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Harry Potter

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Trauma and *Harry Potter*

“There are true horrors in your past, horrors your classmates can scarcely imagine” (Prisoner 237). Remus Lupin expressed this to Harry the day he taught Harry the Patronus charm. It is safe to say that this line bears a great deal of significance within the *Harry Potter* series in understanding the pain and trauma of Harry’s past. Harry and his friends deal with events in their lives that we, as readers, could possibly write off as something that would never happen to us. Most of us are not beaten and forced to live in a cupboard under the stairs, such as Harry. No one in this “muggle” world has ever been called Mudblood. I assure you, no one has to deal with dementors, or being chased by the most evil wizard that ever lived, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Although, in our world people experience physical abuse. People are treated poorly because they are “different.” Prejudice and bullying run rampant, and many tragedies and past scars within the series mirror historical events of our own lives. Despite not having wizards, wands, and moving staircases, our world evokes themes of pain, and trauma in the everyday and ordinary, which JK Rowling portrays in the series through the extraordinary. *Harry Potter* has presented these wizarding world traumas in such a way that the violence/abuse, the experience of it and the way in which the characters deal with it, are completely relatable to our world.

The abuse/trauma, which Harry receives from the Dursleys—both physically and psychologically—is extremely identifiable for children in the real world whom are beaten down everyday by the environments they live in and the bullies at school. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, it describes how, “when he had been younger, Harry had dreamed and dreamed of some unknown relation coming to take him away, but it had never happened; The Dursleys were his only family” (Sorcerer's 30). Up until age eleven, Harry has suffered feelings of isolation, hopelessness and submission pressed upon him from his first birthday. He is made from a young age to cook breakfast in the mornings, sleep in a broom cupboard, given less to eat than the rest of the family, and wear only clothes that are hand-me-downs of Dudley. The Dursleys don't even celebrate Harry's birthday. Not only this but he suffers maltreatment from the bullies and other kids at school. His Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon “were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense” (Sorcerer's 1). They refused to discuss Harry's past or parents with him, even going so far as to escape to the Hut-On-The-Rock to evade Harry's Hogwarts letters, lying to him that his parents died in a car crash, and refusing to even speak a word of anything to do with the wizard world. This leaves Harry with a false sense, or better, lack of identity as a person.

One of the most universal themes which inflicts trauma and pain amongst our characters is that of prejudice, seen though the treatment of Hermione and her blood status. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Draco calls Hermione a

“filthy, little Mudblood” (Chamber 112). This in our terms it is the same as using a racial, cultural, or sexist slur against another. Ron goes on to explain the, then unfamiliar, term in saying, “Mudblood's a really foul name for someone who is Muggle-born — you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards — like Malfoy's family — who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood” (Chamber 115-116). This distinction of blood shows how truly similar the magic and real worlds are. This verbal violence in the series is akin to the hatred and hostility, which pervaded our world in the days of slavery, the dawning of the Civil Rights Movement and that unfortunately still exists in our world today. For example, as described by W.E.B. DuBois there existed a “one-drop” law where anyone with even a drop of “Negro” blood was considered unclean, of low breeding, or having “dirty blood.” All terms used in the series to describe Mudbloods.

Harry's past, induced by his scar, encounters with the dementors and his connection with Voldemort show his psychological and emotional trauma in a relatable way, especially to events in history. As the series progresses, we begin to see a manifestation of Harry's deeper connection to Voldemort. They both having been orphans, speaking Parseltongue, even Harry's scar hurts whenever danger or Voldemort is near and he has very vivid dreams of Voldemort (later revealed to be glimpses into Voldemort's mind- link of connection). For many, scars of their past, be it childhood or from a specific traumatic event can be hard to get rid of and sometimes have triggers that re-awaken them in flashbacks, such as a scent, or hearing a sound or word, etc. (PTSD). The whole concept of the dementors, Death

Eaters and Voldemort suggest certain similarities to real world wars and ethnic cleanses. What it reminds the reader of the most is Hitler and the Nazis. The dementors feed on every happy thought and when encountering them feels as if one could “never be cheerful again” (Prisoner 85). Dementor’s Kiss, a worse punishment than death, involves one’s soul being sucked out of their body, until they are just a shell of a person, lifeless and dehumanized. This has connections to concentration camps. Those put in the camps became, over time, frail, gaunt and degraded to the point where many gave up or went mad. The fear of saying Voldemort’s name, his emphasis placed on purebloods being superior and symbol of the Dark Mark all have relations to this World War II period. The swastika symbol, adopted by the Nazis, was used as a symbol for the Aryan WASP race, considered to be the only true race in Hitler’s opinion. Like Hitler, Voldemort believed in a “master race” of pureblooded wizards. Many during World War II dreaded the trauma of they and their family being discovered by Hitler, so many lied about their ethnicity, sexuality and basic identity out of fear. This is similar to the wizard’s fear of speaking Voldemort’s name thinking that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named will come out and murder them any minute. Even the Ministry of Magic themselves is in denial of the return of Voldemort in *The Goblet of Fire* for fear of another war or being overtaken themselves, which mirrors those who lived around the concentration camps who heard the screams and saw the smoke, and didn’t say anything for fear of their own life. These horrors of the magic world also relate to other historical groups and events still in existence to day such as the KKK, and ethnic genocides in African countries including but not limited to Darfur.

When the reader strips away all aspects of magic, all of the trauma, pain and suffering experienced by the characters in the *Harry Potter* series is very realistic to many in life and true to world history. Through all this, what is important to note is the lesson of resilience and defiance of evil written by JK. It is how the characters deal with trauma is what makes them great. It could have been easy to give into evil, to not be teased or bullied, but accepted. Yet, the “good guys” don’t. Harry stands up to Malfoy, refusing to be his friend and telling him that he can “sort out the right kind for myself, thanks. Does Hermione give up or by into herself not being worthy enough of magic? No. She’s one of the brightest wizards of her age. She stands up for the little guy and fight for house elves suffrage. (last book of the series she even prides herself on being a mudblood when talking with Ron and Griphook) Do our heroes give Voldemort the satisfaction of fear? No. They refuse to call him anything but Voldemort, believing that “fear of the name only increases fear of the thing itself” (Sorcerer’s 298). JK Rowling writes that story so that it becomes not living in terror of trauma or living in the past, but that one should defy their bad past experiences, accepting it within your identity, but not letting it define who you are. Life is defined by the choices that you make and no one can change the past. After all, Dumbledore said it best. “It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live” (Sorcerer’s 214).

Works Cited

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Harry Potter is a film series based on the eponymous novels by J. K. Rowling. The series is distributed by Warner Bros. and consists of eight fantasy films, beginning with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001) and culminating with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (2011). A spin-off prequel series that will consist of five films started with *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016), marking the beginning of the Wizarding World shared media franchise. Professor Quirinus Quirrell (26 September, 1967 or earlier – 4 June, 1992) was a half-blood wizard who attended Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and was Sorted into Ravenclaw House. He was the Muggle Studies professor at Hogwarts, though he later became the Defence Against the Dark Arts professor during the 1991–1992 school year. Before teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts, Quirrell went out in search of Voldemort, believing he could achieve recognition for finding him and could learn the title of Professor is given to members of the wizarding scientific and scholarly community engaged in education and research, taken as a whole. It is, perhaps most notably, used by teachers at wizarding educational institutions such as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Durmstrang Institute, and Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It is considered rude by some for students to not address a member of a teaching staff on their school as professor, Madam or Sir, as is the case with