

LIMINALITIES BETWEEN THE GOTHIC AND THE *BILDUNGSROMAN*: *HARRY POTTER*
AS CHILDREN'S GOTHIC

by

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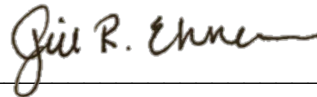
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Introduction

Upon first glance, the Gothic and the *Bildungsroman* are two genres that seem unrelated. On the one hand, Gothic literature evokes themes of darkness, the past, and humanity's relationship with the uncanny and the subconscious; characters in the genre don't appear to grow or evolve, but they often dwell in an ambiguous and contradictory reality where the ancient and the modern seem to coexist or collapse. The *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand, presupposes a linear time, a before and an after, a narrative trajectory that tells how a protagonist matures from a young age into adulthood, growing physically and emotionally, and eventually assimilating into society. The eerie, stunted temporality of the Gothic could thus appear at odds with the developmental time of the *Bildungsroman*, and yet, a blending of these two genres in the form of what we could call a Gothic *Bildungsroman* has emerged as a relatively new literary trend in the sphere of children's literature. At the forefront of this wave of Gothic children's literature is the tale of a boy wizard with a lightning-bolt scar: Harry Potter, the hero of the famous eponymous series by J.K. Rowling. The *Harry Potter* series is the story of a boy who suddenly enters the wizarding world, but it is also the *Bildungsroman* made Gothic, a narrative embodying the overlap of the two genres. Through its seven novels, *Harry Potter* brings together these genres into a children's story where growing up is a Gothic affair, and where the uncanny and the atavistic are imbricated in the process of maturing and adapting to the social world.

From the start, the story is defined by the experience of growing up. On his eleventh birthday, Harry Potter discovers that he is a wizard. A storm rages in the night as a half-giant stands over the little boy and tells him that his life is not what it seems. Harry's parents were wizards and they had been killed by an evil sorcerer. Over the course of the next seven years, Harry Potter goes on to learn magic at an enchanted castle, solve mysteries that go beyond the

living, and defeat the Dark Lord Voldemort. The epilogue portrays Harry and his friends nineteen years later in 2017 sending off their own children to Hogwarts.

The *Harry Potter* series began in 1997 as a children's novel titled *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J.K. Rowling. The core series of books came to a conclusion in 2007 with the seventh installment, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The canon content of the series has since continued to expand with the publication of several works in what is now called the "Wizarding World" (*Wizarding World*). The 2012 launch of Pottermore, a multi-faceted website created by Rowling, further broadened the scope of the Wizarding World with ongoing publications ("J.K. Rowling Original"). The story of the boy wizard has turned into a global phenomenon that stands as the best-selling book series in history ("500 million copies sold").

Despite the first *Harry Potter* novel being about a child and marketed to young audiences, the series has grown to appeal to readers of all ages. The story begins just before Harry turns eleven and ends just shy of his eighteenth birthday. Readers follow Harry through his childhood and watch as he lives not only the life of a wizard, but also the life of an average teenager. He makes friends and rivals, plays on a school sports team, stresses over class examinations, and even has his first kiss; however, Harry experiences these ordinary events in the extraordinary setting of a medieval castle where he interacts with ghosts and battles a dark wizard. To read *Harry Potter* is to read the tale of a child growing up in a Gothic way.

The primary subject of this thesis, the analysis of the *Harry Potter* series as an example of a Gothic *Bildungsroman*, is structured in two sections. The first part provides an overview of both the Gothic and the *Bildungsroman*, surveying their individual histories and themes and highlighting their similarities and tensions. As I will argue, one of the main similarities is an interest in questions of liminality, which are often portrayed through episodes and motives of

transition and in-betweenness, though in different ways within each genre. While the Gothic highlights the hybridity of a place between the past and present, the *Bildungsroman* places an emphasis on the transition of childhood to adulthood. Through a look at how liminality is present in *Harry Potter*, I will examine the series as one of the first of a recent wave of Gothic *Bildungsromane*. To accomplish this study of liminal spaces in the Gothic and *Bildungsroman* through *Harry Potter*, I will primarily focus on two books within the series: the first novel — *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* — and the final novel — *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. I have selected these two texts to highlight how Harry has grown from the first novel to the last, and also due to the introduction to the wizarding world in the first novel and final battle for the wizarding world in the final novel. By considering the traits of the *Bildungsroman* and the Gothic genres as dramatized in *Harry Potter*, I foreground the series' use of liminal elements space and time and the way these devices convey the growth of Harry as a character from childhood to adulthood in a world that defies reality.

The second part of this thesis will consider the reception of children's Gothic through the example of *Harry Potter*. In particular, I will discuss the role of the "Other" and its impact on young audiences. The emergence of *Harry Potter* as a children's Gothic cultural phenomenon raises the question of how education responds to such cultural influences, making *Harry Potter* a prime example of the impact children's Gothic has begun to have. In consideration of this, I will take a final look at the censorship that impacts not only Gothic novels read in classrooms by children, but the criticism *Harry Potter* in particular faces as a children's Gothic series and how the story of a boy wizard is relevant today.

The *Bildungsroman* Tradition

The definition of “children’s literature” is one that spans a wide age range. *Harry Potter* has been read by youth and adults alike, but was originally published by Bloomsbury in the category of children aged nine to eleven (Huler). As the series begins when Harry turns eleven, readers are able to watch as Harry grows up and transforms from an ostracized little boy to a confident young man. This growth of a character over time and as a person is a trademark of the *Bildungsroman* genre that can be found within its very name, a compound German term: *bildung* — meaning “education, learning, or culture” — and *roman* — meaning “novel” or “fiction” (Pugh 50). It is a text that often depicts the growth of a character physically, mentally, and emotionally. The theme of learning within this genre typically follows the education of a person through personal growth as they grow older, allowing them to become self-realized adults by the end. Gregory Castle notes that within the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre, “harmonious identity-formation, aesthetic education, meaningful and rewarding social relations, [and] a vocation” (24) are integral. A *Bildungsroman* is notable for spanning the childhood and adolescence of the protagonist’s life, often including young adulthood. By the end, they will usually have found a sense of self within their society. Jeong-Hee Kim and Aaron Zimmerman write that the *Bildungsroman* is a genre that serves as a “reflective narrative of personal growth” through the “story of one’s *Bildung* that focuses on the ontological issue of developing oneself and one’s journey of becoming” (239). This “journey of becoming” that the character undertakes is their own tale of development that focuses on physical and emotional growth. Castle writes that, “The *Bildungsroman*, then, is written for the sake of the journey, and not for the sake of the happy ending toward which that journey points” (12). The protagonist learns about themselves while concurrently learning about their surrounding community to “confront the prevailing norms of their world.”

This world that the protagonist lives in becomes integral to their journey. The trajectory of the *Bildungsroman* often exists in a specific structure: an ordinary beginning for an extraordinary character, movement to a broader place of learning, and integration into the typical social order. This trajectory is one that *Harry Potter* shares, beginning with the theme of “child protagonists, who are equally prone to being orphaned” and who serve as “a vulnerable and friendless figure” (Butler and O’Donovan 129). The trope of an exceptional-yet-unaccepted protagonist growing up in an a provincial town is seen within many *Bildungsromane*, including notable British titles such as Jane Austen’s *Emma* from 1815, Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* from 1850, D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* from 1913, Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* from 1985, and countless others (Pugh 50). It is a tradition also included in *Harry Potter* from the first page of the series. Harry grows up in the fictional town of Little Whinging, located in Surrey, England, with the Dursley family made up of his Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon, and cousin Dudley. The family, “of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 1). Harry’s stark exceptionalism to this “perfectly normal” upbringing is revealed only pages later when we learn that Harry Potter, only a year old and freshly branded with a lightning-bolt scar, had been delivered to his aunt and uncle on the night of his parents’ murder. Little Harry is the sole survivor of the attack, and now he is to grow up away from the wizarding world. This childhood outside of the enchanted society of wizards causes Harry to be unaware of magic before his eleventh birthday. Once he is swept into a magical education at Hogwarts, he must come to terms with his place in a new world.

Concerning the transition of place, Harry’s entrance into Hogwarts marks the typical *Bildungsroman* trope of a character going off to a broader place, and often obtaining an

education. As Nita Novianti writes, “this genre is undoubtedly one that is concerned with a character’s education and development from childhood to adulthood” (255). Through education, the characters are able to grow in a place of traditional learning that also becomes a space for their emotional transition into adulthood. The *Bildungsroman* partly shows a character’s shifting from these phases of life through the transitional period of school. In *Harry Potter*, Hogwarts becomes this stage: “Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 112). The imposing castle becomes not just a school for Harry, but his home where his own self-identity develops. Noting this importance of identity in the genre, Castle writes that the traditional *Bildungsroman* stresses “the sheer complexity of individual potentiality” and “practical reality” and the “hero’s self-realization” (12). The practical reality for Harry exists within a new, magical society — functioning as a school — where he must learn how to respond to, not only school lessons, but new challenges he is presented with in order to become a self-realized adult.

In the *Bildungsroman*, this self-realization and reality typically comes from protagonists finding themselves confronting an ideology presented within their society that they must struggle with (Pugh 51). Similarly, Harry himself must also contend with internal struggles throughout the series. Harry’s entrance into the wizarding world is filled with his confrontation of ideologies around “blood purity” based on magical or non-magical parentage and even the prejudices the four Hogwarts Houses have against one another. All of Harry’s confrontations with these dogmas take place in the setting of Hogwarts, the setting for the overarching ideas presented by his wizarding education. One primary example of Harry’s confrontations inside Hogwarts takes place in the final novel concerning the wizarding education Harry has experienced. Within *Harry*

Potter and the Deathly Hallows, education is shown to become a “perverted” tool with which different individuals aspire to instill harmful ideologies within the pupils (Pugh 51). In this book, Voldemort assumes control of Hogwarts and brings an era of darkness upon it. Voldemort begins a new set of curricula within the school based around the social hierarchy of “blood purity” and utilizes corporal punishment for dissenters. This new structure creates a disturbing image of a society where the main antagonistic force controls the very education of wizarding children, attempting to instill his own prejudices of blood purity and dark magic within Hogwarts. An example of this is shown when Neville Longbottom tells Harry about the state of Hogwarts in the final novel: “what used to be Defense Against the Dark Arts, except now it’s just Dark Arts. We’re supposed to practice the Cruciatus Curse on people who’ve earned detentions” (*Deathly Hallows* 487). This mention of the Cruciatus Curse refers to a spell that inflicts physical pain on the recipient. Having students perform torture on other fellow students who break school rules - such as refusing to participate in the new “Dark Arts” class - becomes a way for Voldemort to attempt to turn the students into vehicles of his own practices. Ironically, the class formerly known as “Defense Against the Dark Arts” is the one class Harry finds himself prodigious in, furthering the negative mark that Voldemort has inflicted on Hogwarts.

Harry’s struggle with the ideologies presented during his time at Hogwarts culminate in his final year spent outside of the castle walls in symbolic rebellion and the final battle against Voldemort which takes place inside the Hogwarts castle. In this battle, an army of Voldemort’s followers — called Death Eaters — descend on the school where students, both old and new, stand in defense of the castle and, symbolically, their own ideologies. It is not only a physical battle, but a battle of morality where individuals decide what their beliefs are and stand for them. As critics have noted, though Harry is painted as being the leader of the army of wizarding

students at the battle, he is not presented as an infallible voice of moral judgement throughout the entire series. There are moments throughout the books when Harry himself teeters between choosing right and wrong, and has chosen both. These lapses in his judgement provide a chance for Harry to not only grow emotionally and ethically within his *Bildungsroman*, but serve as an example of how the “hero is able to recuperate his or her own experiences as part of a productive process of self-development” (Castle 249). Furthermore, not all of Harry’s developmental decisions are critical and concern battling a dark wizard. Many of his choices involve things relatable by a general audience: struggling in school with instructors and exams, navigating friendships and romances, and choosing where to spend his Christmas vacation. While this allows Harry to grow as a character, it also involves teachable moments and thought-provoking discussions for young and adult readers alike. This unique combination is markedly part of children’s literature which, “almost from its inception, has been both didactic and entertaining” (Chatterjee 206). Within the setting of a *Bildungsroman*, the audience is able to see the consequences of Harry’s own choices as he grows older and encounters increasingly complex issues and ideologies.

The Gothic Genre

As Harry turns a year older in each novel and faces new challenges, the story becomes more deadly and sinister. The *Harry Potter* series itself steadily darkens as it progresses. This is markedly obvious in the fourth novel, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when a ritual of dark magic brings Lord Voldemort to life in a graveyard, and when Harry watches a friend die for the first (but far from last) time. The first three novels appear to highlight whimsical attributes by comparison while the following four novels highlight more grim, mature themes, culminating in the final bloody battle of the last book; however, it can be argued that the *Harry Potter* series has

been a dark tale from its first page, even with the playful elements. The initial novel carries grim elements such as the murder of Harry's parents that leaves him an orphan, a gloomy forest outside school grounds called the Forbidden Forest, a creature drinking the blood of a slain unicorn, a Cerberus being kept in the Hogwarts castle, and a wizard with a villain growing out of the back of his head. These dark elements provide Harry's tale with hallmarks of Gothic literature that can be observed from the beginning of the first novel up until the final page of the *Harry Potter* series. The role of *Harry Potter* as an example of the Gothic genre is observable through its rendition of traditional Gothic tropes and themes. To understand these elements, it is prudent to first discuss the history and traditions of the Gothic genre itself.

The emergence of the term "Gothic novel" came out of a society that had embraced the Gothic within its culture (Duggett 342). The versatile word had become a term ascribed to several topics, but by the eighteenth century was notably being used to refer to a particular style of architecture. This architecture was meant to be a modern imitation of past styles, and was used to "to expand one's sense of reality" (Howard 27). Likewise, Gothic literature would similarly challenge the ideas of reality. The first book recognized by many to receive the label was *Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole in 1764, and was conceived by Walpole in a nightmare (Crawford 1). The novel tells a tale with ancient familial prophecy, untimely death, a castle setting, skeletal apparitions, and the descent into madness. Walpole himself wrote in the preface of the novel's second edition that it was meant to "blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" (Morin 75). This combination was presented in the novel by extraordinary elements, such as a supernatural presence, through the classic story of a romance. Through this, Walpole was able to combine two types of storytelling that narrated a tale of reality and what lies beyond it. Walpole's

use of “the realism of the novel and the fantasy of the romance” (Morin 75) would go on to help establish the Gothic genre.

The genre itself has been marked by a presence of motifs including “gloomy castles, secret passages, terrified damsels, evil and domineering aristocrats, ghosts, storms, ancestral curses, inherited sins, and mysterious and unnatural happenings” (Crawford 2). But what separates the Gothic from other supernatural genres is its depiction of a liminality — a space of transition, becoming, and in-betweenness — within time and place. By using a Gothic setting and romantic storytelling in *Castle of Otranto*, Walpole transferred historical otherness from traces of the past in texts and buildings, to archaic structures in the present minds of both author and reader” (Duggett 343). This shifting of time and space within literary traditions continues in Gothic literature written centuries after Walpole and his *Castle of Otranto*. The term “Gothic” itself has come to be “not only a term of transition itself [...] but the mode of transition itself” (Duggett 352). Within the *Harry Potter* series, transition plays an intrinsic role in the story and development of Harry’s character. Harry’s story carries strong transitional elements such as childhood to adulthood, Muggle to wizard, outsider to insider, student to teacher, and life to death. The novels become an exploration of how he operates within the space between these binaries, with a particular focus on life and death. It is the aspect of death that often appears in Gothic fiction, and is heavily considered with its transitory relationship with life through the supernatural.

David Punter, a member of the International Gothic Association, is quoted as saying that the Gothic genre places “an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of suspense” (Morin 2). These

aspects remain in Gothic literature, which has expanded since the *Castle of Otranto* and has opened fields of study in the literary production of such works as the Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen in 1818, Irish Gothic in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in 1897, Southern Gothic in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" by Flannery O'Connor in 1953, and more. As the Gothic genre has continued to be published, more sub-genres of the Gothic have been observed. One of these notable genres that the Gothic has given rise to in modern years is children's Gothic.

The history of the Gothic within children's published literature can be argued to begin with the fairy tales and fantasy stories that have existed — and been read by children — for centuries. Rosemary Jackson writes that the vast genre of fantasy has often been defined as literature that has shown a "refusal of prevailing definitions of the 'real' or 'possible'" and can be applied to "any literature which does not give priority to realistic representation: myths, legends, folk and fairy tales" (14). Gothic literature also defies many of the constraints applied to what is "real" or "possible" such as the presence of supernatural aspects within the Gothic but differs greatly in nature from many other forms of fantasy, such as fairy tales. Despite this, Lucie Armitt writes that both the Gothic and fairy tales share a connection through "readers identifying fearfully but pleasurably with vulnerable interlopers" and "secrets and the textual encoding of latent desires" ("Gothic Fairy-Tale" 135). Both the Gothic and fairy tales have included a subconscious layer that looks at desire and vulnerable characters finding themselves in an in-between place; however, the Gothic is often shown to have a more introspective look that examines the fears underlying the human subconscious. Jackson writes that the Gothic "examines personal disorder, opposing fiction's classical unities (of time, space, unified character)" (R. Jackson 97). This look at the inner self and the opposition to a confined definition of time and space creates a unique place for the Gothic to exist separate from other fantasy

genres. Still, Gothic elements can be found in many fairy tales, meshing with the themes and structures within fairy tales in a Gothic fashion. Jack Zipes writes that “the fairy tale creates disorder to create order and, at the same time, to [...] ponder instinctual drives and gender, ethnic, family, and social conflicts” (15). When combined in certain fairy tales, the Gothic emerges as part of their form and helps to give a look at the human desires and fears underlying the “disorder” that fairy tales use to examine different issues.

Several examples of the Gothic being found in certain fairy tales is sometimes thought to be found in Germany with the 1812 publication of *Grimms' Fairy Tales* (originally titled *Kinder- und Haus-Märchen*, or *Children, and Household Tales*. Written in the Gothic town of Marburg, a town filled with Gothic architecture, this text by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm contained 86 stories of folklore with such tales as “Cinderella” and “Hansel and Gretel.” These didactic stories contained familiar elements of a medieval landscape lush with dense forests and pastoral villages. Villains take the form of witches, goblins, and evil fairies, often trying to prevent a happy ending for the protagonist. Notably, many of the stories end in bloodshed: “The Hand with the Knife” ends with a bloodied, severed limb and hysteria over a betrayed romance; “Bluebeard” ends on a happy note, but only after the protagonist finds the corpses of her husband’s former brides in his castle; and, possibly the most disturbing tale, “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering” tells the tale of children murdering each other like livestock for fun, familial murder, madness, and suicide. Zipes notes in the 2014 republication of the first *Grimms' Fairy Tales* edition that certain stories - including “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering” - were omitted in later prints “because they were too gruesome” (Grimm xxxvi). Despite the dark themes found within the *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, it became more widely-read than

other folklore compendiums that had gained popularity, such as Ludwig Bechstein's *Deutsches Märchenbuch* (1845) by the turn of the century (Worley 67).

At the second half of the nineteenth century, the Grimm Brothers anthology stands out as a darker text among during a time when children's stories often revolved around a whimsical fantasy adventure with a happy ending, such as *The Light Princess* by George MacDonald (1864), *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain (1881), and *The Black Arrow* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1883). This is a theme that would continue throughout the twentieth century with most Gothic publications reaching an adult audience. Children's stories continued to focus on bright fantasy with happy endings for the protagonist and avoided unnecessary details of bloodshed. This began to change towards the very end of the century when an exponential rise in Gothic stories for children took place. Tales of haunted castles and disturbed love stories were not just reserved for adults or fairy tales, but were able to reach a young audience. This divergence from the former pattern of avoiding darker subjects in children's literature reveals a unique observance of the traditions found within Gothic and how it approaches elements relating to the liminalities of life through the eyes of a child. These texts can be found to mesh with children's stories in a way that is both a Gothic tale and a *Bildungsroman*.

The Gothic as *Bildungsroman*

The Gothic, Anna Jackson asserts, has now come to permeate children's literature (365). It is not just adult literature that features serious themes of reality and death, but instead the Gothic has come to be featured in novels in the Young Adult category and even the Middle Grade category. The first Young Adult novel, as the genre is defined today, considered to be part of the Gothic is not a recent publication, but instead arguably began near the publication of *Castle of Otranto*: the 1818 novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley.

The author herself was only twenty years old and the novel's protagonist — Victor Frankenstein — is a young adult studying at university. During his adolescence, Frankenstein must contend with what it means to be alive and what defines the difference between a human and the “Other.”

This theme remains in other children's novels dealing in the Gothic, notably in a coming-of-age novel such as Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* from 1960 that delves into racial, class, and social “Otherness.” These themes have continued in Gothic publications, particularly since the beginning of the twenty-first century when the Gothic has experienced a growth in popularity within children's literature (Davison 190), strongly retaining its experience with the “Other.” *Harry Potter* is one of the earliest examples of this new children's Gothic wave with its publication in 1997, and was followed by Stephanie Meyer's paranormal-romance, *Twilight*, in 2005. Other popular children's novels featuring the Gothic filled the 2000s and 2010s with Chris Priestley's *Uncle Montague's Tales of Terror* in 2007, Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* in 2008 and *Coraline* in 2009, Ransom Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* in 2011, and Holly Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* in 2013. Notably, five of the seven listed works have been made into internationally-released films, going beyond the pages of books to reach even broader audiences. Exposure to Gothic works has begun to extend past adult literature, grade school literature, and even films, as Gothic stories can now be part of teaching children how to read through books like *Dracula: A BabyLit Counting Primer* by Jennifer Adams where children learn how to read numbers by counting tombstones and castles. Children are able to grow up surrounded by elements of the Gothic from the very beginning of their literate years and spend their time in grade school with shelves increasingly filled by Gothic novels. In these new renditions of children's Gothic, the “Other” is often the child protagonist themselves (Wisker 381). For example, *Twilight* features a teenager who falls in

love with a vampire at her school, while *The Graveyard Book* features a boy raised by ghosts after his family is murdered.

Harry Potter is an example of this rise in children's Gothic novel where Harry grows up as the child that does not fit in with his provincial town of Little Whinging. His first transition occurs as he "escapes from the dreary world of the Muggles in the gothically ornamented wizarding world" (Jackson 373). Through making the wizarding world a place where the dark and Gothic is often made into a collection of whimsical traits, the novels present oddities as something interesting and fun, turning something "Other" into something palatable. Early occurrences of this include mixing a dark topic with something whimsical or silly: "Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945. [...] Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling" (*Philosopher's Stone* 103). This description of Dumbledore, written on the back of a card, features a note on a fight against a "Dark wizard" before switching to "chamber music and tenpin bowling." This jarring transition changes from a dark tone into a casual one, undermining the reader's expectations and lightening an otherwise frightening "Other" into a humorous line. Gina Wisker notes that children's Gothic compares the "othering" that happens to its protagonist as part of "identity formation" in teenage years with new "Others" such as witches, werewolves and vampires (378). Through making the "Other" a magical entity, Gothic children's books make these characters relatable and fascinating. Through the lens of the "Other" in these books, audiences are able to see mature topics in the real world made approachable. It is the fantastical "Other" side of children's Gothic that "exposes our complacency about managed systems, tolerance and equality, truth and justice" (Wisker 381). This focus on the protagonist challenging popular beliefs is one shared by the *Bildungsroman* genre and ties in the Gothic theme of transition through the use of a protagonist

occupying a liminal space in society. Wisker notes that it is this liminality in children's literature that is "expressed in troublesome, transitional moments, testing times, identity crises amidst social and environmental crises" (90). Through the transitional period of childhood and young adolescence, children's Gothic uses supernatural elements to challenge the growth of its protagonist in a fantastical society. Children's Gothic finds its place in the "underlying tensions between challenge and dis-ease, guidance and conformity, also traditional Gothic staples, and a sense of transition, of liminality" (Wisker 378).

As one of the earliest of this modern wave of children's Gothic, *Harry Potter* embodies the traits of the *Bildungsroman* and the Gothic in their unique interpretation within the world of Gothic made for young readers. As Jackson notes, children's Gothic has a unique "carnavalesque energy" (373) that combines the terror of adult Gothic with the whimsy of children's literature. Through this, the macabre and haunting elements typically found in Gothic literature are rendered less threatening and more palatable for a young audience. In response to this darkness, the novel still maintains a level of light-heartedness and humor that keeps the story from being completely grim. The setting of an ancient castle, Hogwarts, becomes a boarding school with competitive sports, social clubs, and even a student's choir. The Black Lake outside the castle holds a friendly giant squid and the Forbidden Forest hides a charmed Flying Ford Anglia car. The school ghosts chatter with the students at decadent feasts and even celebrate their "Deathdays" with a party. As Jackson points out, the story begins as a child's book serving as "escapism" that becomes progressively darker and more perilous as Harry grows older (374). What began as an eclectic children's story finishes in the final novel with a Wizarding War, and as readers find the childlike, innocent cheerfulness stripped away, *Harry Potter* is left gritty and raw in its confrontation with death and finality. This culminates in the series beginning how it

ended, but flipped: the death of Harry Potter, now seventeen, and his victory over death as he not only survives the Killing Curse but defeats Lord Voldemort.

This triumphant ending presents Harry in a reflection of the circumstances he began in reflects a unique reflection of endings found in children's Gothic that unify some of the tensions between the Gothic and the *Bildungsroman*. One primary tension between the two genres is how the tales come to a close. Concerning the endings of Gothic stories, Jackson writes that Gothic stories become "twisted into a circular journey to nowhere, ending in the darkness which it opened, remaining unenlightened" (R. Jackson 101). In *Harry Potter*, a darkness continues to pervade the story even in its final pages in the epilogue as Harry addresses his youngest son: "'Albus Severus,' Harry said quietly, [...] 'you were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew'" (*Deathly Hallows* 637). Harry's three children - James Sirius, Albus Severus, and Lily Luna - are named after deceased figures from Harry's life. It is a reference that presents the promise of childhood with the reminders of the past that Harry himself faced, and the losses he suffered along the way; however, unlike Gothic stories, Harry's journey to this moment is not "circular." Rather, the ending of the series is a mirror of how Harry's adventure began, portraying him as victorious over the danger that caused his orphaning in the first novel, present with his children as his own parents were not. Harry is no longer unenlightened, but rather he is at home in the wizarding world he fought for.

This divergence from the typical Gothic ending can be ascribed to the *Bildungsroman* tradition that features endings reflecting on the growth and transition of its protagonist. The endings of *Bildungsromane* feature "the significance of the lived experience in the final story" and the culmination of "one's journey of becoming" (Kim and Zimmerman 239). This ending to

Harry's story focuses on the growth of Harry's growth not only physically but also as a person. An example of this is found within the final lines that reference Harry's signature scar given to him by Voldemort: "The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well" (*Deathly Hallows* 638). His own lived experience is one that began with adversity but ends with Harry's journey transforming him. While his scar represents the lack of a lethal threat from Voldemort, it is not a purely happy ending, as the names of Harry's children remind readers, but it is one that reminds of how Harry can now live the "normal" life of any other wizard. The domesticity of this life as a parent highlights another aspect of the *Bildungsroman* that features an extraordinary protagonist becoming a relatively ordinary individual. As exhibited by the epilogue, Harry is no longer a public celebrity surrounded by attention but is just another father seeing his children off to boarding school: "the family emerged onto platform nine and three-quarters [...] Indistinct figures were swarming through the mist, into which James had already disappeared" (*Deathly Hallows* 634). Harry's growth from hero to parent brings together this growth from the *Bildungsroman* where the Boy Who Lived has become one of the many figures on the platform.

Harry Potter's ending combines the static darkness of the Gothic with the dynamic growth of the *Bildungsroman*, allowing the usage of death in *Harry Potter* to be transformative. It is no longer a question of the end of a life, it becomes something that allows Harry to grow as a person and become an adult. In the final novel, Harry's defeat of Voldemort acts as a confirmation of this new maturity, allowing him to overcome his childhood adversary, and, metaphorically, to overcome the shadow of death that occupied his formative years. This final reversal of death, question of life, and triumph of Harry is the climax of the novel's relationship to liminality, connecting it in both the Gothic and the *Bildungsroman* traditions.

Liminality in *Harry Potter*

Within *Harry Potter*, “in-between” spaces become a major theme and a primary vehicle for story-telling. These transitory elements become, in certain instances, iconic parts of the series that establish liminal spaces. The word “liminal” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as an adjective “[r]elating to a transitional or initial stage of a process” or “[o]ccupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold” (Oxford). The origin of “liminal” can be traced back to the 19th century to Latin word “limen” or “limin” which can be translated as “threshold.” The word “liminal” also relates etymologically to “sublime,” “preliminary,” and “subliminal” (Oxford). Following this connection to thresholds, George Simmel wrote a series of essays in 1993 focusing on “the phenomena such as as the door, the window, the frame and the bridge” (Schimanski and Nyman 23). The term “liminality” when used to describe “various aspects of constructing relations between individuals, as well as between groups and collectives” originates from Victor Turner, an anthropologist, in 1964 (Schimanski and Nyman 23). The idea has come to become realized in literature in genres such as “liminal fantasy” that “evokes humorous and surreal overtones” to blur the lines between reality and fantasy (Klapcsik 318).

Liminality within *Harry Potter*’s fantasy world can be primarily found within the depiction of space and time becoming transitional elements of the magical wizarding world, but also of the experiences within adolescence. It provides the otherworldly setting and time found within a familiar place and modern era used by the Gothic, and allows this to express the growth of Harry through his childhood to adulthood. One of the most overt of these spaces is a shared, in-between place that is neither fully reality and not fully supernatural. Armitt notes that the Gothic itself is a “conflict between worlds, the world inside the Gothic mansion being ‘an interior dream- (or rather nightmare-) space’ and that beyond its walls forming ‘the outer world of daylight order” (“The Magical Realism” 309). For *Harry Potter*, the “Gothic mansion”

becomes the setting of the seven novels: the medieval castle of Hogwarts.

Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry functions as the main microcosm of the liminality of setting and time that catalyzes Harry's transformation from child to adult. Hogwarts itself becomes a setting both between reality and between time. The presence of Hogwarts is realized as a place physically embodying somewhere not completely magical but not completely non-magical. Through its role as a school, Hogwarts becomes both extraordinary and foreign, yet familiar and relatable at the same time. The presence of a school provides readers with the familiar experience of sitting in a classroom, taking exams, and even reluctantly finishing homework. It is a setting made enchanted and otherworldly by the presence of a magical curriculum. In this magical world that bends reality, chemistry class becomes Potions, algebra class becomes Arithmancy, and philosophy class becomes Divination. The classrooms hold magical creatures, exams involve incantations, and homework is written on the ingredients of elixirs. Just as the Gothic exists as an extraordinary, supernatural story in the familiar setting of a romance tradition, *Harry Potter* exists as an extraordinary, magical world in the familiar setting of a school tradition. It is the culmination of mundane made fantastic. Readers are able to experience this similar wonder as opening the pages of the books sweeps one into a magical sphere where dragons exist, schools teach spells, and wands are an everyday accessory. It could be argued that this presents an effect on readers where reality is made to seem more drab in comparison to a sphere of magical sports, duels, and artifacts.

Within Hogwarts itself, the artifact of the Sorting Hat is a smaller version of something familiar in a fantastic setting, turning the everyday into the extraordinary. During Harry's first minutes of entering Hogwarts, he finds himself before an old wizard's hat perched upon a stool. Between the patched fabric of the hat, "a rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth — and the

hat began to sing” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 117). The Sorting Hat is something familiar but made magical and supernatural. Its very existence lies within a transitory space within the series as something sentient, but “living” only to sort the eleven-year-olds into their Houses within Hogwarts. Similarly, Hogwarts also occupies a space between sentient and inanimate. As Harry explores the castle during his first week of school, he notes that “there were doors that wouldn’t open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren’t really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 131). Harry finds himself in a place that exists itself in an uncertain place within reality.

The location of Hogwarts also lies within a between-space of reality and the fantastical. The school is nestled among the rolling green mountains of the Scottish Highlands, located within the real world outside the series and the Muggle world within the series. It is reached through Platform Nine and Three-Quarters in King’s Cross Station in London. As Harry struggles to understand how to cross the magical barrier, he watches as another boy “reached the dividing barrier between the two platforms, a large crowd of tourists came swarming in front of him and by the time the last backpack had cleared away, the boy had vanished” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 92). Through the location of Hogwarts and the magical barrier in King’s Cross Station, familiar and normal settings are transformed into the supernatural. It is only through crossing this magical barrier with Harry that readers are able to enter the magical world of Hogwarts.

Along these lines, it is worth noticing that within the real world outside of the novels, King’s Cross Station in London has become an in-between place that combines the real and the fictional due to the series’ success. While King’s Cross has been referenced in other British novels - including other children’s novels - none have had the impact that the *Harry Potter* series did in altering the actual structure of the railway station. In 1999, a metal plaque reading

“Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ ” was placed between platforms 9 and 11 along with a fake trolley and old suitcases, halfway “disappeared” into the brick wall. In 2012, they were moved near a *Harry Potter* shop that was installed within King’s Cross Station. The location has since become a popular tourist attraction both by independent visitors and as a stop on *Harry Potter* tours. This physical manifestation of the *Harry Potter* world realized within the real world blurs the line between fiction and reality in a tangible fashion. The existence of this tourist location can be attributed to the cultural phenomena that *Harry Potter* has created. *Harry Potter* has attained such great commercial success that real-world locations have been made in imitation of the novel to blend the two worlds together. No longer is the magical wizarding world bound within the pages of the novel, but has instead entered into the world as a liminal space of its own that can allow for physical interaction with readers.

At Hogwarts, there are reminders of the relation between the outside, non-magical world with the inner, magical world through a social hierarchy. Sherry Truffin writes that, within many children’s Gothic stories, “[s]chools are haunted or cursed by the persistent power inequalities (of race, gender, class)” (110). Within the wizarding world, people are classed by three identifications based on their magical — or non-magical — parentage: Muggle-born, or born from non-magical parents; Half-blood, or born from a mixed family of magical and non-magical; and finally Pure-blood, or born from only magical parents. Chatterjee notes that the emphasis on blood is a common motif in Gothic literature, but here it is used to refer to hierarchies named after blood as a literal life-force but now metaphorically used to classify (197). These classifications are represented by each of the trio of main characters: Hermione, a Muggleborn; Harry, a Half-blood; and Ron, a Pure-blood. While the subject is not touched on extensively within the first novel, it becomes a running tension within the series as Harry learns of the

prejudice that many in wizarding society hold for Muggleborns, notably through the derogatory term “Mudblood.” Interestingly, the shame attached to coming from a Muggle family is contrasted with how the Muggles in the series are unaware of the existence of a vast wizarding world. The reason why Muggles must be unaware of the existence of witches and wizards is largely ignored - save for slight references to medieval executions of witches - and is never fully resolved within the series.

While the Muggle world remains mostly unaware, the wizarding world continues to use the differences in heritage as a form of classification used to reflect perceived ideas about each other. These classifications based on the magical heritage of individuals within the wizarding world highlight a dichotomy between characters from the world outside versus characters from the world inside the magical sphere. Personal value and acceptance within the magical wizarding world come from one’s proximity to it. Characters such as Hermione are considered to be outsiders, raised in Muggle society, while characters such as Ron are insiders, raised in wizarding society. Harry himself embodies a borderline space within this classifications being a Half-blood — due to a Muggle-born mother and a Pure-blood father — but also due to his unique status as having been born to wizarding parents, but raised by Muggles. While Hermione represents those new to the wizarding world, and Ron represents the old, Harry finds himself lost in the space between.

The relationship of old and new begin to go beyond the characters, and stretch into the question of time’s reality itself as an in-between space. Just as the Gothic is both medieval and modern at once, encapsulating the paradoxical idea of time as old but new, *Harry Potter* represents a world that is a combination of the archaic and the current. Howard notes that “the past is, in fact, inextricably connected with the supernatural” (32). Hogwarts exists as an old

space from the past in the form of a medieval castle in modern-day Britain. After traveling from London's train station, Harry looks in awe: "perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers"

(*Philosopher's Stone* 111). The scene introduces readers into a familiar medieval setting amidst a modern world, creating the sense of wonder with "sparkling" windows reflecting the stars against a "vast" and mysterious castle. While in the Gothic tradition "space is always threatening and never comfortable in the Gothic novel; castles loom with superhuman capacity for entrapment" (Haggerty 20), Hogwarts contrasts this by turning the looming castle into an inviting space, rather than something to entrap Harry. Instead, this new world becomes his home.

Hogwarts is presented as being just as otherworldly inside as its surroundings, and just as caught between the past and present, particularly in regards to how death is presented. As Andrea Stojilkov writes, being "dead" or "alive" is not a binary at Hogwarts (135). Ghosts make up some of the permanent residents of the school, and are featured in each of the novels. As Harry observes on his first night in the castle, "[a]bout twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they glided across the room talking to one another and hardly glancing at the first years" (*Philosopher's Stone* 115). The contrast of the dead with the living is highlighted through the ancient ages of the ghosts juxtaposing the youth of the first year students. It is space made up of the ancient dead world with the young living world. Similarly, enchanted paintings exist within the walls of Hogwarts, depicting figures who are usually dead. These paintings interact with the students, as Harry notes when "the people in the portraits along the corridors whispered and pointed as they passed" (*Philosopher's Stone* 128). Just as the ghosts exist between life and death, so too do the paintings, through magic, exist between life and death in magically painted brushstrokes (Stojilkovic 863). Though Hogwarts is

home to those who lived in the past, and continue through a quasi-life now, Hogwarts is also home to all the children who make up the students. It is the coalescence of the people of the past with the people of the present, all of them continuing into the future together.

This relationship between the past and the present is embodied by Harry's physical journey to Hogwarts. Noting this connection within time, Howard writes that "Gothic settings move from the remote past somewhere in Europe (as in *Otranto*) to the reader's own time and country" (22). Hogwarts functions as the Gothic setting from the past placed into the reader's own time period through a journey that begins at the modern King's Cross Station, and is taken on an archaic train known as the Hogwarts Express. Harry emerges onto Platform Nine and Three-Quarters to find that a "scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people" (*Philosopher's Stone* 93). The students are then whisked north to the train station outside of Hogwarts, disembarking through billowing smoke. In the process of traveling from London to Hogwarts, it is as if the students — and the reader — are taken back in time. While trains themselves are inherently liminal due to their nature of transition, the Hogwarts Express becomes more pronouncedly in-between by existing as obsolete technology made useful and metaphorically transporting its passengers into the realm of magic.

Hogwarts becomes a world that resembles the past, not only through its existence as a medieval castle, but also through the use of old technology and aesthetics. It is a world devoid of modern technology and instead replaced with the magic of witchcraft. Hogwarts itself is trapped in the past with quills and ink as part of their school supplies: "They stopped to buy parchment and quills. Harry cheered up a bit when he found a bottle of ink that changed color as you wrote" (*Philosopher's Stone* 79). Hogwarts features older technology and a lack of electronics, but is filled with children who have the knowledge of a modern world. Harry quickly grows to find

comfort in this unusual, in-between place: Harry could hardly believe it when he realized that he'd already been at Hogwarts two months. The castle felt more like home than Privet Drive ever had" (*Philosopher's Stone* 170). Harry's happiness at Hogwarts - the opposite to Privet Drive - takes place in a world where the fantastic occurs in a gray area of reality.

One of the most prominent ways that this gray area exists in the wizarding world is found in how life and death are not strictly defined. During his first year, Harry encounters the Mirror of Erised, a play on words in which the "Erised" is "desire" backwards, a reflection of the word just as the mirror is a reflection of the soul's desires of the onlooker. For young Harry, the desire is to see his deceased parents: "'Mum?' he whispered. 'Dad?' They just looked at him, smiling. [...] Harry was looking at his family, for the first time in his life. [...] He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness" (*Philosopher's Stone* 209). Within the wizarding world, and within the walls of Hogwarts, the space between life and death, the time between the deceased and the now living, is liminal. Harry's emotions themselves are not simply on one end of a binary, but instead a mix of oxymoronic joyful sadness, staring at the smiling parents he has never met. His amazement is short-lived, as Dumbledore advises Harry that "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live" (*Deathly Hallows* 214). The Mirror of Erised is a corporeal embodiment of Harry's desires, to have a living family that is now dead, but it exists within a space between reality and the outside, caught in the dreams that lie between.

This representation of death between reality or fantasy is one that carries throughout the entire series, but is fully realized in the final novel. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the liminal space between life and death is so crucial that they are reflected in the very title referring to the alchemical Philosopher's Stone. Like the mirrored desires of the first novel, this seventh installment is a mirrored reflection of Harry's first year at Hogwarts. Instead of traveling to the

magical school, he instead ventures out into the Muggle world in search of Horcruxes, the split soul of Voldemort that must be destroyed in order to defeat the dark wizard. The Horcruxes become tools that keep Voldemort alive but, if destroyed, will leave him open to death (Deamer 207). The awe and amazement of venturing to school, safe from his abusive home, is flipped when Harry must instead go out into a hostile, wartorn England, abandoning Hogwarts. His confrontation with the gritty reality outside of Hogwarts' walls brings him face-to-face with several aspects of the Horcruxes, and later the Deathly Hallows. Stojilkov writes that Horcruxes are a magical taboo, coming from using dark magic to kill innocent victims, ripping the soul, and placing part of the broken soul into an object. According to Stojilkov, the word comes from *dehors* — French for “outside” — and *crux* — Latin for “soul” — to mean a “displaced life source” (Stojilkovic 135). This translation could be argued to be misattributed, as other dictionaries state different translations. An example of this is found in Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short's *A Latin Dictionary* (1879) that notably translates *crux* not as “soul” but rather as “tree, frame, or other wooden instruments of execution” and “torture, trouble, misery, destruction” (Lewis and Short). This suggestion of the concept of Horcruxes serving as a self-inflicted means of “torture” suits their nature as an inhumane splitting of the soul; however, the dictionary *A Latin Dictionary* does not include “soul” as one of its accepted translations for “crux.” The reference that *crux* makes to a “tree” or wooden frame of execution could stand as a nod to the Christian influences on *Harry Potter* where Harry often acts as a sacrificial Christ-like figure. In this sense, the Horcruxes defile the idea of this Christian allusion to Harry and darken Voldemort's status as not only breaking his soul in a way that acts counter to his humanity, but also exists as a form of blasphemy. Horcruxes exist in a seemingly paradoxical way not only through its Christian symbology but also as a peripheral state of a soul existing outside of a

person, independent but not, once whole but now broken.

As Harry, Ron and Hermione try to find and destroy these dark Horcruxes, they come across a second set of magical artifacts that also share a liminality in the Deathly Hallows. As explained to the trio by an older wizard named Xenophilius, whose name comes from the Greek words *xeno* for “alien” or “strange” and *philia* for “love.” He relates that the Deathly Hallows are “three objects, or Hallows, which, if united, will make the possessor master of Death” (*Deathly Hallows* 253). These three objects are the Elder Wand, symbolic of power; a Resurrection Stone, symbolic of life and death; and finally the Cloak of Invisibility, symbolic of wisdom. The story of the Deathly Hallows was recorded in an ancient children’s fairytale known as “The Tale of the Three Brothers.” In the tale, which all wizarding children listen to growing up, three brothers are each individually gifted with the objects by Death, personified as a paradoxically living being. Xenophilius adds that the story “is a children’s tale, told to amuse rather than to instruct” but contains the hidden message of the Deathly Hallows. This carries a tradition within the Gothic that contains a “story within a story” (Howard 23). The layering of a children’s tale within a children’s series compliments the in-between space that the Deathly Hallows occupy, fictional in the world outside *Harry Potter* and pseudo-legendary inside the series. “The Tale of the Three Brothers” is used to entertain young wizards as they grow up, ancient in age but still used in modern day, occupying a gray space within time. The use of a figure such as Death incarnate furthers this relationship, blurring the lines between reality and falseness through the combination of the living and dead.

It is through the Deathly Hallows that Harry eventually comes to see his deceased family once again, standing in the Forbidden Forest outside of Hogwarts as the battle between the students and Voldemort’s army rages. It is a reflection of the Mirror of Erised in the first novel

where, separated by glass, time, and death, Harry saw his parents for the first time. In the forest, now in possession of the Resurrection Stone, Harry sees his parents again, this time accompanied by other loved ones lost throughout the series. Now, as Harry looks at his parents, they are only separated by time, for Harry is walking to his own death. Fraser Los writes that *Harry Potter* “personifies the stages of maturity we all must attain on our inevitable path toward death” (32). By voluntarily going to die, Harry defies how Voldemort runs from death through the production of Horcruxes, and Harry instead becomes mature through his facing the reality of death. For Harry, this first comes in the form of him facing his dead loved ones. This resurrected group — his parents and two of his mentors — look younger now, but wear the clothes they died in, and are “neither ghost nor truly flesh” (*Deathly Hallows* 589). Through the Resurrection Stone, the dead are not like the pearly ghosts within Hogwarts but are also not like the living Harry. They are between, something completely different, in a liminal space between the living and the dead. Harry asks them a single question about his approaching death, simply “does it hurt?” (*Deathly Hallows* 590). It is indicative of his resolution to die. He is not afraid as he walks to Voldemort, prepared to face the Killing Curse, with the living-dead at his side.

It is this moment that defines Harry’s character in the series, transforming him from who he was as an awe-struck eleven-year-old. As Harry walks toward his death, it is not toward a happy ending, but rather forces the audience to look back on his journey that has brought him there, and on how the choices Harry has made during the past seven years have allowed him to reach this moment of maturity. It is a reflection on the transitory space of his childhood that has been spent at Hogwarts, and now ends outside the school. What began in the first book as a new life in the wizarding world now becomes Harry laying down his life for the wizarding world, and

accepting death, conquering his fear of it — and, in essence, conquering death itself when he survives.

This is realized most clearly when Voldemort casts the Killing Curse on Harry and the boy is sent into a limbo realm that resembles a half-formed King's Cross Station. This question of the reality and incompleteness of King's Cross Station speaks to its liminality, as it cannot be attributed to either binary or real or imaginary and creates its own space of transition. It is a bright, misty, space that is neither warm nor cold. It is a place where Harry awakens to find that "nobody else was there. He was not perfectly sure that he was there himself" (*Deathly Hallows* 595). It is a place of interim, somewhere that leaves the readers just as unsure of its reality as Harry. Stojilkov writes that this King's Cross limbo is the paradox of "life death" found within the series, something that is both alive but dead. It is here that Harry finds himself to no longer be wearing his glasses and for his trademark, lightning-bolt scar to be gone. He is himself from the earthly realm, but is changed. Los notes that *Harry Potter* is existential literally and philosophically, using the grounded world to relate life and death (32). This becomes transitional now when a world that is not grounded, is not life, and is not death is used to consider the existential question of what existence is. This becomes pronounced when Dumbledore, who is now deceased, approaches Harry, saying "You wonderful boy. You brave, brave man" (*Deathly Hallows* 597). This emphasizes how Harry's confrontation of death has transformed him from the childhood of the first novel into the adulthood of the final novel, initially transported to otherworldly Hogwarts but now transported into another plane of existence.

Together, Harry and Dumbledore look on at one other figure present in this King's Cross limbo: "a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for

breath” (*Deathly Hallows* 596). This pained figure is implied to be the final Horcrux that had been within Harry himself, killed by the Killing Curse (Deamer 205), now separate from Voldemort and suffering from the violence that brought it into its fractured existence. In a way, it echoes the infant Harry who Voldemort attempted to murder, and also recalls the Gothic theme of birth and death (Chatterjee 197). It is not a child but is instead something that is not human or animal, but is the personified piece of a split soul, taking the form of a flayed infant, a horror inflicted on the most innocent. It is a liminal space all of its own, something that both exists and does not exist, and is neither dead nor alive, but rather has never been alive to die.

Just as Harry leaves this place of limbo, set on returning to defeat Voldemort in a final battle, he asks Dumbledore if this King’s Cross is just in his own mind. Dumbledore answers with a question: ““Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?”” (*Deathly Hallows* 610). It is a question that reveals the marginal place of the mind within the space of the story, possibly transcending even the space of the novel to ask readers about what constitutes reality versus fantasy. The answer can go beyond not only the King’s Cross limbo, but from the pages to the readers to ask them to reflect on their own lives and what reality means to them as they immerse themselves in the fictional world of a boy wizard.

Considering the popularity of *Harry Potter*, a growing effort to incorporate the series in classrooms has been rising. While the Gothic is not explored deeply by grade school classes, Gothic literature meant for children is continuing to grow. Due in part to its position as one of the first children’s Gothic series of this popular trend, *Harry Potter* stands as an apt example of why the study of the Gothic in classrooms is important. Additionally, *Harry Potter* has become a cultural hallmark that has grown to influence other films, books, songs, and art. Despite the

Gothic not being taught extensively to children, they are encountering it through series such as *Harry Potter* on an everyday basis that demands a consideration of how the Gothic is approached within academic curricula, particularly those for children in grade school. How the Gothic is taught and received in a classroom setting can provide a greater insight into the understanding of Gothic literature for children, and *Harry Potter* has become a notable model of this relationship.

Reception of the Gothic in the Classroom

While the final novel contains the most graphic and grim moments in the books, the steady darkening of the *Harry Potter* series has led to complications in strictly categorizing it within one age-range genre, and has also caused some to declare that it is no longer children's literature by the end of the series (Jackson 374). This consideration of how *Harry Potter* is viewed for certain audiences is similar to how the broader Gothic genre is approached as being for older audiences rather than children. This becomes particularly noticeable when literary curricula is observed within classrooms, and what literature is primarily taught — and avoided — for young audiences.

Children's literature itself has become increasingly common in schools, particularly the books featuring supernatural elements. The literary category of "children's literature" did not come into official recognition until the 1700s, but notably excluded ghosts (Davison 193). As Jacqueline Howard curiously notes, "although the supernatural was absent from the *novel* during the first half of the eighteenth century, it was still present in the translations of fairy- and folk-tales" (34). As children's literature progressed into the nineteenth century, the supernatural began to take form within the pages of novels. Dead and dying children in particular became common in British literature during this era. This can possibly be attributed to the mortality rates of children at the time, and while British child mortality experienced a decline in the

mid-nineteenth century, the twentieth century experienced a sharp decline of 84% from 1916 to 1983 (Davison 193). During this earlier period of high mortality among children, it was common for siblings to watch their brothers and sisters pass away, and thus early death was considered a factual part of life (Davison 193). This changed in the early twentieth century as mortality rates for children in Britain declined, and death became less common in children's literature, until the post-war period of the 1950s when child mortality in literature began to return (Davison 193). Within this new wave of children's literature, death became a theme not uncommon in books meant for young readers.

As children's literature as a genre expanded largely in the United States in the 1970s as a "niche market" (Kidd 94), the contrast between the presentation of child death grew. While past novels showed child death as a normal part of life, modern novels portray child death "as an unnatural event that is to be regretted, with childhood understood as only a temporary phase in the necessary path to maturation and adulthood" (Davison 194). This current view of premature death manifests itself in modern literature as the death of children being tragic and, in essence, a life cut short. The tragedy is not only that a child has died, but that all of their potential for the rest of their life has been taken. The new wave of children's Gothic literature has a particular representation of dead youth in novels meant for children that uses this tragic portrayal to serve didactically for the adults in the children's lives. Carol Davison writes that, instead of existing to terrify the characters in these novels, "recent Gothic fiction for young people mobilise ghostly children to critique or remedy adult actions, often expressing distrust in adults as authority figures" (192). This connection between death and children's literature highlights the liminal space of life and death found in both the *Bildungsroman* and the Gothic genre. This is due to how

the ghostly and supernatural occupy a space between life and death, and “children occupy a transitional state between infancy and adulthood” (Davison 192).

A primary example of this within *Harry Potter* is “Moaning” Myrtle Warren from the second novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Myrtle was killed by a monster, a giant snake called a basilisk, within Hogwarts, and now haunts the bathroom she died in, perpetually age fourteen. She is often featured in the novel floating around the abandoned bathroom, wailing, and excitedly telling visitors about how she died. Myrtle’s status as a dead child places her between life and death, as well as youth and adulthood. While her death is painted as eerily humorous within the pages of *Harry Potter*, Myrtle is not alone in being a dead child in the series. *Harry Potter* features a cast of dead characters, killed at a young age, a common theme within Gothic literature produced for children today. This forms one facet of children’s Gothic that calls into question its representation within grade school classrooms.

Though many books in the Gothic genre are considered to be part of the canon of Western novels taught in higher education — such as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* — there is a lack of Gothic literature taught to young readers in grade school (Del Nero 552). This lack of exposure to Gothic writing within this classroom is questionable, as Jennifer Del Nero notes, because “the Gothic genre is prevalent in these students’ out-of-school literacy practices [...] in the popularity of texts containing Gothic tropes, such as the *Harry Potter* series and the *Twilight* series” (552). While both series experienced a spike in popularity during their years of publication, they continue to be read widely by young audiences. The presence of Gothic literature within classrooms could be considered appropriate throughout themes that it expresses concerning growing up. Though many Gothic novels contain heavy elements of death and morbidity, it is in “Gothic tropes such as corruption, death, and destruction [that] students find

meaning and hope” (Del Nero 551). This focus on finding the hopeful message within the darkness of Gothic literature allows young readers to find hope in their own lives during a difficult, transitional period. Additionally, the underlying message of hope helps readers to embrace novels that are otherwise not considered part of the young classroom canon, and provides something that students can relate to on a personal level, even if their own life doesn’t involve the supernatural and ancient castles. Del Nero writes that the “Gothic literary genre involves exploring the societal ‘other’ or a ‘thing’ existing on the borderlands that fascinates and horrifies” (552). Since grade school occupies the age range that the *Bildungsroman* genre partially takes place during, children in this age range are able to identify with Gothic literary protagonists as the “Other.” With the *Harry Potter* series in particular, the identification of readers with the literary protagonists is one that went in conjunction with the children’s own ages. The *Harry Potter* series found its genesis through its readership of children. In a 2013 interview, the Bloomsbury Publishing chairman, Nigel Newton, told the story of how his daughter, Alice, “read a chapter and demanded more” of the initial manuscript sent to the publishing house (“Revealed”). Rather than reading the manuscript sample himself, Newton gave it to his eight-year-old daughter who was persistent in asking her father about the book’s publication. Convinced by his daughter’s determination, Newton published *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* and paid J.K. Rowling and initial £2,500. The book series became a financial success and had returned £19 million to Newton within four years. The primary audience that caused the book’s overnight success were thousands of British children who eagerly read the first novel of British children just like them going off to a fantastical wizarding school. These children were able to grow up with the series, and grow up with the characters, experiencing pivotal life moments alongside the witches and wizards within the novel’s pages.

Identifying with the *Harry Potter* series became integral to a generation's own story of growing up, defying just being a story, but rather becoming a kind of companion the children were able to grow up and see themselves in.

In a concentrated study using a set of Gothic literature for a 7th grade class, Del Nero observed that the students “aesthetically transacted” themes of the books they read and connected it to things they experienced in their own life with death and ‘otherness.’ What began as a disconnect between the grim material and the students turned into the children identifying with the feeling of being an ‘other’ in their social groups at school (Del Nero 554). This is connected to how “Gothic fiction commonly features characters with little agency because of their own status as societal other” (Del Nero 554). Within the classroom, the Gothic begins to focus less on its elements of terror and medievalism, and instead becomes about the experience of the protagonist and how it relates to young readers. This transition becomes increasingly overt as the novels progress through Gothic wonder of the magical world in the first two novels. In the third novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, a trend of mature themes begins to emerge. In this third year at Hogwarts, Harry must now contend with heavier themes when he is faced with his godfather and familial betrayal, dementors and questions of the soul, and how to understand growing up with the knowledge of such issues. As the novels progress, they become less about the magical aesthetics of the fictional world and more about reality and experiences that even non-magical readers can understand. This is profoundly noticeable in the themes of social struggle found within children's Gothic, such as the “blood purity” hierarchy within *Harry Potter*. Castle writes that, “The modern hero, marginalized by race, class, education, nationality, or gender, refuses socialization and assimilation into social institutions that do not advance his or her artistic designs.” (24). It is through refusing to conform to these marginalizing social

standards that the protagonist is partly able to grow, and set an example for young readers. By functioning as the “Other” within the story, the protagonist creates a familiar ‘other’ that readers can identify with. An example of this is when Harry is confronted by Draco Malfoy: “‘You don’t want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there.’ [Draco] held out his hand to shake Harry’s, but Harry didn’t take it. ‘I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself’” (*Philosopher*108). This moment presents Harry refusing Draco’s prejudice against other students at Hogwarts, differentiating himself from a bully. This can allow readers to view Harry “othering” himself in order to defend his friends and becomes something that readers can identify with or admire due to many of the same social pressures existing in their own lives.

Through children’s Gothic, young readers are able to read about a protagonist around their own age and going through similar experiences as an ‘Other’ in a setting similar to theirs — such as a school — while retaining elements of Gothic literature. In the first *Harry Potter* novel, Harry finds himself as an outsider to the wizarding world who must be taught the ways of this new society. His status as having survived an attack as an infant from Voldemort creates intrigue for readers, but also sets Harry apart. Del Nero writes that, arguably, “the most distinguishing characteristic of Gothic texts is featuring individuals who exist outside societal definitions of ‘normal’” such as Harry Potter, marked physically with his difference by a lightning-bolt scar (Del Nero, 555). Gothic children’s literature is a place where characters do not have to be “perfect” and their route to adulthood does not need to be neat and simple. Chatterjee writes that the Gothic includes the “complexities of children’s circuitous and uneasy path to adulthood and our own incomplete trajectory to that elusive goal” (207). Children’s Gothic becomes something allowing for the complex to flourish, and for difficult questions to be related to a young

audience. It challenges readers with content that may be difficult but is rewarding to relate to in the shared journey to adulthood that readers take.

Despite the ability for Gothic literature — including *Harry Potter* — to be used for children to relate to in the classroom, contention exists in particular around the series about the boy wizard and other children's novels with darker themes. Gothic literature overall has been challenged around the world, as its content has been called into question for being too disturbing for children. At even a more acute rate, *Harry Potter* has faced a gauntlet of criticism accusing the series of promoting death, the occult, and even anarchy. This record-level of criticism challenging the appropriateness of the *Harry Potter* series for children is notable due to its popularity among children. Due to the cultural phenomena that *Harry Potter* has become, it is difficult for one to not experience a reference to *Harry Potter* whether it be through the books, films, merchandise, real-world locations, or even everyday references. Because of *Harry Potter's* largest demographic of readers being children, it is worth considering the efforts made to restrict the access of *Harry Potter* by young readers.

***Harry Potter* and the Banned Books**

According to an online compendium of Banned Books, edited by the University of Pennsylvania, the Gothic novels commonly included in the Western canon have faced criticism before the modern era of children's Gothic literature. *Frankenstein* was banned in South Africa in 1955 on charges of being “indecent, objectionable, or obscene” (Banned Books). Similarly, the *Harry Potter* series has also received criticism deeming it objectionable as the series set modern records when it “topped the list of the 10 most challenged books of the 21st century (2000-2005)” (“Forthcoming Final Installment”). Within the United States, court cases within the past fifty years have been pivotal in deciding what constitutes a “banned book” and how it is

impacted legally for students. Cases raised to the Supreme Court, such as *Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent Community School District* from 1968 to 1969, have recognized students as being under the protection of the First Amendment, and protecting books from being banned from public school libraries under freedom of speech. The caveat for what books can be prohibited from public school libraries are books that qualify as containing “pervasive vulgarity and lack of educational suitability” (DeMitchell and Carney, 161).

The reasoning given for why *Harry Potter* should be banned from school libraries often rests on a variety of arguments. Peter Childs notes that many of the criticisms find issues with the series’ possible influence on young readers (119). One major category of criticism is that the *Harry Potter* series is actively encouraging “occult” practices and promoting magic, such as when the novels were banned in sixty Australian schools (Childs 118). In a collection of complaints against the *Harry Potter series*, Todd DeMitchell and John Carney write that criticisms have included ““Harry Potter promotes the religion of witchcraft, or Wicca, during the school day”” and that ““it is not surprising that this series, and other occult themes, are being pushed deeper into the classroom”” (160). This is particularly remarkable as “witches, wizards, sorcery, and spells have long been staples of the category of children’s literature in which characters use magical powers in the struggle between good and evil” (DeMitchell and Carney, 160). Another category of concern, as noted by Childs, is that parents “who may not be concerned about magic and witchcraft, see the books as yet another example of overly scary and violent media that children should not be exposed to” (119). The final common concern leveled against *Harry Potter* regards the mischief and hijinx that he and his friends cause in the books, and extends to Harry’s rebellion against the authority of the Ministry of Magic. Because of his disregard for the rules, some parents believe that “children will not be able to distinguish the

value systems of made-up worlds from that of their parents' society and so will themselves act in ways that harm or create fear in others" (Childs 119).

The debates surrounding *Harry Potter*'s presence in classrooms caused a 2003 district court case in Arkansas. The main argument against the *Harry Potter* series was, as mentioned, that "the books would create problems in the school and could potentially lead to anarchy" (DeMitchell and Carney, 163). The case, Counts vs. Cedarville School District, was ruled in favor of keeping *Harry Potter* in schools on account of infringing on the students' rights of the First and 14th amendments of the U.S. Constitution in response to the education board attempting to ban all the first four *Harry Potter* books (DeMitchell and Carney 161).

While public schools have become the main battleground around the appropriateness of *Harry Potter* for children's reading, the series has become part of classrooms extending into higher education. Dina Khapaeva writes that "top universities — Durham and Yale, to mention just two — have recently introduced the *Harry Potter* books into their curriculum, with the declared aim, in the case of Yale, of exploring 'Christian themes such as sin, evil and resurrection'" (125). For Khapaeva, the introduction of *Harry Potter* books in classrooms is a problematic effect of the current culture of society. Khapaeva writes that, in her opinion, the use of *Harry Potter*'s Gothic themes become a "celebration of death" that "presents violent virtual death as fun for the whole family" (174). The violence presented within the series becomes one that glorifies brutality, especially for an audience of impressionable youth. For Khapaeva, this is most apparent with the main character of the series, as "Harry is constantly seen bleeding, wounded, suffering intense pain, tortured, hiding, and fleeing. The whole story of this sad little orphan boy revolves around his attempts to escape a violent death, and his death is the true culmination of the plot" (134). Despite the constant presence of pain in Harry's life, his suffering

is turned into redemption. Through Harry's frequent suffering and self-sacrifice, he acts in a fashion of Christological imitation. In each novel in the series, Harry is threatened with death and manages to survive. It is in the final novel that Harry no longer runs from his death, but instead walks toward it in order to sacrifice himself for his loved ones. In possibly the most overt instance, Harry is portrayed as a "figura Christi" through his walk to Voldemort as this could be comparable to a type of imitation of the Way of the Cross, when Christian theology says Christ accepted a cross with humility and walked willing to own his execution out of self-sacrifice. Similarly, Harry returns from the dead after his act of ultimate sacrifice. The comprehension and willingness to die that Harry possesses is what makes his death so transformative. Khapaeva notes that in the final passage as Harry decides on his own self-sacrifice to save his loved ones, that *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* reads, "Harry understood at last that he was not supposed to survive. His job was to walk calmly into Death's welcoming arms." In this portion, "Death" is capitalized, referring back to the personified character of Death within the series, but representing the series' larger worship of death for Khapaeva (158). She additionally notes that subtle references to medievalism as part of *Harry Potter's* Gothic elements also refer back to death. Khapaeva writes that this is most prominent during the fourth novel, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when the ghosts of the dead emerge from Voldemort's wand to protect Harry, including the recently-murdered boy, Cedric Diggory. Khapaeva compares this to the medieval *Danse Macabre*, furthering the series' connection to death through the Gothic (159). The entire *Harry Potter* series is, for critics, a connection to death itself through which the idea of the dead is celebrated through grim themes and dark motifs. By labelling *Harry Potter* as a series celebrating death and darkness, critics declare the series inherently encouraging the same morbidity in readers' lives.

Despite the criticism the series has faced, *Harry Potter* continues to find economic success and popularity. The cultural influence of *Harry Potter* has grown and seemingly defies the censorship challenges it faces to manifest itself as candy from the books, such as jellybeans and chocolate frogs, to real-life groups, such as competitive Quidditch teams. The realm of influence that *Harry Potter* occupies is continuing to grow, and with it the outreach of other children's Gothic books are expanding.

Conclusion

The Gothic and the *Bildungsroman* are two genres that explore humanity's relationship with its own existence, though in distinct ways. The Gothic is often shown to represent the darkly romantic and nostalgic where ruin is guaranteed. The *Bildungsroman* is often represented by growth and struggle where transformation leads to an acceptance of society. Through their unique use of liminalities articulated through transition, hybridity, and the in-between, the genres overlap in a way that allows the Gothic *Bildungsroman* to embody a new expression of both.

Harry Potter is one of the primary texts that began the recent trend of children's Gothic and continues to represent the interweaving of the Gothic and the *Bildungsroman*. It is a dynamic series that embodies the *Bildungsroman* trajectory of an exceptional child taken from a provincial space and forced to face a series of transformative challenges in an educational sphere that eventually lead to assimilation into society. As Harry and his friends grow as characters, the readers are able to understand their own positions in life and their own personal growth. It is a connection that transcends pages and enters into readers' lives, following the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, by providing the reader with a narrator who is relatable through their own personal experience. As Harry grows as a person, he must do so in an extraordinary setting: a world filled with magic.

The magic of the wizarding world is one that is both whimsical and dark, turning the frightening into something wondrous. The usage of the Gothic through settings of castles and interactions with dark creatures allows for the replication of motifs that often appear in children's fairy tales. These Gothic elements are made into the "Other" in a fantastical setting, allowing the main, relatable character to be someone different from the reader's reality. Harry is a fictional wizard, a magical "Other" in a Muggle world, but he is made into someone that readers can relate to as he grows. Children who read the books are able to understand Harry's position as someone who is an "Other" in an educational setting, made wondrous through magic, and transformative through personal growth. He becomes someone familiar in a foreign world, someone in a transitory place just as children are growing themselves, embracing a world of in-between and transition.

Both the Gothic and the *Bildungsroman* are characterized by their emphasis on liminality — or better, on conceptions of liminality which, although dramatically different, somehow overlap and collaborate with each other in the genre of children's Gothic. In this sense the Gothic *Bildungsroman* exists in a unique space of its own where the hybridity of the past and present of the Gothic is used alongside the transformative growth communicated within the *Bildungsroman*. The world of Hogwarts becomes an educational setting that combines elements of the former with the present, which in turn creates a backdrop for character development. The unfamiliar and mysterious of the Gothic is made familiar and understandable by the elements of growth Harry explores and embraces in this new wizarding world. School systems become extraordinary through magical education, allowing for the ways of wizardry to become something readers themselves explore. Ultimately, the liminal in-between space the wizarding world presents through life and death is explored by the Gothic and *Bildungsroman*, telling the tale of an

orphaned child who grows into an acceptance of, and victory over, childhood death.

The liminal, as shown through *Harry Potter*, exists as a dynamic element of the Gothic *Bildungsroman*. The combination of the genres itself constitutes a liminal textual space where the past allows for present growth, where the unfamiliar becomes known, and an in-between place exists between life and death. Children's Gothic is a growing genre in part because readers are able to understand this transitory place in life, and relate it to their own experiences.

Children in particular are able to comprehend the themes of "Otherness" within these tales of the curious made incredible, seeing themselves within characters like Harry Potter. Due to this aspect of the "Other," how the Gothic is approached in classrooms allows for a deeper understanding of this relationship and how it is perceived by its primary audience. While the Gothic *Bildungsroman* is still an emerging genre, series like *Harry Potter* provide an example of how these stories can inspire and captivate readers. It is a genre that becomes a liminal stage space, not only within its pages, but also extending into reality to create an original space that readers can place themselves within.

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