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The Significance of the Unconscious:

A Literary Study of Fear Factors and Psychological
Blockings in the Harry Potter Series

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Abstract

This essay examines various fears presented in the Harry Potter series along with the psychological blockings connected to each fear. Furthermore, this study examines whether the effect of the characters' actions and behaviours in situations that frightens them can simulate strategies of managing fears in real-life situations as well. The study has been conducted through a close reading of the Harry Potter series and by using psychoanalytical criticism, based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Lois Tyson's explanation of the concepts *defences* and *core issues*.

The analysis shows that there are some defences that are more common among the characters and that those defences determine long lasting behaviours. Some characters, such as Harry and Dumbledore, show that it is possible to manage and also overcome fears if being determined to not be consumed by the fear. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that characters' core issues are closely connected to past experiences in life. In conclusion, the analysis highlights that the fears and strategies depicted in the Harry Potter series in fact do mirror real-life situations and strategies of managing fears.

Key words: Harry Potter, fear, psychoanalytical criticism, defences, core issues, the unconscious

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Introduction

When growing up, there are several things that seem frightening. Many young children are afraid of monsters beneath the bed, of darkness or of imaginary creatures from stories they have heard (Cantor 63). Depending on age and development level, these fears usually fade away and are usually replaced by fears of death, violence or illness (Cantor 63). Of course, fear is not only connected to children; it is a feeling that everyone can feel, regardless of age. Stories and experiences that adults heard when they were young, might still frighten them at an old age.

One specific story that has scary elements and creatures in it is the story of Harry Potter, which has captivated both children and adults around the world. The first novel in the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone*, was published in 1997.¹ All seven novels of Harry Potter have become enormously popular with a selling record over 500 million copies (Bloomsbury). They have also been adapted into eight blockbuster movies (Bloomsbury). The novels include themes such as morality, rule-breaking and facing and overcoming fears. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, fear is a frequent theme where for example a creature called Boggart takes the form of the biggest fear of the person standing in front of it (*Prisoner* 140).² Even though Harry Potter is a fantasy story, Deborah Taub and Heather Servaty have seen that some people find the fantasy world which Harry and his friends live in as too far from reality, with too many terrifying elements for children, such as Voldemort and the Dementors (54). Therefore, this study will highlight and examine some of the fears presented in the Harry Potter series, in order to see if the characters' strategies to manage those fears can mirror real-life strategies of managing fears.

¹ Henceforth, I will refer to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, as "Philosopher".

² Henceforth, I will refer to *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, as "Prisoner".

Background

Taub and Servaty's previous research in the Harry Potter field shows that parents are afraid that their children might view the fantastic in the series as real (58). However, they also argue that Harry's confrontations with realistic issues can provide a basis for discussion about similar issues in children's lives (Taub and Servaty 61-2). Since death is a major theme within the Harry Potter series, Taub and Servaty problematise that all deaths in the series are somewhat connected to evil and violence which do not represent the reality of death (63). Therefore, they suggest raising awareness about topics brought up in the books, in order for children to gain knowledge about controversial content and concerns (Taub and Servaty 68).

John Kornfeld and Laurie Prothro have also carried out a study within the field of Harry Potter, but about various family covenants presented in the novels. After having studied the many family constellations in the Harry Potter series, they argue that the significance of a loving family and a safe home is vital for young people trying to find themselves (Kornfeld and Prothro 196). Kornfeld and Prothro discuss psychological aspects that are connected to family covenants in the novels, such as Voldemort seeking a new family, the Death Eaters, as a result of being abandoned as a child (197). Their study emphasises the importance of a character's life choices depending on his or her family covenants (Kornfeld & Prothro 198).

Christopher Routledge, who has studied the phenomenon of Harry Potter, argues that J.K. Rowling, the author of the novels, has received considerable recognition both among children and adults because of her incorporation of realistic and magical components within the story world (202). Evastina Thörnqvist also concludes that the Harry Potter series has gained great interest because of the mix of magic and reality. She argues that Harry's transition from an ordinary boy in an ordinary world into a famous boy in a magical world is what speaks to such a broad audience (Thörnqvist 39).

Throughout the seven Harry Potter novels, there is a battle between good and evil, where Harry fights his parents' killer, Lord Voldemort – a feared wizard in the wizarding world. During Harry's seven years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, he moves closer to the truth about his past, himself and his parents' deaths. Each year, Harry and his friends are faced with new mysteries and fears that they must confront in order to fight the evil forces that are evolving in the wizarding world.

Fear

Arne Öhman, professor in psychology, argues that fear is a reaction to something that has threatened a person's welfare or existence (10). Furthermore, he claims that the feeling of fear derives from humanity's ancestors when fear was a way of surviving surrounding dangers (Öhman 10). Therefore, fear and flight have become closely related to avoid life-threatening situations (Öhman 10). Öhman further argues that fear is connected to immediate threats, whereas anxiety, which is closely connected to fear, is more about expectations of negative incidents (10).

Similar to Öhman's arguments, Richard S. Lazarus, a psychologist, also distinguishes fear from anxiety. Lazarus states that fear is a primitive fear involving concrete and sudden dangers (235). He explains fear further by claiming that people can be afraid of the unknown such as being anxious about death in the sense of what happens after life, but it is not until one's life is in severe danger, that people actually fear death (Lazarus 235). In relation to fear, he states that anxiety is connected to future events, which always concerns existential and uncertain threats (Lazarus 235).

Regarding fear within the 21st century society, Zygmunt Bauman argues that humans have constructed a secondary fear that derives from earlier experiences which have shaped human approach towards threatful situations, even if there is no direct threat (3-4). Bauman's secondary fear can be associated with Lazarus's description of anxiety, since Bauman further argues that even though a person never has experienced a specific threat, the imagination of the threat is sometimes scary enough to avoid it (3). Other general threats that are common within the 21st century are matters that threaten one's place in the world, such as identity, employment and social exclusion (Bauman 3-4). Hence, there is an important distinction between fear and anxiety that will be regarded when examining how the characters' fears are portrayed.

Fear in Children's Literature

Since there are many things that seem frightening when growing up, Kathy G. Short asserts that stories are helpful for learning perspectives because they provide information about issues that can be connected to human's lives (12). She further claims that by integrating stories in children's and young adults' lives, they can learn different values and construct meaning about themselves and others (Short 9). Furthermore, Short states that stories clarify

fundamental matters of life, such as love, loneliness and fear, and that stories can conduce to expand children's and young adults' worldviews since they are exposed to other perceptions than their own (9-10).

Lena Kåreland, who has studied the features of children's literature and the specific genre of fantasy, argues that fantasy has its roots in the Romantic period and usually follows a traditional set (78). Within this traditional set Kåreland claims that the story begins in a representation of the real world and then the main character is transferred to another world, usually to a magical world (78). In this new magical world, it is common that the hero or heroine from the non-magical world must face instances of battles between evil and good forces which he or she must participate in (Kåreland 78). This pattern is explicitly seen within the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of OZ* by L. Frank Baum, where the protagonist Dorothy is transferred from her home in Kansas to the magical land of OZ. In this new world she must face and defeat an evil witch in order to return home (Baum). Another fantasy story that follows the same pattern and contains several scary features is *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again* by J.R.R Tolkien. In the novel the heroes must face their fears in order to fight the evil forces even though they are not always comfortable or confident in their own ability to do so (Tolkien).

The features of fantasy and fear are present in the Harry Potter series as well, as Harry is transferred from his dull reality at Privet Drive to an enchanted and adventurous world at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. In this new magical world, he is drawn into dangers to defeat the evil forces that are lurking around each corner. There are several fears depicted in the story which all differ from character to character depending on their individual backgrounds. One character who represents several fears and most of the evil in the story is Voldemort. Furthermore, he represents fears connected both to others and himself that will be further explained in the following analysis.

In order to emphasise the various fear factors in the Harry Potter series, psychoanalytical criticism will be used as a theoretical framework. Psychoanalytical criticism is based on psychoanalysis founded by Sigmund Freud who states that psychoanalysis is about understanding a person's behaviour and feelings, by examining what is beneath the surface and by looking into a person's deepest levels of thoughts (Freud 41). Within psychoanalysis, the concept of the *unconscious* is frequently used which Freud explains as something related to a person's past, where unhappy events or memories affect a person's behaviour (317-8). Through repression, these unhappy events stay unresolved and the mind places them in the

unconscious as a way of protecting itself from feeling anxiety (Freud 327-43). In this essay, particular focus is given to the concepts of *defences* and *core issues* that are related to the unconscious. These two concepts are explained in an accessible and thorough way by Lois Tyson, a professor in English, who bases her definitions on the psychoanalytical principles coined by Sigmund Freud. Tyson explains defences as a process that keeps repressed emotions in the unconscious, since those emotions are too difficult to handle (15). Tyson further argues that defences are closely connected to a person's core issues, which are characteristics that stay with a person and defines his or her being (16-7). Therefore, the concepts of *defences* and *core issues* will function as the most significant tools for this study.

Through a close-reading analysis of Rowling's Harry Potter series, this study aims to analyse how various characters' fears and psychological blockings illustrate how the characters' pasts affect the present. Furthermore, this study will investigate how the effect of facing and managing these fears are presented and how they can be correlated to real-life situations. By doing so, this study will highlight the theme of fear and its function within the Harry Potter series from a psychoanalytical point of view. Hence, in the Harry Potter series, Rowling uses fear factors as a way to represent psychological blockings in order to demonstrate various strategies of managing fears.

Analysis

Fear of a Name

Throughout the Harry Potter series, the feared villain is Lord Voldemort. One way in which Rowling illustrates the fear of Lord Voldemort is by the hesitancy of calling him by his real name. Instead the wizards and witches refer to Voldemort by calling him either “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named” or “You-Know-Who”. This hesitance and anxiousness about calling Voldemort by his real name derive from fear, something which can be analysed with psychoanalytic criticism. As Tyson points out, literary characters are not real people, however, their behaviour can be seen as a representation of psychological experience, which can be considered as acts of avoidance in accordance with psychoanalytic defence strategies (35). Avoidance means, Tyson explains, “staying away from people or situations that are liable to make us anxious by stirring up [...] repressed – experience or emotion” (15). Hence, by avoiding what frightens them, the wizards and witches believe that they are safe from their “repressed experiences and emotions” (Tyson 15) and therefore protect themselves from those memories for the moment. However, it is not only the name of Voldemort that is feared. The reasons behind the fear of the name is explicitly expressed by Hagrid who explains:

Anyway, this – this wizard, about twenty years ago now, he started lookin’ fer followers. Got’em too – some were afraid, some just wanted a bit o’ his power, ‘cause he was gettin’ himself power, all right. Dark days, Harry. Didn’t know who ter trust, didn’t dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches [...] Terrible things happened. (*Philosopher* 59)

Hagrid provides information of why Voldemort is feared in the wizarding world, at the same time as he provides a clearer insight into the experiences that have led to the avoiding behaviour. Moreover, the avoidance of saying Voldemort’s name can be compared to Öhman’s argument that one of the most substantial characteristics regarding fear is to avoid situations connected to fear (10). Through the lens of psychoanalysis, Hagrid and the rest of the wizarding world’s avoiding behaviour can be related to their core issues. As shown in the example, Hagrid reveals that several witches and wizards had difficulties in trusting one another because of the uncertainty of who were allies with Voldemort. Thus, their fear of interacting with the wrong person can be related to the core issue called “fear of betrayal” which Tyson explains as “the nagging feeling that our friends and loved ones can’t be trusted” (16). Having a disastrous mindset and fearing whom to trust can be related to real-life issues. Therefore, the fears that the wizards and witches feel can be recognised among readers as well, since they probably have wished to avoid unpleasant situations connected to their own

unconscious defences. One effect of showing the wizarding world's avoidance of saying Voldemort's name is to demonstrate that most people feel fear and that fear may be rooted in past experiences. Nevertheless, Rowling shows that avoiding fears also strengthens fears, which is mentioned by Dumbledore who is one of those who dare to speak Voldemort's name.

The first time in the Harry Potter series when Dumbledore speaks Voldemort's name is in the very beginning of the first novel *Philosopher*, in a discussion with Professor McGonagall. McGonagall refers to Voldemort as "You-Know-Who", which Dumbledore questions: "My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his proper name? It all gets so confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who'. I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name." (*Philosopher* 11-12). In this example, Dumbledore attempts to instruct McGonagall by saying that there is nothing to fear from a name and that avoidance is not the solution. Dumbledore's words can be connected to Öhman's argument that avoiding the source of fear or anxiety is what preserves that specific feeling, since the person never is exposed to what frightens him or her (105).

Another instance when Dumbledore ignores the fear of a name is in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, during a conversation with Voldemort when Voldemort says that he is no longer called Tom.³ To that Dumbledore replies: "I know what you are known as [...] but to me, I'm afraid, you will always be Tom Riddle" (*Prince* 367). Through these examples, Dumbledore is portrayed as a strong and self-confident character who does not allow his fears to control his mind and actions. Regarding the fear of Voldemort, he does not share the same destructive behaviour such as avoidance and mistrusting his peers, as the rest of the wizarding world. Instead Dumbledore sees through Voldemort's persona, since he has watched him grow up and therefore knows about his past, his weaknesses and his core issues. Therefore, Dumbledore is an example of a character who does not have any defences or core issues that affects his mindset and actions regarding Voldemort. This is explicitly shown in *Philosopher* when Harry starts saying Voldemort's name but hesitates and says You-Know-Who instead, which Dumbledore replies to as: "Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases the fear of the thing itself" (*Philosopher* 320). As Dumbledore puts it, fear of something is what increases and gives fuel to that specific fear. The first thing to do in order to overcome fear is according to Freud to be exposed to that

³ Henceforth I will refer to *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, as "Prince".

specific fear and change the behaviour of avoidance (41). This is exactly what Dumbledore suggests to both his colleagues and his students, which therefore is a helpful learning lesson in how to deal with long lasting fears and anxieties that prevent people from living their lives to the fullest.

Fear of Death

Since Voldemort plays a considerable part in the Harry Potter series, it is of importance to examine his fears as well. In a battle between Dumbledore and Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore tells Voldemort that he does not wish to kill him because that would not be satisfying enough.⁴ To that Voldemort replies: “there is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore” (*Phoenix* 718). Voldemort’s obsession with immortality is shown in the sixth novel, where several flashbacks reveal his past. During one flashback the young Voldemort wants to find out how horcruxes work, which is a way of splitting and hiding a bit of one’s soul in a certain item to prevent death (*Prince* 412-6). Voldemort’s fixation about being immortal can be connected to Tyson’s claim that fear of death is often related to a person’s psychological schemas and a person’s earlier experiences of death (22). Therefore, it is of importance to examine which parts of Voldemort’s past that have influenced his fear of death.

One flashback of Voldemort’s past in *Prince*, is when Dumbledore visits him in the orphanage where he grew up and when he still used his birthname, Tom Riddle. Dumbledore finds out that Tom’s mother died after giving birth to him and that his father never cared to find him. When Dumbledore explains to Tom that he possesses magical powers and that he is accepted to begin at Hogwarts, the young Voldemort asks about his parents and says: “My mother can’t have been magic, or she wouldn’t have died” (*Prince* 229). Voldemort’s vision of death from an early age is therefore that it represents weakness and something that, in particular, magical persons should be able to trick. Tyson explains that fear of death is generally not about biological death, but about loss in general, such as “psychological death” when feeling abandoned by a parent (23). Given that Voldemort was abandoned as a child, one of his core issues may be fear of abandonment, which Tyson explains as the belief that friends and family do not care about you and that they eventually will abandon you (16). Likewise, fear of intimacy is connected to matters regarding family, since people with fear of intimacy distance themselves emotionally from others to avoid being hurt (Tyson 16).

⁴ Henceforth, I will refer to *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, as “*Phoenix*”.

Both these core issues can be seen in Voldemort's characteristics, as he is explained by Dumbledore to not value close relationships and that he prefers to operate alone (*Prince* 231). Voldemort's previous experiences of abandonment draw his unconsciousness into a destructive behaviour such as avoiding close relationships, in order to save himself from being hurt. In comparison to the wizarding world avoiding speaking his name, Voldemort also has the defence of avoidance, but regarding death. His efforts of avoiding death can be seen towards the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, when Voldemort finds out that Harry, Ron and Hermione are looking for and destroying his horcruxes, which makes him desperate to hide away and protect the rest of his horcruxes in order to remain immortal (442-6).⁵ The effect of having a complex backstory to Voldemort provides an insight into the idea that even the most cruel and heartless person suffers from unhappy experiences that fuel his or her fear.

Voldemort is not the only one afraid of death, neither in the wizarding world nor in the real world. In the wizarding world there is a story about three brothers who meet Death and are rewarded with one choice of item each, because they manage to trick Death. The two oldest brothers ask for items that will award them power and that somehow make them avoid death, whereas the third and youngest brother wishes to not be followed by death and therefore is given the Cloak of Invisibility. In the end of the story, the only surviving brother is the youngest, who did not seek for a way to cheat death:

It was only when he had attained a great age that the youngest brother finally took off the Cloak of Invisibility and gave it to his son. And then he greeted Death as an old friend, and went with him gladly, and, as equals, they departed this life. (*Hallows* 332)

This story gives the message not only to the wizards and witches, but to the readers as well, that death is a natural cause that everyone eventually must face, regardless of power. As mentioned earlier, it is more common with fear of psychological death than biological death, since psychological death concerns loss that a person will endure, such as losing a family member or losing power. Due to this fact, Tyson's explanation of "fear of abandonment" can be applicable to people who fear death, since people who are afraid to be abandoned fear that "friends and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment)" (16).

⁵ Henceforth, I will refer to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, as "*Hallows*".

When fearing to be abandoned by loved ones or leaving a powerful position, it is really not death itself that seems frightening, it is the thought of the final stage and what might happen after life (Tyson 23). As Dumbledore explains to Harry in *Prince* about death:

There is nothing to be feared from a body, Harry, any more than there is anything to be feared from darkness. Lord Voldemort, who of course secretly fears both, disagrees. But once again he reveals his own lack of wisdom. It is the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more. (*Prince* 471)

In this example, Dumbledore clarifies that it is the unknown people fear when fearing death, which is similar to Tyson's words about the uncertainty people feel regarding the final stage. Therefore, the Harry Potter series provides a valuable message regarding fear of death, namely that the fear possibly derives from psychological experiences that somehow make people scared of losing what they have or have not been able to achieve in life. In Voldemort's case he is probably afraid of both, since his core issues of fear of intimacy and abandonment make him focus on gaining endless power and terrorising the rest of the wizarding world instead. By occupying himself with other matters, he assures himself that the wounds of his past will not come to surface.

Anxiety

Fear of the unknown, also known as anxiety, does not only concern death, it is present in other instances in the novels as well. One instance is in the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when Harry has witnessed Cedric Diggory be murdered by Voldemort, and Minister Fudge refuses to believe that Voldemort has returned: "It seems to me that you are all determined to start a panic that will destabilise everything we have worked for these last thirteen years" (*Goblet* 613).⁶ Instead of listening and trying to understand what Harry is saying, Fudge chooses to deny the burdensome truth to sustain his comfortable and arranged world. Fudge's behaviour can be connected to the defence called denial, which is about "believing that the problem doesn't exist, or the unpleasant incident never happened" (Tyson 15). His actions reveal that he is afraid of what might happen if Voldemort really has returned.

Also, as the minister of magic, he is the one who must make the major decisions for the safety of the wizarding world. Therefore, it is easier to choose to not believe it, in order to adjourn that specific fear and focus on what he knows is true instead. By keeping

⁶ Henceforth, I will refer to *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, as "Goblet".

emotions repressed, Tyson argues that people avoid knowing what they feel since they cannot deal with those specific emotions or memories (15). Since the wizarding world is traumatised by the former reign of Voldemort, they desperately wish to forget those unpleasant memories of that time, Fudge included. The fear of the unknown is therefore present as a way of not knowing what might happen if the terror once again is unleashed.

However, there are some wizards and witches who do challenge their fears, one being professor Lupin. In *Phoenix*, Lupin says: “While the Ministry insists that there is nothing to fear from Voldemort it’s hard to convince people he’s back, especially as they really don’t want to believe it in the first place” (89). Lupin and the other members of The Order of The Phoenix, a secret society fighting against Voldemort, believe that postponing fear will not help. They act by fighting the oppressors instead of allowing the fear of the unknown to take over. Due to their resistance, the members of The Order of the Phoenix function as an inspiration for standing up for what one believes is right and not to be consumed by anxiety. Meanwhile, the ministry is silencing those who imply that Voldemort is back and their effort in restoring order reveal their fear of a possible chaos. Instead of focusing on the actual problem, the ministry focuses on aspects that upset them for the moment. In other words, they are displacing their fear, a defence which Tyson explains as “‘taking it out’ on someone or something less threatening than the person who caused our fear” (15). The ministry is therefore misplacing as well as denying the actual fear, which is the opposite to what The Order of The Phoenix does, since the ministry does not challenge their fears.

Another instance in the Harry Potter series that correlates to anxiety, is in *Prince*, when Harry discloses professor Slughorn of having modified his own memory. The memory concerns a conversation between Slughorn and Voldemort when Slughorn explains how horcruxes work, which later results in Voldemort’s great power (309). Similar to the Ministry of Magic, Slughorn does not challenge his fear because he is ashamed of what people might think of him if they see that specific memory. Moreover, he is afraid of what Voldemort might do if Voldemort finds out that he is providing Harry and Dumbledore with valuable information (*Prince* 407). Slughorn’s act of modifying his memory can be related to Tyson’s words about the defence “selective memory”, which is about modifying memories in order to prevent feeling overwhelmed by them or to forget them entirely (15). In Slughorn’s case, he is trying to save himself and by

eliminating that specific memory, the fear and shame he feels will not be as burdensome. In other words, Slughorn might be viewed as a weak character in the sense that he is too scared to deal with the consequences of his actions.

By using Slughorn as a character who acts out of fear, Rowling shows dilemmas that derive out of fear. Another character who also is driven by his fears is Draco Malfoy. In *Prince*, Draco attempts to kill Dumbledore because Voldemort has ordered him to do so. Dumbledore tries to talk Draco out of it, but Draco explains: “I haven’t got any options [...] I’ve got to do it! He’ll kill me! He’ll kill my whole family!” (*Prince* 492). In this example, Malfoy fears what might happen if he fails with the mission he is assigned. He is confused and shaking out of fear, which Dumbledore can tell when he says: “If you were going to kill me, you would have done it when you first disarmed me” (*Prince* 492). In these examples, it is evident that Draco is fearing Voldemort and that he is torn between two sides.

Due to Draco’s actions and insecurity, his core issue could be “insecure or unstable sense of self”, which Tyson states is about “the inability [...] to sustain a sense of knowing ourselves. This core issue makes us very vulnerable to the influence of other people” (16). Draco is influenced by the will of his parents who are members of the Death Eaters, as well as the will of Voldemort. They try to determine his future while they command him to execute their orders at Hogwarts, such as killing Dumbledore. However, Draco himself is mentally confused, which is evident when Harry exposes Draco of crying in the bathroom out of distress and fear (*Prince* 434). He is obviously feeling a great stress about who he is and what he should do, which is connected to his unstable sense of self. The effect of portraying Draco’s fear through insecurity and confusion is that fear is sometimes connected to irrational decision making.

Furthermore, it shows that fear brings out people’s most vulnerable sides and that people’s actions can be related to their core issues.

Dementors and the Fear of Losing Hope

A Dementor, another fantastic fear factor within the Harry Potter series, is a creature that Rowling has portrayed as one of the darkest creatures that feasts on people’s happiness in the wizarding world. Professor Lupin explains to Harry:

Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth [...] they drain peace, hope and happiness, out of the air around them. Even Muggles feel their presence [...] Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory, will be sucked out of you. (*Prisoner* 197)

The first time Harry faces a Dementor is in *Prisoner* on the train to Hogwarts, where it is presented as “slimy looking and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water” (*Prisoner* 88). When the Dementor enters Harry’s carriage, it is further explained that an “intense cold swept over them all” and that Harry felt as he “was being dragged downwards” (*Prisoner* 88). The illustration of a Dementor’s impact on the characters’ mind can be connected to depression, which J. Raymond DePaulo explains as an illness that makes people feel low, drained, worthless, and the lack to feel anything at all (12-15). Harry endures several of the explanations of depression when facing a Dementor, as he feels an intense cold and despair when hearing the final moments of his mother’s life (*Prisoner* 188). The Dementors engage to suck out Harry’s happiness by showing him the horrors of his past, which is the loss of his parents. Their action could be seen as revealing the unconscious, a concept which Tyson explains as “the storehouse of [...] painful experiences and emotions” (Tyson 12). Thus, Harry’s repressed memories from his past come to surface when he encounters a Dementor.

What the Dementors do to people is comparable to Tyson’s explanation of the defence called regression, “a return to either a painful or pleasant experience” (15). By being exposed to his repressed memories, Harry feels an immediate lack of happiness and hope. However, Tyson further explains that the reason why regression is categorised as a defence is because “it carries our thoughts away from some present difficulty” (15). For that reason, Harry’s regression is not a destructive behaviour that he has developed himself, instead it is forced on him by the Dementors.

Rowling does not only show how being scared and feeling depressed affect a person’s life and mind. Through the Harry Potter series, she also shows how to manage those dark thoughts. Lupin explains to Harry that the spell to repel Dementors is the Patronus charm, a charm that works as a positive force that projects happiness and the desire to survive, in other words an anti-Dementor spell (*Prisoner* 251). Lupin further explains that to manage the spell, Harry must concentrate and hang on to a happy memory (*Prisoner* 252). With the information of how a Dementor is dealt with, Harry learns how to fight a Dementor, which can be compared to what a person feeling depressed or

scared might do. Since depression and anxiety are connected to feelings such as hopelessness, loneliness and darkness, the antidote that Harry uses to overcome those feelings is to hold on to happy memories (DePaulo 12-15). Therefore, Lupin's advice of concentrating on happy memories rather than being consumed by fears can be applicable in real life as well.

Even though Harry has the tools to succeed facing and defeating a Dementor, he struggles to fully concentrate on his happy memory since his fear of what the Dementor might reveal takes over. Instead of focusing on the happy memory, Harry focuses on that he might hear his mother scream, which has a stronger effect on Harry than his chosen memory (*Prisoner 252-3*). By understanding that it takes time and practice to face and overcome fears, the reader learns that it takes time to process painful memories and sometimes the unpleasant feelings take over. However, Harry is dedicated to face his darkest memories and to overcome his fears, which shows that hard work and dedication pay off. Harry's dedication can be compared to Tyson's words about how the defence regression can be used as a therapeutic tool, since focus is on working through and altering the effects of a specific experience (15-16). Instead of fearing his mother's final moment, Harry accepts it and does not allow it to take control over him and his well-being. He learns that his past of being abandoned as a child and growing up without his parents does not define his persona. He still feels his parents' love and chooses to focus on that rather on the loss, which gives Harry the strength to cope with various obstacles. Rowling demonstrates that Harry is stronger than he believes, and with courage and a will power, it is possible to eventually face and overcome fears.

A Boggart – Everyone's Greatest Fear

As mentioned in the beginning of this essay, a Boggart is a creature in the Harry Potter series that transforms into the greatest fear of the person standing in front of it (*Prisoner 140*). During a Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson, professor Lupin introduces his students to what a Boggart is and how to repel it, which is done by laughter and a charm called Riddikulus (*Prisoner 140-1*). Lupin further explains that "what you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing" (*Prisoner 141*). By exposing the students to their greatest fears, one defence that is especially challenged is the defence called selective perception. Tyson explains selective perception as "hearing and seeing only what we feel we can handle" which functions as protecting the conscious and preserving the destructive behaviour (15). When the students at Hogwarts are exposed

to their individual fears, they are forced to deal with their fears and to manage them. They learn that by defusing and adding a comical aspect to their fears, the fears appear less scary. By concentrating on making the fear into something amusing, focus shifts from the scary to the comic, which is a crucial real-life lesson.

In order for the students at Hogwarts to succeed with the Riddikulus charm, they need to confront their fears. To do so, it is crucial to have belief in oneself which is difficult if having a low self-esteem. Tyson explains the core issue low self-esteem as: “the belief that we are less worthy than other people [...] we often believe that we deserve to be punished by life in some way” (16). One character with low self-esteem is Neville Longbottom, who is very self-conscious in the first novels and he seems to accept that people in his surroundings bully him. Neville constantly ends up in unfortunate situations and is self-conscious because his grandparents believe that he does not possess magical powers enough to be accepted at Hogwarts (*Philosopher* 134). Moreover, he is bullied by Professor Snape, which can be seen in *Prisoner* right before Lupin’s class when Snape says: “Possibly no one’s warned you, Lupin, but this class contains Neville Longbottom. I would advise you not to entrust him with anything difficult” (*Prisoner* 138). Therefore, some people in Neville’s surrounding affect his self-esteem badly, especially Professor Snape since Neville reveals that Snape is his greatest fear.

Neville is the first student to try the charm in class which makes him nervous, but after encouragement from Professor Lupin he succeeds with repelling the Boggart by adding a comical aspect to his fear. He proves to himself and the rest of the class that he is not as worthless as Snape claims, and that he can face and manage his greatest fear successfully (*Prisoner* 144). In this instance, Neville is dealing with the defence concerning selective perception, because he is able to challenge his fear of Professor Snape which gives him a greater confidence in himself. Furthermore, he also challenges the defence about avoidance when he decides to complete the task and not avoid the situation. By showing that Neville, a boy with low self-esteem, succeeds with facing his fears Rowling demonstrates that even an insecure person with little belief in themselves, can succeed with overcoming their fears.

Conclusion

This essay has focused on emphasising how various fear factors within the Harry Potter series can reveal characters' psychological blockings. Furthermore, it has aimed to show what kind of strategies the characters use in order to manage their fears.

By studying the characters' defences, one finding is that avoidance is a common defence among several characters in the Harry Potter series. The wizarding world avoids Voldemort's name out of fear and Voldemort avoids death out of fear. For that reason, they are not managing their fears, only concealing it deeper in their unconscious. Dumbledore, however, tries to provide guidance to his peers, since he believes that avoidance only increases fear. His strategy is seemingly familiar to the psychoanalytical strategy of breaking destructive behaviours to face and manage fears or anxiety (Freud 41).

Another aspect that became apparent during this study is that many characters keep repressed emotions in their unconscious, mostly because they lack the strength or are afraid of facing those emotions. They show tendencies of defences such as denial, displacement and selective memory which all function as a way of keeping the repressed emotions in the unconscious (Tyson 15). Harry, on the other hand, experiences his unpleasant memories through the defence regression that is forced on him by the Dementors. By altering the effect of the unpleasant memories from negative to positive, Harry succeeds with facing and defeating the Dementors. He is therefore using a strategy of psychoanalysis where regression is used to return to a painful memory and accept it and alter its effect on the mind (Tyson 15-16). Consequently, Harry's strategy of managing unpleasant memories and focusing on what makes him happy suggests how to confront painful and fearsome memories.

Other psychological blockings that deserve special attention are the characters' various core issues, which Tyson explains as past experiences that shape a person's being and behaviour (17). Voldemort's psychological blockings about fearing death can be connected to his past of being abandoned and unloved as a child, which have shaped his core issues fear of abandonment and fear of intimacy. By allowing his unresolved experiences from the past to influence him badly, he wishes to control his future and for that reason he is not confronting his fears. Similar to Voldemort, Draco and Neville also struggle with their core issues. Draco is weak by the influence of others because of his

core issue unstable sense of self, whereas Neville is struggling with his insecurity because of his core issue low self-esteem. They both feel anxiety, which Tyson explains as: “anxiety can tell us a good deal about ourselves because we are anxious in situations which our core issues are in play” (17). Draco and Neville’s core issues are quite similar, but it is their actions in how to manage their fears that differ. For instance, Draco is driven by his fear of Voldemort, which makes him feel insecure and act irrationally. Neville on the other hand, proves that he does not allow his fear of Professor Snape to control his mind, instead he faces his fear through determination and by diminishing the scariness.

Finally, the various fear factors used in the Harry Potter series do in fact mirror fears in the real world. Fear of death, losing hope and fear to not be enough, are fears that real people can understand and relate to. As shown in the analysis, most fears derive from core issues and defences that are connected to past experiences and emotions. In accordance with psychoanalysis, the strategy to face and eventually overcome fears and anxiety is to change destructive behaviours which Dumbledore, Harry and Neville prove to be possible.

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