amongst the population. The devil was seen as the dark entity that created disharmony, conflict, and catastrophes that tested the faith of the adherents. In the *Harry Potter* universe, although it mentions religion and faith very rarely, the themes and symbolisms bear a strong similarity to Christianity. The conflict between the good, exemplified by Harry and Dumbledore, who strives towards ideals of liberty, tolerance, and multiculturalism, and the bad, exemplified by Voldemort and his adherents, that wants to purify and dominate, is residing in every book. This battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil are highly comparable to the wrestle between God and the devil in the Bible. Nevertheless, there are characters in *Harry Potter* that play fast and loose with the terms good and bad. Dolores Umbridge is a delegate from the Ministry of Magic, supposed to be from the good side, but she is portrayed as a horrible person with too much power and is by many considered the 'most hated character in Harry Potter'.<sup>33, 34</sup> Severus Snape, in contrast, is seen as the villain for the majority of *Harry Potter*, but his role is turned around in a shocking twist at the end of *The Deathly Hallows* that left many fans in astonishment. With his arrogant, ruthless, intelligent, and emotional investment in Lily Evan (Lily Potter marrying James Potter) one could argue that Snape is a Byronic hero. By taking this line of argument a step further one could surely see the relation between Snape and redeemed, Harry and Jesus, Voldemort and the devil, and God and Dumbledore. Moreover, Harry is killed by Voldemort in *The Deathly Hallows* to save his friends from further harm in a sacrificial manner that mirrors the account of Jesus' sacrifice, and he is brought back to life by a conversation with Dumbledore to continue to fight the adversary. One could view this as Rowling reasserting a sense of religiosity to the *Harry Potter* universe and perhaps to her readers who have gone further and further away from religion since the Age of Enlightenment. Hence, after transgressing with issues concerning homosexuality, a controversial topic, and racism she is arguing for the necessity of religious limitations in society.

The idea of analyzing Voldemort as the devil opens up many intriguing possibilities for interpreting many elements of *Harry Potter* as Gothic. For instance, in *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry is angry and in agony after Bellatrix Lestrange kills Sirius Black, Harry's godfather, and Harry thirsts for revenge upon the guilty party. He is here enacting one of the key features of the Gothic novel: revenge. This raw, emotional response to a villainous act is consistently used throughout many novels, and it emerges in *The Castle of Otranto* when

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<sup>33</sup> BuzzFeed Community, "Ranking The 17 Most Evil Characters In "Harry Potter" Published: 11.03.2014 URL: [https://www.buzzfeed.com/suzefigs/the-17-most-evil-characters-in-harry-potter-9ynr?utm\\_term=.urJv1ONpE#.ysPRr2KmY](https://www.buzzfeed.com/suzefigs/the-17-most-evil-characters-in-harry-potter-9ynr?utm_term=.urJv1ONpE#.ysPRr2KmY)

<sup>34</sup> The Top Tens, "Top Ten Most Annoying Harry Potter Characters" Accessed: 26.05.2016 URL: <http://www.thetoptens.com/annoying-harry-potter-characters/>

Manfred wishes to kill Isabella to enact vengeance upon Theodore for stealing his future bride. Another example of revenge comes from *Frankenstein*. When Victor finds out that the monster has killed his best friend and his bride he is consumed by a feeling of guilt and rage, and he sets out on a mission to kill the monster. The monster, being rejected human warmth and compassion by society, seeks revenge upon individuals close to Frankenstein to gain his attention. Harry, in this state of emotional turmoil, is being engaged in a battle of the minds against Voldemort when Voldemort attempts to possess Harry to acquire control of him. This forced violation of Harry's body is resisted by Harry's mind when he is reminded by Dumbledore how much he still has to love and care for; how he is not like Voldemort.

One of the key elements in *Harry Potter* is the power of dreams/nightmares and visions. In Harry's first night at Hogwarts in *The Philosopher's Stone*, the reader is given a dream to interpret:

*"Perhaps Harry had eaten a bit too much, because he had a very strange dream. He was wearing Professor Quirrell's turban, which kept talking to him, telling him he had to transfer to Slytherin at once, because it was his destiny. Harry told the turban he did not want to be in Slytherin; it got heavier and heavier; he tried to pull it off but it tightened painfully—and there was Malfoy, laughing at him as he struggled with it—then Malfoy turned into the hook-nosed teacher, Snape, whose laugh became high and cold—there was a burst of green light and Harry awoke, sweating and shaking. He rolled over and fell asleep again, and when he woke the next day, he didn't remember the dream at all."*<sup>35</sup>

In the dream, which Harry, unfortunately, cannot remember, the struggles Harry will have to deal with in the future. What is going to be a long and bitter rivalry with Malfoy is mentioned, Snape, who was going to be Harry's secondary enemy whilst at Hogwarts, and the high and cold laugh belonged to Voldemort, the man with whom Harry would be in opposition for years to come. Although not aware of the fact until years later, the dream anticipates Harry's struggle against his inner demons, against the part of Voldemort left inside Harry that connects the two adversaries on a path from which only one could survive. The dreams and nightmares continue throughout the books, some being concerned with day-to-day troubles such as being beaten by Malfoy, but often going back to the night when his parents were brutally killed, leaving Harry with emotional scars that might never heal. However, as the story progresses and become darker and more mature, the reader witness dreams/visions about events that have happened, making Harry clairvoyant as well as giving him a psychic ability to know the thoughts of Voldemort. This connection becomes increasingly dangerous, however, and Harry learns the danger of his dreams too late. The significance of dreams has been explored in *Frankenstein* as well. After completing the monster, Victor Frankenstein falls asleep and dreams about Elizabeth turning into his dead mother.<sup>36</sup> One could certainly

<sup>35</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*: p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*: Chapter 5.

interpret this dream as Victor's subconscious response to him creating life, represented by the monster who is ultimately going to be an agent of death, perverting the natural creation of life. Consequentially, dreams in Gothic fiction are bearers of meaning and foreshadowing and likewise in *Harry Potter*.

Part of the Gothic function is to be a connector between the past and the present. Many Gothic novels look backwards to a somewhat idolized past with nostalgia, or the plot of the story is revolving around overcoming obstacles from the past that weighs psychologically on the characters. *The Castle of Otranto* is looking behind at a feudal past, and if one looks at Rowling's *Harry Potter* and George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* one can clearly see tendencies of the same interest with the old times. For instance, the use of sword and shield as primary weapons indicates that the setting of *Game of Thrones* takes place in a fictional Middle-age inspired world where dragons exist and technology is rudimentary. However, as Philip Hel notes, while the setting of the *Harry Potter* books takes place in England in a modern environment with PlayStation and televisions Rowling has included items from the past such as writing with quills and delivery of mail by use of birds.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, many of the *Harry Potter* books involve Harry and his friends discovering something about the past to solve a problem in the present. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, the mysteries from 50 years ago needs to be revealed to stop Voldemort, or Tom Riddle as he was called at that time. This ties in with the understanding that Gothic fiction operates in the cracks, in the space between extremities; neither past nor present, but both. In *Frankenstein*, the past could be said to be represented by the religious attitude and the pull back towards nature and its supposed healing powers. The present is represented, although also criticized by Shelley, by the progress of science. Shelley is transgressing by using two main points. Firstly, the scientific mentality at the time that tried to go beyond the natural order of things. Secondly, by using the monster's experience of people pushing him away from society and into a state of desolation, loneliness, and atrocity because of his looks as a way of criticizing people's morality. However, she also reaffirms societal values by making Frankenstein seem just as guilty as the monster because he ignored his obligations to his family and his creation.

One of the uncanny incidents in *The Castle of Otranto* is the time when the portraits move and talk. This supernatural occurrence has a special significance as it works to move the story further with critical information. In Hogwarts one can also observe moving and talking portraits, some, like The Fat Lady, is especially important to the story in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. Sirius Black, who is later revealed to be Harry's godfather, destroys her portrait in a

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<sup>37</sup> Hel, *Harry Potter novels*: p. 14.

fit of rage when she refuses him access to the Gryffindor common room. Staircases that move independently and armors coming to life also transpire in the haunted castle of Hogwarts, adding more unnatural items to the castle. Portraits and stairs are normally quite ordinary, but when they behave in a fashion that is entirely unexpected, they serve as functions of the uncanny that creates an air of suspense. Moreover, the Room of Requirement and the Chamber of Secrets are two rooms that closely follow the Gothic conventions of hidden rooms with dark and mysterious secrets that, if released, could put many lives in danger. Especially the tunnel leading to the Chamber of Secrets are illustrated in a frightening manner that builds suspense through words such as: dark, shadows, monstrous in the wandlight, and quiet as a grave.<sup>38</sup> These words, along with the knowledge that something deadly awaits at the end of the tunnel makes for an interesting comparison with Jonathan Harker's daunting way to Dracula's tomb in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.<sup>39</sup>

Harry Potter and his friends must travel to get to Hogwarts. This means taking the train from the civilized nexus of transportation that is King's Cross, and moving north into an undisclosed location in the highlands of Scotland. The trip from London to Scotland is simultaneously a voyage (more on that above) and a move into one of the most typical Gothic features: the wild and untamed nature. Rowling has consciously put the school of witchcraft and wizardry in a region where nature reigns supreme. One could make the association of naturalism plus magic, perhaps meaning that magic is, in a sense, intertwined with nature on a deeper level. *Castle of Otranto* is also surrounded by wild and untamed nature, as is, of course, *Frankenstein* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. In all instances, the wildness and tamedness of nature can symbolize the emotional status of the characters. An example of how nature is personified in *Harry Potter* is the ability of animagi, the skill to transform into an animal. Each person who partakes the long study to become an animagus is given a form not by choice but by his or her personality. For instance, Sirius Black, who is a loyal father figure to Harry, is given, by his nature, the form of a black German shepherd. In contrast, Peter Pettigrew, the man who sold out Harry's parents to Voldemort, is given the shape of a rat. The symbolism here is clear; nature has given a traitorous figure the characteristics of a rat, a euphemism for an untrustworthy individual. Voldemort himself, although not an animagus, is described as something other than human; he has lost the physical properties of humanity, and has thus been transformed into a monster. The main villain in *Harry Potter* is thus the uncanny, monstrous other that relentlessly pursues a young boy that stands in his way to power. This ability is different to that of a werewolf, who is unable to control the change, and

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<sup>38</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secret*: p. 223.

<sup>39</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). p. 63.

it resembles the transformation from one being into another. Another example of a transformation from the Gothic is the story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The transformation of Bathilda Bagshot into Nagini, the snake that belonged to Voldemort, is one more example from *Harry Potter* that bears many similarities to Gothic fiction. It is a transformation that is described in a grotesque manner, invoking feelings of horror and disgust. These feelings are related to Gothic horror, which separates itself from Gothic terror whose focus is upon the imaginative while horror is on the visually repulsive.

One of the many Gothic elements in *Harry Potter* is, according to June Cummins, a scene in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* where Hermione is pursued and fighting against a troll in the girl's bathroom.<sup>40, 41</sup> Cummins argues that this scene can be considered Gothic because of several facts. Firstly, she is physically threatened as a girl, against a man in a huge castle and is finally rescued by another man. Secondly, she is entrapped within a room now associated with danger. Lastly, she is threatened by a troll -- a monster. Monsters, as discussed earlier, can be considered a representation of the anxieties in society, and Cummins claims that the troll signifies the attitude towards the ugliness and filthiness of menstruation amidst the public. Hermione proceeds to fight against the symbolism with the help of her male companions, and when she emerges from the enclosed room, she has been transformed from an intolerable, arrogant, and unlikable girl into a feminine woman. By describing Hermione as a damsel in distress, Rowling is placing her in a temporary Gothic light, but when she steps out of the bathroom, she asserts herself as a strong and independent woman. In contrast with Hermione's change, Cummins uses the ghost of Moaning Myrtle to show how she is forever stuck in the Gothic mode.<sup>42</sup> She has been reduced to a symbol of society's expectations of girls, and is thus unable to move on from the girls' bathroom. Hermione's transformation also opens up the possibility for romance between Ron and Hermione, and already in book 4, *The Goblet of Fire*, one can observe Ron's jealousy when she is with somebody other than him meaning that they have begun to view each other romantically. The sexual innuendo can also be seen for the first time in this book when Moaning Myrtle is looking at Harry while he is taking a bath, bringing the degree of maturity in the books to another level.

Perhaps the darkest and most brutal part of *Harry Potter* is the area concerning torture. In *The Deathly Hallows*, maybe the darkest and most mature chapter of *Harry Potter*, one can observe Bellatrix Lestrange torturing Hermione until she is unconscious while Ron and Harry

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<sup>40</sup> Jackson, Coats, and McGillis, *Haunting the Borders*: p. 179.

<sup>41</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*: p. 139-143.

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, Coats, and McGillis, *Haunting the Borders*: p. 190.

are locked inside a cell forced to listen to her desperate screams of pain.<sup>43</sup> On a side note, in the cinematic version of *The Deathly Hallows*, one can even see the word 'mudblood' carved into Hermione's skin. Although the carving is not stated in the book, the use of the word mudblood to describe Hermione's blood status makes the scene politically charged. By using blood status as a tool for creating a hierarchical system of value the antagonists, Voldemort, and his Death Eaters, take an extremist position. They claim that if one is not of pure blood, one is not truly a wizard or witch. This can perhaps be extrapolated to mean that many believe, still, that white people are superior to people of other ethnicities. Rowling is here using one important feature of the Gothic novel, the transgression of societal norms, to criticize those that hold that attitude toward others.

Finally, a feature of Gothic fiction that one does expect to find in a book that is read by kids is the inclusion of sadism. Bellatrix Lestrange, responsible for most of the truly brutal things happening in *Harry Potter*, including the torture of Neville Longbottom's parents to incurable insanity, is also the one connected with the practice of sadism. Bellatrix is a result of possible incestuous relationships between the families with 'pure blood', giving birth to violent tendencies and mental health issues. She is delighted by violence, and appears unstable from the start to her ultimate end at the hands of Molly Weasley. She tortured Hermione, killed Sirius Black, her cousin, and then taunted Harry until he gave in to his anger and used an unforgivable curse on her. It can be argued that she does acts of evil to gain Voldemort's affection and attention, but as he lacks the ability to love he has never reciprocated her feelings which makes her slightly more sympathetic. In *The Deathly Hallows*, after Harry is resurrected, one can see her standing over Voldemort attempting to comfort or console him.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the actions of this individual could be interpreted as a result of her upbringing and family history. Rowling might have meant for this character to be a tragic figure whose actions are more understandable, although maybe not excusable, considering. As such, her role in *Harry Potter* could be to show how wrong things can go if elitism and poor parenting is left unchecked.

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<sup>43</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: p. 465-468.

<sup>44</sup> Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: p. 724-725.

### Conclusion:

The aim of this dissertation was to address three questions: what is the relationship between Science Fantasy and Gothic fiction, what are the Gothic features that have become seamlessly incorporated into children's literature, represented by *Harry Potter*, and what are the function of these elements. To answer the first question there was important with an account of the background of SF to see similarities and differences between Science Fantasy. Moreover, as one can see from the similarities, the elements that constitute a Gothic novel shares many core values with Science Fantasy such as moralistic discussions (philosophical fiction) and the uncanny. Though, the uncanny is frequently supernatural creatures in Gothic while it could be aliens in Science Fantasy. During the course of this dissertation the questions surrounding the nature of the Gothic and how the suspenseful atmosphere it inspires can be said to occur in contemporary literature were tried to be answered by using *Harry Potter* as an example and occasionally using other Gothic novels to provide further insights. As such, by showing to the gloomy use of language in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* one could safely say that the Gothic has penetrated the children's books. Children, however, would perhaps say that the Gothic elements are the best parts, further demonstrating that the terror and anxiety originating from Gothic elements are desirable aspects of the story.

For the last part of the dissertation, the analysis of Rowling's use of Gothic features in *Harry Potter* one can clearly see that the story is permeated with Gothic elements creating suspense and a feeling of terror for the reader. With little doubt, Rowling has used her knowledge of genres and literary devices to insert various elements of Gothic fiction to create an atmosphere of mystery, darkness, and magic. This creates a surge of powerful emotions initiating the imaginative parts of the human brain. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the examination of the Gothic elements in *Harry Potter*; they usually have a deeper meaning than simply a literary device to bring excitement to the reader. They can for instance have a feminine point of view as indicated in Jane Cummins interpretation of Hermione's change occurring in the bathroom, or sociocultural and socioeconomic aspect of blood status that could be explained as critique of nobility and the oppression of the working classes.

*Harry Potter* could thus be said to be an embodiment of the contemporary style; it contains multiple genres and it is read by people from all walks of life, ethnicities, religions, and age groups. Additionally, it also contains numerous Gothic conventions that makes it a suspenseful story that becomes deeper and more meaningful as each new interpretation reveals more of the transgression and limitation inherent in the 3407 pages about a boy who lived.



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## Section 2

## Section 3