

SYMBOLISM AND COHERENCE:

*HARRY POTTER* AND THE MAGIC OF SYMBOLISM IN THE NARRATIVE



BY

KIARA STAALS

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Kiara Staals

4517881

Dr. Dennis Kersten

BA Engelse Taal en Cultuur

Bachelor Werkstuk Engelse Letterkunde

Radboud Universiteit

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## Abstract

The following study will investigate the use of symbolism in the popular culture phenomenon that is the *Harry Potter* novels. It will attempt to prove that symbolism is one of the core features that creates coherence across all seven of the novels, by answering the question: how does symbolism manifest itself and contribute to the coherence of the narrative in the *Harry Potter* novels? This question will be answered through the use of literary sources, a theoretical background and thorough analysis of the novels and the instances of symbolism that occur within the narrative structure.

The study will show that symbolism can occur in a variety of ways, ranging from symbolism in the names of the characters, spells and the creatures, to symbolism in the major themes of the novels. In addition to that, it will show that the meaning of the symbolism can be found in the classics, mythology and the themes of the novels. Furthermore, it will show that patterns can be found in the symbolism and that a number of these patterns relate to some of the core messages of the books. The thesis will demonstrate that symbolism lies at the base of the literary techniques of foreshadowing and repetition, which influence the coherence of the story, and thus that symbolism influences the coherence in itself.

Keywords: *Harry Potter*, symbolism, coherence, narrative, J.K. Rowling, patterns, foreshadowing, repetition, underlying meaning, mythology

## Table of Content

Abstract and Keywords .....	3
Table of Content.....	4
Introduction .....	5
1. A Theoretical Setting for Symbolism.....	8
2. Examples of Symbolism in Harry Potter.....	13
2.1 Names and Spells .....	14
2.2. Creatures.....	16
2.3 Wands.....	17
2.4 Well-known symbols .....	18
3. Patterns and their meaning .....	21
3.1 Blood.....	21
3.2 The bond between Harry and Voldemort.....	22
3.3 Individual and personal magic .....	23
3.4 The Phoenix and the power of love.....	24
4. Influence on the narrative.....	26
4.1 Foreshadowing .....	26
4.2 Repetition and elaboration .....	29
4.3 Understanding symbolism.....	30
Conclusion.....	32
Works Cited.....	35

## Introduction

*Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling is often referred to as a popular cultural phenomenon that has taken the world by storm from the moment it came out. Over the last two decades, the novels have amazed and inspired millions of people around the world, children and adults alike, and the craze has shown no signs of dying down, considering the new material being released. The story has influenced an entire generation of readers and, in part due to its astounding success, has even become the subject of numerous studies. Steve Dempster et al., for example, examine the use of the novels as a tool to improve literacy skills (270). Another example is the research of Loris Vezzali et al., who investigate whether the books can be used for, “improving attitudes toward stigmatized groups” (105). The many studies presently in existence concern themselves with a wide variety of subjects, ranging from studies researching the marketing process, to the effects of the novels on young readers and the possible meanings of the text. Although much research has been done on the novels, there are still questions that remain to be answered. This thesis will concern itself with the subject of symbolism within the novels and how it may contribute to the coherence of the general narrative of the books, by researching and aiming to answer the question: how does symbolism manifest itself and contribute to the coherence of the narrative in the *Harry Potter* novels?

In investigating the occurrence and influence of symbolism on these novels, this research will be treading on relatively new ground. Although previous research has been conducted into symbolism as a whole, as well as on some forms of the occurrences of symbolism in these particular novels, no link has been made so far between symbolism and its possible influence on the coherence of the novels. Thus, this research will take into account the previous research on topics that can be related to the questions that will be asked here, as well as a theoretical background. Furthermore, this study will explore whether symbolism influences the novels and helps to establish coherence throughout the series, by analysing the seven *Harry Potter* books and by investigating instances in which names, places, characters or magical subjects symbolize something other than the surface form and are repeated throughout the novels to create coherence. As it would go beyond the scope of this essay, this text will not go into some of the names and objects that are not of essential importance to the plot, regardless of their interesting underlying meaning and background. The choices made about which instances of symbolism are addressed in this text, are made based on the analysis of the novels, to determine where the symbolism occurs based on the reading and the repeated use, and the research of sources. After the initial examination of the novels, the text aspires to find patterns in the

way that the symbolism arises and attempts to link the patterns to literary techniques. From the findings made in the previous chapter, conclusion will then be drawn.

It is important to state, that although the films that have been made about the novels are a part of the overall *Harry Potter* phenomenon, they will not be discussed here. The focus of this research will be on the novels alone, as including the films falls beyond the scope of this thesis and would result in a different and more expansive study. The study will be working with the hypothesis that patterns can be found in the manner in which symbolism manifests itself in the novels and that these occurrences have been thought out and implemented from the start. Furthermore, the research hypothesizes that the patterns that are found contribute to the coherence of the novels.

The relevance of this study can be found not only in its exploration of a new field of research, but also in its attempt to discover more about a cultural phenomenon that is still largely unexplained. Moreover, it is hoped that this investigation will inspire an expansion of the field of symbolism and its role within literature. From this, other research may be extended to the fields of, for example, symbolism in films. Above all this, it is important to explore the possibility of symbolism giving profounder meaning and coherence to novels, because this can build a deeper understanding and appreciation of the literature at hand. Additionally, it is important to investigate ways in which we may comprehend and appreciate literature to its full extent.

This thesis will be divided into various chapters, each tackling a different aspect of the study. The second chapter will be concerned with setting up a theoretical framework, with which the study aims to create a background for the research that is to follow. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss previous studies into symbolism and into the *Harry Potter* novels. Chapter three will concern itself with the results of the analysis of the novels and examine examples drawn from the books. This chapter aims to answer the sub-questions: in what way does symbolism appear in the novels, and what is the meaning of the symbolism in the novels? These questions will be answered by both analysing the context in which they appear and their possible meaning, as well as by consulting other studies. This chapter will also take into account some of the revelations J.K. Rowling herself has made about additional meaning of aspects of the novels, as revealed on her well-visited *Pottermore* website, in consideration of the author's intent. The fourth chapter revolves around some of the examples discussed in the previous chapter and discusses the possible patterns that can be found in them. The chapter will attempt to answer the question: in what way do the instances of symbolism form patterns? After having shown examples and analyses of symbolism, the fifth chapter will focus on the patterns that have been found in the previous chapters and discuss their position in the narrative. This chapter

will answer the questions: how do the instances of symbolism that we have encountered contribute to the narrative of the *Harry Potter* novels, and to what extent is the recognition of symbolism necessary in understanding the narrative? These questions will be answered by reviewing various other researches and relating them to the study at hand. Finally, this thesis will end with a conclusion that will examine the findings of the previous chapters and answer the main research question that has been put forth in the beginning of this introduction. Additionally, the conclusion will evaluate the possible implications of this research and the possibilities for further study.

## Chapter One: A Theoretical Setting for Symbolism

In order to appropriately analyse and set the instances of symbolism that will be discussed in the following chapters of this thesis, it is important to establish a theoretical background and to contextualise the research done in this thesis. This chapter will be discussing previous analyses of symbolism in fiction and popular culture, as well as research specifically into *Harry Potter*. Throughout this section the term “symbolism” will be mentioned on a regular basis. This word is chosen for lack of a better one and from here on out will be defined as the underlying and often hidden meaning of aspects of the novels, symbolized by any object, person, creature or aspect of the novels. This chapter will aim to provide the background necessary to understand and explain the following chapters and the arguments made in them. As has been mentioned before, there has been little to no research into the area of symbolism as an influence in literature. Thus, this research will create a theoretical frame based on studies of symbolism on its own and previous studies of Rowling’s works, as well as from studies related to these subjects.

The definition of symbolism chosen for this thesis is similar to the definition expressed in Yeeyon Im’s reconsideration of symbolism in a work of Oscar Wilde. In that research, the author examines the symbolism as it is present in a work of literature and it is stated that, “Symbolism is an elusive concept to pin down” (164). It then goes on to claim, “Symbolism presupposes the existence of the invisible, which can be manifested through the use of symbol,” and that a symbol, “is conventionally defined as ‘representation of idea by form’” (164). In exploring the sources used for the present paper, definitions close to this one seem to have been accepted by those authors as well, though the characterisations or their definitions are never voiced explicitly. Symbolism, in that sense, means the existence of something beyond what is present in the text, which is tethered to a form of a symbol. Based on this seemingly agreed upon definition, the meaning of the word as expressed in the introduction of this chapter has been formed.

Although the amount of research about symbolism appears to have increased in recent years, there has yet to be a study that focuses exclusively on symbolism as an influence in literature. Moreover, in evaluating sources for this research, it became apparent that in many cases the research of symbolism focuses on one particular theme. The same seems to be true for studies on the *Harry Potter* novels as well. The themes are, for example, often related to religious content in symbolism or another specific aspect of symbolism. An example of this can be found in the research by Anastasia Apostolides and Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, where they



discuss the representation of the Christ discourse in the novels (1). Another theme that is frequently explored is the psychological aspect of the novels. Colman Noctor, for example, explains the uses of the novels in a psychoanalytic research process, to discover how the symbolic features of the story can be beneficial in a psychotherapeutic context (579). The themes mentioned here are the most common and often appear together to make their case, but neither explores the effects of symbolism on the narrative. Rather, the focus is on the effect of symbolism and the novels on the readers. Nonetheless, these sources will be able to provide this research with valuable information, as they do address similar grounds and explain some of the symbolism and how it may be interpreted in the novels. Furthermore, they also provide a context in which this study can be placed. Notably, in a number of the sources discussed in this chapter, the authors examine other examples of popular culture as well, which fall into the same category as the *Harry Potter* novels, namely Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. As they consist of a fictional and largely magical world, similar to J.K. Rowling's work, and display various forms of symbolism in their own right, this research could also be extended to any of these successful fantasy series.

When thinking of the word symbolism and symbols in itself, the mind might wander to a term related to religious ambiguities. This might be because these kinds of symbols and symbolic meaning are most often displayed in daily life and popular culture. However, this does not mean that symbolism can only be related to religious content. On the contrary, symbolism can come from anything and can mean almost anything at that. What is particularly important to understand, is that symbolism can present itself in many forms and shapes. It can, for example, appear through the use of metaphors, as Peter Wolf describes in his research on using seizures and epilepsy as a metaphor in literature (243). He explains that a metaphor of epilepsy can be used in texts to signify strong emotions. For example, when the emotions run so high that they result in a seizure, as he says, "an emotional crisis will end with a person's dramatic breakdown which repeatedly has been expressed metaphorically in an epileptic seizure" (244). This is just one of the examples of symbolism in literature that might go unnoticed when one is not specifically looking for it. Although the reader might subconsciously be aware of a link between the seizure and the emotions running high prior to it, the symbolic message might be overlooked. This text will show later that this is often true in the case of symbolism in *Harry Potter* as well.

Other examples of forms of symbolism that might not immediately be recognised as such, are explained by Don L.F. Nilsen and Alleen Pace Nilsen in their research explaining the different tropes and schemes in Rowling's work, with a particular focus on the names in the

novels and how they use the novels to convey the meaning of the tropes and schemes to their students. They suggest that, “One reason that the *Harry Potter* books have such appeal to a worldwide audience is Rowling's rhetorical density as illustrated by how much meaning she can pack into the few short sounds needed to create a name” (60). They go on to mention the different ways in which some of the names chosen in *Harry Potter* use symbolism to give off a certain meaning, though this meaning is not always picked up by the reader on a conscious level. A name might have a symbolic background that refers to a negative story, but as this story might be unknown to the reader it is not recognised. The effect, however, still comes through, regardless of the understanding of the symbolism. Aside from metaphors and metonymy, one of the examples they mention are “innuendoes”. They state, “Innuendo relates to extra meanings that are so subtle only some readers catch onto them” (62). Their research explains not only various elements of symbolism in the novels and how J.K. Rowling has used them, but also provides some literary techniques that are used in the novels, such as alliterations and appositions. Although these techniques may not necessarily be directly related to symbolism, they do show Rowling’s skill and purposeful implementation of technique that stretches to her use of symbolism as well. Furthermore, this source is particularly useful, because it centres on the symbolism in the names that appear throughout the novels. This has aided in the search of symbolism in reading and analysing the novels, as it assisted in recognising the symbolism in the names and their possible meanings. Also, this source reveals that symbolism cannot only be found in the names of the characters, but also in the names of places, creatures, objects and spells, all of which must be taken into account when analysing and identifying the symbolism in the books.

Symbolism has become a recurring theme in many forms of popular culture and people are becoming increasingly aware of its existence, be it the occasions in which symbolism is recognisable. David Nylund states, “Media stories also provide the symbols, myths, and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of people in contemporary global, capitalist societies” (13). This indicates that people are aware of symbols and mythological references we have come to know through time. Most children are likely to have grown up with fairy tales and myths read to them and the information we gather from these is what we can still recognise and understand later in life. The media using symbols and myths increases the common culture of symbols and myths that we collectively know. Thus, when we read a text that mentions one of these symbols we understand their underlying meaning and heritage. Although this is not directly related to the coherence in the novels being discussed in this text, it does provide an idea into what kind of symbolism the readers collectively recognise and

understand. Furthermore, it also strengthens the notion that one of the forms of symbolism that can be looked for in these novels, as will be dealt with in later chapters, can be found in symbols of myth. Maria Sachiko Cicere adds to this in her research of medievalism in popular culture and children's literature, in which she investigates the role of medievalism in British literature since the 1950s (395). She mentions that the *Harry Potter* books are an example of newer fantasy, which tends to, "reflect popular knowledge about the Middle Ages and the generic conventions of fantasy, both of which are frequently conveyed through other fantasy works" (398). According to her, newer fantasy not only admits the medievalism of castles and knights, but also accepts creatures drawn from classical mythology, such as, for example, centaurs. This further strengthens the idea that in the recognition of symbolism, attention must be paid to examples drawn from mythology.

Leanne Simmons also provides some valuable insights in her discussion of the representation of magic in the books. She claims that the magic as it is depicted in the novels seems to come from oneself, when she states, "it is significant that Rowling does not portray magic as coming from divine powers but from the self and that many of her illustrations of magic-making involve projecting symbols of the witch or wizard's identity outward" (62). Her analysis suggests one of the patterns that this study may be able to find in its evaluation of the novels, namely that magic is personal and that some of the instances of symbolism point to this. John Rosegrant adds to this in his research of the main themes and their symbolization of adolescent developmental issues. In this he suggests that the readers might be reminded of mythology in the main themes as well (Rosegrant 1402). He also argues that there are three developmental issues found in the main themes of the novels, which resonate in the symbolism of the books as well (Rosegrant 1421). Thus, strengthening this thesis' idea that symbolism lies at the core of the novels and in that regard, may influence the coherence of them.

What makes the study of symbolism even more interesting and diverse, is that apart from the variety of ways in which it can appear and the innumerable meanings, the meaning of symbols can change over time. In his study, Kearl explains that the symbol of a skull, which used to be a traditional symbol of mortality, as in *Hamlet*, has now lost its symbolic meaning (15). This is due to an overuse of the symbol in popular culture, where the constant repetition of, for example, items of clothing has reduced the meaning of the skull to nothing, because it came to mean too many different things (15). In other words, the symbolism as we may encounter it, may mean one thing in the present day, but as they are used more commonly, may change their meaning. This opens opportunities to revisit symbolism based studies to discover if their conclusions remain true after a period of time.

As this study will attempt to prove that symbolism in the *Harry Potter* novels influences the coherence of the books, it is important to understand what coherence means, particularly in the context of literature. Charles Repp examines this, or more accurately the difference between literary coherence and epistemic coherence, in his 2017 research. He states that, “discussions about the coherence of a literary work tend to focus, rather, on ‘the consistent or inconsistent behaviour of its characters, the congruence or incongruence of its themes, or the unity or disunity of its mode of presentation or its language’ (Haack 2004, 173)” (60). He suggests that coherence can have to do with the work’s theme and that the coherence, “can be expressed in various ways—sometimes through explicit authorial commentary, but perhaps more often through the thoughts and dialogue of the characters or the events of the story” (61). Keeping Repp’s of coherence in mind, it would be reasonable to believe that symbolism might be one of the ways in which coherence expresses itself in *Harry Potter*. It also pitches the idea that if the characters and themes have to be consistent to create coherence, then this must also be true for the symbolism used in the novels. Symbolism would have to be used consistently and congruently. Because of this, in the recognition of the symbolism in the novels, additional attention will be paid to symbolism that is repeated throughout the novels and symbolism that ties in with both the themes and other symbolism.

From the above, it becomes clear that symbolism can be found in the underlying meaning of various different things. It becomes apparent that although research has been done in both symbolism and the *Harry Potter* novels, no specific research into symbolism as a contributor to the coherence of the narrative has yet been completed. This chapter also supplies the necessary theoretical framework to work with, in order to analyse the novels and the interpretation of the symbolism that may be found in them. Additionally, the above-mentioned sources have given some indication as to where symbolism might be found, which will be useful in the reading and analysing of the novels. Due to this, in the analysis of the novels, attention will be paid to possible symbolism in names of characters, spells, places and creatures, myths and even in the main themes. Moreover, in the recognition of the symbolism, the repetition and consistency of the symbolism must be taken into consideration. Taking these realisations of symbolism into account, the study will also include the search for patterns in the symbolism that it may encounter. The paper will then attempt to answer the research question by consulting further sources and tying the found symbolism to the coherence as it is mentioned above. This text will aim to show the ways in which J.K. Rowling has used different ways of symbolism to create coherence in the *Harry Potter* novels, and how the novels are shaped by their symbols of meaning.

## Chapter Two: Examples of Symbolism in Harry Potter

In this chapter, some examples of symbolism, and the context in which they appear in the novels, will be discussed. A distinction will be made between various groups and themes, paying particular attention to recurring instances of symbolism throughout the books. The sub-research questions that this chapter aims to answer are: in what way does symbolism appear in the novels, and what is the meaning of the symbolism in the novels? The method used to answer these questions is, as has been explained in the preceding chapter, by presenting some of the examples of symbolism that were found in the reading and analysing of the novels for this research, and by taking into account the theory discussed in the previous chapter. Particularly the studies of Nilsen and Nilsen, along with that of Simmons, will be of use in this chapter, as well as the analyses of instances of symbolism by some of the other authors. The recognition of symbolism is based on the previous research on symbolism in the narrative and their account of examples of symbolism, some of which have already been discussed in the second chapter.

It is important to remember is that symbolism is in many ways a personal perception of symbols and their apparent meaning. What one person might read into it, another might see completely differently. Nonetheless, there are interpretations that are most likely in light of the context, as well as the author's intent. Over the years, J.K. Rowling has added a considerable amount of background information about the characters, creatures and the magical world to the *Pottermore* site. Here, fans can confirm their own ideas and learn more about the alternate world they have come to know. It has also become a place for Rowling to publish much of the writing she has done while creating the magical world, but which she did not include in the actual books. Although this source will not be used to provide any conclusive evidence, it will be mentioned on occasion to show the author's own interpretation and intent of the meaning, as many of the site's articles and stories are written by J.K. Rowling herself, along with some additional ideas to where other forms of symbolism may be present. But while new information becomes available every day from the author's perspective, questions still remain to be asked about the true meaning and extent of the symbolism. Thus, although some of the symbols, and their meanings, that will be discussed here have been addressed by Rowling in the past, they will mostly find their explanation in previous research and in the analysis done for this thesis.

## 2.1 Names and Spells

In one of the articles that have been published on the *Pottermore* site, it is stated that, “Like so much in the *Harry Potter* books, symbolic meaning can be found in the smallest of details” (Rowling, *Pottermore*). This statement can be said to be true in many aspects, one of which is the names that have been attributed to the vast number of characters that appear throughout the novels. In several instances, the names of the characters have symbolic meaning and reveal something about the characters to the audience. Others, for example, the origin of the name “Tom Riddle”, have a different background. J.K. Rowling found this one on a gravestone while strolling around in a cemetery in Edinburgh, the same cemetery where she also came upon the last name “McGonagall” and close by the school that initially inspired Hogwarts. However, on many occasions the names have a more elaborate background and symbolic meaning, which may be overlooked by most readers. In numerous cases, the names of the characters reveal something about their character traits. One example is the full name of Dumbledore, namely Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, which symbolizes many different things, each saying something about the characteristics of the character. “Percival”, for example, is one of the well-known knights of the round table from the Arthurian legend, and, according to *Pottermore*, “Brian” is an old Celtic word for “noble” (Rowling, *Pottermore*). The name thus creates the image of a noble knight. As Dumbledore’s character is in the books often described as being a wise and noble genius, who fights for the “good” side, it seems that the meaning of the name is appropriate for the character of Dumbledore. Another example can be found in Draco Malfoy’s name. The name “Draco” is Latin for “dragon” and Nilsen and Nilsen state that the surname “Malfoy”, divided into “mal” and “foi”, translates to meaning “bad faith” (62). Considering the fact that Draco is Harry’s enemy and is often perceived as being a rather rotten boy, it seems no surprise that his name reflects this. It is true that some of the names do not have any symbolic meaning and have simply been chosen at random from either Rowling’s memory or encounters. Others have been chosen to be alliterations such as Dudley Dursley or Luna Lovegood. However, many names do have a symbolic meaning and including Minerva McGonagall, whose first name is the same as that of the Roman goddess of wisdom and tactic. Minerva is on more than one occasion described as being strict but fair, very clever and in the final volume of the novels is one of the main people in charge of leading the Battle of Hogwarts. Furthermore, her last name, though taken from a gravestone, embodies some symbolism as well, as it hints towards her Scottish heritage. This accompanied by the McGonagall’s occasional appearances in a tartan dressing-gown or scarf, supply the reader with an idea of her personal background, which is confirmed by some of Rowling’s additional

writing (Rowling, *Prisoner* 282). Nilsen and Nilsen mention that the name Lily Potter is what they call an “innuendo”, which relates to additional meaning that not all readers will catch up on (62). According to them, “In the language of flowers, lilies stand for purity. In contrast, Lily's sister, Petunia, who serves as Harry's foster mother, has a name that symbolizes anger and resentment. Both ideas are supported throughout the series” (62). Here, they show again that on many occasions the names give the reader an idea about the character and often sets a tone for the character as well, which is reinforced throughout the series.

Similar instances of symbolism can be found in the spells that were created for the books as well. As a student of the classics at university, Rowling has used her extensive knowledge of Latin, folklore and mythology in creating her magical world and this can be seen in the aforementioned names and the spells. Nilsen and Nilsen suggest that Rowling uses Latin roots in a variety of spells, to add a, “sense of dignity or mysticism” (61). They mention the “cruciatu curse”, with its Latin root “crux”, meaning cross or gallows. But apart from adding an air of mystery, the Latin translations often also reveal the purpose of the spell. The cruciatu curse, for example, is used to torture people, which the gallows translation relates to. Other spells are more direct, for example “accio”, a summoning spell, which, in Latin translates to “I summon” and “finite incantatem”, a spell to stop other spells, which translates to “to end bewitching”. These examples thus symbolize the meaning of what they effectively do. Another instance of symbolism and meaning behind spells, is the spell ending “sempra”, which first appears in the second book, but gains importance in the sixth as the ending of a spell of Severus Snape's invention. According to *Pottermore*, sempra is not a Latin word in itself, but does share a close resemblance to the word “semper”, with the meaning “always” (Rowling, *Pottermore*). This has significance, because Snape is well known for his relentless love for Lily Potter and when asked about this, simply answers: always. Thus, this spell ending, though seemingly insignificant, points to one of the major plot lines that will only be revealed in the last book, but has been present since the beginning.

One of the most well-known spells in the books is “expecto patronum”, which produces a “Patronus” that protects against the “Dementor” creatures. Expecto patronum translates to “I await a patron”, which can be related to the idea that the Patronus is a protector of sorts or as Lupin describes it in the novel, “a kind of Anti-Dementor – a guardian which acts as a shield” (Rowling, *Prisoner* 251). But this is not where the symbolism of this spell ends. It is explained that a Patronus is unique to each wizard, and in Harry's case it takes the shape of a stag, the very form that is symbolic of his father, as he could turn himself into a stag at will. Simmons suggests that in Rowling's magic, “many of her illustrations of magic-making involve

projecting symbols of the witch or wizard's identity outward" (62). She explains this notion by mentioning that in many cases the magic that is revealed is specific to the one that is responsible for it and is related to the inner workings of the character, as it does in the Patronus as well. Harry conjures up a Patronus that symbolizes the father he never knew, because, as Dumbledore explains it, "Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that particular Patronus?" (Rowling, *Prisoner* 454). The Patronus thus symbolizes part of who the character is. This also explains the shape of Snape's Patronus, which is a doe, and more importantly, the same one as Lily Potter had. Lily's Patronus matches that of her husband, and Snape's Patronus, whose love for Lily ultimately powered his actions in the novels, matches hers. As such, much like the *sempra* spell ending and his answer "always", Snape's Patronus symbolizes his undying love for Lily, even after she has passed.

## 2.2. Creatures

Throughout the seven books of the series, many creatures come to pass, some of which may be recognisable to the readers, and others that may not be because they were created by Rowling. Creatures such as the phoenix, centaur, kelpies, werewolves, unicorns, dragons and hippogriffs all find their roots in mythology and have been used in numerous other forms of literature before. Thus, in these cases, the creatures symbolize a link to mythology, where they may find additional meaning. As Cicere mentions, many works of fantasy literature make use of classic mythology to shape the fantasy world and given J.K.'s background in the classics it is no wonder that she makes use of them as well (398). She also claims that in many cases, these kinds of literature reflect generic conventions of fantasy that frequently come up in other examples of fantasy. Nylund adds, that, due to the increasing use of symbolism and myth in the media and popular culture, people are becoming more aware of their existence and meaning (13). Therefore, it would be fair to say that, considering the growth in understanding, the creatures used in these novels will have been familiar to many of readers and can be considered as examples in which the symbolic meaning is more obvious to the reader. The centaur, for example, is not only recognisable as a mythological creature, but its symbolism is much simpler to determine as well. They symbolize wisdom and fortune-telling in the novels, which becomes clear from their star gazing and the eventual appointment of one of the centaurs as a divination teacher. However, creatures such as the Dementors were created by Rowling herself and may have unfamiliar symbolism. Dementors are essentially creatures that suck out all the happiness from a person, leaving nothing but despair. In their representation, they are created and surrounded by nothing but darkness and can only be defeated by a creation of pure light and



hope; the Patronus charm. Simmons notes about the creatures, “Rowling portrays creatures called ‘Dementors’ as a literary symbol of the experience of depression that can utterly destroy the self” (67). Keeping this in mind, Dementors can be said to symbolize darkness, loss of mind and fear itself and in the third novel, one of the professors notes Harry’s fear of them is rather sensible because, “that what you fear most of all is – fear” (Rowling, *Prisoner* 164). In that sense, the Patronus charm in return, apart from being a personal creation to each wizard, also symbolizes happiness and light, which is the only thing that can defeat the darkness. In many ways, this is one of the central messages of the novels, symbolized in the form of a creature and the defeating spell, telling the reader that the only thing that is strong enough to defeat the dark, is the light that comes from love and happiness. But the Dementors bring much more to light than just this. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban* Harry is told, “The Dementors affect you worse than others because there are horrors in your past that the others don’t have” (Rowling, *Prisoner* 197). Initially this seems to be true, based on the deaths of his parents before the time he was one year old, as he relives that moment when the Dementors affect him. But by the time the reader gets to the final book, it becomes clear that Voldemort has unintentionally attached part of his soul to Harry. This implies that the moments that Harry feels the influence of the Dementors, he not only relives the worst moment of his own life, but that of Voldemort as well, namely the moments leading to the loss of all his power. Therefore, the effect of the Dementors also symbolizes the bond between Harry and his enemy Voldemort.

### 2.3 Wands

When reading the novels, it becomes apparent how important wands are, as they are not only the conductors for the magic, thus symbolizing the power of the witch or wizard, but also because some of the main conflict in the final book revolves around one particular wand. Throughout the novels, wands become of increasing importance and can symbolize many things, in different ways. From the very start, meaning when Harry goes to buy his wand at Ollivander’s wand shop, it becomes clear that, “the wand chooses the wizard,” a fact that is repeated a number of times in the books that follow (Rowling, *Philosopher’s* 92). The wands are very close to the wizard and upon closer inspection, have the ability to reveal vital information about the characters to the readers. No two wands are alike, as they may differ in their core, the wood they are made of, the length and its flexibility. Each character’s wand in the novel symbolizes their individual trades and personality. An example can be found in what are probably the two most important wands in the books; Harry’s and Voldemort’s. It becomes clear to the audience from the start that the two wands share a core, meaning that the phoenix

feathers the wands hold came from the same bird. A likeness between the two characters is hereby established from the start. The connection of the wands is so powerful, that the owners are even revealed to be unable to mortally harm one another, causing for Voldemort's search of a more powerful wand. However, as much as the cores may be alike, the exteriors are radically different and tell a different tale for each owner. According to Rowling's additional text on *Pottermore*, "Yew, the wood used in Voldemort's wand, is poisonous" (Rowling, *Pottermore*). This can be seen as symbolic for Voldemort himself, as he is the cause for death and destruction in much of the novels. The wood used in the creation of Harry's wand, however, is the complete opposite as, "Holly wands often choose owners who are engaged in some dangerous and often spiritual quest" (Rowling, *Pottermore*). As Harry is often stated to attract trouble and was destined to be engaged in a battle with Voldemort from the moment he was born, this seems to be accurate. Furthermore, holly is supposed to repel evil, which is symbolized in Harry in his eventual defeat of Voldemort; the Dark Lord. The wands and what they are made of, symbolize personality traits and in some ways even the fates of its owner. Simmons supports this idea as she recounts the character Neville's experiences with his wand, "The breaking of his first wand and its replacement with one that suits his own character rather than his father's symbolizes his own coming of self" (64). Although the use of his father's wand may have had sentimental value, it seemed to have held Neville back. When he finally receives a wand that suits him, he can live up to his true potential. There is also the Elder wand, which Jordana Hall describes as being, "a symbol of power that mocks death according to the Tale of the Three Brothers" (78). This particular wand symbolizes the ultimate magical power, as the possessor of the wand cannot be defeated, as well as the seemingly absolute law that the wand chooses the wizards, or it will not work to its full potential. The meaning of the wands show Rowling's intent to add additional meaning to this subject, reinforcing the idea that the presence and complexity of the symbolism was planned from the beginning.

## 2.4 Well-known symbols

In the previous sections, some of the instances of symbolism have been discussed on the basis of the research material for this thesis and the analysis of the novels. However, there are multiple examples of symbolism in these books that are more widely known to the public, but rarely mentioned in previous research.

Harry's scar, the one he received from Voldemort when he tried to kill Harry, is quite possibly the most well-known symbol of this book series. The scar is immediately associated with the main character and is known to symbolize the attack on his family that he survived,

giving him the “The-Boy-Who-Lived” status. However, the scar can be said to symbolize much more than just his survival. The scar is the first mentioned and most visible indicator of a bond between Voldemort and Harry, thus starting the journey that takes seven books to complete. The scar becomes increasingly important, when it becomes clear that when it hurts, it signifies their link to one another. The second to last sentence of the novels is even, “The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years” (Rowling, *Deathly* 620). As the reader realises part of Voldemort’s soul resides in Harry, it becomes clear that that is the reason why his scar hurts and their connection is so strong. Therefore, the scar symbolizes the journey between Voldemort and Harry from start to finish, from when he got it as a baby to the point where Voldemort is defeated and the scar no longer hurts, signifying that, “All was well” (Rowling, *Deathly* 620).

Another one of the more recognisable examples, is the sign of the “Deathly Hallows”, symbolizing the coming together of the invisibility cloak, the Elder wand, and the resurrection stone, which together make the possessor the master of death. However, it also symbolizes the link between Harry and one of the original brothers of the tale around the Deathly Hallows, as the invisibility cloak is handed down from generation to generation. This in turn links him to Voldemort, as Voldemort’s background story tells the reader he is a descendant of one of the other brothers, hereby making Harry and Voldemort distantly related. The symbol signifies that Harry finally overcomes death in the end, which the owner of all three items is set to do, by being ready to die, thus mastering it. The Deathly Hallows show, that although there may be ways to cheat death, which is what Voldemort is essentially trying to do, one can only master it by accepting it. This is something Voldemort never understood and in turn is a main theme of the novels, as he is always in search of power and ways to overcome death, but never manages to do so. Harry however, is motivated by love and doing the right thing, he is able to overcome death with love, understanding and signifying that love is stronger than death and symbolizing light over darkness.

Many people will also know the “lucky number seven” or in the case of its occurrence in fantasy, “magical number seven”. It is a number that rings through in many different ways, for example in the number of Weasley children or the amount of quidditch players and, of course, the number of “Horcruxes” Voldemort intended to make. Horcruxes are pieces of Voldemort’s soul separated from his body, to serve his attempt to cheat death, by preserving part of his soul. In the sixth novel, a young Voldemort asks, “isn’t seven the most powerfully magical number?” (Rowling, *Half-Blood* 414). This is the reason that Voldemort wanted to make seven Horcruxes, as he believed it to be the most powerful magical number. He ultimately

failed in making seven, as he inadvertently made an eighth, hereby negating the number's power. The power of seven is evident in the seven years spent at Hogwarts as well, as this is the amount of time it takes to be a fully trained wizard. Thus, seven symbolizes the strongest and most magical number, which is quite possibly the reason for the existence of a seven-book series.

From the above sections, it is clear that symbolism can be found in the names of characters, as well as the spells that are used in the novels. Furthermore, symbolism is apparent in the creatures that appear in the books in various ways. Where some creatures find their symbolism in classic mythology, the creatures that have been created by Rowling herself find more complex meaning, which can even reach to the core of the novels, namely the fight between the dark and the light. Symbolism can also be found in the wands that are used by every wizard and witch in the series and how they symbolize the specific character of their owner, as well as being the conductor of their power. Symbolism in many of these occasions appears as part of the magical world as it is created and have their individual roles in this magical world. Moreover, it may often be overlooked by the readers, if not paid particular attention to. Additionally, this chapter has shown that in several cases, the implementation of symbolism appears to be well thought out and their symbolizing of the main themes premeditated, supporting the idea that Rowling has intended for their occurrence and role.

### Chapter Three: Patterns and their meaning

Some of the examples of symbolism that occur throughout the novels have been investigated in the previous chapter. As symbolism in *Harry Potter* occurs rather frequently, this thesis is not long enough to be able to discuss them all and instead has attempted to provide a collected view. The previous chapter is designed to give us an idea of the extent to which the symbolism reaches. This chapter will be looking at some distinct examples of symbolism that can be found in the novels and have a recurring role that is related to the main themes of the novels, by asking the question: in what way do the instances of symbolism form patterns? One of the patterns which has already become apparent in the previous chapter, is the use of mythology and the classics, particularly in relation to the creatures, names and spells that occur throughout the novels. It becomes clear that Rowling has used her experience in these areas to help shape her magical world and add a layer of symbolism that may be recognisable to the reader, but could also be easily overlooked. The following chapter will attempt to uncover other examples of patterns that seem to arise in the novels which may influence the coherence as a whole.

#### 3.1 Blood

Blood, be it blood relations or bloodshed, has an interesting role in the *Harry Potter* books. From the very first chapter, in which we meet Harry's only living blood relatives, the readers' attention is turned to the fact that you cannot choose family. However, hints are also dropped about the importance of blood, when Dumbledore explains that Harry must remain with his family, although the reason for this is not revealed until later in the story. In many ways blood symbolizes one of the main themes in the books, which subsequently causes for much of the turmoil. An example of this can be seen in the war that Voldemort starts, because he feels that magical blood has the right to rule non-magical blood (also known as "Muggles") and all impure magical blood, meaning witches and wizards that come from Muggle families, must be destroyed. Although Voldemort's standpoint is a rather radical one, the idea that there are differences between the bloodlines of the magical community is of considerable importance in the novels and it has often been said to symbolize the racial issues that we face in today's society. Cicere even states, "Rowling addresses questions of blood-based discrimination directly through 'Pure-blood' prejudice against 'Muggle-borns'" (402). And it is not just amongst the humans in the novels that blood is of importance. Tensions between the species of the goblins and the humans, and the suppression of the house-elves is also related to blood.

Apart from this, blood also symbolizes issues on a smaller scale, namely within families. Throughout the novels, it becomes clear that Lily Potter's sacrifice for her son Harry was so powerful that a protection resides in his blood. Towards the end of the series, it becomes clear that this protection only holds as long as Harry stays with the only living blood-relation he has, his mother's sister Petunia Dursley. Harry in that sense, is literally protected by his family's blood. This is also the reason that Voldemort, or more the body he was sharing at this point, could not touch him at the end of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The blood that ran through his veins protected him from Voldemort even after his mother's initial sacrifice.

As can be seen above, blood symbolizes the separations in the magical community, which is similar to the race issues we face today. Furthermore, blood also symbolizes the ultimate protection that is upheld by it. What is more, blood symbolizes a variety of things that come back in each novel and is hinted towards in the earlier novels, thus creating a pattern.

### 3.2 The bond between Harry and Voldemort

The connection between Harry and Voldemort is one of the main themes that appears across the books. Subtly created from the very first novel, with the symbolic scar provided as visual evidence, the bond grows with each passing volume. Many forms of symbolism support this bond and can be considered to be one of the features of their connection. Take for example Harry's ability to speak "Parselmouth". At the end of book two, Dumbledore explains that some of Voldemort's power was transferred to Harry when Voldemort tried to kill him, which is why he can speak with snakes. This is not only the first indication towards Voldemort unintentionally transferring part of himself onto Harry, the extent of which is only revealed in the last novel, but it also shows how deep this bond really goes. Along with the progression of the books, the link between the two develops and becomes stronger, which is symbolized by the increasing strength and power of Voldemort. As Voldemort grows stronger, so does his influence on Harry and thus the connection between these characters. Another example of symbolism that fits into this pattern, is the effect of the Dementors on Harry. It has been previously addressed, that Harry feels their influence more intensely, because he is reliving not only his own worst memory, but also Voldemort's. This, again, symbolizes the bond of the two that reaches to the core of Harry's being. And the connection does not stop there. It is also visible in the connection of their wands, which share a core. In the first book, Ollivander notes that it is curious that Harry is meant to hold a wand that shares a core with the wand that has caused the death of his parents (Rowling, *Philosopher's* 92). The connection of their wands, also a recurring theme in the novels, is another hint towards their bond.

Through a variety of symbolism, a pattern is created that symbolizes the deep running connection between them, which is one of the main themes in the novels and comes down to the battle in the seventh book. These examples of symbolism not only show the pattern of connection between Voldemort and Harry, but also the differences. Harry on occasion does mention himself to be, in some ways, similar to Voldemort, for example because he is an orphan half-blood with the ability to speak to snakes. Yet, whenever a similarity is mentioned, a difference follows swift. Contemplating the Dementors, it shows that Harry's worst moment is when he loses his family. Voldemort's worst memory, however, is not the loss of love, but that of power. Thus, although the likeness and connection between the characters is developed and symbolized throughout the novels in various different ways, the differences are always present, the main one being that Harry acts out of love, whereas Voldemort acts out of a lust for power, showing the opposing light and dark once more.

### 3.3 Individual and personal magic

Simmons claims that Rowling's representation of magic is a form of self-projection and she notes that many spells, "involve appropriate mental state, a degree of focus, or even a happy memory, conducive of the right emotion, in order for a spell to work" (62). The idea that magic comes from the inside of the wizard and is highly personal, forms another pattern of symbolism that is repeated throughout the novels in a variety of ways. There are a number of things that symbolize this personal aspect of magic, for example the wand specification that have been described in the previous chapter. The wood, core and flexibility of the wand reveal characteristics of the wizard in question, which explains why wand use is often symbolized as being a highly personal aspect. Simmons states that the wand, "is an extension or totem of self that 'selects' the wizard because its 'magical core' (in Harry's case, a phoenix feather) has psychic affinities with the character of the wizard or witch" (Simmons 62). Thus, the wands highlight the individuality and personality of the wizard. Other examples that highlight the individuality of the characters are the "Boggarts" and the "Mirror of Erised". The Boggart is a creature that takes the shape of that which you fear most, in Harry's case Dementors, and is therefore different to every person. The Mirror of Erised shows not your reflection, but "the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts" (Rowling, *Philosopher's* 229). For Harry, this means he sees the family he never had, but always longed for. Ron, who has spent his life sharing everything with his siblings and standing in their shadow, sees himself as a successful champion. The differences between the characters and who they are on the inside and what has shaped them, are illustrated here. Possibly the clearest example of this is the Patronus, which,

as mentioned before, shows a key characteristic of the person that conjures it. A pattern is created in various examples that highlight not only the individuality of the character and what sets them apart, but also symbolizes the personality of the individual, displaying the highly personal aspect of magic and showing that its strength comes from within.

### 3.4 The Phoenix and the power of love

Hall mentions that, “The recurrent imagery of the phoenix that runs throughout the novels is representative of the cycle of death and rejuvenation” (77). The phoenix comes back on several occasions, for example in the core of Harry’s wand and in the so-called Order of the Phoenix, an organisation which attempts to rise from the ashes of Voldemort’s destruction to defeat evil, which is subsequently the title of the fifth book. The theme of rising from the ashes is one of the main underlying themes of the novels and is created as a pattern in symbolism as well. Voldemort in his ways, rises from death and regains his power after the fourth book and Harry does the same in the seventh after the part of Voldemort’s soul that resided in him is vanquished. At this point in the battle of Hogwarts, the “good” side seems to be losing, but after Harry returns, the good side comes back more powerful and forceful than before. This is a theme that is symbolized throughout. Whenever the events seem to be going downhill, Harry and his friends find their way out, best symbolized in their defeat of Voldemort. This ability to rise and fight back often comes from the power of love. As mentioned before, part of this is symbolized in the protection Lily gave her son when she sacrificed herself, but it is apparent in more than just that. The tables turn in the battle of Hogwarts, because Harry sacrificed himself for his friends, giving them the protection his mother gave him. Love and friendship are the reason that Harry and his friends prevail time after time, symbolized in their moments of friendship and their loyalty to one another. Thus, a pattern is created, in which love is paired with power and will ultimately defeat evil.

The patterns that are mentioned in this chapter appear across all seven novels and develop together with the story. In all the cases discussed, the symbolism lies at the base of the main themes of the books and is thus explored and symbolized to great extent, though not always visibly. Patterns can appear in smaller forms, for example, where the symbolism comes from or is based on, but it can also create a larger image, that relates to the core themes of the novels as a whole. Furthermore, many of the major themes, and with them symbolism, are foreshadowed across the books. The link between Harry and Voldemort, for example, was



foreshadowed from the beginning of the novels, although the extent of it was yet to be seen. The same can be found in the other examples as well. As these themes and instances of symbolism are repeated and elaborated on across the books, they create a coherent unit, which seems to hold symbolism at its base.

## Chapter Four: Influence on the narrative

The following chapter will be discussing the patterns that have been put forth in the previous chapters and evaluate their possible influence on the narrative as a whole. Furthermore, this chapter will consider the findings up to this point and attempt to answer the questions: how do the instances of symbolism that we have encountered contribute to the narrative of the *Harry Potter* novels, and is the recognition of symbolism necessary in understanding the narrative? In doing so, this text will consider the previous findings and place them in the larger scale of symbolism and its possible effect on both the reader and the unity of the story at hand.

### 4.1 Foreshadowing

In the previous chapters of this thesis, various forms of symbolism have been encountered and it has been found that there appear to be patterns in the way they occur and the manner in which they create meaning within the story. One of the ways in which symbolism occurs in the narrative is through the creation of the magical world that Harry enters when he is eleven. This world is created through the use of parallels between the normal Muggle world and the magical community, and the use of symbolism can be found everywhere. Upon closer inspection, it may become apparent that many of the instances of symbolism find their meaning and heritage within the ancient Greek and Roman cultures, as well as having their basis in myths and legends. Creatures that may be familiar to the audience, such as unicorns, centaurs and phoenixes, all of which are based in myths, have been found and the majority of the spells used in the series appear to have their linguistic roots in Latin. Aside from symbolism being used to create the atmosphere of a magical environment and patterns relating to the style of symbolism and where it comes from, patterns that relate to how the symbolism is situated in the narrative have also been shown. One way in which this is done is through the foreshadowing that occurs in each of the seven novels of the series. George E. Duckworth explains the importance of foreshadowing in Roman comedy, and although the source text being discussed here is not Roman comedy, the parallels in foreshadowing cannot be ignored and will be explained further in the following paragraph. As there is no specific research into foreshadowing in literature, the research done about its appearance and use in theatre will be used to substitute for this lack of information within literature itself. Furthermore, as Rowling studied the classics in college, it would not be too far of a leap to think that she may have used stylistic devices from Roman theatre and literature. Duckworth claims:

Dramatic interest or suspense may be of two different types: (1) suspense of anticipation; the spectator knows what is to happen, but not when or how; he follows the progress of the action and awaits with ever-increasing hope or fear the coming of the expected event; (2) suspense of uncertainty; the spectator does not know the outcome and remains in a state of ignorance and curiosity about the later action. (209)

He then goes on to state that the two are compatible in creating foreshadowing, by letting the reader in on small amounts of information, but not enough to reveal the entire plot, thus creating suspense. This analysis can be said to be true in fiction as well, as any author has to make similar decisions about keeping their readers in the dark for the reveal of the plot, or letting them in on the secrets. In the case of *Harry Potter*, J.K. Rowling seems to have taken a similar approach to that in Roman comedy. She appears to have chosen to reveal small amounts of information to the readers from the very first novel, letting them in on a small point which would prove to become more important as the series progressed. Duckworth goes on to explain that there are essentially two techniques that a dramatist can choose from in Roman comedies, “(1) the dramatist explains the situation in full to the audience in the opening scene or scenes, or (2) he gives only the information that is necessary and withholds certain facts until they are dramatically more effective” (218). This again is true for Rowling’s story. An excellent example of this can be seen in the character of Sirius Black. This character’s name was mentioned briefly in one of the earlier chapters of *The Philosopher’s Stone* and was seemingly of little importance, so much so that many people completely miss it. However, by the time the readers get to the third book, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, they learn that Black is to become arguably one of the most significant characters in the entire storyline. And it does not stop at this brief mention. In the third volume of the series itself, Black is initially presented as being the adversary of the novel and an enemy to the lead character. It is slowly revealed to the reader that Harry and Sirius have a more complicated history than they initially seemed to, and the character helps to reveal more about Harry’s parents’ past as well. It is only in the closing chapter that it becomes clear that Black is actually on Harry’s side. Rowling thus expertly foreshadows the entire existence of a character and then uses the information she reveals to the audience to give them the correct idea that Sirius is of importance to Harry’s story, but not the way in which he will be. Duckworth elaborates on this as well, by explaining that foreshadowing can either take the form of clear indications to the events that are to come, or vague foreshadowing that reveals no real information about the plot, but which does arouse the interest of the audience and keeps them in anticipation (220- 221). Rowling appears to have chosen the second option.

The foreshadowing in her novels is often central to the idea that she mapped out each part of the seven-novel journey from the beginning. Furthermore, she has done her foreshadowing in such a way that it may not always be apparent to the reader on the first read. Symbolism plays a significant role in the foreshadowing as it is presented in the novels, as it is often at the centre of the information being revealed to the reader. Take the invisibility cloak that Harry receives in *The Philosopher's Stone*. This cloak not only symbolizes the bond between Harry and his deceased father and as one of the items of the Deathly Hallows, but also serves as a valuable symbol through which, for instance when Harry overhears conversations while hiding under it, more of the story can be revealed and which grows in importance to the plot as the story develops. By the seventh book, the cloak has become central to many of the adventures of the main character and is a consistent artefact of importance in the novels. In this seventh book, however, the reader slowly becomes aware that the cloak is of more significance than the reader may have initially thought. It becomes clear to the audience that the cloak is one of the three objects that are combined known as the Deathly Hallows: Dumbledore's wand, which has also been previously mentioned in the novels, and the stone which made its first appearance in the sixth book, form the other two relics. The cloak becomes part of something that together symbolizes the "conquer of death", thus providing an extra sense of symbolism to the cloak, the importance of which was foreshadowed from the start. The same can be said for Dumbledore's wand. In itself, the wands symbolize trades of the people that own them, as has been mentioned in previous chapters, and from Dumbledore, one of the wisest and most powerful characters of the novels, one would expect his wand to be equally powerful. When it is revealed that his wand is quite literally the most powerful of them all, this idea is reinforced. A similar progression of symbolism and growing importance that is indicated by foreshadowing, can be found in what is arguably the most well-known symbol of the series; Harry's scar. In the first novel, this symbolizes Harry's loss of his parents and Voldemort's attempt to kill him too. But as the story develops, it becomes a reminder of the ever-growing connection between Harry and Voldemort on a much deeper level, finally leading to the battle in the last book. This deeper connection is foreshadowed in Harry's ability to speak snake language, the resemblance of their history and the similarity of their wands. This foreshadows the connection that they unwillingly develop throughout the novels. Thus, it can be seen that at the base of much of the foreshadowing in the novels, lies symbolism.

## 4.2 Repetition and elaboration

The symbolism in many ways develops as the story goes along and becomes more presents and more complex in meaning towards the end. In the very first novel, the reader starts out in the normal Muggle world. Although symbolism is present here as well, it becomes more evident once Harry, the main character, is introduced to the magical society. As readers, we follow Harry as he is immersed into the magical world that the readers, and he, come to know and the reader encounters the symbolism that Harry is confronted with. Thus, we know what he knows. As the story progresses it becomes noticeable that the books become larger in volume. Where the first novel only had 332 pages in it, the last has a vast 620 pages. This is not only symbolic for the amount of adventure and ordeal that Harry is faced with, but also Harry's growing immersion into this new world and all the symbolism that comes with it. As we become accustomed to the magic we read, the symbolism grows in density, creating a smooth transition into the magical. In order to create a consistent image of this magical world, the symbolism being used is repeated throughout the entire series. The audience may be introduced to new elements of the world, but the ones that we have already come to know remain present in the storyline. Suman Gupta states that, "It has been rightly observed by several critics that the *Harry Potter* books have a repetitive structure, and that each of them follows a similar sequence of events with a similar outcome," and that this structure is comforting to the readers (93). Although Gupta addresses the overall structure of the story as being repeated, this is also true for the symbolism that is used in the story, thus creating one coherent unit throughout the seven volumes of the novels. Gupta argues that the *Harry Potter* novels manage to be both repetitive enough in structure to create familiarity, yet also be progressively unpredictable (94). This is a feat which is not commonly accomplished by series, as they tend to choose between either one or the other. By using the same set of similar events in each novel within the same environment, Rowling creates repetition while also showing the progression of the central characters. Gupta reasons that Rowling manages this through, "a method of elaboration: both repeating and progressively delineating a finite number of situations and themes by adding ever greater degrees of complexity in their relationships," which according to him, "occurs in matters of detail as well as in the unfolding of the overarching repetitive/developing plots of the *Harry Potter* novels" (95). It is this feature that the present study is linking to coherence.

The elaboration that is spoken of above is achieved by carefully repeating elements of the previous novels and adding more detail and complexity to them, while simultaneously keeping the major plot lines. In doing so, Rowling has also added extra levels of symbolism to the story and has shown the progression of the symbolism within the story. This thesis argues

that, in repeating the symbolism that was present in the previous novels and elaborating on them by divulging new meaning and new possibilities, the symbolism contributes to the overall coherence of the seven novels. Examples of this can be found in many different parts of the story. Take for example the journey from platform 9 ¾ to Hogwarts. This journey symbolizes the transition from the Muggle world to the magical world and is important to the story in multiple ways. The transition is repeated in every novel, but has new elements to it in each one, revealing more information to the reader each time. Thus, the element and its symbolism is repeated and elaborated on in each novel, adding a level of consistency to the novels. This pattern of repetition and elaboration can be found in many of the major and minor plot lines of the series, as well as in the details. In doing so, the magical world that is shown to us becomes ever more complex, without losing the comprehensibility of and coherence between the novels. Because the symbolism in the novels is also elaborated on, as has been shown in previous passages of this thesis, and is more often than not, central to the themes, symbolism can be said to contribute to the coherence of Rowling's work.

#### 4.3 Understanding symbolism

This thesis has previously supposed that recognising the symbolism that is present in the novels, is not always necessary for understanding it on a more subconscious level. Although many adults may be able to spot much of the symbolism in these books, children may not be able to do so. Sharon Black argues that this does not influence the way in which the narrative is understood by the reader (244). She mentions that although young readers may not be able to recognise the symbolism or where it may come from, they do understand their meaning. She states, "The unreal metaphors and symbols of the story become the raw materials to experiment with reality" (240). This means that the children may translate the symbolism in the novel to reality and are therefore able to understand it. An example of this can be found in the relationship between Draco Malfoy and Hermione Granger. Draco is horrible to Hermione because she comes from Muggle parents, which he perceives as being less than coming from a wizarding family. Although the child may not be able to recognise the symbolism behind this, meaning the tensions of race, they can understand that Draco is bullying Hermione for being different, thus grasping the overall concept. Consequently, it becomes apparent that although symbolism may not always be clear to everyone, the underlying meaning can be understood. This shows that symbolism can be an important contributor to the narrative, without having to be completely recognised.

It has been shown in this chapter that symbolism contributes to the coherence of the narrative in the *Harry Potter* novels in various different ways. Symbolism is often a part of the foreshadowing that is used as a literary technique throughout the entirety of these novels, thus creating both a sense of familiarity and suspense. Furthermore, symbolism is repeated throughout the novels and elaborated on, so as to create a complex world that the reader learns more about with every passing page. Symbolism lies as the root of both of these literary techniques and is shown to have an influence on the coherence of the novels as a whole. Moreover, because of the seemingly conscious implementation of these techniques, it would be reasonable to assume that Rowling has also intentionally implemented the symbolism that goes with it.

## Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis, it has been proven that symbolism can occur on different levels and have a different effect and meaning. It is shown that symbolism can be present in almost anything and that recognising the symbolism is not required for the understanding of it. The text has attempted to explain the kinds of symbolism and the way that it manifests itself in one of the most popular works of fiction to date: the *Harry Potter* novels. Above all, this thesis has explained the influence that symbolism has on the coherence of the novels.

This thesis set out to answer the question: how does symbolism manifest itself and contribute to the coherence of the narrative in the *Harry Potter* novels? From the research that has been described here, we can conclude that symbolism in *Harry Potter* is far from scarce and manifests itself in a number of different ways. It is demonstrated that examples of symbolism, both recognisable to most people and more hidden examples, can be found in many aspects of the story, ranging from the names of the character, the creatures and the spells, to symbolism behind major plot lines. The text has described patterns in the style and occurrence of the symbolism at hand and has explained the origins and importance to the story behind examples of them. Many occurrences of symbolism that have been found in these novels have a connection to myths and legends and upon closer inspection it is visible that many of the names and spells presented have their base in Latin. Furthermore, the research leads to the conclusion that symbolism is vital to the use of repetition and foreshadowing in these novels. These two things are, in their turn, important to the creation of coherence throughout the seven novels and thus symbolism can be said to have a direct influence on the coherence of the novels, as it lies at the very base of the essential themes that make it one unit. The coherence of the novels might be seen as one of the most appealing aspects of Rowling's work. The fact that the narratives of each novel both stand on their own, as well as being one coherent unit is remarkable and this thesis has proven that symbolism is a part of how this was made possible. From the paper's results, it has become clear that foreshadowing and repetition help tie the story together and link one book to the others, with the use of symbolism at its core. The results of this thesis support the hypothesis, as it proves that patterns can indeed be found and the symbolism in them contribute to the coherence of the narrative over the seven books. Furthermore, it has been shown that there is a strong reason to believe that Rowling has thought out and implemented the symbolism from the start, thus intending for its presence and influence in her work.



The literature and theory used for this thesis have provided a theoretical frame in which this text can be situated and they have contributed to the analysing, interpreting and understanding of the symbolism that has been discussed. However, this research could be improved by more specific sources that relate to coherence in the narrative, as well as sources that study the use of symbolism as a literary technique or as a contributor to coherence. Furthermore, as the scope of this research is not wide enough to include all forms and examples of symbolism, the method of this research could potentially be improved by broadening the study to include more examples and investigating the extended influence of smaller instances of symbolism. Moreover, the study could include the symbolism as it is extended and translated into film, to determine whether it has an influence here as well.

This thesis can be useful to other research, as it shows the importance of symbolism within the story and throughout the series. It demonstrates how symbolism can contribute to creating a coherent piece of work, through the use of a combination of literary devices. Furthermore, it can be used as a starting point for other studies, as it may lead to additional questions regarding any of the points discussed here. For example, can extensive use of symbolism be found in non-fantasy works and how they may differ from the examples in fantasy literature? Other questions could be related to the broader subject of the success of the novels. For example, asking questions that may explore the reason for the success of the novels and whether symbolism or indeed coherence may have had an influence on it, and if so, to what extent? It can thus be seen as important, because it creates a new area of research that can be explored in relation to many other works of literature as well, using the same method. One could, for example, conduct a similar kind of research into Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* or Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as analysing other works of literature might help construct generalizations on this subject. As was mentioned in the theoretical background, many studies investigating the *Harry Potter* books draw parallels to these examples of fantasy literature, due to their similar types of themes and symbolism. Thus, it would be sensible to investigate whether symbolism can create coherence in these novels as well, or if this occurrence is specific to Rowling's work. In this manner, the conclusions that are drawn here can contribute to the creation of other research as well as enlighten the subject of symbolism in literature as a whole and, more specifically, within popular fiction.

There has been a vast amount of research into the formula for a successful novel, but no answer has yet been found. It is my hope that this thesis, might be of use to future researchers, as it discussed one of the most universally successful novels and one of the aspects that makes it so appealing to readers of all ages and all nationalities. Symbolism is something that we

encounter every day in various forms. And whether you may be aware of the symbolism in the *Harry Potter* novels or not, there is no denying that it is a powerful force in the story. Symbolism is a constant in each of the novels, growing and evolving with the story. The hidden, symbolic meanings, intricate details and compelling story are what make these novels such a pleasure to read, and re-read, for all generations. Nothing is forced, everything is possible and the symbolism leaves it all open to interpretation, while still generating a coherent, mesmerising story.

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