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What Happens to Our Wishes: Magical Thinking in Harry Potter
by Judith P. Robertson

Since Harry Potter’s appearance in 1997, critical response has not done justice to the young sorcerer’s enormous appeal and the search for truth in childhood. Among notable exceptions are Natov, Tucker, and Zipes. Forms of response tend to converge around the story’s staggering market success, censorship debates, and Joanne Kathleen Rowling’s biography. Less common are analyses that rethink the dynamic relation of fantasy fiction to the passionate mental processes of childhood and children’s uses of transitional objects—including word play, rhetorical figures, literary forms, and reading experience—to create their magical realities and to allay their anxieties.

In this article, I assess the allure of Harry Potter by reconstructing its conditions of success within psychological experiences provoked by the deeper structures of the narrative. Of particular interest to me is what Hélène Cixous calls “the mystery of literary creation and the secret of this narrative. Of particular interest to me is what Hélène Cixous calls realties and to allay their anxieties.

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In this article, I assess the allure of Harry Potter by reconstructing its conditions of success within psychological experiences provoked by the deeper structures of the narrative. Of particular interest to me is what Hélène Cixous calls “the mystery of literary creation and the secret of this enviable power possessed by its creator who manages to seduce us” (527). What Cixous calls a “beckoning” (527) is for Paul de Man that irreducible “something often referred to as literariness” (8). In his attempt to account for the problematic nature of reading (i.e., why being seduced by a story is so difficult to explain), de Man lays stress on the destabilizing effects of language. He signals the “autonomous potential of language” to subvert or somehow overthrow the controlling structures of aesthetic form (10). I am interested in how Harry Potter functions in this way as a region of formal linguistic and literary play that propels child entry to some elemental problems of inner life. “All our stories,” writes Adam Phillips, “are about what happens to our wishes. About the world as we would like it to be, and the world as it happens to be, irrespective of our wishes and despite our hopes. Our needs thwarted by the needs of others, our romances always threatened by tragedy, our jokes ruined by the people who don’t get them. The usual antagonism of daydream and reality” (Beast xiii). Rowling utilizes aesthetic form as a holding device whose function is to keep to a manageable scale the disorienting uncanniness of wishes, while at the same time allowing mental space for the exercise of magical thinking to transgress those laws that give rise to the very developmental tasks of childhood.

Fantasy and Inner Life in Childhood

Childhood is situated at a thoroughfare of impossible demands: being dependent on others for survival; having no say in the matter of having to grow up to responsibility and independence; wanting (contemporaneously) care, love, interest, freedom, and power; and being properly suspicious of a world over which being young exercises little command. If children’s inner realities are filled with passionate predicaments, it is the corresponding structures of feeling that fantasy acknowledges and contains. Rowling remembers the dissonant psychic realities of childhood interiority: “I really can, with no difficulty at all, think myself back to eleven years old…. I can remember being a kid and being very powerless and having this whole underworld that to adults is always going to be impenetrable” (Shapiro 5). “I definitely wouldn’t go back and do childhood again. I don’t look back on it as a phase of blissful happiness at all” (de Bertodano 1156). About her famous character’s struggle to learn amidst lessons that can be painfully difficult, the author says, “I suddenly had this basic idea of a boy who didn’t know what he was” (Shapiro 49). “He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness” (de Bertodano). In the tradition of the psychological realism of other celebrated fantasists, including her favorites—such as Graham Greene, Edith Nesbit, Jane Austen, C. S. Lewis, Colette, Nabokov, and Ian Fleming—Rowling engages readers at the very boundaries of language. She arouses the reader’s ability to shift and play with parts of being that involve feeling anxious or vulnerable, and thereby making something possible in the work of self-symbolization.

Moreover, the author’s rainbow coalition of magical and non-magical creatures stages a theater of associated parts “so organized to perpetuate an endless and elaborate setting out of desire” (Donald 142).

Art does not just call forth emotion (Bell 6), but is singular in how it privileges the fantasy operations that reside at the center of all our mental life as human beings. We may wonder what is at stake when a story beckons the kind of arresting response that feels preverbal. In considering the primacy of fantasy life to the capacity for learning and growth, Freud thought of children’s unconscious phantasies “as if they were like islands in the sea of mental life”; whereas for Melanie Klein in her work with children, “one gets a glimpse of an internal fantasy world like a vast continent under the sea, the islands being its conscious, external, observable manifestations” (Segal 19). Acknowledged here are two ideas: that mental continuity in childhood is marked by deeply felt divisions of greater force and magnitude than most adults fathom and that fantasy scenarios express children’s knowledge of crisis, allowing them to construct a psychic reality in which the self becomes
thinkable in relation to wishes. Without fantasy, it is unlikely that the child could defend itself against the threat of breakdown or psychosis in its encounters with the real: “From the beginning of life there is sufficient ego to experience anxiety, to form some object relations in reality and phantasy, and to use primitive defences. . . . "[P]hantasying is a defence against painful realities" (Segal 20-21). From early childhood, then, mental life is crucially affected by its capacity to recognize and tolerate the disagreement between omnipotent phantasy and expectation, and the reality that is actually encountered. Healthy development demands multiformulaic projects through which the psyche may be led to investigate and adjust to the demands of shared living.

Fashioning Signs of Life Through Marks of Personal Identity

In the struggle for psychic survival the child must be rapacious (Phillips, Winnicott 70-72; citing Winnicott, Home 210-20). As the child attempts to find a place in the world, a process that is intrinsically rivalrous, he may make a theory whereby he “imagines that his relationship to his parents has been modified (as when he imagines, for example, that he is really a foundling)” (Laplanche and Pontalis 160). As Freud noticed in “Family Romances” (1908), such theory-making fundamentally connects the child to a way of trying to make sense of how he came to be and in what sense he was still there after the birth of siblings or the (imagined) destruction of parents. Theory-making in childhood helps children construct personal myths, elegant thought-experiments that provide opportunities for research into dilemmas such as feeling unwelcome, hungry, or wanting things to be otherwise because they are not as they are supposed to be. In all of this wanting, the child must be able to fashion signs of life, a task assisted by story.

Freud believed that all of the child’s curiosity derives from issues pertaining to the enigma of where babies come from. Children’s questions do not receive adequate answers from adults. Instead, children hear displaced answers that may not satisfy them and so produce further confusion. Yet even the most detailed factual answer could not really satisfy them, since the his or her bodily experience is not adequate to allow it to understand the nature of adult desire, sexuality, and the meaning of sexual difference. This insures that the child’s desire to know will, from the beginning, be frustrated and so will construct itself on a model of frustration in which desire is always in excess of the capacity of objects of knowledge to satisfy it. The child thus partakes of an erotic investment in knowing (knowing as desire, desire as knowing). What Freud called Wisstrieb (translated by Strachey as epistemophilia) is always inherently frustrated, and the body itself (a banquet of knowing) can never be wholly digested as an understandable or representable object (Brooks 99-101). Language is the elaboration of desire, and a child’s taking up of story holds out one way in which to learn how to talk about desire and thereby seek to make sense of it.

If child readers are, as Freud believed, insatiably curious about bodies and their origins, the Harry Potter books are a reliable place to go seeking solutions. The primordial feelings associated with questions like “where do I come from” and “why do I feel (un)welcome here” find analogical expression in the economical landscape of Rowling’s narrative. Indeed, the author is a kind of wordsmith whose atelier is language itself. Harry’s story, for example, opens on Privet Drive in a dark closet in which he is concealed by his dead mother’s hateful sister. The child’s address serves as a shrewd device to encrypt a psychological scenario (or “family romance”) of deprivation and hope that is rhetorically, semantically, phonemically, and symbolically inscribed within. Privet Drive is a cryptonym, literally a “word that hides.”48 Shrouded homonymically within the word is its French equivalent prior (to deprive somebody of something). Etymologically/allosemically, its fifteenth-century Latin root privare means bereave plus privatus, to equal withdrawn from public life. But strangely, an antithetical double meaning shifts and divides the powerful negative associations of the word, so that prior is also connected with survival and growth, as in evergreen shrub (OED 712). From the opening of the fantasy sequence, then, Harry’s place of abandonment (his Privet Drive) preserves interlinguistically something exalted (green and unripened) to counter the antithetical effects of his predicament. The cryptic problem of Harry’s address, with its multilingual floors of meaning, encapsulates from the beginning the thematic kernel of the work, which is about identity.

Harry Potter’s “possession” within this “crypt” gives rise to his craving to possess knowledge of the secret of his origin and destiny. His strategies for dealing with feelings of hunger may be read as metonymic. The figure of the hero’s stomach/appetite functions economically as a linguistic conductor of the undigested contents of his predicament. For example, “the way things were going, he’d probably starve to death anyway. The cat-flap rattled and Aunt Petunia’s hand appeared, pushing a bowl of tinned soup into the room. Harry, whose insides were aching with hunger, jumped off his bed and seized it. The soup was stone cold, but he drank half of it in one gulp” (Chamber 22). The terrible dilemma of the child’s animal-like confinement—where Aunt Marge turns up with “a box of dog biscuits for Harry”—gains magnified significance when juxtaposed against Hogwarts, with its sumptuous feasting (Prisoner 19). Once Harry experiences such plenitude, his absence from it “was like having a constant stomach ache” (Chamber 8).

Rowling’s use of hyperbole when describing the feasts at Hogwarts (in which food objects constantly appear exaggerated in quantity and quality) function ironically. Her
straightforward accounts of lavish food extravaganzas underscore a perception of inconsistency, something being undermined, thus drawing readers to notice a very different significance or sense of the importance of food than is available to our understanding simply through Harry's straightforward accounts. Thus, opulent food types delivered in luxury containers in the midst of endless community emphasize the presence at Hogwarts of the child's elemental need for relationship and reassurance: "The dishes in front of him were now piled with food. He had never seen so many things he liked to eat on one table" (Stone 92); "A hundred fat, roast turkeys, mountains of roast and boiled potatoes, platters...silver boats...Flaming Christmas puddings" (Stone 150); "Everybody was in their pyjamas, and the celebrations lasted all night" (Chamber 249); "The golden plates and goblets before them filled suddenly with food and drink. Harry, suddenly ravenous, helped himself to everything he could reach and began to eat" (Prisoner 73). The ritual of the "good feed" at Hogwarts symbolizes the act of trying to make social reparation, a process that requires the child to feel reassured about the goodness of the internal society into which he must make courage to venture further as he matures. Food images in the story telegraph the psychological process of restoration through which the child's internal world must take shape through meaningful social intercourse.

Even so, as Rubeus Hagrid constantly reminds us, the care of magical appetites (including Harry's) is always potentially dangerous and divided by something threatening from within. Accordingly, problems with eating signify thematically in the narrative as times of severe trial, insecurity, determination, and testing for the child characters: "Harry started to go off food again" (Goblet 419, 538); "Slave labour," said Hermione, breathing hard through her nose. 'That's what made this dinner. Slave labour.' And she refused to eat another bite" (Goblet 162). Inevitably, what is at stake around appearances of food is the child's innermost situation, and the times when characters cannot derive satisfaction from the relief of hunger are the times when they feel most terrified that what they have lost may never again be restored. Such breakdowns in the feeding situation (cravings, refusals, food ambivalence) are the symbolic equivalents of the child's feelings of primitive confusion, slippage, and unspakable anxiety as he undertakes once more to find himself within the context of his Privet Drive—his difficult inheritance and genealogy.

Feasting around Hogwarts possesses both *heimlich* and *unheimlich* qualities (homey and disquieting), as food figures are apt to multiply in signs of uncontrolled fecundity:

> There were shelves upon shelves of the most succulent-looking sweets imaginable. Creamy chunks of nougat, shimmering pink squares of coconut ice, fat, honey-coloured toffees; hundreds of different kinds of chocolate in neat rows; there was a large barrel of Every Flavour Beans, and another of Fizzing Whizzbees, the levitating sherbert balls that Ron had mentioned; along yet another wall were "Special Effects" sweets: Droobles Best Blowing Gum (which filled a room with Bluebell-coloured bubbles that refused to pop for days), the strange, splinterly Toothflossing Stringmints, tiny black Pepper Imps ("breathe fire for your friends!"), Ice Mice ("hear your teeth chatter and squeak!"), peppermint creams shaped like toads ("hop realistically in the stomach!"), fragile sugar-spun quills and exploding bonbons. (Prisoner 147)

Through such formal devices of lexical containment, the disturbing elements of the omnipotent desire for the good feed (complete with its primitive oral fantasies of utter possession and control, "having your cake and eating it too") are held and "chewed" as something digestible (psychically real) by the author. Rowling achieves ironic and distancing effects through the uncensored graphic literality of her anamist projections (where ice mice or toad mint candies literally come to life in the body), delivered through the exuberant, accepting tone of voice of her *naif*, nonplussed narrator. The author is masterful in her carnivalesque lexical playfulness (i.e., "butterbeer" and "Jelly Slugs," [Prisoner 149, 147]), as well as in her Rabelaisian deployment of bawdy, regressive, onomatopoeic infantile body humor (i.e., "blood-flavoured lollipops," "CockroachClusters," "stink pellets," "Belch Powder," "Whizzling Worms," "dungbomb," "hurling hex," and "ton tongue toffee" [Prisoner 115, 143, 147, 181, 195; Goblet 49]). Through the dynamic boldness of such figures, Harry's feelings of helplessness as he engages the challenges of his quest appear to be tolerable (edible), even if immense (feeling at times like too much). The psychological effect is to allow the hero regenerative contact with deep wishes while protecting him against the very real danger of bringing them to life. The books bombard readers with an excess of signs of fecundity and fertility, at the same time as ensuring that the familiar but rejected signs of uncontrolled desire (the abject, undigestible bits of blood, vomit, feces, and insect) are deferred through childish humor against the danger of coming too close to satisfaction. Rowling's use of abject imagery brings to mind Julia Kristeva's theoretical elaboration of the emergence of subjectivity within language as the Oedipal child finds his drives organized into the service of the Symbolic, a process that requires the splitting off of some semiotic presupposing material into abject form (1982). Kristeva's theory of abjection helps us to understand the pressures that exist between the call of language and the call within the child's prelinguistic body to deal with powerful dilemmas of separation, wish, and development. The Harry Potter
series allows child readers entry into the forbidden satisfaction of wanting unlimited access to succor and satiation, whilst shielding the would-be-sorcerer against the effects of vulnerability that such primitive psychic material generates.

What is to be revealed in Harry Potter’s growing up is the mysterious relation between himself and his (dead) parents, himself and his (difficult) community, and himself and his (magical) body, charged from the start with narratable energy. The boy’s slight frame may be read as a site on which the “aspirations, anxieties, and contradictions of a whole society are played out” (Brooks 33). Besides food, another important symbol in the hero’s quest for knowledge condenses around the peculiar lightning shaped scar inscribed on Harry’s forehead. Displayed since infancy, Harry’s personal sign is inscribed by the evil sorcerer Voldemort in a murderous rampage that leaves Harry’s parents dead and the baby an orphan. Harry’s mark permits a public sign of recognition not only of his virtuous (distinguished, abandoned) identity, but also of the burden imposed by being special: “Harry was used to people looking curiously at him when they met him, used to the way their eyes moved at once to the lightning scar on his forehead, but it always made him feel uncomfortable” (Goblet 68).

Notably, “the only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead which was shaped like a bolt of lightning” (Stone 20). “Harry ran his fingers over the scar again.... He examined the lightning-bolt scar of his reflection more closely. It looked normal, but it was still stinging” (Goblet 20). “You were clutching your scar!” said Professor Tralawney. ‘You were rolling on the floor, clutching your scar!”’ (Goblet 501). The hero often questions the meaning of his enigmatic scar, sometimes touching and examining the token of his castration and possibility. For child readers who also long to possess the key to the enigma of personal markings (family secrets, identity), such displacement helps “to cross the bar of repression, to bring out what has all along been latent, to unrepress, to give access to the hidden signifier of desire” (Brooks 75-76). “D’you—d’you know why my scar’s hurting me?” Harry finally finds the nerve to ask his protector, Dumbledore (Goblet 521).

As in her use of food figures, Rowling deploys Dumbledore as a containment device for enabling the magical thinker to sustain his capacity for illusion, which is also about developing his symbolic capacity for exchange and relation with the external world. Child psychologist Donald Winnicott believed that through such uses of the primary caregiver, the child “starts to build up a capacity to conjure up what is actually available” (qtd. in Phillips, Winnicott 85). Harry’s caregiver appears initially in the text in terms that are blatantly feminine, with long silver hair, sweeping purple robes, half-moon spectacles, thin physique, “high-heeled buckled boots” and a gentle, calm, protective demeanor (Stone 12; Prisoner 71). In addition to referring to a bumblebee, Dumbledore’s name is a strange semantic
hybrid, inscribing elements of something both mom-like and (grand) dad-like, something malleable, intimate, foreign, and exotic. Semantically and associatively dumble brings to mind nonsense, as in the act of mumbling or speaking indistinctly. Graphically the word recalls dumb, which means to be mute or mum on an issue, silent and not given to expression in language. The oral accent on the um of the first syllable resonates phonemically with mom, as does dum dum or Dumbly-dorr (Goblet 246). The old wizard’s affectionate diminutive brings to mind the pleasures of nonsense (i.e., the undifferentiated semiotic space beyond the prohibitions of reason), associated with sleepytome and the infant soother, a substitute for mother’s breast. But as well, Dor combines the elements of the French word for gold, a precious, brilliant and non-rusting (supple) material, and the Hebrew word dor connoting ancient blood ancestry and regeneration. Indeed, the original meaning of Dor in the Hebrew language was Genesis, the name for the sacred book of origins, the site inscribing the miracle and mystery of creation itself. Dumbledore’s multilingual role in the narrative is thus to serve as a grand, ancient, malleable, and trustworthy transitional object through which the hero (a baby when he comes into relationship with his caregiver) may learn to differentiate himself through the establishment of self-boundaries. In helping Harry to discover and create the boundaries of his subjectivity in his gradual development toward independence, Dumbledore must stick with Harry (i.e., be psychically available to him as a good internal object) through the duration of the boy’s “family romance.” The precise variations on this phantasy are many and mixed, including expressions of struggle with archaic solitude, separation, malady and denigration, mirror scenes of illusion, and near experiences of death. Child readers may be said to extract from these aesthetic recreations psychological satisfactions pertaining to pressures exerted by the Oedipal situation itself.

Rowling structures Harry’s transition around the revelation of secrets, beginning in book one with the riddle of the scar: “He had had it as long as he could remember and the first question he could ever remember asking his Aunt Petunia was how he had got it” (Stone 20). The boy’s mark betokens his superiority and predicament. It is the thing that causes adults and children alike to revere him: “Mr. Ollivander touched the lightning scar on Harry’s forehead with a long, white finger” (Stone 64). “And have you really got—you know.... He pointed at Harry’s forehead. Harry pulled back his fringe to show the lightning scar” (Stone 74). But the scar (like food) also physically enjoins Harry with the unconscious instincts of envy and hate, in which the child must battle his own and others’ aggressive anxieties of omnipotence: “A pain pierced his head like he’d never felt before, it was as though his scar was on fire— half-blinded, he staggered backwards” (Stone 187). “[T]he pain in his scar reached such a pitch that he retched” (Goblet 553). Arguably the sign of the scar exteriorizes for child readers at a fantasy level something that feels personal and familiar: a forbidden wish having to do with exalted status. The wish allows expression of the child’s ancient desire to possess distinctive strength of extraordinary proportion, and (like Harry) to be spared grotesque disappointment. The wish emplots itself through narrative sequences that elaborate dangerous conflict, which inevitably return both protagonist and reader to the mystery of origins.

Accordingly, in book one, Harry is called upon to find and defend the Philosopher’s Stone (referred to in the U.S. as the Sorcerer’s Stone), an object that could very well put an end to the problem of origins, insofar as it confers eternal life and power on its possessor, thus reinstating the problem of endlessness. In book two, Harry must enter the deadly underground Chamber of Secrets to wrestle an “enormous serpent, bright, poisonous green, thick as an oak trunk,” the blinded Basilisk (under the spell of Voldemort) whose ancestral language (Parseltongue) only Harry (among a select few) knows how to speak (Chamber 234). In book three, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Harry painfully encounters his own distinctive history in a lethal appointment with the traitorous wizard responsible for betraying his parents. And in book four, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Harry must complete three tasks of which the most precipitous enjoins him once again to confront his harrowing enemy, risen again from the dead. Harry’s interviews with death bring him face to face with his birth, in which he repeatedly perceives (like Hamlet) the ghost of his beloved dead father. Such moments of witnessing tutor the son not in revenge, but rather in qualities of thoughtfulness, as in “magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable” (Prisoner 311). In all of these projects, in order to fulfill his destiny and make a self, Harry must make the most fantastic researches (plot theories) into major predicaments of childhood: What would it be like to be invisible, granting “a kind of immortality but also a dangerous power” (Rossi 122). Such investigations require the protagonist to make thinkable complex mental conceptualizations that are fed by passionate concern: What does evil look like? What if I am seduced by it? What would it feel like to have absolute power? Why does it hurt to be alone? Such researches require extraordinarily inspired struggles, as Harry Potter confronts destiny and the potentiality of character. Within Rowling’s fantasy projection, the child’s desire for absolute power and revenge may get split.
off, brutally configured, and made representable as something evil, primitive, and persecutory (i.e., Voldemort: \textit{vol} from the Latin \textit{volo}, expressing wish, intention or determination + \textit{mort} meaning death). The symbolic displacement provides fantastic expression for children's unconscious anxiety, envy, and aggression, mental operations that are an alarmingly real component of the unquenchable human thirst for love, attention, and need. Dreamwork in Harry Potter thus centers on the fate of the sign of the scar. And such dreamwork makes thinkable for child readers dilemmas whose investigation may serve as a lively spur for development.

**Uncanny Experience, Gothic Formalism, and the Fantasy of the Family Romance**

I have argued that in the process of making knowledge for himself or herself, the child creates a story about returning to a place of origin. The appetite for such fiction is motivated by curiosity and fantastic sexual speculation, an attempt to solve problems that are too hard for comprehension and whose adult explanations indubitably fall short of satisfaction. Freud believed that to speculate about origins is a process of accomplishment carried out by competent children who are not willing to relinquish the pleasures of personal interest. I want now to explore further a dynamic that excites children's theory making and speculation—their imaginary play through feelings of the uncanny—and Rowling's use of Gothic form to bear witness to this aspect of affective reality.

Freud believed that conflicts in human development give rise to uncanny psychic effects. In \textit{"Das Unheimliche"} ("The Uncanny"), he analyzes the primal fear provoked "when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" ("Uncanny" 220). According to Freud, the uncanny sensation (like a sense that mischief is up) is provoked when old worries return to haunt the mind. Notably, (in relation to \textit{Harry Potter}) mental operations giving rise to uncanny experience include animism, sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, attitudes toward death, and castration anxiety. These thought processes "recall that sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams" ("Uncanny" 241). Freud's model of uncanny experience suggests that our psychological entry to the unheimlich place achieves something important in the articulation of desire. It guarantees the legitimacy of the wish to enter heim (home), the place where each of us once lived in the beginning. But because the wish is kept unconscious, out of view in a part of the mind where it can be felt but not symbolized, its impossible destiny is kept safe from having to be consciously endured.

Child readers repeatedly experience the uncanny in \textit{Harry Potter} through encounters with primitive emissaries from the unconscious configured as goblins, dragons, talking toads, trolls, witches, werewolves, nearly-headless ghosts, and three-headed dogs. But greater than these fantastic characteriological provocations is something structurally formal that is built into the very plot of Harry Potter: uncanny thought-experiments that sweep children up into a way of feeling mental uncertainty as they remain spellbound by dreams that feel like wishes. The linguistic and formal elements that constitute a story's literariness react uncanny effects: "the struggle within the limitations of language to express intellectual and emotional conflict, the desire to sweep readers up" into a way of seeing (Lydenberg 1074).

In its elicitation of the uncanny, the Harry Potter books conform to the typical formal criteria of Gothic novels, "which are for the most part designed to place the reader in a position of intellectual uncertainty" (Young 214). The mode of the Gothic text is performative: "while ostensibly offering the reader knowledge, in the manner of realist fiction, its real project is to produce theatrical effects during the reading process...to make the reader undergo an experience...to create a 'situation' out of images" (219). One vehicle artfully exploited by Rowling to evoke the effect of unspeakable secrets and enigmatic transmissions is interlinguistic language play. The author's academic training and professional life has involved both the study and teaching of classical texts and languages. Her exemplary talent in using language to construe her subjects' inner states and human trials is deserving of sustained analysis in its own right. I gesture once more toward it here because of the way such lexical play functions aesthetically as a psychic enabler, simultaneously concealing and revealing in true gothic form issues of origins, genealogy, and phantom meanings.

Gothic novels typically unfold through the use of scientific investigations to explore paranormal phenomena. The variety of forms in which Latin appears in Rowling's text (i.e., "the patronus," "Professor Lupin," "Grammatica," "Remus," "Sirius," "Hermione," "quidditch," "Impertius," "Cruciatux," "Lucius," "Narcissa") brings to mind the Old Speech of Europe, the language of learning, religion, medicine, and magic, as well as the international mode of communication between scholars (Swinfen 238). Rowling's lexical play with classical phrases of Latin and Anglo-Saxon origin places her in the company of beloved fantasy authors such as Le Guin, Nesbit, Lewis, and Tolkien, all of whom probe ancient languages to name people, places, and things. Linguistic detail reformulated through such dramatic events as Hermione's adroit solving of ryming word puzzles (Stone 206-07) and Harry's solving of enigmas in \textit{The Chamber of Secrets} (215) also exemplify the unique Anglo-Saxon contribution to European learning with its linguistic awareness and reflection on the alphabet through enigmas, acrostics, cryptography, the use of the runic alphabet, and fondness for riddles and riddling (Lendinara...
278). Indeed, the core curriculum at Hogwarts (including Astrology with Professor Sinistra and Arithmancy with Professor Vector) includes scientific subjects that faithfully echo the ancient quadrivium or staple of scientific study on the European continent in the first millennium, which included geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and harmony (Lendinara 277). The use of classical texts arguably produces the effect in child readers of making a journey that feels valid, yet also puzzling and weighty, as though venturing into an erudite, Old World (uncanny) place. But as with Harry’s encounters with food, his digestion of ancient texts of disorienting foreignness is kept manageable through Rowling’s aesthetic techniques of framing and control.

Throughout the text are multiple allusions to doublings, uncanny coincidences, peregrinations, and uncommon symptoms. These point to the young wizard’s need to account for a traumatic secret that, while it compels him and affects his destiny, is too painful to be absorbed by his ego. Such pursuit of forbidden transgressive knowledge pertaining to the secrets of life and death is no easy work, yet also puzzling and weighty, as though venturing into an erudite Old World (uncanny) place. But as with Harry’s encounters with food, his digestion of ancient texts of disorienting foreignness is kept manageable through Rowling’s aesthetic techniques of framing and control.

The narrative effect of uncanniness gets reproduced through a proliferation of signs that can induce spellbinding disorientation. Observe, for example, the corporeal layout of Hogwarts:

There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones; some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump. Then there were doors that wouldn’t open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren’t really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending. It was very hard to remember where anything was, because it all seemed to move around a lot. The people in the portraits kept going to visit each other and Harry was sure the coats of armour could walk.

(Stone 98)

Superfluous details mark not an absence in the story but a dizzying excess of puzzling signs: “Harry picked the shining, silvery cloth off the floor. It was strange to the touch, like water woven into material. ‘It’s an invisibility cloak,’ said Ron, a look of awe on his face. ‘I’m sure it is—try it on’” (Stone 148). In such sequences the child is involved in involuntary and repeated returns to particular landmarks or paths. The unheimlich is that interior place in which one can get lost in signs of strangeness. The traveler and his wandering consciousness is never completely at home here. Similarly, in a Harry Potter book, he migrates, he drifts, he misses trains, he loses his glasses, powerful dark magic causes him to lose control of his broomstick, his bed hurtles through space, ghosts flash through doors he is trying to open, and poltergeists grab his nose, screeching “Got your cork!” (Stone 98). Harry is frequently in the grip of death, and the coziness of even a train compartment can restore an inherent Unheimlichkeit to the familiar. In this plot the familiar ground of the self gets lost over and over again, going unsecured precisely in order to find or remake itself again.

Delight is also a cherished part of the uncanny experience. It may take the form of gothic humor, which in the Harry Potter books materializes in forms of pastiche and self-mocking games. “Wizard chess,” for example, involves the use of figures who are alive and who keep shouting confusing bits of advice at the young players: “Don’t send me there, can’t you see his knight? Send him, we can afford to lose him” (Stone 147). Sometimes the blending of horror with wry humor achieves “a sophisticated lightness of tone reminiscent of the charm of Tolkein” (Rossi 94): “I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors” (Stone 94). At other times regressive humor takes center stage: “Ugh—troll bogies!” (Stone 130). Political burlesque is known to enter the uncanny scene: “‘Ministry of Magic messin’ things up as usual,’ Hagrid muttered” (Stone 51). And sometimes a theatre of horror holds sway, marked by projections of things venomous, root like, and persecutory: “They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog which filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs” (Stone 119). Through all of this machinery of locked rooms, ancient spells, moving staircases, nearly headless ghosts, raucous disguises—i.e., The Invisible Book of Invisibility that keeps hiding itself (Prisoner 45)—and silly malapropisms—i.e., Mrs. Weasley’s “please men”/policemen (Goblet 141)—the hero of the uncanny place is on a quest to revisit something age-old and familiar, a place where life and value began: “A small fortune belonging to him, buried deep under London” (Stone 58).

Readers experience uncanny effects when strangeness and familiarity are made to co-mingle in provocative tension. The effect is evoked in Harry Potter through scenes in which matter-of-fact or even scientific discourse is used to represent the most fantastic and unordinary events. Witness, for example, Harry’s inaugural fitting for his sorcerer’s robe: “In the back of the shop, a boy with a pale, pointed face was standing on a footstool while a second witch pinned up his long black robes. Madam Malkin stood Harry on a stool next to him, slipped a long robe over his head and began to pin it to the right length” (Stone 59). All of the taken-for-granted familiarity of an ordinary tailor shop (complete with pins and measuring tapes and mindful routines for conducting proper fittings) gets superimposed here
onto the extraordinary episode of a small wizard being helped by a friendly witch to don the garments of enchantment.

In gothic form appears the evocation of the ancient or medieval past as a means of projecting the reality of the impossible world of fantastic desire with its heimische and unheimlich qualities. Now time is past time, all time, no time, creation time. Some of Harry Potter’s teachers are at least five hundred years old. His best friend’s brother conducts scientific research on live dragons in Romania, while another watches over Gringott’s gold in Egypt, the site of Biblical exile, idolatry, and exodus. Thus, the gothic story has not just a history but a geography that gets referenced throughout, allusions that act as “fictional coefficients of reality” (Rossi 129). The effect is uncanny insofar as an impossible strangeness is made to inhabit something that also feels familiar, controlled, unthreatening. In this way hyperrealism (in which the fantastic gets enclosed within a plausible scientific framework) is used in the Harry Potter series to facilitate uncanny effects. Rowling often deploys realism as a means of projecting Harry into the fantastic realm. To mount a train. To mount the train he needs to pass through ticket barrier 9 3/4. It doesn’t exist, of course, and yet it does, somehow, as an unseen presence of a real passage that has concrete and verifiable validity—but only to magical thinkers.8

A gothic story also attempts to reconnect readers to the mystery of dreams, the dream’s “point of contact with the unknown,” and to reinstate the ineffable in the form of nightmarish horror or uncanny delight (Garber 129). To apply Marjorie Garber’s discussion, the ghosts at Hogwarts signify as cultural markers of absence, reminders of loss, replicating in the very plot the impossibility of the protagonist’s quest, reminding us of the sins of the fathers, borne by the ghosts (129-30): “He gasped. So did the people around him. About twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they glided across the room talking to each other and hardly glancing at the first years…. Dotted here and there among the students, the ghosts shone misty silver” (Stone 84-87). Garber identifies such ghosts as producing an effect of uncanniness related to their significance as “a sign of potential proliferation or plurality and to its acknowledgement of the loss of the original—indeed, to the loss of the certainty of the concept of origin” (15). The ghost is a copy, the positive presence of a negative image, a reminder of the loss of a place of origin and its persistence. Harry Potter’s encounter with his father’s ghost reinstates that which the little boy mourns (his forsakenness), thus making present, as Garber would claim, what has been declared absent and lost (146). The ghost of Hamlet and the ghost of Harry Potter thus both call upon sons to remember and to act. But unlike Hamlet (whose “O that this too

What Happens to Our Wishes: Magical Thinking in Harry Potter

too sallied flesh would melt” signifies the deadening pain of remembering), Harry Potter embraces the childhood dilemma of how to remember and work through without tempting recourse to primitive revenge.

I have been arguing that the strange setting of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry serves as an uncanny site where Harry (and child readers) may reenact imaginary episodes of reentry into a forbidden place where ancient desires reside. For Harry Potter, Hogwarts feels like going home to family (Stone 85). In fantasy his entry to the forbidden world of enchantment (Hogwarts) returns the child to a lost world, where he was once one with a maternal body before being expelled (or abandoned). Rowling’s description of Harry’s initial transport into Hogwarts relies heavily on figurative language associative of childbirth: “[T]hey all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy which hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbor, where they clambered out on to rocks and pebbles” (Stone 84). Once ensconced in this magical element, Harry rapidly discovers his capacity for achieving great things. For example, his physical build (light and speedy) makes him well-suited for the magical broomstick game. But here, too, Harry encounters something strange, something ancient and familiar, yet difficult and binding—the law of the father.

“Your father left this [cloak] in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well” (Stone 148). “Your father would have been proud,” she said. ‘He was an excellent Quidditch player himself’” (Stone 114). Harry’s impulse to master the unheimlich place of Hogwarts through being the most privileged player in a magical game replays a repressed wish. It is unheimlich because one can never go back to absolute safety and enclosure, but the wish to regain it, to appropriate the maternal element and to witness its divine secrets (including the presence of the father and his seed), expresses the epistemophelic instinct to master insight into the mystery of procreation and destiny itself. Child readers (who also mourn a hopeless passion for parents through imaginary and idealized identifications) embrace the uncanny through Harry Potter. Yet psychological desire is ultimately denied final satisfaction in Rowling’s story of the sorcerer’s apprenticeship. For the author continually and repeatedly has Harry Potter enter into and return from unheimlich places, and it is that action of deferral that simultaneously postpones and sustains the wish for satisfaction, an erotics of desire that expresses the child’s instinct for knowledge. Arguably, Harry Potter makes operative the Winnicottian ideal in which children must learn to rest content with fantastic yearnings that, while impossible to satisfy absolutely, yet require absolute expression. Fantasy in Rowling (“The Journey From Platform Nine and Three Quarters”) gives play to the child’s desire to inhabit
the pleasurable realm of magical thinking, yet it allows for a working through of the idea that one cannot remain arrested (oblivious to the call of external reality) within.

The use of the fantasy of mastery of the unheimlich plays a vital role in children’s learning. Paradoxically, it is the denial of final satisfaction in fantasy (the object of fantasy must survive the child’s desire to master or destroy it) that serves as a foundation in the child’s struggle to establish a sense of self as autonomous, alone, not omnipotent, but secure. In making a self, the child must be able to experience his isolation and vulnerability in the face of his own primitive and abject desires (Phillips, Winnicott 71; citing Winnicott, Home 210-20). At Hogwarts, the young hero contrives incredible objects to assist in this developmental journey. Under Hagrid’s guidance, Harry acquires all of the tools of an aspiring sorcerer, including a wand, robes, a cauldron, a world-class broomstick (the coveted Nimbus Two Thousand), and a faithful owl who conveys letters from pals with the morning post. Harry’s formal curriculum comprises Herbology, the History of Magic, Charms, Potions, Care of Magical Creatures, Transfiguration, and Defence Against the Dark Arts. Under the tutelage of what Winnicott would call his “good enough mother,” Dumbledore, the young sorcerer’s sometimes clumsy use of transitional objects assists in his elaboration of a desiring, aspiring self, one who learns (usually from mistakes) to act out of a repertoire of ways of being (Winnicott, Playing 11). At the same time, continual reminders of even the limitations of magic (in book four, the uses of magic cannot stop a friend of Harry’s from dying) bear witness to the existence of a resilient reality outside of his omnipotent control.

Harry Potter thus replays the childhood struggle to integrate a sorcerer-self (who invests in magical thinking) into a less powerful self who can tolerate disappointment and still be in love with life. Throughout the sequence, Harry must learn to manage his capacity for the dark arts in a way that is co-terminus with the demands of justice and morality. Notably, some of Harry’s closest friends are Muggle children born of non-magical parents, and “half and half’s” (i.e., Hermione Granger, Seamus, and Neville). Harry himself is of mixed ancestry, born of Muggle and Magical parentage. In “Goblin Market” Christina Rossetti’s Lizzie covers her eyes to shield her from enticement into the goblin underground, resisting the allure of the fantastic with its richly seductive anarchism (Knoepflmacher 308). Harry Potter betrays no such resistance, and his willingness to embrace the shadow world of sorcerers, goblins, and poltergeists may be read as a representation of his earnestness to explore the Other in himself.

Harry’s passion gets schooled by none other than the good-enough teachers (themselves sorcerers) at Hogwarts. Some are utilitarian, sharply intent on maintaining their distance from the children over whom they exert little authority. For example, Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, is a tiny little wizard who must stand on a pile of books to see over his desk. At first sight of Harry he gives an excited little squeak and topples out of sight (Stone 99). Others are matter-of-fact and display little forbearance for childish pranks and antics. Professor Binns is the most intolerably boring of all, a History of Magic teacher who had been very old when he had fallen asleep in front of the staff room fire and got up the next morning to teach, leaving his body behind him (Stone 99). In yet others, such as Professor Snape (the Potions teacher), adult impatience seems to arise from a perpetual state of annoyance, in which children’s questions get repeated only to dismiss them. Not only do these authoritarian types inspire fear, but they also deny their imaginative control over stories of their own invention. They repeatedly derogate magical thinking as the child wizards clumsily experiment with their own budding powers of possession.

The effect of such narrative disavowal is subversive and ironic. It appears to reek of the reality principle, with its adult anti-fantasism and literal-mindedness. “‘Idiot boy!’ snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. ‘I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?’ Neville whimpered as boils started to pop up all over his nose” (Stone 103). At the same time, usually even the most impatient of Harry’s teachers function as “good-enough” caregivers. They allow the children’s magical reverie or projected terror to be taken in, contained, and because contained and dealt with, to be tolerated and perhaps even modified. Melanie Klein believed that, for children “The containment of anxiety by an external object capable of understanding is a beginning of mental stability” (qtd. in Hinshelwood 248). Rowling provides exemplary narrative and psychological models of containment through the likes of Professor McGonagall and Professor Dumbledore, figures who excel in their ability to mirror back desire in such a way as to foster childhood insight about internal states.

In Winnicott’s views on playing and mental development, children require opportunities for illusion, and through the experience of imagination, reality (which eludes the child’s control) can be made more nourishing and comforting (1971). “Development for Winnicott begins with a magical act: the infant’s purely imaginative process of conjuring up a mother he needs. At the very beginning fantasy is not a substitute for reality but the first method of finding it” (Phillips, Winnicott 84). In Winnicott’s view, fantasy helps children create their realities when they learn to imagine in accordance with desire and then learn to link imagination with the external world. Winnicott thus proposes a theoretical correlative to Harry Potter, in which the young hero first encounters the magical Mirror of Erised: “It was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was an inscription carved around the top: “Erised sta ehr uyt ube cafru
oyt on wohsi” (Stone 152). Erised is, of course, an anagram (i.e. desire spelled in reverse). When Harry gazes into the mirror of his desires, he sees, for the first time in his memory, his mother and his father: “‘Mum?’ he whispered. ‘Dad?’” (Stone 153). In a poignant description of the boy’s almost unbearable joy and incredulity: “He stared hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness” (153). Rowling elaborates the terrible feelings of loss and sadness that attend separation. Harry is “terrible sadness” (153). Rowling elaborates the terrible feelings of loss and sadness that attend separation. Harry is captivated by the mirror and keeps feeding upon its image, until Dumbledore shows him that what he is witnessing is his own desire: “It shows us nothing more or less than the memory that” (Stone 157–58). Rowling plays on the paradox that Harry Potter must learn the subjective has tremendous value but is so alarming and magical that it cannot be enjoyed except as a parallel to the objective” (Phillips, Winnicott 85).

Hogwarts School extends a symbolic invitation to child readers to remake interest, to fashion the self into an educable creature by making insight into knowledge. Despite the presence of maternal figures like Dumbledore, Rowling plays on the paradox that Harry Potter must learn magic within a setting that can be maddeningly unmagical. For example, first year students at Hogwarts require “1. Three sets of plain work robes (black) 2. One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear 3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar) 4. One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings). *Please note that all pupil’s clothes should carry name tags*” (emphasis added; Stone 52). Such narrative matter of factness and literal mindedness repeats at a structural level the intergenerational schism that exists between compliance and wishing, accommodation and the power of make-believe. The teachers at Hogwarts are sorcerers, eternally immersed in a dreamworld of illusion. But many are quite understated in their deployment of supernatural powers, an irony that draws attention to the fragility of adult perception, notions of mastery, and the idea that one’s “Dumbledore” need not be magical in the deployment of duty but merely good-enough to withstand the intensity of demand.

The family romance is a satisfying daydream in which the child plays out his or her interest in being the best, the most dear, a person born to do special things and therefore unaccepting of passivity or prudence. Freud believed that the fantasy is capable of manifold manipulations in the child’s mental elaborations of place during the latency period of childhood. Romantic reasoning in childhood, for example, might take the form of an illusion that symbolizes the underbelly of the family romance, an imagined horror in which the cost or burden of being the best gets split off and projected onto someone quite monstrous. Rowling conducts this thought-experiment by way of Dudley (allosemic and homophonic stand-in for deadly, dally, doodle), Harry Potter’s foster sibling who symbolizes the ridiculously arrested greed-child.

Rowling’s delightful translation of order in this fantasy figure configures the human child (Dudley) as monstrous, and the magical child (Harry) as benign. Dudley is ugly, vulgar, and horribly fat with a demonstrably wide mouth. “Dudley had always taken anything that Harry really wanted, even if it made him sick” (Stone 92). His chief interest is in food, and his incessant hunger, demand, jealousy, sadistic fits of rage, and all-round demonic disposition serve important imaginative functions. Such a subtext not only elevates the legitimacy of magical thinking in childhood (i.e., Harry’s gift), it reproaches (by implication, through inversion and hyperbole) uninspired and overtly pious representations of childhood. Dudley’s oral greed signifies envy, when the desire to possess is at stake, a rivalry motivated by primitive love and hate. As Rowling makes clear in her portrait of Dudley, it is the spoiling aspect of envy that is so destructive to his development, since the very source of goodness that the child depends on is turned bad, and good introjections, therefore, cannot be achieved (Segal 41–42).

For children, inventing a minor epic through inversion, hyperbole, magic, the use of primal words, and the family romance is a good way of making interest, making importance, making a life. The child’s importance “is literally sustained by such fantasy life” (Phillips, Beast 30). The theme of the enigma of origins may involve the fantasy of subverting the father or replacing the known parent figure with an unknown, greater one (Garber 7). This fantasy structure organizes Harry Potter’s dreamquest, in which he is most frequently addressed by none other than his dead father’s name: “We must expect great things from you, Mr. Potter” (Stone 65). The pattern repeats itself narratologically throughout the series in
a network of archaic signifiers of father/son conflict and loss, including Barty Crouch and his son; Neville and Frank Longbottom; Hagrid and his wizard father; and Voldemort and his father. Child readers experience something familiar yet primitive in such highly coded forms of address: a reminder that one of the most necessary yet painful challenges of growing up is that they must liberate themselves from parents; a reminder of how difficult, in actuality, this is, when one’s parents are (initially) the child’s only authority and the source of all belief; an acknowledgement that (despite their authority) parents are less than ideal and that other parents may actually be preferable to one’s own; and the feeling that one may in fact be a step-child or an adopted child. Freud believed that such apparently violent fantasy serves the child “as the fulfillment of wishes and as a correction of actual life” (Gay 299).

The Harry Potter series thus builds on a wish structure that is quintessentially rooted in childhood experience (and possibly in the life of humanity), a fantasy in which one must imagine oneself to be a foundling in order to work through the tricky obligations of growing up. What better platform for performing this work than through the figure of a magical boy abandoned by his mother who perished saving him? It makes perfect sense to child readers that Harry Potter’s dreadful archenemy, Voldemort, will never be able to understand or counteract the power of such love. Rowling’s consummate narrative feels delightful to children because it simply prolongs the delay of having to give up the wish for ecstatic containment: “to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin” (Stone 216).

The Child as Adolescent Theorist: Trauma Stalks the Family Romance

As Dudley Dursley shows, the fantasy of the family romance can run amok when the child enacts absolute obedience to his illusions and self-interest. The child who stays immature, who keeps himself narrow-minded, who stops struggling to be more plural, or who rests content with a stereotyping of imagination has not learned how to safely contain his conflict. Should decisions concerning the body, particularly in its sexual and reproductive uses, fall to the individual alone? How does the body and its private meanings relate to the public realm, including the state and its regulations? If, as I have argued, the Harry Potter books provide aesthetic containment for acquiring an understanding of the child body, its freedoms and capacities, pleasures, and responsibilities, then how does Rowling carry these concerns for her hero into the revolution of adolescence?

The author’s decision to write a series of seven Harry Potter books may be related to seven as the number of years encompassing children’s difficult development between pre-adolescence (age 11) and their attainment of legal and genital maturity (age 18), a time when they are also required to come to terms with the experience of separation and learn to sustain the forces of dialogue that will enable them to participate lawfully in society. It is worth noticing in this regard how Rowling incorporates narratological material through which to consider the primary tasks of adolescence, which include not only healthy psychosexual development, but also activities and pleasures that are explicable in terms of their relation to morality and civilization.

One of Harry Potter’s enemies in the series is Draco Malfoy (whose semantic associations bring to mind Dracula, malaise, malefactor), distinguished by his display of contempt for Harry and others. He performs the narrative role of playing out manically (through denial) the importance of Harry as an object worthy of love or admiration. In Kleinian terms Malfoy’s contempt may be seen to be aimed against his own gratitude to an object, which, if experienced, would give rise to the boy’s feelings of dependence and smallness, a dismantling of his feelings of omnipotence (Hirschelwood 253). Notably, Malfoy’s loves and hatreds introduce readers to vivid fantasies that play a key role in the difficult struggle for sociality within a common world. Rowling’s character impersonates a fantasy structure of racism, including the psychical elaboration of the fantasy of “race” as real. As an emissary from the fantasy world of domination, Malfoy effectively challenges readers to think about what Deborah Britzman alludes to when she asks education to move beyond a reliance on cognitive correction in children, to “reach the more difficult question of how internal conflicts fashion and attach to discourses of hatred” (112).

The most salient characteristic of Malfoy is his need to project his hatred of others into a regulatory imaginary that includes the social desire for segregation by “race,” including the classification of different “racial types.” Malfoy’s morphological taxonomic method of classification simplifies the ordering of individuals by sorting them into two types: Wizards and Muggles. Rowling systematically deploys this symbolic equation to shift the Linnaean signifier of color as signifier of race onto magic.10 Draco Malfoy performs the “logic” of this fantasy structure through his social relations with others. His projective identifications are violent and sadistic, involving a splitting off of aspects of his own being in which the invaded external object/individual is suffused with retaliatory hatred. The naked politics of race are clothed for Draco beneath an ideal of world domination, in which the co-existence of all races must cohere under the domination of the so-called purebloods. Within this social imaginary, the crucial distinction among creatures is the presence of magical powers. Accordingly (and in keeping with the Linnaean scheme, in which the breast is the linking attribute among mammals), humans are linked with certain animals according to the presence or non-presence of the attribute of magic.
The society in which races of Muggles and Magics live may be described as multicultural and cosmopolitan, and both types deploy the concept of race with the marker of magic to denote access or its absence to certain allegedly higher forms of culture or civilization. Thus, Muggles are disdained by some Wizards, just as Wizards are disdained of magic to denote access or its absence to certain allegedly inferior race-group. Both races are seen to deride the other for a supposed absence of finer feeling, which might qualify them to something called “civilization” (MacCannell 45). As a political commentary, the Harry Potter series may be read as an excursion into the politics of war driven by racial fantasies of domination and superiority, in which the protagonist, a mischling or half-and-half, fights for the establishment of jouissance for all subjects. Rowling inscribes an important moral lesson in this fantasy against the aspiration to perfection that neglects the consequences of sacrifices blithely suffered in others and demanding severe sacrifices from the perpetrators (MacCannell 48).

We may well ask why Rowling has chosen to populate the world of Harry Potter according to what Žižek refers to as an anatomy of prejudices that recalls the dominant story of nineteenth- and twentieth-century humanity, with its fantasy of an out-group who is accorded the status of something unfathomable, a group that gives rise to unbearable anxiety because it is nowhere to be found, the omnipresent fiction out of whose holes of repression fantastic elements arise (qtd. in Young-Bruel 14). How are we to think about Rowling’s uses of fantasies of prejudice? Theories of language would suggest that it is impossible to tell a story that does not play out a repressed impulse and the fantasies that attend it. We have examined one key linguistic marker utilized by Rowling to elicit uncanny effects, Harry’s scar. The mystery of the healed wound and its significance organizes the formal narrative structure of Harry’s quest to uncover the hidden meaning of his life. One important aspect of the search relates to the mystery of the secret/destination that Harry Potter shares with the evil Lord Voldemort. Uncannily, the phoenix, whose tail feather is in Harry’s wand, gave just one other feather to another wand, to none other than Voldemort’s wand (Stone 67). The sibling wands imply the idea of fraternity, duality, self-knowledge/repression, two-dimensionality, and the sharing of a hidden bond somehow connected with renewal. Both characters share an identity as speakers of Parseltongue (an enigmatic language transmission understood by few); both are mentioned as belonging with the house of Slytherin (Chamber 245); both share the “Riddle” of orphan boyhoods and murdered fathers, and both are the offspring of magical and non-magical parentage (Chamber 231).

Good stories satisfy a craving, so we may well ask what buying time with a story means to a child. How does buying time through story play out at bedtime, in classrooms, at recess, or while waiting to grow up? What does the purchase of story attempt to liberate in terms of a child’s capacity? And what is the cost in childhood of not getting in time through story?

Although Paul Ricoeur does not specifically address himself to the dilemmas of childhood, his philosophical reflections invoke narrative’s relation to a child’s experience of time, and the difficult obligations of freedom (in which growing up may be considered an existential predicament worthy of faithful attention). Ricoeur considers how a writer’s effects of “ redescribing reality” get extended from author-time to story-space, through to embodied experience that enables readers to participate in acts of “indwelling” (180). For Ricoeur, suspicion and renewal pull through narrative like an obstacle course through which participants must travel in mental elaborations concerning necessity and possibility. Morality (which means learning how to think about the good and just collective life) articulates its interactions to human existence through language, with all its lost sense, creative power, and possibility. Fiction is that privileged province where children learn to play with forms of making sense of desire in time, through the invention of narrative techniques. Accessing the time of self requires working through plot and thus experiencing analogically a world like one’s own in which all kinds of action take place (Joy xvii). Narrative discourse is just one kind of language related to the human capacity for understanding, but it is a quintessentially universal aspect of the human condition (Joy xix). In light of these ideas, we may say that J. K. Rowling wades neck deep into the primal sleaze of modern existence and does not refuse the political/ethical obligations that attend language and story making, even in fantasy and even for children. It remains to be seen how such symbolic elaborations are engaged by child and adolescent readers, and whether, in fact, narrative representations of systematic discrimination, magical thinking, and possibility may be engaged by a generation of readers as a site through which to educate the ego about its history and transgressions.

NOTES
1. The Harry Potter series currently comprises four published books written by J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 1997); *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 1999); *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 1999), and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2000). All subsequent references to the books will be cited by a shortened form of the title within the text.

2. Rowling’s stunning market success provides commentary on the forcefulness of her creative impulse and its effects on the collective unconscious. In October 1999, Harry Potter books occupied the three top slots on *The New York Times* Bestseller List, with ten million books in circulation (Cowell C1). By summer 2000, twenty-eight million
copies had sold worldwide (Matas R1). By 2002, world-wide sales will exceed one hundred million (Smith 67). In Britain, Rowling beat out Stephen King for the British Book award and lost the Nobel prize by one vote (Matas R1). After accepting Rowling's manuscript, Bloomsbury Publishing house posted a 176 percent rise on the stock market between April and October 1999 (Cowell C10). Booksellers delayed the release of the books so that children would not play hookey from school (Cowell C1), and “Potter police” secured tight reins around book launchings with “measures worthy of Fort Knox” (Stonehouse A1). Dismissals of the books abound, as in “There is no lyrical writing here, no greater truths about our world or ourselves to be found, no ulterior or inner meaning beyond the market between April and October 1999 (Cowell ClO). Booksellers persuade youngsters to espouse paganism (Bernstein El). Parents from Minnesota, Michigan, New York, California, and South Carolina credit the books with promoting interest in the occult, classes, and orders, a practice that Rowling deploys by substituting magic as the distinguishing principle for the organization of types.

3. I am not aware of any substantive and sustained critical examinations of Rowling’s literary debt to other fantasy writers. But for useful observations on the sources of her inspiration in authors such as Edith Nesbit and Jane Austen see Ambrose R2; Bernstein E2; Crawford 10; Shapiro 25, 31, 33, 39; and Tucker 228-29.

In Kleinian and Freudian terminology, “phantasy” refers to an unconscious process, while “fantasy” denotes a conscious or preconscious daydream. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, phantasy is an “imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes” (314).

5. In her analysis of the “haunting effects of family secrets on characters in narrative,” Esther Rashkin calls on the work of French psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok to discuss rhetorical modes of hiding and concealment through which interpersonal relationships are disguised in texts (3). “One such mechanism…at work is cryptonymy. Just as a phantom carries a secret, so words, Abraham and Torok propose, can themselves be carriers of veiled lexical relationships. A word can be a cryptonym, literally a ‘word that hides’” (32).

7. See also Vladimir Propp’s structural analysis of the folktale, in particular his discussion of the motif of the symbolic “branding” of the hero, which he deems to be “a structural homology rooted in the human mind responsible for narrative” (Payne 440).

In a delightful commentary on fantasy’s effects, London’s train terminal at King’s Cross station has erected a well-marked sign to designate the (non-existent) Platform 9 3/4, serving as a magical beacon for Harry Potter fans world-over.

9. Prior to her success as a first-time published author, Rowling allegedly worked for Amnesty International where she “spent two years researching human rights violations” (Shapiro 46). The author’s contempt for the lexical and material dimensions of a “rotten and unjust system” (Goblet 112) that includes bigotry, racism, notions of blood superiority, and misogyny receives full blown expression in book four, in particular through Hermione Granger’s philosophy concerning the House-elves (associatively, “ourselves”), and their right to feelings of dignity and self-worth, wages for labor, holidays, clothes, and independent thought (see especially 112, 169, 198, 198, 210, 344, 468).

10. The Swedish botanist Linnaeus classified plants and animals through genera, classes, and orders, a practice that Rowling deploys by substituting magic as the distinguishing principle for the organization of types.

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