

# 'I can touch him now': Harry Potter as a Gothic Narrative of Trauma and Homoerotic Sexual Abuse

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## Abstract

In this article I argue that the Harry Potter novels constitute a Gothic narrative about homoerotic child abuse. The various confrontations between Harry and the Dark Lord are interpreted as representing the unavoidable encounter with what Ruth Bienstock Anolik has defined as 'the sexual Other' infiltrating the Self in Gothic texts. Specifically, I examine the re-enactment of trauma in the narrative as a typical trope of the Gothic. Harry's progressive acquisition of knowledge on his adversary is therefore interpreted as a metaphor for the gradual re-assertion of repressed traumatic memories on consciousness.

**Keywords** : Harry Potter, trauma, repression, Gothic, abuse

The critical readings on J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels hitherto published have mainly focused on the commercially-successful and worldwide consumerist phenomenon of the series and have specifically considered it as belonging to the literary genre of children literature (Carey 159; Rangwala 140; Nafici 209; Nikolajeva 240). We could, however, also inscribe the series into the Gothic genre. This is due to the use of many figures (such as the monster), locations (such as the castle), and tropes (such as the depiction of the story's villain as a sexual threat or the theme of the return of the past) that are typical of the Gothic genre. The novels begin with the murders of Lily and James Potter and the attempt on the life of Harry (Hook 91) and are then permeated by the "themes of evil, darkness, destruction and murder" (Patrick and Patrick 221). As some critics have

noted, there are “numerous and horrendous instances of violence” (Taub and Servaty-Seib 22) throughout the series and death is one of the dominant themes of the narrative, which “moves from wonder, innocence, and comedy to fear, experience, and tragedy” (Behr 263). Secondly, many of the scenes of the seven novels are set in environments which are typically Gothic, as the following examples illustrate: the Forbidden Forest inhabited by many dangerous and lethal creatures in *The Philosopher’s Stone*; the mysterious and hidden chamber under the Hogwarts castle within which a frightening and monstrous horror resides in *The Chamber of Secrets*; the low and narrow secret passages leading out of the castle in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*; the dark and overgrown graveyard in *The Goblet of Fire*; the labyrinthic corridors of the Department of Mysteries in *The Order of the Phoenix*, full of rooms which are actually laboratories where dangerous experiments unknown to the community at large take place; and the frightening cave containing a lake which hides an army of zombies in *The Half-Blood Prince*. As Anne Hiebert Alton has recognized, the use of such Gothic elements “leads to an atmosphere that tends to be frightening” and thus further stimulates suspense in the reader (203). For example, the tunnel under the castle – a location which itself has been the proper setting for Gothic narratives since Horace Walpole’s 1764 *The Castle of Otranto* – leading Harry and Ron to the Chamber of Secrets in the second volume of the series is depicted as

*so dark that they could only see a little distance ahead. Their shadows on the wet walls looked monstrous in the wandlight. . . . the tunnel was quiet as the grave [and the floor] was littered with small animal bones. (Chamber 223)*

This description could easily remind the reader of the tunnels of a castle as described in many Gothic novels, such as in Ann Radcliffe’s 1790 *A Sicilian Romance*, Elisa Parson’s 1793 *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and Bram Stoker’s 1897 *Dracula*. In the latter work, for example, the character of Jonathan Harker adventures into a “dark, tunnel-like passage, through which came a deathly, sickly odour [growing] closer and heavier”, which leads to the ruined chapel where Count Dracula sleeps (Stoker 63). In both *The Chamber of Secrets* and *Dracula*, the monster resides in the chamber at the end of the passage, menacingly waiting for its victim.

Furthermore, Rowling often portrays monsters that are usually present in Gothic tales (such as werewolves and zombies), but also creates new terrifying creatures that are specifically described in a Gothic fashion. This is the case of the Dementors – foul, soulless, and towering hooded figures that know no pity or compassion for their victims and “drain peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them” ( *Prisoner* 140). Similarly, the appearance of the main villain of the tales definitely resembles that of a monster. Indeed, Lord Voldemort is depicted as having lost many of the physical traits of human beings, particularly because of his eerie livid complexion, his scarlet eyes, and his nose as flat as a snake’s. As in the case of many monsters in Gothic novels (such as in Mary Shelley’s 1818 *Frankenstein* ), Voldemort strikes fear and terror in almost all of the narrative’s characters. The wizarding community is terrorized to merely pronounce his name. He thus represents the quintessential uncanny and monstrous Other. This is also exemplified by his actions and behavior, which are dictated by cruelty, sadism, and the will to dominate. Literally, Voldemort has killed Harry’s parents and has then attempted to take the boy’s life because of a prophecy which designated Harry as the only person with the power to defeat him. Rowling constructs the two characters in direct opposition to each other: Harry is frequently stalked and haunted by Voldemort in all of the novels, even when the two characters are not in close proximity. The use of many Gothic elements and an atmosphere often meant to produce terror and gloom are thus coupled with the anxiety of a victimized young boy and the desire for power and possession of an adult male. Voldemort is in fact presented as a strong, masculine figure, intent on submitting and dominating all other individuals, whether male or female, wizards or Muggles. He is mainly characterized by his aggressiveness and sadism and, as Ximena Gallardo and Jason Smith observe, he insistently attempts to obtain and master the masculine symbol represented by the Elder Wand as well as frequently being associated with the phallic image of a snake (97-100).

The series resumes a typical trope of Gothic literature also by representing the villain as a sexual threat for the novels’ protagonist. Indeed, the tension between Harry and Voldemort has an erotic nature. Since his return in the form of a spirit possessing the body of Professor Quirinus Quirrell and specifically after his rebirth in the final chapters of *The Goblet of Fire* , one of Voldemort’s main obsessions is to find Harry and eliminate him. The dark wizard constantly desires to face the young boy and orders all of his devoted servants (the Death Eaters) to capture him without hurting him

because he wants to personally face and touch him. Specifically, in *The Goblet of Fire*, a few moments after being reborn, Voldemort rushes to Harry and touches him on the scar, which thus becomes “the physical point of contact” between the two characters (Nemeroff 145). Harry’s scar immediately bursts with pain, an experience that the Dark Lord sincerely enjoys because he declares in front of his followers, “I can touch him now,” as if he had received an enormous pleasure from such physical contact (*Goblet* 566). Voldemort has waited thirteen years before reincarnating and being able to touch the boy again. In this sense, he represents the figure of the ‘sexual Other’ described by Ruth Bienstock Anolik. According to Anolik’s argument, the villain of many Gothic texts represents a sexual menace for the protagonist(s) of the narrative and does not only attempt at the life of the victims, but also at their sexual integrity. Specifically, Anolik affirms that “the sexual Other is thus particularly and unavoidably dangerous, infiltrating the home and even the bed of the threatened self” (4). This is precisely what occurs in the case of the Harry Potter narrative as well: Voldemort infiltrates the boy’s home, murders his parents, and penetrates his bedroom where an unmentionable act is said to occur.



The Beginning, Marco Pintus

Literally, according to Rowling's text, the Dark Lord attempts to kill the one-year-old child. Nevertheless, we could interpret this as a metaphor for a case of homoerotic child abuse. The Harry Potter novels therefore utilize what George E. Haggerty defines as a recurrent theme of Gothic literature when arguing that "terror is almost always sexual terror" (2). Haggerty affirms that Gothic fiction has offered from its beginning in the 18th century a "ground for many unauthorised genders and sexualities, including sodomy, . . . romantic friendship (male and female), incest, pedophilia, sadism, masochism" and further argues that, in this way, the Gothic genre "offers a historical model of queer theory and politics: transgressive, sexually-coded and resistant to dominant ideology" (2). By applying this argument to Rowling's novels, we could interpret the Harry Potter series as a Gothic narrative which depicts the unconventional and deviating issue of homoerotic child abuse, a topic which is definitely transgressive in respect to dominant ideology.

The representation of violent sexuality – which, according to Valdine Clemens "is a continuing preoccupation of Gothic fiction" (8) – is associated to the return of the past and the re-enactment of a trauma. This is a frequent thematic concern of Gothic narratives, whose "retrospective direction" is voluntarily utilized by the genre's authors for the purpose of re-enacting personal and socio-cultural trauma, as Andrea Juranovszky points out. David B. Morris defines this as "the replication of an unknown or buried pattern" (304). In Gothic tales, such a haunting return of the past is often expressed through the presence of a monstrous and revenant figure, such as the mummy in Arthur Conan Doyle's 1894 "Lot 249" and in Bram Stoker's 1904 *The Jewel of the Seven Stars*, the vampire in *Dracula*, or the ghost in Margaret Oliphant's 1885 "The Open Door". These figures force the tale's characters to face an unresolved crime or situation which incumbently and anachronistically haunts the present, but also simultaneously cause the revival of the previous traumas and repressed memories. Gothic tales also linger on the characters' memories of such traumatic and shattering encounters, of such "unwanted epiphanies", as Steven Bruhm defines them (268).

In Rowling's novels the confrontation with 'the sexual other' is similarly associated with the theme of the return of the past, the re-enactment of trauma and the return of the repressed. This argument could be firstly demonstrated by means of an analysis of Harry's memories of his first encounter with Voldemort, memories which are slowly reasserted into the young boy's conscious

mind and which progressively cause him many sufferings. The story of Harry is, in fact, largely based upon the importance of memories in the life of an individual. The narrative progresses by means of the boy's discovery of the evil which has been perpetrated on his own body when he was only a year old. Indeed, at the opening of *The Philosopher's Stone*, the eleven-year-old Harry only remembers "a blinding flash of green light and a burning pain in his forehead" (27). The boy's memory is thus initially pictured as confused and imprecise, although it is also immediately associated with the sensation of pain. When, shortly later, Hogwarts' gamekeeper Hagrid (later to become one of Harry's best friends and confidants) recounts the death of the boy's parents, Harry gradually adds some details to such an incomplete memory. Rowling's text states that "something very painful was going on in Harry's mind. As Hagrid's story came to a close, . . . he remembered something else, for the first time in his life – a high, cold, cruel laugh" (*Stone* 46). After this episode, Harry arrives at the School of Hogwarts and repeatedly has nightmares in which his parents disappear in a flash of green light. These particulars seem to suggest that, from the very first book of the series, the narrative is based upon the disclosure of a painful memory that the boy seems to have forgotten or repressed.

Memory of the early violence Harry has suffered at the hands of Voldemort is progressively acquired by the young wizard. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, a clearer memory appears in the conscious mind of the boy during his encounter with a Dementor on the train to Hogwarts (66). On this occasion, Harry hears the voice and precise words of his mother before being murdered by the Dark Lord. This memory is merely triggered by the presence of a Dementor in front of him, a creature which is characterized in the novels by its ability to force its victims to relive the worst memories of their lives. In a certain respect, Dementors are excellent figures for the resurgence of traumatic memories into the conscious mind of a subject. Harry's encounter with one of them thus further represents the resurgence of his repressed and traumatic memory of sexual abuse, which he subsequently fights back by learning the Patronus Charm and confronting an entire group of Dementors near the end of the third volume in the series.

Harry Potter is therefore presented as the victim of a trauma which has been partly repressed by his consciousness. His behavior in the course of the story reproduces very closely many of the traits that characterize the individuals who suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) according to

the scholars and researchers in the field. Donald Kalsched, for example, states that “the psyche’s normal reaction to a traumatic experience is to retreat from the [painful] scene of the damage” (41 my trans.). Similarly, Claudia Herbert and Fabrizio Didonna affirm that “the information about what occurred during the trauma is stored in the brain” for the immediate survival of the individual, but trauma itself is subsequently re-experienced through involuntary memories (46-47 my trans.). In the same respect, Chris R. Brewin argues that “the most interesting aspects of PTSD are . . . the incompleteness of the traumatic memory and the repetitiveness of the traumatic event through involuntary flashbacks” (177 my trans.). Brewin further explains that patients with PTSD tend to “progressively recall more and more details of their traumatic experience” (178 my trans.). As we shall now see, Rowling’s seven novels represent many aspects of PTSD in the life and experiences of the protagonist.

Indeed, the forgotten or repressed memory of the encounter with Voldemort at the age of one is clearly traumatic in its nature. This is evidenced by the pain experienced by the young wizard each time he confronts the Dark Lord, but, also, as we shall see later in detail, by his frequent nightmares. Previous critics of the seven-book saga have partly recognized Harry’s experience as one of trauma. Misty Hook argues that the boy’s path is “powered by unfathomable loss, trauma, and grief” (100), whereas Neil Mulholland affirms that, although “Harry doesn’t seem to show any signs of trauma, . . . the increasing pain and shock that he still experiences at Hogwarts, when Voldemort is around, appears to trigger the old trauma” (272). These critics, however, have mainly focused on Harry’s experience of trauma as caused by the murder of the boy’s parents and the following abuse suffered in the unloving environment of his relatives’ (the Dursleys) home.

However, a close examination of the novels exposes that Harry actually exhibits several other signs of trauma as specifically caused by his encounter with the dark wizard. Marian Mesrobian MacCurdy’s 2007 definition of trauma as “any assault to the body or psyche that is so overwhelming that it cannot be integrated into consciousness” could be easily applied to Harry’s experience (16). Harry has indeed removed almost every memory of such an encounter from his conscious mind and it takes several years for him to become aware of it. This is a typical reaction of persons who have suffered abuse during childhood and who, according to Alexander C. McFarlane and Rachel Yehuda, “have greater possibilities to experience amnesias of the trauma” (249).

Secondly, the various symptoms relating to trauma that the psychotherapist Phil Mollon lists – such as general anxiety, avoidance behaviour, and depression – all characterize Harry's conduct throughout the novels (28). According to critics such as Claudia Herbert and Fabrizio Didonna (63) as well as Claudio Foti ("L'ascolto della sessualita" 18), the victims of abuse are usually irascible and agitated. The young wizard is often described as such when he wanders alone through the castle and refuses the company of his mates. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, for example, after his repeated dreams revealing a deep connection to Voldemort, Harry decides to deliberately avoid his friends while staying at Grimmauld Place and does not want anyone to talk to him. Subsequently, after Voldemort's physical possession of him at the end of the fifth novel, Harry finds it hard to be in the company of his friends and of the other students: "He was finding it hard to decide whether he wanted to be with people or not; whenever he was in company he wanted to get away and whenever he was alone he wanted company" (*Order* 749). This is also rendered explicit shortly later when the reader is told that

*an invisible barrier separated him from the rest of the world. He was – he had always been – a marked man. It was just that he had never really understood what that meant. . . . his wishes varied with his mood. (Order 754)*

Harry is therefore presented as a person who has suffered a deep trauma and needs at times to purposefully isolate himself from the rest of community.

Such a re-enactment of trauma, which is definitely painful for the young boy, re-asserts itself mainly in connection to Voldemort's presence. Indeed, the young wizard's memory of the violence he has suffered as well as the only physical evidence of it – the lightning shaped scar on his forehead – are repeatedly associated in the texts with a sense of pain, particularly when the boy is in the presence of the perpetrator of violence. After his encounter in the Forbidden Forest with the hooded figure that is the new incarnation of Lord Voldemort, Harry starts to suffer from "stabbing pains in his forehead" and is repeatedly "woken by his old nightmare" (*Stone* 191). Furthermore, physical contact with Voldemort causes pain to the boy, as in the case of a person who is being raped. Harry's scar seriously hurts when the child has his first direct contact with Voldemort by means of Professor Quirrell (the physical vessel of Voldemort) seizing him in the chamber where



the Philosopher's Stone is secretly kept: "At once, a needle-sharp pain seared across Harry's scar; his head felt as though it was about to split in two . . . . Harry's scar was almost blinding him with pain" ( *Stone* 213). It is when the encounter with Voldemort occurs near the end of *The Order of the Phoenix* that the pain becomes much stronger for Harry: "Harry's scar burst open and he knew he was dead: it was pain beyond imagining, pain past endurance" (719). This occurs exactly when Voldemort penetrates into the boy's mind and possesses his body. The greatest pain is thus experienced when Harry is possessed by Voldemort. This is described almost as an act of sexual violence. Harry cannot react to the penetration of the Dark Lord into his mind and body. Voldemort forces him to beg Dumbledore to kill him while "every part of him [was] screaming for release" ( *Order* 720) – a phrase that could be interpreted as a metaphor for sexual abuse, Harry preferring being murdered rather than re-suffering an experience of physical violence. This is further evidenced by the fact that the mere thought of being possessed by Voldemort causes the boy to feel "dirty, as though he were carrying some deadly germ" – a typical reaction of many victims of sexual abuse ( *Order* 435).

Trauma is also evident in the fact that Harry frequently talks, shouts, and moans in his sleep. This is another form of re-enactment of trauma according to Foti ("L'ascolto della sessualita" 18), and Herbert and Didonna. The latter affirm that "the traumatizing event is re-experienced in the subject's disturbing dreams and in nightmares" (49 my trans.). Alexander C. McFarlane and Rachel Yehuda further specify that "the presence of nightmares and sleep problems signifies that even the safe retreat into the unconscious has been lost" (263 my trans.). After Voldemort's return near the end of *The Goblet of Fire* , Harry exhibits a telepathic and painful connection with the Dark Lord, which usually occurs during his sleep. In *The Order of the Phoenix* , the boy perpetually wakes up "with his scar prickling" (294). Voldemort's presence in Harry's unconscious could be seen as representing the boy's repressed thoughts about the person who has committed the abuse. The intimacy between the two characters grows and deepens as the fifth volume in the series develops: Harry comes to share Voldemort's thoughts and desires as well as his moods and sensory apprehensions. The boy is not completely conscious of the nature of such a connection: he still does not know all the details about the night on which his parents were killed and thus wonders what is "this weird connection between them, which Dumbledore had never been able to explain

satisfactory" ( *Order* 340). Later on, Harry has a vision in which he adopts the first-person point of view of Voldemort's snake Nagini while attacking Mr Weasley in the Department of Mysteries. He dreams of an episode in which Nagini – Voldemort's aggressive, phallic-shaped and most faithful servant as well as vessel of part of the Dark Lord's soul – commits an act of violence on a man and leaves him unconscious and bleeding. This scene depicts an abuse perpetrated on a male character, very similar in a certain respect to the abuse Harry himself suffered at the age of one. When he wakes up, Harry reacts with revulsion and abjection: the pain blinds him and he immediately vomits over the edge of the mattress. The telepathic contact with part of Voldemort's soul could therefore be equally considered as a metaphor for the memory of the violence Harry himself suffered.

Harry insists on telling his friends and Professor McGonagall that his visions are not normal dreams ( *Order* 646). This represents the young wizard's attempt to convince his friends and professors of the reality of his own trauma. Indeed, when narrating about his telepathic identification with the snake Nagini to Dumbledore, the Headmaster's lack of explicit attention and his refusal to directly speak to Harry causes the young boy to feel an incredible upsurge of hatred. Harry feels compelled to have a clear knowledge of his relationship with the perpetrator of violence: he needs a conscious explanation for the presence of Voldemort in his mind. In fact, together with the series' epistemological tension and its continuous use of the revelation plot (Bousquet 189-90), Harry's life is characterized from its very beginning by the need to have knowledge. This is soon thwarted by the boy's Muggle relatives: the Dursleys lie to him about the origin of his scar (by telling him that it is the result of a car accident which killed his parents) and forcedly teach him not to ask any questions in order for him to live "a quiet life" ( *Stone* 20). Harry is then depicted as eagerly inquisitive about everything that surrounds him, about the unfamiliar world of magic. He often adventures into dangerous enterprises merely to satisfy his need for explanations and thirst for information and, as Susan Engel and Sam Levin affirm, he "suffers terribly because he's so interested in answering questions, solving puzzles, and figuring things out" (19). For much of the series, the greatest question the protagonist wants answered, however, remains that of the origin of his scar, which is defined as "the only hint of Harry's mysterious past" ( *Chamber* 9). Such a past (specifically, what occurred during his encounter with the Dark Lord) constitutes the heart of the seven novels: discovering it and confronting its significance becomes Harry's duty and the reader's

main object of interest. As we shall now see, the return of the past and the re-enactment of trauma must be necessarily faced by the story's protagonist in order for him to recover from the terrible experience he has suffered.

On the one hand, the revival of psychological trauma is presented as a threat to the subject's well-being. This is confirmed by Mollon's argument that trauma forces human beings to deal with psychological pain by "the use of illusion, pretence and distraction as means of rendering life and its reality more bearable" (3), a conduct which is enacted by many of the adult characters surrounding Harry. Indeed, Professor Lupin, Mrs. Weasley, and Dumbledore initially decide not to inform the boy of what actually happened during the night in which his parents were killed. They do not want Harry to linger on a memory which is painful, difficult, and unsettling. In the concluding chapter of *The Philosopher's Stone*, for example, when asked to reveal the particulars of the night in which Harry suffered violence at the hands of Voldemort, Dumbledore states that the truth "is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with caution" (216) and refuses to inform Harry until he is older and ready to know. Similarly, in *The Order of the Phoenix*, the Headmaster does not initially want Harry to be told about the nature of Voldemort's telepathic connection with him. This renders the boy most unhappy and angry. Indeed, the refusal of several adults to inform him is questioned by Harry, who thinks that the adults do not believe him mature enough to deal with the problems he is trying to sort out. He thus feels "exhausted, he [is] confused beyond measure. . . . We won't bother telling you anything, though, because your tiny little brain might not be able to cope with it!" (*Order* 438).

At the end of the fifth novel, Dumbledore finally confesses the reason why he has kept Harry in the dark about his connection with Voldemort. He admits that, "I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan" (*Order* 739). Dumbledore's purpose thus appears to keep Harry's traumatic memories repressed in order for the boy not to suffer until he is old enough to face the trauma. It almost seems as if Hogwarts' Headmaster prefers the boy to enact repression, according to Sigmund Freud's 1915 definition of the term. Freud affirms that "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the unconscious" (qtd. in Mollon 103). Dumbledore attempts to turn the boy's mind away from the physical violence he has suffered; he tries to keep Harry's trauma away.

On the other hand, as Foti argues, in order to help the victims of abuse "it is necessary to know [the traumatic event] and to talk about it ("Noi t'ascoltiamo" 33 my trans.). Foti explains that adults must not to fear to further damage the child or teenager by directly addressing his/her problems. Dialogue is, he adds, an efficacious form of resolution of the trauma ("Noi t'ascoltiamo" 34). In Rowling's novels this is exemplified by the fact that the school's Headmaster progressively shares his knowledge of Voldemort with the boy. In the final chapters of *The Goblet of Fire*, for instance, Dumbledore – "focus[ing] on Harry's long-term interests" (Provenzano and Heyman 115) – insists on the necessity for the boy to face the transformation of the fake Mad-Eye Moody into Barty Crouch's son because "he needs to understand . . . . Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery. He needs to know who has put him through the ordeal he has suffered tonight, and why" (590). Harry must accept the terrible experience of abuse he has suffered and have a conscious knowledge of it, if he wants to recover and lead a serene life. Certainly, the memories of violence are not easy to face for the young protagonist. Indeed, after the reincarnation of Voldemort and the physical contact between them, Harry "didn't want to have to think about anything that had happened. . . . He didn't want to have to examine the memories . . . which kept flashing across his mind" (*Goblet* 602), whereas Dumbledore insists on reviving them immediately because "numbing the pain for a while will make it worse when you finally feel it" (*Goblet* 603). It is therefore Harry's duty to linger on, to analyze his own memories in order for him to defeat his adversary, that is, in order for him to overcome his own trauma. He seems to admit this when, in *The Half-Blood Prince*, he confesses to Ron and Hermione that "now, it seems as though I always knew I'd have to face him in the end" (97). This is affirmed by Dumbledore as well when he decides to give Harry private lessons in which the two of them "shall be leaving the foundations of fact and journeying together through the murky marshes of memory" (*Prince* 187). Memories are explicitly mentioned as the very material on which the work of recovery of the young boy must be made.

After Dumbledore's death near the end of *The Half-Blood Prince*, Harry becomes conscious that

*he must abandon for ever the illusion he ought to have lost at the age of one . . .*

*there was no waking from this nightmare, no comforting whisper in the dark that he was safe really . . . he was more alone than he had ever been before. (601)*

Harry's narrative thus symbolizes the loss of childhood innocence, as some critics have noted when arguing that the novels actually conclude with the protagonist's growth and maturation (Lavoie 84; Appelbaum 85; Alton 208). We could, however, explain Harry's growth into maturity also as the young boy's overcoming of trauma. The young wizard feels compelled to abandon any pretence of a life without problems: he has to face his own trauma. For this reason, he decides to embark on a dangerous mission (the search and destruction of the Horcruxes containing the fragments of Voldemort's soul) even without the help of an adult mentor or strong guide. He fights for his own good. He is uncertain of what he really should do and begins feeling resentment against Dumbledore, who has abandoned him in their common quest for the truth, in their battle against his own trauma. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry comes in fact to believe that everything that Dumbledore has left him is "impenetrable, unhelpful, useless" (287). He specifically considers the Headmaster's heredity as "impenetrable" and thus connects it with an epistemological problem of knowability of the object. This is confirmed by the fact that he specifies, "Dumbledore had left them to grope in the darkness, to wrestle with unknown and undreamed of terrors alone and unaided: nothing was explained, nothing was given freely" (*Hallows* 287). The young wizard feels resentment for not being helped anymore, for being left alone in a quest for knowledge, for the 'unknown' he must deal with now, which he associates with Gothic elements such as terror and darkness.

Harry finally manages to face his own trauma, though it takes him almost the entire narrative to do so. In *The Deathly Hallows*, in fact, he becomes able to live with the pain of his scar and to master the telepathic connection with Voldemort. The text states that "his scar burned, but he was master of the pain; he felt it, yet was apart from it. He had learned control at last" (*Hallows* 387). Harry has therefore learned how to cope with his traumatic experience of abuse and is ready to face his repressed memories. This finds resolution in the last chapters of *The Deathly Hallows*, when, by watching Professor Snape's memories in the Pensieve (a magical instrument which enables a wizard to see and analyze an individual's memories), Harry discovers that part of Voldemort's soul lives

inside him, that he himself is a Horcrux. Voldemort has been inside Harry all the time: the boy has carried him without even knowing it – a further metaphor for a repressed memory which has come to consciousness only at times and that is now fully confronted. Indeed, after this discovery, Harry finally decides to face his rival in person and put an end to his own suffering by meeting him in the Forbidden Forest. Harry wants to end the cycle of violence by sacrificing himself, an act which actually reveals to be the only way to defeat the Dark Lord. By not being afraid of confronting his abuser and, specifically, by destroying that part of Voldemort which resides in his mind, Harry experiences a healing reparation, wins over his own repressed memories, and thus overcomes the trauma connected to them. Victory over his own trauma then coincides with the defeat of the villain, of 'the sexual other'.

The Harry Potter saga could therefore be seen as a narrative which utilizes tropes and elements of the Gothic genre in order to indirectly address a problematic issue of the non-magical world such as child abuse. The relationship between the young protagonist and the main villain of the story could be interpreted as representing the victim's fear of the aggressive and inimical Other, "as a metaphor; a projection of particular threats, fears and contradictions that refuse coexistence with the prevailing paradigms and consensual orthodoxies of everyday life", as Paul Wells has argued (9). Wells defines horror texts as "foreground[ing], through the comparative safety of fiction, the very agendas humankind needs to address in 'fact'" (24). In this way, we can think of the Harry Potter novels as foregrounding the difficult issue of child abuse in contemporary society, an issue which definitely refuses coexistence with the paradigms and consensual orthodoxies of everyday life and which needs to be addressed and reported in all of its occurrences. Particularly, the story is largely based upon the progressive resurgence of traumatic memories in the conscious mind of the young subject. The narrative subsequently develops into Harry's fight against his own trauma. The texts finally show a positive characterization of adult sexuality. Harry manages to defeat his adversary as well as his own trauma. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in the final volume's epilogue, he is said to marry Ginny Weasley and then form a large family. The story has a happy ending, not just for the defeat of Voldemort, but for the very fact that Harry manages to conduct a happy life afterwards. Most important of all, as *The Deathly Hallows* novel states in its last sentence, "the scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well" (606). Nineteen years after

Voldemort's defeat, there are no more repressed memories in Harry's life: the wizard has definitely managed to cope with and defeat the trauma he has suffered at a young age.

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