

“Every Child in Our World Will Know His Name!”: Malcolm Gladwell’s Theories as an  
Explanation for the Cultural Phenomenon of *Harry Potter*

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To Justin and Max, my loves.

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To my Savior, for your sacrifice;

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home and loving me unconditionally;

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### Abstract

When *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* hit stores in the United States in 1998, children and adults alike went wild. Not only had Rowling's first book made huge waves in the UK, but Americans were talking about the struggling, single-parent who had penned a children's classic before the book even reached American stores. American audiences accepted Rowling's first novel with open arms, making it one of the first children's books to reach and occupy *The New York Times* best-seller list for so long. While certain marketing techniques and the rise of the Internet did contribute to *Harry Potter's* initial success in both the UK and US, other more important factors made the series reach its tipping point. Malcolm Gladwell, noted journalist and best-selling author, explores three theories that serve as explanations for the series' success, particularly in America: tipping points, outliers, and underdogs. He explains that for something to reach a tipping point—or a moment in which something goes from being an average product or idea to a phenomenon—it must mean something to certain groups of people, it must take place in the right environment, and it must be worthwhile. Gladwell's other two theories—outlier and underdogs—better explain the worthwhile aspect of the series and point to reasons why Harry Potter, the character, resonates with readers as an imperfect hero who chooses good and eventually defeats the ultimate evil one, Lord Voldemort.

## Introduction

### The *Harry Potter* Phenomenon

*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* had few of the makings of a traditional children's book. Rowling's finished manuscript of 90,000 words and 223 pages was almost twice as long as the usual children's book, and because of this, many publishers were unwilling to give *Harry Potter* a chance (Gunelius 50). Bloomsbury, Rowling's UK publisher, would not have picked up the novel had the children's division editor, Nigel Newton, not relied on his 8-year-old daughter's judgment. He handed her the manuscript, and he came back an hour or so later to the response, "Dad, this is so much better than anything else" (Lawless). He read and loved the manuscript too, and because Bloomsbury was just beginning its children's book division, he did not see any harm in publishing a first-time author (Gunelius 50). So, Newton offered Rowling her first publication opportunity for £2,500<sup>1</sup> (Lawless). Bloomsbury's children literature division was new on the UK market in 1997, so they only printed 500 hardback copies of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, of which 300 were distributed to the libraries and just 200 hit the bookshelves. Clearly, even Bloomsbury was not expecting much revenue from *Harry Potter*.

However, when Scholastic's Arthur Levine purchased the publishing rights to Rowling's early manuscript for an unprecedented amount, the media took notice. After an international book fair in Bologna, Italy, Levine showed his enthusiasm for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by bidding the unbelievably high amount of \$105,000 for the US publishing rights. Levine was looking for something that "people will talk about in 20 years" (Morreale), and Bloomsbury had just that. With such a high bid, publishers and authors became quite interested in Scholastic's big, new project. Scholastic spent the months before August 1998 promoting the book through the usual means—book signings, advance copies for reviews, press

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<sup>1</sup> \$4,700 US

releases, and the like—while also telling the author’s poverty-stricken, single-parent sob story. When Scholastic published *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in October of 1998, just a few weeks after *Chamber of Secrets* was released in the UK, American readers were already prepared to purchase their copies and dive into the world of *Harry Potter*.

In December, just two months after its US publication, *Harry Potter* found its way to *The New York Times* best-seller list, the first children’s book to make the list since E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* (Garner). Susan Gunelius notes that because of the media buzz and Rowling’s personal story, “More and more people heard about J. K. Rowling and Harry Potter and became curious enough to pick up one of the books and start reading” (30). She explains that “[g]enerally, once someone started reading, that person was hooked on the good product and became another player in the domino effect of Harry Potter’s word-of-mouth marketing campaign” (30). Because of the novel’s initial success in the UK, and the heart-warming story of the struggling author, Americans eagerly picked up their copies and began the journey with Harry.

Whenever something has such a visible cultural impact<sup>2</sup> as *Harry Potter*, fans and critics alike typically attempt to make sense of such a phenomenon. When a product has such a drastic effect as turning children away from the television to read books, drawing massive crowds—dressed up in Gryffindor scarves and circular glasses—to midnight movie premieres, and sparking ongoing Internet conversations spanning from fan fiction to controversial debates,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>This impact can be seen through the length of time that the series appeared on *The New York Times* bestseller list—three years on the regular list, and seven years on the children’s portion of the list, making a total of ten years on the list. All eight of the movies are in the top 50 list of highest grossing movies of all time. The last installment—*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*—holds the number four slot. Universal Studios debuted The Wizarding World of Harry Potter in 2010, but plans on opening its latest expansion in 2014. Universal Studios in Hollywood will open its very own Wizarding World in 2016. Warner Bros. has also announced a three-part movie series based on Rowling’s *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

<sup>3</sup>17,700 results come up in a search of “Harry Potter” on *The New York Times* website. There are also many fansites that still get several thousand hits a day—*The Leaky Cauldron*; *Pottermore*; *Hogwarts Online*; and *MuggleNet*.

critics want to either combat it, support it, or attempt to account for and explain it. Malcolm Gladwell, noted journalist and social commentator, concerns himself with taking traditional ways of looking at phenomena<sup>4</sup> and challenging people's common assumptions. For example, in *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000), he combats the idea that for something to become great, such as “an idea, trend, or social behavior” (*TP* cover), it must take time. He defines his term “tipping point”: “The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once” (*TP* 9). Whereas the word “epidemic” typically has a negative connotation, Gladwell uses this term to illustrate how a seemingly insignificant or small event can trigger something of great proportions and spread rapidly. He sets up his argument for tipping points by explaining that the epidemic phenomenon is logically quite difficult to grasp:

As human beings we have a hard time with [the epidemic] . . . progression, because the end result—the effect—seems far out of proportion to the cause. To appreciate the power of epidemics, we have to abandon this expectation about proportionality. We need to prepare ourselves for the possibility that sometimes big changes follow from small events, and that sometimes these changes can happen very quickly. (*TP* 22)

Typically, success is accounted for as having taken a significant amount of time and hard work. And while Gladwell claims that products that tip are typically backed by hard work, the tipping point may occur at a surprising moment that has nothing to do with the hard work behind something. An idea, product, or trend that tips can only make sense with the examination of

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<sup>4</sup>Phenomena such as the spark of popularity (*Tipping Point* 2000), how to think without thinking (*Blink* 2005) what contributes to true success (*Outliers* 2008), and how underdogs defeat giants (*David and Goliath* 2013).

certain surrounding factors such as the people who get it to the right place at the right time, the cultural climate, and the infectious agent itself.

Gladwell argues that an epidemic contains at least three characteristics: “one, contagiousness; two, the fact that little causes can have big effects; and three, that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment” (TP 9). In *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell explores what contributes to a cultural epidemic, and explains that the dramatic changes are due in part to what he deems “the Law of the Few,” “the Stickiness Factor,” and “the Power of Context” (TP 19). “The Law of the Few” points to the specific people and companies that make something a household name. “The Power of Context” accounts for how the society around the product somehow bolsters it up rather than hinders it. And “The Stickiness Factor” speaks to the quality of the product, answering the question of what it is about this product that makes it stick, or resonate, with its audience. He argues that with certain factors in place, books like *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*—with a completely unknown author, who is a single mom and living on welfare—can take off at a sudden, unexpected moment, sparking a phenomenon.

Two major contributing factors to the start of any phenomenon are the support of certain key individuals and the surrounding cultural climate. The *Harry Potter* series shattered and created records partially because of the time it was published—a time in which the Internet was beginning to become a public forum for discussion, creating an outlet for fans to discuss the series and speculate about the upcoming books. However, the strongest reason for its initial success and continued following is the inventiveness, familiarity, and presentation of the seven-part story. Gladwell discusses how a series such as *Harry Potter* can tip from a fairly popular children’s book to an international bestseller. He labels the three major contributing factors of a tipping point as “The Law of the Few,” “The Power of Context,” and “The Stickiness Factor”

(TP 19). Each of these theories helps to explain how the people involved, the surrounding culture involved, and the actual product<sup>5</sup> turn into something of epidemic proportions.

*Harry Potter* certainly owes its tipping point to many surrounding factors, but two of Gladwell's sociological theories serve as strong explanations for the reason not only the series, but the character, Harry Potter, resonates with so many readers. In *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008), Gladwell argues that people do not rise from nothing, but are given certain advantages through parentage, patronage, and immediate circumstances to help them succeed. Gladwell argues that "there is something profoundly wrong with the way we make sense of success" (*Outliers* 18), and he asserts that an outlier is someone who does not simply rise because of hard work,<sup>6</sup> but rises due to the added benefit of outside help. Contrary to the traditional ideal of the American Dream, Gladwell claims that a great deal of success is partially determined:

People don't rise from nothing. We do owe something to parentage and patronage. The people who stand before kings may look like they did it all by themselves. But in fact are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot. It makes a difference where and when we grew up. The culture we belong to and the legacies passed down by our forebears shape the patterns of our achievement in ways we cannot begin to imagine. It's not enough to ask what successful people are like; in other words, it is only by asking where they are *from* that we can unravel the logic behind who succeeds and who doesn't. (19)

But success only begins with certain predetermined advantages. What people do with the

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<sup>5</sup> Gladwell does not just discuss how products tip, but he explains that ideas, messages, and behaviors can also have tipping points (TP 7).

<sup>6</sup> However, hard work is very much a part of being an outlier, as Gladwell explains in his chapter "The 10,000-Hour Rule." He notes, "the people at the very top don't work just harder or even much harder than everyone else. They work much, *much* harder" (*Outliers* 39).

advantages they are given is what makes for true success. Harry Potter, also known as the Boy Who Lived and the Chosen One, is certainly an outlier. In the same way a product can reach epidemic proportions because the right factors are in place, Harry Potter happened to be born at the right time, to the right parents to become the possible<sup>7</sup> one the prophecy foretold would defeat Voldemort. The beginning of Harry's life determines part of his path, but his choices, friendships, and hard work lead him to succeed in his ultimate goal of defeating the darkest wizard of all time.

In *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (2013), Gladwell challenges the long upheld notion that giants are always at a greater advantage than underdogs, which he turns around to assert that many underdogs succeed because of their disadvantages. As Gladwell is always concerned with challenging the way people think about typical situations, *David and Goliath* accounts for underdogs that succeed because of their disadvantages. In the introduction, he explains that his book explores all types of underdogs, and he answers the question, “what happens when ordinary people confront ‘giants’[?] By ‘giants,’ I mean powerful opponents of all kinds—from armies and mighty warriors to disability, misfortune, and oppression” (*DG* 5). Even though he is the ultimate underdog,<sup>8</sup> Harry somehow manages to escape Lord Voldemort time and again. And while Harry does have the advantages of being an outlier, his greatest advantages are the weaknesses that make him who he is. Gladwell claims that underdogs can defeat giants because “the act of facing overwhelming odds

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<sup>7</sup> Neville Longbottom could have been the Chosen One instead, as Sibyll Trelawney's prophecy stated, “The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches. . . . Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal” (*OP* 741). Dumbledore explains to Harry that the first two stipulations could have also referred to Neville (742).

<sup>8</sup> Harry is the ultimate underdog because he is orphaned at a very young age, he is cursed by a dark wizard (the lightning bolt-shaped scar on his forehead is the mark of that curse), he is treated exceptionally poorly by his uncle, aunt, and cousin, and upon receiving his acceptance letter to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry—for which he fights his family members to get his hands on a copy—he has never even heard of the school, let alone known his wizarding ancestry. He enters the wizarding world with a list of seeming disadvantages that are not necessarily disadvantages at all.

produces greatness and beauty” (*DG* 6). He also notes that the typical way of looking at underdog versus giant battles is wrong:

We misread them. We misinterpret them. Giants are not what we think they are.

The same qualities that appear to give them strength are often the sources of great weakness. And the fact of being an underdog can *change* people in ways that we often fail to appreciate: it can open doors and create opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seemed unthinkable. (*DG*

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In Harry’s case, being an underdog works to his advantage as it keeps him humble about his fame, unafraid of saying Voldemort’s name—lessening the fear of the Dark Lord himself—and eager to learn any and everything about the wizarding world. His seeming disadvantages work to his advantage by forcing him to compensate and work through his struggles and weakness to turn them into strengths.

Gladwell’s exploration of tipping points, outliers, and underdogs provides insight into the cultural phenomenon of *Harry Potter*. The series reached a tipping point because of certain factors and then spread rapidly, and while it could have easily fizzled out—as do many trends that tip—it remained successful and continued to gain momentum long after the publication of the final book and the release of the final movie.<sup>9</sup> Harry becomes an outlier and underdog from birth, but through the help of others, and through the many disadvantages that he must overcome,

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<sup>9</sup> Although Rowling’s primary series ended in 2007, she has written other supplemental books for charity. One book, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, will make it to the big screens for a trilogy. Warner Bros. in collaboration with J. K. Rowling just recently announced the dates for this trilogy—2016, 2018, and 2020 (Haas). The Harry Potter fandom is also still very much alive. For instance, every October, the town of Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania holds an Academic Conference, a Quidditch tournament, and the entire town transforms into Hogsmeade for a weekend (“Harry Potter Festival”).

he rises from the ashes of being broken down and turns into the hero who can defeat the ultimate evil one.

## Chapter One

### The Tipping Point of *Harry Potter*: The Series as a Cultural Epidemic

*Harry Potter* tipped the summer of 2000 and spread to epidemic proportions when *The New York Times* created a separate bestseller list for children's literature in anticipation of the fourth installment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. And while important factors contributed to *Harry Potter*'s success—such as the enthusiasm from its publishers, the rise of the Internet, and media buzz—it is the story that has made the greatest impact on readers, and Harry's disadvantages and realistic character qualities strengthen the series greatly, contributing to its cultural impact on American readers. Gladwell's discussion of tipping points helps to account for *Harry Potter*'s initial success, with the theories of "The Law of the Few" and the "Power of Context," but the theory of "The Stickiness Factor" helps to explain why a children's series has remained so popular for so long. While *Harry Potter* may not have succeeded with just initial popularity and a welcoming environment alone, the "stickiness" of the familiar story, themes, and characters, repackaged in such a unique and interesting way, ensured its sustainability as a series that will remain a part of the children's literature canon.

Whereas Gladwell did not coin the term "tipping point,"<sup>10</sup> he popularized it with his debut, bestselling book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. In this work, he uses the concept of cultural epidemics to discuss and account for the sparked change or success of certain products or ideas.<sup>11</sup> After explaining certain properties of

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<sup>10</sup> In his 1958 work, *The Metropolitan Area as a Racial Problem*, Morton Grodzins first used the term "tipping point" in a sociological context to discuss class and racial tensions within a metropolitan society (6). Andrea Shapiro notes, however, that Thomas Schelling, 2005 Nobel Laureate in Economics, was the first to use the term "tipping point" in a similar context in which Gladwell uses it. Shapiro states, "Schelling . . . coined the term 'tipping point' to describe situations where small increases in numbers reaches [sic] a critical level and causes a system-wide effect" (18).

<sup>11</sup> He mentions the work that Thomas Schelling and his team did by noting, "The expression first came into popular use in the 1970s to describe the flight to the suburbs of whites living in the older cities of the American Northeast. When the number of incoming African Americans in a particular neighborhood reached a certain point—20 percent,

contagiousness, such as something that affects people visually, aurally, or emotionally,<sup>12</sup> he notes, “Contagiousness, in other words, is an unexpected property of all kinds of things, and we have to remember that, if we are to recognize and diagnose epidemic change” (*TP* 10). Thus, recognizing and diagnosing epidemic change seem to be key elements behind the purpose of his in-depth look at tipping points. One author quotes Gladwell as stating that he likes to think of his books as “playful, intellectual explorations” or “conversation starters” (Zengerle), not as definitive, expert guides to each concept he presents.<sup>13</sup> On his personal website, he provides a summary of what *The Tipping Point* is about, and in doing so, provides insight into his purpose for examining this particular subject:

It’s a book about change. In particular, it’s a book that presents a new way of understanding why change so often happens as quickly and as unexpectedly as it does . . . It’s that ideas and behavior [sic] and messages and products sometimes behave just like outbreaks of infectious disease. They are social epidemics. *The Tipping Point* is an examination of the social epidemics that surround us. (“Q and A”)

In his examination of social epidemics, Gladwell does not provide an exhaustive list of every possible reason why something reaches a tipping point, but he relies on a few key rules that

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say—sociologists observed that the community would ‘tip’: most of the remaining whites would leave almost immediately” (*TP* 12).

<sup>12</sup> The example he uses to discuss the visual, aural, and emotional aspects of contagiousness is “yawning.” He notes, “Yawning is incredibly contagious. I made some of you yawn simply by writing the word ‘yawn.’ The people who yawned when they saw you yawn, meanwhile, were infected by the sight of you yawning—which is a second kind of contagion. They might even have yawned if they only heard you yawn, because yawning is also aurally contagious: if you play an audiotape of a yawn to blind people, they’ll yawn too. And finally, if you yawned as you read this, did the thought cross your mind—however unconsciously and fleetingly—that you might be tired? I suspect that for some of you it did, which means that yawns can also be emotionally contagious” (*TP* 10).

<sup>13</sup> When asked to classify *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell replies, “I like to think of it as an intellectual adventure story. It draws from psychology and sociology and epidemiology, and uses examples from the worlds of business and education and fashion and media” (“Q and A”).

social epidemics typically follow. The rules are summed up in three main areas—the carriers, the epidemic itself, and the environment in which it spreads:

There is more than one way to tip an epidemic, in other words. Epidemics are a function of the people who transmit infectious agents, the infectious agent itself, and the environment in which the infectious agent is operating. And when an epidemic tips, when it is jolted out of equilibrium, it tips because something has happened, some change has occurred in one (or two or three) of those areas. (*TP* 19)

In order for something to spark a phenomenon, or to reach the tipping point of an epidemic, it must undergo some sort of change. Change typically happens gradually, but because of the people behind an epidemic, the epidemic's surrounding environment, and the product, idea, message, or behavior in which the epidemic centers on, an infectious agent can tip and spread in an instant. In regards to *Harry Potter*, arguably the most expansive cultural epidemic to date, the tipping point occurred quickly and unexpectedly, and the phenomenon, while no longer at the height of epidemic proportions,<sup>14</sup> remains imprinted on American culture today.

The first major contributing factor to the tipping point of the series, which Gladwell labels “The Law of the Few,” deals with the specific people who enthusiastically introduced *Harry Potter* to the public marketplace and supported it, giving it the chance to succeed through marketing techniques and award nominations. He explains, “The Law of the Few says that there are exceptional people out there who are capable of starting epidemics. All you have to do is find

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<sup>14</sup> In *The New York Times.com* article, “Ten Years Later, Harry Potter Vanishes from the Best-Seller List,” published in May 2008, Dwight Garner comments on what he calls the end of an era: “It had to happen sometime—and, lo, an era has ended. After a 10-year run, and less than a year after the seventh and final book in J.K. Rowling’s series was published, the Harry Potter books have fallen—as of the May 11 issue of the Book Review, which went to press last night—of the Times’s best-seller list” (Garner).

them” (*TP* 132). He then categorizes these “few” as “Connectors”<sup>15</sup>—people who seem to know everyone—“Mavens”<sup>16</sup>—people who are experts in a certain area—and “Salesmen”<sup>17</sup>—people who persuade the doubters (*TP* 34). It is through these specialists that outbreaks of cultural epidemics happen. And the “Law of the Few” applies directly to the start of the *Harry Potter* series, as certain “Connectors,” “Mavens,” and “Salesmen” were instrumental in sparking the phenomenon. In *Harry, A History*, Melissa Anelli notes that the effortless release of *Harry Potter* books, movies, and merchandise makes the phenomenon seem orchestrated by marketing mavens and research analysts, but she argues that, aside from the strength of the story, *Harry Potter* tipped despite great odds:

Harry Potter has actually been a very intimate phenomenon, the story of small groups of people acting in ways they shouldn’t, doing things they usually wouldn’t, and making the kind of history that, without Harry, they pretty much couldn’t.<sup>18</sup> There’s been one woman, a handful of small companies, and one multibillion-dollar corporation—which has at times, operated like an independent movie studio—at work. . . . At almost every step of Harry’s early journey, things

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<sup>15</sup> A “Connector” is a person who, essentially, knows everyone. Gladwell claims that they are “people with a special gift for bringing the world together” (*TP* 38). These people have a way of passing along information to as many people as possible because of the gift of knowing a great number of people in vastly different circles.

<sup>16</sup> He uses the term “Maven” to label “information specialists” (*TP* 59), the people who provide the “Connectors” with their information. He explains, “The word *Maven* comes from the Yiddish, and it means one who accumulates knowledge” (*TP* 60). “Mavens” know everything about a product, sale, place, or idea and want to pass along the information they have collected. Gladwell notes, “one thing that a Maven is not is a persuader . . . [but their] motivation is to educate and to help” (*TP* 69). Whereas a “Maven” may not be as well connected as a “Connector,” “Mavens” are information traders, hoping to dispense and collect knowledge whenever they can.

<sup>17</sup> And whereas both “Connectors” and “Mavens” certainly help start and contribute to social epidemics, sometimes “Salesmen” are needed to help persuade the doubters. Gladwell notes the importance of “Salesmen” to the tipping point of an epidemic: “In a social epidemic, Mavens are data banks. They provide the message. Connectors are social glue: they spread it. But there is also a select group of people—Salesmen—with the skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing, and they are as critical to the tipping of word-of-mouth epidemics as the other two groups” (*TP* 70).

<sup>18</sup> Here Anelli is referring to the handful of people—such as Byrony Evans, Christopher Little’s secretary who was in charge of sorting through the rejection pile; Barry Cunningham, editor at Bloomsbury Publishing; Rosamund de la Hey, marketing representative for Bloomsbury Publishing; Nigel Newton, chief editor and founder of Bloomsbury Publishing; Arthur Levine, the Scholastic Publisher; and so on—who gave Harry Potter a chance despite its length, its supposedly elitist setting of a British boarding school, and its unknown, first-time author.

occurred in ways they shouldn't, confounded expectations, and nearly didn't happen at all. (19)

“The Law of the Few” uniquely implies that a small group of specialized individuals are partially responsible for epidemics, and when “Connectors,” “Mavens,” and “Salesmen” all promote the same product, that product can tip and spread at drastic speeds.

Because *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was such an interesting and unique story, with a motivated and well-organized author, “Connectors,” “Mavens,” and “Salesmen” responded and did what they do best to help spark one of the biggest cultural epidemics to date. Of course, without J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter* would not exist, and by her sheer tenacity and dedication to her series, she eventually found someone to publish it. In June of 1995, Rowling sent out a synopsis and some sample chapters to a few publishers and some publishing agencies, including The Christopher Little Agency.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the first “Maven” in the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, Byrony Evans, who worked as an office manager for Christopher Little, took notice of the manuscript. Anelli notes, “It [the manuscript from J. K. Rowling] was supposed to have been automatically rejected, but she [Evans] liked the folder it came in, and read a few pages, and it made her laugh. If Evans hadn't brought it to Christopher Little and handed him the three chapters to read, it would have gone in the dustbin” (43).

Just as “Mavens” provide their stamps of approval on certain products and make them seem irresistible, Evans explains how her experience with the sample chapters sold her on the story: “I read it rapidly because it was really good. I read it in a ‘I-can't-put-this-down sort of way.’ I gave it to Chris with my enthusiastic endorsement and he took it away and read it overnight” (qtd. in Smith 134). Because of Evans's response, Little read and enjoyed the story so

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<sup>19</sup> She happened upon The Christopher Little Agency in a list of publishing agents in a library book, and wrote down the address because she liked the company's name.

much that he took Rowling on as a client and went to work trying to find her a publisher.

Surprisingly, although Little is described as having a strong business acumen and a way with marketing (Smith 132), he could not sell it.<sup>20</sup> However, the strength of Rowling's story continued to win people over, and eventually Little found the perfect publisher teeming with "Mavens" and "Salesmen."

The next group of "Mavens" and "Salesmen" came from Bloomsbury Publishing's children's book division. Barry Cunningham, a former marketing agent at Bloomsbury, had just recently taken over the editorship of the children's book division and wanted to find books that children loved (Smith 136). When Little introduced Cunningham to the wizarding world of *Harry Potter*, Cunningham knew that he had found something special. Upon reading the manuscript he recollects, "It was just terribly exciting. What struck me first was that the book came with a fully imagined world. There was a complete sense of Jo knowing the characters and what would happen to them" (qtd. in Smith 136). His immediate team read and fell in love with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and became some of the first "Salesmen," making it their mission to convince the doubters at Bloomsbury that it needed to be the company to publish *Harry Potter*.<sup>21</sup>

Rosamund de la Hey of Bloomsbury's marketing team and Cunningham's assistant rolled up the manuscripts like scrolls and stuffed them with Smarties candies to make sure that every Bloomsbury executive who would be influential in deciding the book's future received one.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Anelli explains, "He sent it to nine publishers and got nine rejection letters, all of them very nice, but still rejections. The underlying theme was consistent: boarding school is for the rich and elite, and this book is about three times as long as children's novels should be. Too much, for a first-time author. Maybe if R. L. Stine handed in something that long, it would be published" (45).

<sup>21</sup> Cunningham also had some "Connector" in him; Smith explains, "Barry had a small budget—so small in fact he was unable to bid for US rights—and was unable to 'hype' the book at this stage. Instead he relied on contacting people he knew who might be sympathetic to the book" (151).

<sup>22</sup> Smith explains that de la Hey's Smarties idea was likely two-fold. She wanted the manuscript to be memorable by its outward appearance, but she also wanted the editors to be reminded of the Smarties Prize Award that the book

Anelli explains, “It was a gimmick, one that made the pages look like an academic scroll with a treat inside, and whether or not the people to whom the scroll was left had read it, they remembered that it was the manuscript that had literally been tarted up” (46). And while gimmicks such as stuffing a manuscript with candies are not completely foreign in the children’s publishing world,<sup>23</sup> Cunningham and his team truly believed in the potential of *Harry Potter*.<sup>24</sup> The early fan-base, comprised of adults working in a small children’s book publishing division, helped advocate for *Harry Potter* enough for the rest of Bloomsbury to take notice. Eventually, Bloomsbury would win over a large American publisher, gaining Rowling’s first installment in her seven-part series even more recognition.

While “Mavens” and “Salesmen” certainly played their parts in the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, the “Connectors” helped spread the word to as many groups of people as possible through media buzz and word-of-mouth marketing. The most notable “Connectors” involved in the *Harry Potter* phenomenon were Americans, Arthur Levine and Margot Adler. Like Cunningham, who wanted children to love their books, Levine, a children’s book publisher under Scholastic, wanted children to cherish their books just as he had when he was a child. Bloomsbury had a representative present at the Bologna International Book Fair who introduced Levine to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, and it was just the story he was looking for.<sup>25</sup> Anelli notes, “Arthur wasn’t making judgments based on trends, so his decision wasn’t

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would be up for. He notes, “It is unusual in that it is partly voted for by children themselves and so it is a more accurate reflection of what they are actually reading. In the future the Smarties Triple Gold Award would play a significant role in making Harry Potter a hot property” (137).

<sup>23</sup> de la Hey explains, “We had to really fight to make ourselves heard, but that’s quite characteristic of children’s list publishers. You have to jump up and down and shout and scream” (qtd. in Anelli 46).

<sup>24</sup> Cunningham believed in Rowling and her series so much so that he encouraged Rowling to submit a proposal to the Scottish Arts Council for a writing grant, which she won, giving her the finances she needed to discontinue public assistance and focus on her writing (Smith 148).

<sup>25</sup> According to Smith, one of Cunningham’s former colleagues at Bloomsbury, Janet Hogarth, had moved to the US to work for Scholastic. She was instrumental in making sure Levine read the manuscript for *Philosopher’s Stone*. Smith notes that Levine read it on the way to the Bologna Book Fair in Italy (152). However, other sources such as

dependent on what British or American markets were doing. His self-named imprint freed him from that; all his books with his name on them should simply reflect his publishing philosophy” (52). Some of the first media coverage in both the UK and US of *Harry Potter* came with Levine’s high bid of \$105,000 for the rights to publish Rowling’s series in America.<sup>26</sup> Suddenly, newspaper headlines began to read, “penniless single mother gets six-figure sum” (Smith 153), and the media pounced on the information that Rowling wrote at a local coffee bar while her baby slept (154).

Levine had poured so much money into the first-time author that he had to make sure *Harry Potter* sold, so he started connecting as many people as possible through media outlets and marketing, relying on the strength of the story to win people over. He used his name in the publishing community to get the word out: “Arthur sent out a personal email to a list of authors including Philip Pullman, Terry Brooks, Ursula K. Le Guin, Jane Yolen, and Paula Danziger, calling Rowling a ‘real fresh voice in fantasy’ and explaining that *Philosopher’s Stone* has ‘a lot of heart beneath it’” (Anelli 59). Not only did Levine have a great deal of money riding on *Harry Potter*, but he also truly believed that this story was worth reading. Margot Adler of NPR also became a key “Connector” in the early days of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Just as de la Hey had advocated strongly for *Harry Potter*, so Adler began her own street team campaign. She went into bookstores and asked them why *Sorcerer’s Stone* was missing from the shelves. Adler also secured an interview with Rowling in December of 1998,<sup>27</sup> just three months after it had

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Morreale and Adler more widely assert that Levine did not read it until he was on the plane back home from Bologna on his way back to New York (n. pag.). Regardless of when he read *Philosopher’s Stone*, Levine did what he could to purchase the rights and bring the boy wizard to America.

<sup>26</sup> Four other American publishers were also vying for the rights, so The Christopher Little Agency held an auction. The memo Little sent out the morning of the auction read: “There are several reasons for this excitement. One, [it’s] a wonderfully written fantasy evoking Roald Dahl and Philip Pullman. First book in a series about Harry Potter and Howarts school of magic. First time novelist who obviously has a great future. . . . This book is very cinematic. The agent already has film interest” (qtd. in Anelli 52-3).

<sup>27</sup> Adler’s interview “All Things Considered: Harry Potter” is available to download on NPR’s website.

been published in the US, which Scholastic remembers as “the one that made the big difference” (Anelli 62). Soon, children and parents alike were following Adler’s example and asking where *Sorcerer’s Stone* was and why it did not have a more prominent display. Thus, these two Americans became instrumental “Connectors” in the phenomenon.

The word-of-mouth marketing campaign grew with the fan-base that *Philosopher’s* and *Sorcerer’s Stone* found in small, independent bookshops, as well as the children who were reading it, and entering the wizarding world for the first time. Bloomsbury published *Philosopher’s Stone* in June of 1997, and by November of that same year, it had won the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize for children<sup>28</sup> (Anelli 57). This early recognition caught the attention of British booksellers, and more “Connectors” were born: “in small and independent bookshops, owners were having the same reaction to the books as Rosamund had, as Barry had, as that small collection of adults who first championed Potter had, and were pressing Harry Potter into the hands of every child or parent who asked for something good to read” (Anelli 57). The independent bookshops did not have to answer to a mother company that mandated which books were displayed, but they were able to give their own glowing recommendations and display *Sorcerer’s Stone* the way they wanted. Also, as *Sorcerer’s Stone* was released in September of 1998 in the US, independent bookshops used the timing to promote and recommend the books as Christmas presents. The timing of the US release allowed for the hype to build from the media in Britain and for the holiday season to approach.

The strongest “Connectors” at the start of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, however, are arguably the children. Sonali Patel, who also uses Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* to examine the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, explains that children are strong “Connectors” because of the vast

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<sup>28</sup> Because of the media buzz surrounding the auction for the US rights, the first printing of 2,500 paperbacks and 450 hardbacks proved to be a great undershot, and *Philosopher’s Stone* went into its second printing just four days later to keep up with its demand (Anelli 56).

circles in which they run (14). They spend every school day in contact with hundreds of children their age who typically share the same interests, and when several children are spending their lunchtimes and recesses pouring over a book, their friends are bound to take notice. Patel notes, “With the various activities kids participate in from after school sports to summer camp, children have large networks, and are ideal connectors” (14). Not only did children help vote for *Harry Potter* to win the Smarties prize, but they could not contain their genuine excitement about the boy wizard, so fan sites, message boards, fan fiction, and role playing became an outlet for them.<sup>29</sup> As with any epidemic, the work that “Connectors,” “Mavens,” and “Salesmen” did to promote and support *Harry Potter* helped give Rowling’s series a fighting chance in a world in which her title was too confusing, her setting too politically incorrect, and her novel too long to be published.

Another contributing factor to a cultural epidemic is what Gladwell deems “The Power of Context.” He argues that the cultural climate surrounding something greatly contributes to how that product, idea, message, or behavior is received (*TP* 139). He categorizes “The Power of Context” into two parts: environment and community. Whereas “The Law of the Few” details how certain people help to spark a phenomenon, “The Power of Context” rules that “[t]he impetus to engage in a certain kind of behavior is not coming from a certain kind of person but from a feature of the environment” (*TP* 142). Gladwell argues that “an epidemic can be reversed, can be tipped, by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment” (*TP* 146), and he uses the examples of the Broken Windows theory and whitewashing graffiti to illustrate

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<sup>29</sup> FanFiction.net claims that 696,206 stories contain Harry Potter (“Harry Potter FanFiction Archive”). One fan site, *The Leaky Cauldron* contains over 115,000 active members to date (“Members”). In her fandom log, *The Ultimate Guide to the Harry Potter Fandom*, Erin A. Pyne cites a survey that shows the positive impact *Harry Potter* had on its fans: “A 2006 Kids and Family Reading Report (in conjunction with Scholastic) released a survey showing that 51 percent of HP readers aged five to seventeen now read books for fun after reading Harry Potter. According to 65 percent of children and 76 percent of parents, performance in school improved since starting to read the series. Even adults have discovered reading again after opening the pages of Harry Potter” (58).

his point. The Broken Windows theory, as Gladwell explains, asserts that if a broken window goes unrepaired for an extended period of time, people will see this negligence as a sign that no one is in charge, resulting in a tipping point of more broken windows and subversive behavior in the surrounding community (*TP* 140-1). In order to combat a negative context, making a small change to the environment such as repairing the broken windows or painting over graffiti time and again can have a drastic effect in the opposite direction, resulting in a tipping point to reduce crime in a community significantly.<sup>30</sup>

The second part of “The Power of Context” has to do with community, or as Gladwell explains, “the critical role that groups play in social epidemics” (*TP* 171). People like to belong to and identify with something, and when a book or movie series brings people together in a common interest, they form a type of community around it. Gladwell notes, “Once we’re part of a group, we’re all susceptible to peer pressure and social norms and any number of other kinds of influence that can play a critical role in sweeping us up in the beginnings of an epidemic” (*TP* 171). The power of a group mentality, often negatively referred to as mob mentality, can have either a very negative effect, swaying people to identify with or support something they normally would be against, or a positive effect, giving people the chance to participate in something that truly brings groups together for something good. The contexts of environment and community both play a strong role in the tipping point of *Harry Potter*, spanning from controversial media coverage to massive midnight book release parties.

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<sup>30</sup> Gladwell notes that in the 1990s crime greatly decreased due to the hard work that several people put into small changes. He notes that David Gunn, the new subway director in New York City in 1984, began a graffiti clean-up initiative that sent a strong message that someone was, in fact, in charge. Gladwell explains, “He [Gunn] started with the number seven train that connects Queens to midtown Manhattan, and began experimenting with new techniques to clean off the paint. On stainless-steel cars, solvents were used. On the painted cars, the graffiti were [sic] simply painted over. Gunn made it a rule that there should be no retreat, and that once a car was ‘reclaimed; it should never be allowed to be vandalized again” (*TP* 143). Others like William Bratton, who enforced the payment of transit fare, or jail, and Rudolph Giuliani who later appointed Bratton to Chief of Police and insisted that he apply his ruthless crack-down on crime to apply to any little street crime made a huge difference because they both believed that “[m]inor, seemingly insignificant quality-of-life crimes . . . were Tipping Points for violent crime” (*TP* 146).

The environmental context of the start of *Harry Potter* phenomenon may not have had anything to do with changing the course of the crime rate, but the context did contain massive media coverage, which thrust *Harry Potter* into the spotlight from the start. Because Rowling—a first time author—received so much attention through awards and the rights auction, the media took notice. Warner Bros. had also secured the rights to make the *Harry Potter* films just a month<sup>31</sup> after *Sorcerer's Stone* had been published in America. Of course, they did not realize that *Harry Potter* would turn into a phenomenon of epidemic proportions by the time the first movie premiered in 2001, but they certainly did what they could to promote within their media sources. Tammy Turner-Vorbeck argues that a company such as Warner Bros., underneath the umbrella of its mother company Time Warner, has a great deal of control over several media outlets, and was able to make sure that *Harry Potter* stayed in the spotlight:

They can make a short article run in the widely respected periodical, *Time* magazine, describing the ‘phenomena’ of Harry Potter and how the children in the UK are frenzied over the books. Then, AOL’s CNN news subsidiary begins making headlines about the ‘phenomena.’ Shortly after the ‘phenomena’ makes headlines, Pottermania is scheduled for a special interest segment in primetime news on CNN and also on CNN Classroom, bring the ‘phenomena’ directly to the children in schools . . . . In all, Time Warner boasts access in one form or another to over 100 million U.S. households. It creates and then supports the phenomena of Pottermania. (335)

While Warner Bros. was motivated to provide *Harry Potter* with as many opportunities to be seen whether through a movie trailer, an interview with J. K. Rowling, or the latest Potter

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<sup>31</sup> October 1998.

merchandise such as house scarves or handcrafted wands, Rowling kept control of her beloved stories.

This move by Rowling set a tone to the environmental context of the series that clearly stated that she was ultimately in charge. Afraid that Hollywood would “butcher her baby,” Rowling was hesitant to sign over *Harry Potter* to Warner Bros.; however, after meeting Steve Kloves, the screenwriter, she knew that he would do the books justice. She would not have allowed Warner Bros. the rights had they not given her what she wanted, and she wanted Warner Bros. to stay faithful to her canon, only allowing them to make *Harry Potter* movies based on her series (Anelli 67-8).<sup>32</sup> Thus, her control allowed her to protect her story and make sure that the screenwriters and directors respected her wishes. Smith explains that as *Harry Potter* grew, “Joanne gained the strength and assurance to protect her creation and to take a professional interest in his development. There was no way, for instance, that Harry Potter would be attending Beverly Hills School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Joanne told *The New York Times*, ‘I would do everything to prevent Harry from turning up on fast-food boxes. That would be my worst nightmare’” (174). The environmental context of the media surrounding the first few *Harry Potter* books and Rowling’s close watch over her stories undeniably set the tone of success for the rest of the series.

Another aspect of the environmental context that aided in the series’ tipping point in the summer of 2000 was actually due to somewhat negative attention in the form of *The New York Times* best-seller list split. Of course, *The Times* had housed *Harry Potter* 1-3 in the top three spots ever since *Prisoner of Azkaban*, the third book, debuted in the US in September 1999, and with the anticipation of the fourth installment, *The Goblet of Fire*, they decided that it was time

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<sup>32</sup> Basically, Warner Bros. would not have been able to release a movie called *Harry Potter goes to New York* or *Harry Potter and the Three Broomsticks* unless she wrote the book first.

for a best-seller list split. After all, in 1999, “phenomenon” began to follow the words *Harry Potter* without question.<sup>33</sup> In 2000, *The Goblet of Fire* was the first *Harry Potter* book to be published on the same day in both the UK and the US, July 8, and *The Times* worried that other best-selling authors were not receiving the recognition they deserved. On June 24, 2000, an article appeared in *The Times* entitled, “The Times Plans a Children’s Best-Seller List.” The author explicitly states, “*The New York Times Book Review* will print a separate best-seller list for children's books starting on July 23. The change is largely in response to the expected demand for the fourth in the *Harry Potter* series of children's books, editors at the *Book Review* said” (Smith). This decision, while certainly strategic on the part of *The Times*, is a testament to the effect *Harry Potter* was beginning to have, and thus, the environment surrounding the books was starting to make the series irresistible. Something as constant as *The New York Times* best-seller list no longer could hold the weight that was *Harry Potter*.<sup>34</sup>

In the second part of “The Power of Context,” community serves as a powerful factor in the culture of any phenomenon. In regards to the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, both children and adults shared a common interest and found ways to discuss the series. Gladwell explains that creating a community in which an idea, product, message, or behavior can be “practiced and expressed and nurtured” (*TP* 173) is essential to bringing about the small changes necessary that will lead to a tipping point. He further explains that “small, close-knit groups have the power to

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<sup>33</sup> Anelli states, “1999: the year of three Potter book releases, the year that the series became a chronic best seller, and the year people started using the word *phenomenon* liberally next to the words *Harry Potter*” (70).

<sup>34</sup> Other forms of negative attention towards the series occurred after its tipping point. Negative attention in the form of religious warnings through documentaries such as *Harry Potter: Witchcraft Repackaged* (2005) or tracts such as “The Nervous Witch” (2002), book burnings encouraged by pastors Rev. George Bender, Jake Brock, and Becky Fisher—all of which held book burnings in 2001 (*Huffington Post*), court cases, such as *Mallory vs. George State Board of Education*, and books being banned—*Harry Potter* ranked 7th on the ALA list of the most frequently challenged books between 1999-2000, but ranked 1st from 2000-2005 as the most challenged series of the 21st century (Clark and Morales).

magnify the epidemic potential of a message or idea” through “The Rule of 150” (*TP* 175).<sup>35</sup> A group cannot exceed 150 if it has hopes to enact any sort of change. Gladwell explains, “Above that point, there begin to be structural impediments to the ability of the group to agree and act with one voice” (*TP* 182). The Internet provided the avenue for little communities to form according to “The Rule of 150,” bringing *Harry Potter* to epidemic status and later expanding on that number to sustain the phenomenon.<sup>36</sup> “The Rule of 150” can be applied to the groups of fans that began discussing *Harry Potter* in their immediate social groups, but then expanded towards fan sites and message boards on the Internet.

Part of the reason the Internet had such a great effect in binding the *Harry Potter* community was the outlet it gave fans to express their thoughts and theories; it was a safe place for fans to come together, make friends with similar interests, and be heard. Anelli became an active member of the *Harry Potter* fandom through the website *The Leaky Cauldron*,<sup>37</sup> posting in message boards, sending *Leaky* any articles she could find on the books or movies, and making friends along the way. She explains that the Internet provided fans with just the right amount of community to sustain the *Harry Potter* fandom: “It was happening all over the world; the rapid spread of fan fiction,<sup>38</sup> message boards, online chat rooms, and fan sites kept fans occupied and entertained between book releases and allowed new fans to celebrate with those who were like

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<sup>35</sup> In the early 2000s, before social media was so prevalent, psychologist Robin Dunbar and anthropologist Russell Hill investigated the number of people a person or household kept in immediate contact with by counting how many people a household sent out Christmas cards to. Dunbar had seen the number 150 continually linked with intimate groups and was not surprised when he and Hill found that the typically household sent out Christmas cards to roughly 153.3 people (Bennett).

<sup>36</sup> Anelli argues that the Internet played a great role in sustaining the hype of the series because it helped to magnify the fandom: “Word of mouth was enough to carry the phenomenon far, to nudge it right to the edge of the tipping point, but something was about to push it way over: another phenomenon was evolving right next to the Harry Potter books, coming into its own as the thing that changed *everything* we knew about everything” (75).

<sup>37</sup> *The Leaky Cauldron* is one of the largest and most active fan sites in the Harry Potter community.

<sup>38</sup> Ernest L. Bond and Nancy L. Michelson, in their essay “Writing Harry’s World,” discuss how the rise of the Internet has given birth to a completely new medium of creativity in the form of fan fiction. In response to Rowling’s controversial reveal in 2007 that Dumbledore is gay, Bond and Michelson state that a piece of information directly from the author that sparks such a public response “is actually indicative of the way popular fictional narratives might be understood in the age of Web 2.0: as ever expanding networks of story” (309).

them” (87). As the series grew, fans were able to connect via discussion board forums, and fan sites, and they were even able to interact with Rowling herself on her own creation *Pottermore*, an interactive website in which fans can join houses, earn house points, take Potter trivia quizzes, and discuss the latest Potter theories on message boards (Kessler).<sup>39</sup> And while these sites certainly contained more than 150 followers, there were enough small fan sites available that if a fan ever felt like he or she was not being heard—or that the community on a particular site was getting too large—he or she could become a member of another site. These small sites allowed for fans to explore their own creativity and add to the conversation.<sup>40</sup> Internet message boards and fan sites allowed readers to conduct virtual book clubs with people from all over the world, while simultaneously creating more hype about the upcoming books.

Fans also found community in Potter-related events such as book releases, midnight movie premieres, and rock concerts. At the height of the tipping point, bookstores began something completely unheard of before *Harry Potter*: book release parties. Because *Goblet of Fire* was set to be released on the same day in both the UK and US, bookstores took advantage of Pottermania and threw a huge party, which later became the norm for the rest of the *Harry Potter* book releases: “Parties grew bigger and bigger with each new Harry Potter book release. Fans and bookstore employees arrived in costumes and special activities were held during the parties, including mock sortings into the four houses of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, face painting, games, live entertainment, giveaways, parades and so on” (Gunelius

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<sup>39</sup> *Pottermore* went live on April 14, 2012, well after the tipping point of *Harry Potter*; however, within two weeks 3 million fans had enrolled in Hogwarts online school and been sorted into Houses, showing how the fandom has remained loyal even years after the last book was published. Flood explains, “*Pottermore* is a digital way in to the *Harry Potter* books, offering users the chance to join a house, cast spells, fight duels and journey through the world of the first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*” (“Pottermore”).

<sup>40</sup> Rowling has allowed her fans free reign of their fan fiction, but her lawyers do contact any webmasters who are selling unauthorized merchandise or anything pornographic and ask them to politely take down their content or face legal charges (Anelli 99).

80). Fans could also attend midnight movie release parties for all eight of the *Harry Potter* movies.

For the second, and final, part of *Deathly Hallows*, one commentator notes, people showed up in Gryffindor colors with lightning bolt scars drawn on their foreheads and round-rimmed glasses over their eyes, pushing through the crowd to get some popcorn and Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans (Townsend). Rowling's attention to detail in the descriptions of the house colors and decorations, wizard garb, and accessories has made dressing up for events easy for fans. Other events that fans could participate in were Wizard Rock<sup>41</sup> concerts, featuring bands with names like Harry and the Potters, Draco and the Malfoys, The Hungarian Horntails and many other plays on *Harry Potter* characters and magical creatures. In a documentary on Wizard Rock, *We Are Wizards*, one fan expresses what the community has meant to her: "it . . . gave me a place to belong. It gave me a group of people that I'm part of. I probably have more friends through Harry Potter than I've made anywhere else" (Koury). Having a place to meet physically with other *Harry Potter* fans has provided a stronger sense of community than Internet fan sites, fan fiction, and message boards could achieve alone.

While "The Law of the Few" and "The Power of Context" can help explain why and how *Harry Potter* tipped, Gladwell's "The Stickiness Factor" proves to be the strongest explanation of the three theories of tipping points as to why it has maintained epidemic proportions years after its tipping point in 2000. "The Law of the Few" rules that the messenger is important, "The Power of Context" rules that the environment and community must help to nurture rather than hinder, but "The Stickiness Factor" rules that the actual content and the presentation of that

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<sup>41</sup> Wizard Rock is a genre of music that arose out of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Brothers Joe and Paul DeGeorge began writing songs about the *Harry Potter* books and began playing shows at libraries and bookstores. Their website bio defines Wizard Rock as "a DIY music movement of bands playing songs about the Harry Potter books" ("Bio").

content must be memorable enough to reach a tipping point.<sup>42</sup> At the heart of “The Stickiness Factor” is the fact that the message must matter, must be interesting enough to catch on, and must contain certain irresistible elements that make it memorable. The rest of Gladwell’s thesis for “The Stickiness Factor” seems contradictory, but does, in fact, apply to *Harry Potter*:

We all want to believe that the key to making an impact on someone lies with the inherent quality of the ideas we present. But in none of these cases [the examples that he provides, such as *Sesame Street* and *Blue’s Clues*] did anyone substantially alter the content of what they were saying. Instead, they tipped the message by tinkering, on the margin, with the presentation of their ideas. (TP 131)

In regards to *Harry Potter*, the inherent quality of the content *does* matter; without a strong story, the phenomenon would have either not occurred, or would have been very short lived, but the presentation of Harry’s world is what makes the series irresistibly memorable. *Harry Potter* did not spread like it did because a clever marketing team made the right decisions to display the product a certain way and saturate every media outlet with Potter stories; *Harry Potter* reached the point of epidemic proportions because of its “stickiness.”

Rowling uses recognizable and universal themes, a familiar blend of genres, and common elements of fantasy and magic, but she packages them in such a way that they are accessible and unforgettable.<sup>43</sup> Little explains that Rowling has spoken to a broad audience from the beginning:

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<sup>42</sup> For his example, Gladwell uses the popular children’s educational show *Sesame Street*. He argues that the creators of *Sesame Street* followed the rule of “The Stickiness Factor” to create the perfect blend of entertainment and education (TP 91). When the creators of *Sesame Street* conceived of their idea, they spent time figuring out exactly what would keep children’s attentions and what would work for an educational television show: “it is a mistake to think of *Sesame Street* as a project conceived in a flash of insight. What made the show unusual, in fact, was the extent to which it was exactly the opposite of that—the extent to which the final product was deliberately and painstakingly engineered” (TP 99-100).

<sup>43</sup> Some universal themes that appear in the series are good triumphing over evil, friendship, loyalty, the heroic quest, and the issue of morality (or right versus wrong). Granger notes that Rowling is indebted to ten different genres: “schoolboy stories, hero’s journey epics, alchemical drama, manners-and-morals fiction, satire, gothic romance, detective mysteries, adventure tales, coming-of-age novels, and Christian fantasy” (4).

“We didn’t see it as solely children’s literature. It was a . . . good read whether it was for children or not. When Joanne first conceived the books she didn’t see them as just for children” (qtd. in Smith 198). David Heyman, who produced all of the *Harry Potter* movies, comments on how he easily related to the first book: “We’ve all been to school; I’d been to a school not dissimilar to Hogwarts, except without magic. We’ve all had friends who are important to us. We all want to belong in some form or another. We all have teachers that we like and teachers that we don’t like and how great would it be to have magical powers? Above all, it made me laugh. It moved me, and I connected with it” (qtd. in Anelli 66). Rowling took the traditional idea of attending a comprehensive school<sup>44</sup> and transformed it into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, an unforgettable, almost medieval castle that houses the most extraordinary children in Britain. *Harry Potter* was also very carefully planned out and it maintains a consistency from book to book.<sup>45</sup>

While Rowling conceived of *Harry Potter* on a train ride from Manchester to London, the imagining did not stop there; she spent five years thinking, outlining, and mapping out the entire wizarding world before she sent out her manuscript of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* to publishers and agents. She had a clear sense of where the story was headed, and she stayed true to her plan. John Granger explains that Rowling reinvents the familiar, making *Harry Potter* even more appealing: “Rowling *is* writing formula schoolboy fiction. But in her years of ‘meticulous planning’ she had layered into the mechanical format, characters, and themes of this

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<sup>44</sup> A comprehensive school is a public school for children of the same district. Although Hogwarts is a boarding school, it does not follow the same elitist principles that many boarding schools are accused of following. John Nettleship [one of Rowling’s former teachers] is adamant that Hogwarts is broadly speaking a state comprehensive school: “Certainly attendance seems to bear no relation to financial status, nor do pupils have to sit an entrance exam. The Weasley family, who have sent all their seven children there, barely have two ‘sickles’ to rub together. It is the ghastly Dudley Dursley who goes to a fee-paying private school, his father’s alma mater Smeltings” (qtd. in Smith 67).

<sup>45</sup> Both Bloomsbury’s and Scholastic’s editors worked with Rowling to maintain consistency, whether it be certain spells, character traits, or even decorations in the Great Hall (Morreale).

tired genre nine other literary conventions from gothic romance to alchemical drama, and the traditional four layers of meaning, to include allegorical satire and symbolist fantasy” (*Bookshelf* 62). The books also provide a sense of security because they follow a similar structure of beginning at the Dursleys’ house, journeying to Hogwarts, attending classes and bending the rules, finishing the semester with a confrontation of good versus evil (in which good always triumphs), and ending at the train station on the way home for the summer holiday. In the book, *Popular Children’s Literature in Britain*, the authors state, “Whether from having read school stories as a child or as a result of a wider cultural acquaintance with the genre, the ... reader of the ‘Harry Potter’ novels already knows what will happen: at the end of each novel, Potter must return home having completed another year of school” (Briggs, Butts, and Grenby 308). This predictable structure provides comfort and customer loyalty. Of course, Rowling always adds her touch with a surprising dénouement, but the reader can be assured that Harry and his friends will return for the next novel in the series.

*Harry Potter* borrows and expounds on various genres, making it unique yet familiar. By using all of these different genres, Rowling is able to make *Harry Potter* memorable, but also magical. While British readers are likely familiar with the English schooling system, they are still able to discover a new world with Harry. American readers, likely unfamiliar with the schoolboy story tradition or the school system, experience everything from Harry’s acceptance letter, journey to and stay at Hogwarts as magical and fantastical. Not every reader will have attended boarding school, let alone a school of magic somewhere north of London, but the elements of attending school for the first time, coming of age, dealing with horrible and wonderful teachers, and figuring out who to sit next to in the dining hall are all familiar scenarios to anyone who has attended school. Levine and Shapiro note, “Harry Potter’s [story] is the

familiar story of a young boy on a journey of discovery that takes him to a new academic environment, where he eagerly welcomes new experiences, new friends, and new challenges” (8). Hogwarts, the epitomic gothic castle with secret passageways, ghosts, and creepy suits of armor, poses as a microcosm of the wizarding (and real) world. The safety of the world rests on the shoulders of Dumbledore, the wise sage-like Headmaster, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Although only eleven years old at the beginning of the series, Harry and his friends, because of their curiosity and because of certain coincidental circumstances, are inadvertently tasked with thwarting Voldemort’s plans to return to power and take over the wizarding world. Readers can relate to and experience the wealth of adventures in which Harry and his friends participate in each book.

The strength of the story and its recurring and universal themes are strong reasons why readers stayed with the series through all seven books.<sup>46</sup> The archetypal collection of genres, characters, and themes however, make the *Harry Potter* series a sustainable product,<sup>47</sup> creating brand loyalty that surpasses the hype of just the first book. Northrop Frye’s work with Carl Jung’s collective unconscious and the categorizing of archetypes shows that recurring images, characters, themes, and the like are what make literature a part of the universal human experience. While Frye does not necessarily use archetypes to evaluate literature, his purpose is to make connections across works of literature in order to learn about human nature. Frye states

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<sup>46</sup> Fans also felt a deep sense of community with the Harry Potter fandom. Pyne recounts how Rowling spent the night of the release of *Deathly Hallows*: “Rowling held her own party at the Natural History Museum in London. Seated underneath the extended neck of a large dinosaur skeleton, 1,700 lucky guests attended the event. Rowling sat in a big red armchair and read from *The Deathly Hallows* as children of all ages listened eagerly. Fans around the world watched on their computers through a live Web stream of the event. Rowling walked into the crowd for photos, and afterward everyone was treated to an all-night book signing. This was possibly the best place to be in the world on that night!” (33).

<sup>47</sup> The term “sustainable product” comes from Susan Gunelius, who explains that sustainability—or the ability of a product to deliver a certain amount of satisfaction for a certain amount of time—is essential to the success of any product. In regards to *Harry Potter*, Gunelius argues that it was deemed sustainable when Rowling made it clear that she would be writing seven books. This gave fans the assurance that they would live through seven years with Harry (20).

that reading literature “coincides with a feeling that we have all had: that the study of mediocre works of art, however energetic, obstinately remains a random and peripheral form of critical experience, whereas the profound masterpiece seems to draw us to a point at which we can see an enormous number of converging patterns of significance” (“Archetypes” 1309). In his work, *Anatomy of Criticism*, he categorizes seasons as corresponding to different genres, and he also examines certain genres, characters, and themes as archetypes that span and unify literature (*Anatomy* 35). *Harry Potter*, although quite inventive and original, draws from numerous archetypes that all contribute to the collective unconscious of the universal human experience. Thus, readers can directly relate to Harry’s world, even though it is a fantastical and fictional one.

Throughout the series, the characters literally experience the seasons of summer, autumn, winter, and spring, but they also experience Frye’s categorical seasons. And because readers also experience seasons every year and can make connections between the type of season and what it represents throughout the wealth of literature, the categorical seasons are an accurate measure for the universal human consciousness. Each book begins with Harry at his aunt and uncle’s house in the summertime. Whereas Frye’s categorical summer is typically a time of marriage and experiencing the pastoral and idyllic (*Anatomy* 186), Harry’s experience is marred by living in a cramped, spider-infested cupboard under the stairs, and being constantly ordered about, hearing, “*Don’t ask questions*” (SS 25), “He always sp-spoils everything” (SS 29), “I’m warning you now, boy – any funny business, anything at all – and you’ll be in that cupboard from now until Christmas” (SS 29). This juxtaposition of the joys of summertime with the horrors of Harry’s existence under the Dursleys’ roof is an effective means of inducing sympathy for his situation.

The autumn season is, of course, a time of excitement for the students, as they are

returning to Hogwarts for the school year, but much like Frye's category of autumn as the death phase or the archetype of tragedy (*Anatomy* 207), the beginning of the school year is typically when the main characters realize that something is amiss, and Voldemort's dark powers are at work. For example, Halloween is usually the holiday that something dark happens in the books. During his first year, while Harry is beginning to think that "[t]he castle felt more like home than Privet Drive ever had" (SS 211), a couple days later, on Halloween night, Professor Quirrell runs into the Great Hall to exclaim, "'Troll – in the dungeons – thought you ought to know'" (SS 214). The castle, while warm and comfortable, also poses a threat to the students.

The winter phase signifies satire, darkness, and disillusionment (*Anatomy* 224), and spring signifies revival, resurrection, and romance (*Anatomy* 163). Winter typically does not make much of an appearance, with the exception of Christmas at the castle, but spring is where Rowling's classic twist and dénouement takes place. The mystery and intrigue that the autumn brings at the beginning of the school year culminates in the journey to stop Snape—actually Quirrell and Voldemort—from stealing the Sorcerer's Stone. However, at the end of almost every year, Harry and his friends enter into the archetypal spring by defeating Voldemort and restoring order in the wizarding world, until they return for more adventures. The familiarity of the seasons with their natural connotations allows for Harry's world to mirror the real world.

Rowling's *Harry Potter* may have been all wrong for a politically correct market that was unfriendly towards lengthy children's books, but it tipped anyway. "The Law of the Few," "The Power of Context," and "The Stickiness Factor" worked in Rowling's favor in a way that pushed *Harry Potter* into the spotlight and helped it reach its tipping point just three years after it was first published in the UK. Without the help of a few key individuals who believed in Rowling's first story, a media saturated environment, a strong fan community, and the timeless elements of

story repackaged to create a new classic, the world may never have met the boy wizard.

## Chapter Two

### Harry Potter as Outlier and Chosen One

*Harry Potter* tipped and grew to epidemic proportions in America partially because of certain influential people, and a nurturing context, but it has remained popular in America because of those elements that make the series memorable in an unusual way and those that resonate with readers. Harry seems to be the typical disadvantaged orphan that is so often represented in literature,<sup>48</sup> but interestingly, he is afforded a great deal of help through the circumstances of his birth and his friendships that lead him towards choosing to value what is good and to fight against what is evil. The certain circumstances outside of his control that set him apart—from not only Muggle children but also witch and wizard children—certainly provide him opportunities, but it is what he does with those advantages that makes him a relatable hero, contributing to “The Stickiness Factor” of the series. Harry owes much of his success to forces outside himself, and Gladwell’s explanation of outliers also clarifies why, for Harry, “normal rules do not apply” (*Outliers* 7). It also explains why being an outlier makes him an archetypal and relatable hero who not only overcomes great odds, but participates in the human experience of making choices between following good or evil.

Gladwell borrows the term “outliers” from the world of statistics<sup>49</sup> and uses it explain that, despite common belief, extraordinary people succeed because of their upbringing and

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<sup>48</sup> Take any Dickensian orphan for example.

<sup>49</sup> According to Ben-Gal, “An exact definition of an outlier often depends on hidden assumptions regarding the data structure and applied detection method.” However, in the realm of statistics an outlier is typically a piece of data that either deviates so much from the norm or is inconsistent with other observations that it appears to be either suspicious or remarkable (1-2).

Gladwell also provides the dictionary definition of “outlier” in the introduction to his book: “Outlier (noun) 1: something that is situated away from or classed differently from a main or related body 2: a statistical observation that is markedly different in value from the others of the sample” (*Outliers* 3).

culture, not only their innate qualities.<sup>50</sup> Their parentage and patronage are important, and the advantages these unique characters are afforded through opportunities and legacies set them apart. Of course, Gladwell does not assert that the people who are outliers have no control over whether they succeed or not. When asked if success is completely determined, he replies, “I don’t mean to go that far. But I do think that we vastly underestimate the extent to which success happens because of things the individual has nothing to do with” (“Q & A”). Examining an individual’s early life, friends, influences, and opportunities provides insight into the forces outside that individual that help to push him or her towards success. He explains that his purpose in studying outliers<sup>51</sup> is to change the common perceptions of successful people:

My wish with *Outliers* is that it makes us understand how much of a group project success is. When outliers become outliers it is not just because of their own efforts. It’s because of the contributions of lots of different people and lots of different circumstances—and that means that we, as a society, have more control about who succeeds—and how many of us succeed—than we think. That’s an amazingly hopeful and uplifting idea. (“Q & A”)

Thus, his purpose seems to be twofold: to examine the lives of extraordinary people and to acknowledge the typically unacknowledged contributors to those people’s success. While Gladwell’s aim is to focus on the forces outside the individual that help contribute to his or her success, this chapter will take his theory of outliers a step further by acknowledging how the individual uses the advantages of opportunity and legacy to choose the right path and ultimately succeed. Much of Harry’s success can be attributed to his outside circumstances and influences,

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<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, and unfortunately, Gladwell does not provide a clear definition of success, but the examples he provides throughout *Outliers* would imply that by success, he simply means achieving an aim or goal.

<sup>51</sup> He was drawn to the idea because, he says, “I’m interested in people who are outliers—in men and women who, for one reason or another, are so accomplished and so extraordinary and so outside of ordinary experience that they are as puzzling to the rest of us as a cold day in August” (“Q & A”).

but because of these elements that make him an outlier, Harry grows as a person and learns to exercise his free will for good.

For Harry, success is choosing to celebrate and seek after what is good, leading him on the path to defeat the ultimate evil, Lord Voldemort. And while he does choose good over evil, one of the reasons Harry appeals so strongly to readers is that he fits the role of the familiar hero with an imperfect twist.<sup>52</sup> In some ways, Harry seems like an average teenager, but in other ways he can be typified as an archetypal hero. Joseph Campbell's definition of the hero monomyth formula points to Harry as such: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30). Harry ventures from a Muggle life to a wizard life, he encounters forces greater than himself, he defeats those forces, and he bestows boons to the entire wizarding world by ridding it of the most evil wizard of all time. After asserting that each novel in the *Harry Potter* series contains an overarching quest for good versus evil, John Alego explains one of the reasons the archetypal hero resonates with readers: "There is also a single, ultimate quest in the whole cycle. That quest is for Harry to find himself, to discover who and what he is. That is the ultimate quest in life for all of us" (26). Essentially, finding an archetypal character in literature helps readers learn about themselves, and in turn, gives them ways to empathize and identify with the characters on the pages (Prinzi 123).

Harry also deals with very real moral dilemmas. Many of his day-to-day worries have to do with issues any normal young adult deals with: he worries that he will get lost on his way to

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<sup>52</sup> One fan, turned journalist, explains how relatable one of Rowling's imperfect characters was to her: "As a bookish, busy-haired brunette myself, Hermione Granger was an inspiration. I connected not only to her love of learning, but also to her desire to help others (which occasionally bordered on controlling them) and her inability to express her emotions. As she grew from a bossy 11-year-old to a more confident 17-year-old, so did I" (Siede).

class, he wants the other students to like him, he seeks friendships with those he relates to, and he is given detention for disregarding the rules. Harry is a familiar hero because he is very much like a normal young adult; however, although the elements that make Harry a normal kid and young adult are ones that readers can relate to, he still, undeniably, possesses the qualities of a hero. Campbell explains, “[T]he makers of legend have seldom rested content to regard the world’s great heroes as mere human beings who broke past the horizons that limited their fellows and returned with such boons as any man with equal faith and courage might have found” (319). Mythical heroes typically possess some extra, supernatural element that makes them outliers. Campbell continues, “[T]he tendency has always been to endow the hero with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception. The whole hero-life is shown to have been a pageant of marvels with the great central adventure as its culmination” (319). The imperfect twist to Harry’s hero character occurs in his fifth year after he has seen Diggory’s death. Prinzi argues that by the end of the third book, Harry’s story was becoming stereotypical and possibly a bit stagnant, but Rowling knew what she was doing: “she was planning to tear Harry down to rebuild him” (129). Prinzi explains, “The Harry Potter that we meet at the opening of *Order of the Phoenix* is not the likable, downtrodden kid-turned-hero that we had grown to love throughout the first four books. He was sarcastic, mean, angry, bitter, and HE SHOUTED A LOT” (129). Yet, as the phoenix has to pass through fire to experience its rebirth, so Harry has to experience further loss<sup>53</sup> before he can come to the point of willingly sacrificing himself for the greater good of the wizarding world. After being broken down, Harry finally comes to a point where he truly deserves the title of Hero, Chosen One, and outlier.<sup>54</sup> He

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<sup>53</sup> Loss in the form of losing Sirius at the end of *OP* and losing Dumbledore at the end of *HBP*.

<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, this unique aspect of Harry Potter arriving to Hogwarts famous is something that many fans could directly relate to their reading of Harry Potter for the first time. I remember picking up *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* knowing that almost everyone in the real world knew Harry’s name. The books were famous, and

has suffered great loss, and yet, he still chooses to seek after good.

Harry Potter becomes an outlier almost from birth. He is immediately set apart from Muggle children because he is born to a witch and wizard, but what happens to him when he is just a year old is what truly marks him an outlier even in the wizarding world.<sup>55</sup> As he learns from Hagrid,<sup>56</sup> Lord Voldemort, the most evil wizard that the wizarding world has ever known, murdered his parents, but failed in his attempt to murder Harry too; somehow, Harry managed to escape Voldemort's killing curse. Hagrid comments, "No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except you, an' he'd killed some o' the best witches an' wizards of the age . . . an' you was only a baby, an' you lived" (SS 69). However, in his fifth year, Harry learns that Voldemort did more to determine Harry's fate than just make him an orphan; Voldemort chose Harry to be his ultimate opponent.<sup>57</sup> When Voldemort began gathering followers and gaining power, Sybill Trelawney prophesied that a baby, born to wizard parents, would have the power to defeat Voldemort. Her prediction, made to Dumbledore,<sup>58</sup> is as follows:

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when I discovered that the main character was famous in his own world, although I was a mere thirteen-year-old, I couldn't help but make the uncanny connection.

<sup>55</sup> Gladwell's uses the example of hockey players and their birthdays to explain the importance of opportunity in regards to success. He claims that while professional hockey players certainly must be very skilled at their sport, they can gain a great advantage just by having a January, February, or March birthday. In Canada, the cutoff date for hockey little league is January 1st. Gladwell explains, "A boy who turns ten on January 2, then, could be playing alongside someone who doesn't turn ten until the end of the year—and at that age, in preadolescence, a twelve-month gap in age represents an enormous difference in physical maturity" (24). Thus, these players are picked for the elite teams and they end up playing more games, practicing more hours, and receiving better coaching than the players left in the house leagues. Talent is important, but the opportunity of an early birthday may have just as much of an influence in the life of a Canadian hockey player.

<sup>56</sup> Hagrid is the Hogwarts Gamekeeper. He comes to collect Harry from the Dursley's new home after they flee Privet Drive for fear of Harry receiving his Hogwarts letter. It is at the Dursley's cottage that he tells Harry about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

<sup>57</sup> To this end, Dumbledore explains, "He [Voldemort] heard the prophecy and leapt into action, with the result that he not only handpicked the man most likely to finish him, he handed him uniquely deadly weapons . . . By attempting to kill you [Harry], Voldemort himself singled out the remarkable person who sits here in front of me, and gave him the tools for the job!" (HBP 510-11).

<sup>58</sup> When Harry asks who heard the prophecy, Dumbledore states, "I did . . . On a cold, wet night sixteen years ago, in a room above the bar at the Hog's Head Inn. I had gone there to see an applicant for the post of Divination teacher, though it was against my inclination to allow the subject of Divination to continue at all. The applicant, however, was the great-great-granddaughter of a very famous, very gifted Seer, and I thought it common politeness

*THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD  
APPROACHES . . . BORN TO THOSE WHO HAVE THRICE DEFIED HIM,  
BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES . . . AND THE DARK LORD WILL  
MARK HIM AS HIS EQUAL, BUT HE WILL HAVE POWER THE DARK LORD  
KNOWS NOT . . . AND EITHER MUST DIE AT THE HAND OF THE OTHER  
FOR NEITHER CAN LIVE WHILE THE OTHER SURVIVES . . . (OP 841)*

As she makes this prediction unexpectedly and in a public place, Severus Snape, one of Voldemort's supporters at the time, is able to relay part of the prophecy to his master. However, Voldemort never hears the second half. The portion that he hears only gives him the information to discover who the boy would be born to. Dumbledore explains to Harry that part of the reason he survives is because Voldemort's servant does not hear the entire prophecy: "Consequently, he could not warn his master that to attack you would be to risk transferring power to you—again marking you as his equal. So Voldemort never knew that there might be danger in attacking you, that it might be wise to wait or to learn more. He did not know that you would have 'power the Dark Lord knows not'—" (OP 843). Voldemort assumes that killing Harry as a baby will stifle the threat to his power, but he ends up creating his ultimate opponent. Thus, Voldemort's actions alter Harry's future, marking him the Chosen One and further setting him apart from his peers.

Harry's status as an outlier is made even more pronounced when he discovers more about the prophecy and what it means in regards to his free will and his hero's journey. Dumbledore explains to Harry that the prophecy could have been about another wizard baby—Neville Longbottom was also born to wizard parents who had thrice defied Voldemort, and his birthday fell at the end of the seventh month. However, there resides an interesting distinction between

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to meet her. I was disappointed. It seemed to me that she had not a trace of the gift herself. I told her, courteously I hope, that I did not think she would be suitable for the post. I turned to leave" (OP 840).

the two boys, as Dumbledore explains:

And notice this, Harry. He chose, not the pureblood (which according to his creed, is the only kind of wizard worth being or knowing), but the half-blood, like himself. He saw himself in you before he had ever seen you, and in marking you with that scar, he did not kill you, as he intended, but gave you powers, and a future, which have fitted you to escape him not once, but four times so far—something that neither your parents, nor Neville’s parents, ever achieved. (*OP* 842)

While Harry wonders whether Voldemort chose the wrong baby, Dumbledore notes that Voldemort’s choice marks Harry as the Chosen One regardless of which baby the prophecy is about.

However, it is not until Harry’s sixth year, after he and Dumbledore discuss Horcruxes, that Harry understands the prophecy only holds as much power as he and Voldemort allow it. Gregory Bassham asserts that although Divination poses a “paranormal challenge to free will,” one of the wisest wizards of the age, Dumbledore, is not keen on relying too heavily on its practices or prophecies (221-22). Dumbledore even claims that before Trelawney made her prediction, he had considered removing the subject altogether (*OP* 840). However, Dumbledore assures Harry that regardless of what the prophecy says, Harry still has the free will to choose otherwise. As Harry tries to comprehend the power<sup>59</sup> he has that can defeat Voldemort, Dumbledore responds, “But Harry, never forget that what the prophecy says is only significant because Voldemort made it so,” and later, “You are setting too much store by the prophecy” (*HBP* 509). The prophecy does not determine Voldemort’s or Harry’s fate, but the actions they both take because of the prophecy do. Wolosky explains, “[T]he prophecy is significant, not

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<sup>59</sup> Of which Dumbledore explains is “just love” (*HBP* 509).

because it forces events to occur through fate, but because choice governs what finally happens” (91). After a long conversation in which Dumbledore attempts to help Harry understand his own free will in his circumstances, he finally exclaims that Harry is not being dragged into something, but choosing to avenge his parents’ death and fight for love:

You see, the prophecy does not mean you *have* to do anything! But the prophecy caused Lord Voldemort to *mark you as his equal*. . . . In other words, you are free to choose your way, quite free to turn your back on the prophecy! But Voldemort continues to set store by the prophecy. He will continue to hunt you . . . which makes it certain, really that— (*HBP* 512)

“That one of us is going to end up killing the other” (*HBP* 512), Harry finishes. Voldemort chooses and inadvertently hands Harry the right tools that lead to the Dark Lord’s downfall on October 31, 1981, and to his ultimate demise seventeen years later. Because Voldemort acts on the prophecy, he creates his own worst enemy by attempting to kill Harry, thus marking him with a lightning bolt scar, creating a seventh Horcrux, and unknowingly transferring powers to the innocent baby. As Harry learns more about the prophecy and understands that it does not determine his fate, but allows him to choose his own destiny, he willingly accepts the challenge ahead of him.

Harry also gains another advantage the night Voldemort tries to murder him: his mother’s shield of love. Voldemort goes to Godric’s Hollow to murder Harry, with no intention of killing his parents. However, when James gets in his way, Voldemort quickly kills James and continues after his real target. Lily willingly steps in front of Voldemort’s wand in order to shield her son and sacrifice herself, taking the full force of the killing curse. Quite unexpectedly to Voldemort, Lily’s sacrificial love evokes an old magic that he has not foreseen. Harry is not only protected

from the killing curse, but when he encounters Voldemort in his first year at Hogwarts,<sup>60</sup> they both learn that Voldemort cannot touch Harry without feeling physical pain. As a baby, Harry does nothing to defeat Voldemort, but his mother provides him with a shield of protection from the most evil wizard of all time.

Dumbledore argues that Harry's protective love and his ability to love is what sets him apart from Voldemort: "It is Voldemort's fault that you were able to see his thoughts, his ambitions, that you even understand the snakelike language in which he gives orders, and yet, Harry, despite your privileged insight into Voldemort's world . . . you have never been seduced by the Dark Arts, never, even for a second, shown the slightest desire to become one of Voldemort's followers" (*HBP* 511). Dumbledore continues, "You are protected, in short, by your ability to love! . . . The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort's!" (*HBP* 511). Love sets Harry apart even more so than the prophecy or the lightning bolt scar. Armstrong notes, "Love is a central element of Rowling's stories and a central reason why readers love the books" (72). She explains that love or fighting to save loved ones is part of what she deems "the heroic fight for values" (72), of which Harry partakes rather than the dishonorable thirst for power. Dumbledore discusses the importance of love in Harry's life on several occasions, but the strongest statement Dumbledore makes occurs in Harry's fifth year after Harry tries to make sense of Sirius's death:

There is a room in the Department of Mysteries . . . that is kept locked at all times. It contains a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than forces of nature . . . It is the power held within that room that you possess in such quantities and which Voldemort has not at all. That

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<sup>60</sup> In Harry's first year, Voldemort does not have a physical body, but had possessed a willing servant, Professor Quirrell. He resided under the turban that Quirrell wore and hoped to acquire the Sorcerer's Stone in order to make the elixir of life, regain his body, return to power, and live forever.

power took you to save Sirius tonight. That power also saved you from possession by Voldemort, because he could not bear to reside in a body so full of the forces he detests . . . It was your heart that saved you. (*OP* 843-4)

In essence, love is the chief separation—in character and in choice—between Harry and Voldemort. Love protects Harry and becomes his reason for fighting so strongly against Voldemort and anything evil.

If discovering he was born a wizard—and a powerful one at that—was not enough to set Harry apart, he finds himself surrounded by a group of patrons who look out for his best interests and believe in him. His very first patrons are his parents. Although they are tragically killed before Harry can remember them, they did what they could to protect and provide for him. When James and Lily Potter learn that Voldemort has targeted their son, they use the *Fidelius* Charm to hide their whereabouts from Voldemort and his supporters. The *Fidelius* Charm is a complicated spell that requires a Secret Keeper, designated by the one with the secret, to keep the secret hidden by magic. Dumbledore suggested that the Potters use the *Fidelius* Charm and offered to be the Potters' Secret-Keeper, but Harry's father wanted to confide their whereabouts to his best friend, Sirius Black, instead. After going through most of his third year believing that Sirius had betrayed his parents and was now coming to finish the job, Harry learns from Sirius that someone else had been made the Secret Keeper: "I persuaded Lily and James to change to Peter [Pettigrew] at the last moment, persuaded them to use him as Secret-Keeper instead of me" (*PA* 365). Even in this quick decision to change the Secret-Keeper, James was looking out for Harry's best interest. He and Sirius worried that Sirius would be too obvious a Secret-Keeper and that Voldemort would come after their closest friends first, so he decided to switch to a less likely target. Lily and James also named Sirius Harry's godfather instead of Lily's sister Petunia

Dursley. In the event that they both passed away, they would rather Harry go live with their close friend as opposed to relatives who were hostile to their race (*PA* 209).<sup>61</sup>

In addition to taking measures to protect him, Harry's parents also provide for him by saving a small fortune in Gringotts bank. To this end, Gladwell explains that having enough money to focus on one's craft rather than trying to make money is critical to putting in enough hours to become an expert at something.<sup>62</sup> When Harry worries that he will not have enough money to purchase his school things, Hagrid reassures him that his parents have stored enough money away for Harry to make it through his entire seven years at Hogwarts and more (*SS* 93). This provision does not make Harry greedy or careless, but it allows him to focus on his studies, friendships, sports-playing, and his ultimate goal of defeating Voldemort. James also provides Harry with an invaluable tool, the invisibility cloak. The cloak accompanies Harry on countless adventures and helps him evade a great deal of trouble. Not only does the invisibility cloak aid him and his friends, but it serves as proof that the Deathly Hallows do exist, providing Harry, Ron, and Hermione with key evidence they need in their search for Horcruxes. Even in death, Harry's parents seem to be looking out for him and protecting him, and the steps that they took while they were alive to make sure that Harry would be taken care of display how valuable they are as patrons.

Harry also finds a handful of patrons at Hogwarts and sprinkled throughout the wizarding

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<sup>61</sup> However, this is not the case as Sirius is locked up for murdering thirteen people and believed to be the Potters' betrayer. Harry goes to live with Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon Dursley because they are his only living relatives, but also because as long as Harry is under age and calls Petunia's house home, his mother's protection will remain with him (*OP* 836).

<sup>62</sup> Gladwell explains that in order to truly be an expert at something, a person needs to put in roughly 10,000 hours of practice. In regards to having enough money to become an expert at something, he explains, "It's all but impossible to reach that number all by yourself by the time you're a young adult. You have to have parents who encourage and support you. You can't be poor, because if you have to hold down a part-time job on the side to help make ends meet, there won't be enough time left in the day to practice enough. In fact, most people can reach that number only if they get into some kind of special program . . . or if they get some kind of extraordinary opportunity that gives them a chance to put in those hours" (42).

world. Hagrid becomes an early patron as Dumbledore trusts him to bring Harry to the Dursley's house after his parents are killed, and, ten years later, Hagrid is the one who comes to collect Harry when hundreds of Harry's Hogwarts Acceptance letters go unanswered.<sup>63</sup> Hagrid serves as Harry's first real connection to the wizarding world, and he remains a loyal friend throughout Harry's years at school, inadvertently giving Harry and his friends valuable information, trying to help them stay out of trouble, and supporting their fight against Voldemort. Hagrid also gives Harry an invaluable present; after doing some shopping around Diagon Alley, Hagrid insists on buying Harry a beautiful, snowy white owl as a birthday present (SS 101). Not only does Hagrid love animals—and typically very wild and dangerous ones at that—he also makes sure that Harry has possession of this necessary component for communication in the wizarding world.<sup>64</sup>

Professor McGonagall becomes another patron of sorts as she presides as head of Gryffindor House. While she does not show blatant favoritism towards her students, as some professors do,<sup>65</sup> she does take a special interest in their success. When she sees Harry fly on a broomstick and catch Neville's Remembrall, she does not take him to Dumbledore or Filch's office to discuss a punishment,<sup>66</sup> but she introduces him to the Gryffindor Quidditch team captain, claiming that Harry would be a good fit for the Seeker position. Instead of having Harry borrow one of the school brooms, McGonagall purchases the best and newest model, the Nimbus 2000, for Harry and discreetly sends it to him by owl post (SS 203-4). While she may have been

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<sup>63</sup> Harry's Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia take various measures to keep Harry from reading his Hogwarts letter, such as ignoring the mail, boarding up the mail slot, moving to a hotel, and eventually, moving to a shack on a island (SS 53).

<sup>64</sup> Hedwig, his owl, also provides him with company and a connection to his world when he is forced to spend the summers with his awful, Muggle relatives.

<sup>65</sup> Snape very clearly shows favoritism to the Slytherin House, and Malfoy in particular.

<sup>66</sup> During their first flying lesson, Neville's falls off his broom and breaks his wrist. Madam Hooch warns the students that while she takes Neville up to the Hospital Wing, no one is to mount a broom until she returns (SS 182). However, Malfoy immediately disregards Madam Hooch's warning and kicks off from the ground with the intention of hiding Neville's Remembrall. Harry, more concerned with retrieving Neville's Remembrall and bringing Malfoy to justice than he is with following the rules, also kicks off from the ground and chases Malfoy down. While Harry does break the rules, his intention is to right the wrong of the evil-doer, Malfoy, not to break the rules that Madam Hooch set forth.

showing support for her House's team, she certainly goes to great lengths to see Harry, in particular, succeed. Other patrons include Dobby, whose attempts at saving Harry's life often end up putting him in more danger; Professor Lupin, who invests in Harry by giving him private lessons to teach him the *Patronus* Charm;<sup>67</sup> Sirius Black, who acts as a father-figure to Harry for the year-and-a-half that he is a part of Harry's life; and Arthur and Molly Weasley, who treat Harry as their own son, send him Christmas presents, and ultimately look out for his well-being. While all of these people, whether directly affiliated with Hogwarts or simply a part of the wizarding world, show their support for Harry in different ways, they genuinely wish to see him succeed and do what they can to aid him in his endeavors.

The strongest and most influential patron, however, is Dumbledore. As the only wizard whom Voldemort ever feared, Dumbledore takes on the responsibility of learning everything he can about how to finish Voldemort for good. He invests in Harry because he knows—through Trelawney's prophecy—that Harry is the Chosen One and the only one who can defeat Voldemort. He protects Harry by making sure that Petunia, Harry's aunt, knows the seriousness surrounding Harry's safety, and he keeps Harry away from the wizarding world until he comes of age to attend Hogwarts (*OP* 836). While Harry attends Hogwarts, his relationship with Dumbledore grows into more than just a headmaster-student mentorship, but not quite a father-son mentorship.<sup>68</sup> The two strike a balance somewhere in between because not only does Dumbledore keep his distance as he is the headmaster, but in Harry's fifth year, he further distances himself to protect Harry. Dumbledore explains his purpose for avoiding Harry has to do with what Voldemort might do if he knows that Dumbledore and Harry have the close

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<sup>67</sup> In his third year, the Ministry of Magic orders a fleet of Dementors to search Hogwarts and the surrounding area for the recently escaped mass murderer, Sirius Black. While none of the students revel in the Dementors' presence, Harry is particularly affected by their eerie presence—he revisits the moment of his mother's death and often winds up having fainted.

<sup>68</sup> Dumbledore even classifies their relationship as "closer than that of a headmaster and pupil" (*OP* 828).

headmaster-student relationship that they do: “I believed it could not be long before Voldemort attempted to force his way into your mind, to manipulate and misdirect your thoughts, and I was not eager to give him more incentives to do so” (*OP* 827-8).

Dumbledore also distances himself in such a way as to provide Harry with the right tools to discover the way to defeat Voldemort on his own. After stopping Voldemort from stealing the Sorcerer’s Stone, Harry remarks on Dumbledore’s teaching methods: “I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help. I don’t think it was an accident he let me find out how the mirror worked. It’s almost like he thought I had the right to face Voldemort if I could. . . .” (*SS* 376). Eliana Ionoaia notes that Dumbledore seems to be more concerned with teaching Harry and his friends critical thinking than with overseeing every one of their actions. She claims that his methodology “promotes courage, friendship, and reason. He does not constantly punish wrongdoing, such as breaking school rules, since he understands the reasoning behind disregarding them” (72). His concern lies within the overall lesson of learning how to live a virtuous life on the whole rather than getting caught up in the details of the day-to-day. One author compares Dumbledore to the headmaster in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, Thomas Arnold, and states, “Both . . . are valuable male mentors who recognize that a degree of independence is necessary if the hero is to absorb important lessons in a meaningful way” (Galway 75). Every exchange between the two results in Harry learning a little bit more about himself and his destiny. Even when Dumbledore is gone, he has a way of guiding Harry through very subtle means.<sup>69</sup> Through Dumbledore’s guidance, Harry not

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<sup>69</sup> In his seventh year, Harry becomes frustrated with himself for not asking more about Dumbledore’s life and past, and not taking every opportunity to learn more about the daunting task of finding and destroying Horcruxes. But Dumbledore leaves Harry certain hints in the form of bequeathing him and his friends valuable tools—the Snitch, the Light out-puter, and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*—leaving valuable memories for Harry to see in the Pensieve, and giving Aberforth instructions to keep an eye on Harry and his friends through the other half of the two-way mirror.

only learns about his destiny and how to carry it out, but he learns that love, friendship, and loyalty are worth fighting for.<sup>70</sup>

Dumbledore also acts as a father figure for Harry, providing him with some fatherly aspects such as affection and affirmation as well as moral guidance (Ionoaia 75). As the headmaster of Hogwarts, Dumbledore is not obligated to single Harry out and mentor him, but as his ultimate goal is to defeat evil, he invests in Harry in order to help him realize his destiny and grow into the wizard that will accept the challenge. Dumbledore also explains to Harry that while his original plan is to keep his distance, he is unable to execute this as smoothly as he had hoped: “I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than for the lives that might be lost if the plan failed. In other words, I acted exactly as Voldemort expects we fools who love to act” (*OP* 838). While trying to fulfill all of his roles in the wizarding world—Headmaster of Hogwarts, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards—Dumbledore hardly has the time to take on a mentee, but Harry is different. Dumbledore cannot simply view Harry as a pawn in the overarching plan to defeat Voldemort because he has grown to truly care for Harry’s well-being. Of all of Harry’s patrons, Dumbledore provides Harry with the most help and support regardless of whether his means are always effective.

Harry’s friendships are also important in making him an outlier. Ron and Hermione provide Harry with support and a great deal of help. Not only do they rarely waver in their loyalty, but the three round each other out quite well. Ron serves as Harry’s best friend.

Although the two come from different home and economic backgrounds, they form a strong friendship from the start. When Harry is faced with the decision between aligning himself with

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<sup>70</sup> At the end of the movie version of *OP*, Harry states, “I’ve been thinking about something Dumbledore said to me . . . That even though we’ve got a fight ahead of us, we’ve got one thing Voldemort doesn’t have . . . Something worth fighting for” (Cuarón).

the elite Malfoy or the humble Ron, he chooses Ron. When Malfoy snidely comments that “some wizarding families are much better than others,” Harry replies, “I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks” (SS 135). As the first pleasant Hogwarts student<sup>71</sup> that Harry meets, Ron becomes one of Harry’s first introductions into the life of a wizard family. The two can also relate to feeling left out and often forgotten: Ron, being the youngest boy in a family with five older brothers, and Harry, being made to feel as if he were a lesser species than his callous and corpulent cousin, Dudley.<sup>72</sup> They both rely on each other as well. Ron inadvertently relies on Harry’s fame, and Harry relies on Ron’s knowledge of the wizarding world. Ron’s friendship is invaluable to Harry as displayed by Ron being the one whom Harry has to save in the second task of the TriWizard Tournament and by how sorely Harry misses Ron when he leaves Harry and Hermione on their hunt for Horcruxes. Ron constantly proves to be a loyal friend who stands by Harry, hardly asking for anything in return.

Hermione also proves to be a fierce friend, and she consistently proves to be a strong link in the chain of three with her brains and researching skills. Not only is she the top of her class, but she constantly keeps both Harry and Ron in line with their studies and attempts to keep them out of trouble. Hermione acts as the voice of reason when the two boys want to break the rules for one of their schemes. However, she rarely stands in the way of their adventures, and ends up being crucial for their success in many of their endeavors. Both Ron and Hermione serve as valuable to Harry, first for their friendship, and secondly, for their unique skills, bravery, and loyalty. When the three work together, they become a strong cord that can resist almost anything.

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<sup>71</sup> The first Hogwarts student that Harry meets is Malfoy, and he is “strongly reminded of Dudley” (SS 96) and his bullying when the two have their first exchange.

<sup>72</sup> The Dursleys treat Harry as if he does not exist: “The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn’t there—or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn’t understand them, like a slug” (SS 27-8).

The things outside his control dictate most of the trajectory of his life—his magical abilities, his scar, and his fame are a few of the ways in which Harry begins life as an outlier—however, as Dumbledore says, “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (CS 333). Here, Dumbledore’s reference to choices points more so to who a person will become because of those choices rather than simply revealing one’s present character. Gladwell’s theory of outliers focuses more on the outside forces that provide an individual with advantages, and while Harry’s birth, patrons, friendships, and opportunities serve as powerful vessels of support and advantage, what truly typifies Harry as an outlier—a person who does “things that are out of the ordinary” (*Outliers* 17)—are his moral choices and hard work.

Considering his upbringing, Harry could have easily succumbed to a life of revenge, hoping to use his magical powers to manipulate or harm the Dursleys, but this type of revenge never crosses his mind. From the moment he discovers he is a wizard, Harry humbly chooses the brave and honorable path as opposed to the path that leads to ultimate power. Rowling clearly displays the importance of Harry’s choices as early as the opening Sorting Ceremony: “Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought, *Not Slytherin, not Slytherin*” (SS 151). And although the Sorting Hat argues that Harry would do well in Slytherin, the Hat allows Harry to choose. When Harry chooses any of the three houses other than Slytherin—the House of which he had only heard negative things—he believes that he “disassociates himself from the de-centred morality of the Slytherins . . . [choosing] to distance himself from a group of people unhindered by morals, choosing a life of morality and virtue” (Ionoaia 61). While not all Slytherins are “unhindered by morals,” Harry believed the Slytherin House to be a negative one.<sup>73</sup> Thus, Harry

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<sup>73</sup> While the Slytherin House carries a bit of a stigma amongst some of the Hogwarts students—and this stigma is certainly capitalized on by the bully, Malfoy, and his cronies; the Chamber of Secrets opening; and Voldemort being

exercises his free will in a moral way, and it is by choosing to uphold what is good that separates him from Voldemort or any evil he faces.<sup>74</sup> When Harry worries that because he and Voldemort share certain qualities, the Sorting Hat should have placed him in Slytherin, Dumbledore responds by stating, “[T]he Sorting Hat placed you in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think” (CS 333). When Harry admits that he asked the Hat not to place him in Slytherin, Dumbledore responds, “*Exactly*. . . . Which makes you *very different* from Tom Riddle” (CS 333).

From one of his very first moments in the Hogwarts castle, Harry chooses good over evil, and it is this free will he expresses that constantly makes him a better man than Voldemort. One critic argues that free will is essential to any hero, of which Rowling clearly displays throughout her series: “The heroes of the Potter books explicitly accept free will, and they also demonstrate it by making the right choices, regardless of upbringing and environment” (Armstrong 51). Certain aspects of Harry’s life seem to be determined, but he consistently chooses to fight the ultimate evil. Choosing to value what is good does not always line up with blindly following the rules or compromising in tough situations. On several occasions, such as in the race to save the Sorcerer’s Stone, opening the Chamber of Secrets, and defying Umbridge, Harry chooses to break rules for the greater cause of defeating Voldemort than to worry about the lesser consequence of being expelled. And despite his hatred towards the man who betrayed his parents, Harry also stops Sirius and Professor Lupin from killing Peter Pettigrew. He does this because, morally, it would be better for Sirius to have his name cleared and for Lupin to remain

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the most infamous wizard to come from that House—the Slytherin House did celebrate certain strong, and good, qualities: resourcefulness and determination (CS 333). Harry also shows that he has graduated from such prejudices against Slytherin when he consoles Al about his worries that *he* might be placed in the infamous House: “Albus Severus . . . you were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew” (DH 758). He also assures Al that—like he had when he was sorted—the Sorting Hat would allow students to choose (DH 758).

<sup>74</sup> Another evil, for example, would be the Ministry of Magic during his fifth year when the Minister and his pawns refuse to believe Harry and Dumbledore that Voldemort had returned to power.

blameless than for the two to become murderers.<sup>75</sup> Harry becomes an outlier at an early age, but he remains an outlier throughout his years at Hogwarts largely because of the choices he makes in regards to the fight between good and evil.

Harry is not only set apart as an outlier because of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding his fame and his supportive patrons, but also because of the choices that distance him from Voldemort and the hard work that he and his friends put into learning how to defeat him year after year. Although Harry and Voldemort are linked through Harry's scar and some external similarities, their choices are what truly separate and disassociate them. The first time that Harry realizes just how similar he and Voldemort are is when Tom Riddle points it out in the *Chamber of Secrets*: "There are strange likenesses between us, after all. Even you must have noticed. Both half-bloods, orphans raised by Muggles. Probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even *look* something alike" (CS 317). However, although the two share some similarities, their choices set them on very different paths. For instance, when Tom discovers he is a wizard, he replies with "I knew I was special. Always, I knew there was something" (HBP 271), and upon learning this fact, Riddle's face contorts into something somehow less than human. From the beginning, Tom shows signs of dishonesty—by hiding a box of stolen treasures in the closet at his orphanage (HBP 273)—and having a controlling and authoritative demeanor—by demanding that Dumbledore show him magic (HBP 271). Harry, on the contrary, shows humility and only a thirst to prove himself: "Hagrid looked at Harry with warmth and respect blazing in his eyes, but Harry, instead of feeling pleased and proud, felt quite sure there had been a horrible mistake. A wizard? Him? How could he possibly be?" (SS 71). Harry is finally given an explanation for all of the strange

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<sup>75</sup> To this Harry responds to Pettigrew's gushing by stating, "I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing it because—I don't reckon my dad would've wanted them to become killers—just for you" (PA 376).

things he has been able to do like re-grow his hair after a bad haircut, or talk to the snake at the zoo, but instead of revel in his newfound ability, he has difficulty accepting that he is special, let alone famous.

Although they come from similar circumstances, Tom and Harry have very different outlooks on and responses to life. Tom chooses to view himself as better than the other orphans and finds a way to celebrate his “special” blood in the wizarding world. He is sorted into Slytherin, the House that values power, resourcefulness, and determination (CS 333). And he sets himself apart by choosing the path that leads to immortality and total power. Later, he becomes obsessed with discovering more about his family, no doubt looking for yet another means to measure himself as greater than his fellow wizards. It would seem that Voldemort’s eventual choice to reject love and anything good is simply determined for him by his family’s pureblood obsession, his orphan upbringing, and his mother’s sins; however, none of these seeming disadvantages serve as viable reasons for his choices towards evil. In the essay, “Love Potion No. 9 3/4,” Bassham explains that while Merope, Tom Riddle’s mother, came from a rough family background<sup>76</sup> and made some negative choices—like bewitching the handsome Muggle Tom Riddle Sr. with a love potion—she eventually chooses to stop deceiving him, and in turn, chooses to turn her back on evil and seek good. He states, “At the risk of losing the love of her life, her unborn child’s father, and perhaps the first happiness she ever experienced, at the risk of rejection and terrible pain—pain that did in fact practically kill her with a broken heart—she did the right thing, choosing character over power, reality over appearance, forgiveness over resentment” (74). Although Tom displays sinister qualities at an early age, he does so despite his

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<sup>76</sup> The members of the Gaunt family—of which Merope is the only daughter—were the last remaining relatives of Salazar Slytherin. While their ancestors came from immense wealth, they had very little to hold onto but their pureblood pride and their family heirlooms. Merope is mistreated by both her brother, Morphin, and her father, Marvolo for being a Squib—a witch or wizard child who cannot perform magic—and for loving the Muggle, Tom Riddle Sr.

mother's eventual noble choices, not because he is destined for evil at birth.

On the other hand, Harry's only intention is to fit in. He does not attempt some valiant quest to live up to his famous name, but he innocently enters the wizarding world in hopes of finding himself and learning everything he can about the world in which his parents lived. He does not seek ultimate power or immortality; he seeks to survive. Of all people, Harry, who has been abused and mistreated for ten years, sees no need to take revenge on his aunt and uncle, but he simply seeks to make a life for himself in the place where he thinks he can finally belong. And while being an outlier often has more to do with parentage and patronage, Harry's choices seem to make him an outlier even more so than the circumstances outside of his control that set him apart from other wizard children.

Harry is abnormal in the real world, but he is also extraordinary in the wizarding world. He is famous before he can walk or talk because his mother's love protects him from Voldemort's killing curse. He does not do anything to save himself or defeat Voldemort, but his mother's sacrifice allows him to live, causing Voldemort to fall. Because Harry is orphaned at a very young age, born to wizard parents, and protected from Voldemort through his mother's love, he is an outlier. Harry deals with very real choices and moral dilemmas of which his many outside influences help steer him in the right direction, giving him the tools he needs to choose good over evil. Much of being an outlier is out of a person's control, and Harry is no exception. He is given certain abilities through forces outside himself; however, his choices are what truly set him apart and are what lead him towards his ultimate destiny of defeating Voldemort. This is essential to why American readers care about the Boy Who Lived; he is an imperfect hero who receives a great deal of help, but through the help and support of others, he has something worth fighting for.

### Chapter Three

#### How the Ultimate Underdog Defeats an Unbelievable Giant: Harry Potter Versus

#### Voldemort

Arguably, the *Harry Potter* series resonates with American readers in particular because Harry Potter serves as the ultimate underdog, an archetype that Americans typically identify with and support. And while Harry Potter is an outlier, who benefits from extraordinary opportunities and receives a great deal of outside help, one of the reasons he needs so much help is that he is a highly disadvantaged underdog. Being an underdog, however, is one of the strongest reasons he stands out as a notable and likeable main character. Because he grows up separate from the wizarding world, he enters Hogwarts as an outsider who must rely on his patrons and friends for support and insight into this new world. He also has the opportunity to face Voldemort or some form of the Dark Arts at the end of every school year. In Gladwell's most recent sociological study, *David and Goliath*, he explains that being an underdog<sup>77</sup> and "facing overwhelming odds[,] produces greatness and beauty" (6); Harry certainly faces a giant that is seemingly much greater than himself, but through his supposed weaknesses, he is able to defeat the ultimate evil of Lord Voldemort.

As with his other works, Gladwell seeks to challenge assumptions about underdogs, and explains that underdogs, outsiders, and misfits develop a unique set of advantages through what they, and other people, may see as disadvantages. The focus of this chapter centers on what Gladwell calls the set of advantages "that have to do with the *absence* of material resources" (25) that somehow work as benefits rather than disadvantages. Gladwell further explains, "[B]eing an underdog can *change* people in ways that we often fail to appreciate: it can open doors and create

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<sup>77</sup> Gladwell does not give a specific definition of underdog, but through the examples and anecdotes that he offers, they imply that by underdog he means anyone who appears to be disadvantaged and up against great odds.

opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seemed unthinkable” (6). Harry cannot succeed simply as an outlier alone, but because he is also an underdog, his seeming disadvantages provide him with exactly the tools he needs to succeed. What he is not afforded as an outlier, he makes up for as an underdog; thus, he resonates with readers as a flawed hero, who overcomes great obstacles due to immense help from friends and the willingness never to stop fighting for love and truth.

Unlike *The Tipping Point* and *Outliers* in which Gladwell borrows terms from sociology and statistics, he instead draws from the biblical example of the ultimate underdog overcoming the giant in *David and Goliath*. The story of David defeating Goliath is one that characterizes the underdog versus giant motif because, aside from supernatural intervention, David hardly stands a chance against Goliath. Yet, as Gladwell explains, David does not play by Goliath’s rules. Rather than engage in hand-to-hand combat, in which Goliath would have excelled, David chooses to play to his *own* strengths by keeping his distance and using a sling and stones for his weapons (*DG* 13). In the battle between David and Goliath, Saul prepares David for battle in the way that *he* knows how to succeed, with strong and heavy weapons and armor. But these things only weigh David down. However, his skills of agility and marksmanship—which he uses to fight Goliath—come not from the privilege of education or special training, but through his humble job as the family’s shepherd. Gladwell notes, Saul and his military strategists thought they knew the best way to defeat the giant, but what they did not realize was that David had a lifetime of preparation for such a task (*DG* 15). The lean and soft-featured David looked like he would crumble against the nine-foot-six-inch giant Goliath, but underdog strengths often hide behind the surface. Gladwell states, “We think of underdog victories as improbable events: that’s why

the story of David and Goliath has resonated so strongly all these years . . . [however,] [u]nderdogs win all the time” (DG 22).

Gladwell challenges common misconceptions of success—among other things—in both *The Tipping Point* and *Outliers*, and with *David and Goliath*, he turns to success in the form of defeating giants, whether those giants are people, countries, odds, or other such challenges that someone might face. Gladwell explains that his purpose for exploring underdog stories is twofold: “The first is that much of what we consider valuable in our world arises out of these kinds of lopsided conflicts . . . And second, that we consistently get these kinds of conflicts wrong” (DG 6). *David and Goliath*, as Gladwell notes, “[T]ells the story of a different person—famous or unknown, ordinary or brilliant—who had faced an outsize challenge and been forced to respond. Should I play by the rules or follow my own instincts? Shall I persevere or give up? Should I strike back or forgive?” (5). Often, weaknesses appear to work against any underdog, but Gladwell argues that it is precisely because of certain weaknesses and disadvantages that some people are able to overcome great odds.

In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling capitalizes on the underdog effect<sup>78</sup> by making Harry the ultimate example of one. One of the first elements that makes Harry an outlier is also what makes him an underdog: he is orphaned by the most evil and powerful wizard of all time. Not only does this elicit sympathy, but it sets him apart from the norm. John Granger explains that Harry follows a literary tradition that sets him up as a sympathetic character: “She [Rowling] pulls the ultimate empathy-winning card in English literature and plays it to the hilt. Harry Potter

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<sup>78</sup> In fact, John Granger argues that “[a]ll of her [Rowling’s] good guys are misfits. Hermione is a Mudblood. Ron and the Weasleys are dirt poor and blood traitors. Hagrid is half-giant. Sirius is an escaped prisoner and convicted murderer looking at a Dementor’s Kiss first thing if he is caught. Remus? Werewolf. Tonks? Metamorphmagus. Firenze is a friendly centaur who might as well have a red shiny nose like Rudolph. Mad-Eye has gone round the twist with ‘constant vigilance.’ Mundungus is a thief and coward. Severus . . . well, where do you start with the Potions Master? Dumbledore seemed the only Boy Scout in his army but we learn in *Deathly Hallows* he has a Machiavellian streak as big as the Room of Requirement” (*Bookshelf* 16).

is an orphan, and, not only does he not have loving parents, he is saddled with relations who are almost unbelievably cruel to him” (*Bookshelf* 17). The Dursleys reinforce Harry’s underprivileged position by treating him as if his very presence in their lives is a severe imposition to which they most certainly did not agree. Granger explains that the role of the reader then becomes that of an adoptive friend or parent: “He has no one, so we identify him as one of us” (*Bookshelf* 17). Few readers of *Sorcerer’s Stone* can actually relate to the circumstances of his upbringing, but his innocent and humble attitude towards his situation—when he has every right to be bitter—makes him a charming eleven-year-old, discovering the wizarding world for the first time. Alongside this sweet boy, readers also become introduced to this fantastical world, which strengthens the bond with the main character. Harry comes into the wizarding world with completely fresh eyes and perspective, and although he has few advantages, those elements that set him apart—whether negatively or positively—eventually work in his favor.<sup>79</sup>

Harry’s upbringing hardly seems like it would set him up for success, but surprisingly, it equips Harry with one of his greatest advantages against Lord Voldemort: he is not afraid to speak his name.<sup>80</sup> Growing up in the Muggle world means that everything in the wizarding world is new to him. Thus, despite Hagrid’s explanation—“I don’ like sayin’ the name if I can help it. No one does” (*SS* 67)—the name of Lord Voldemort fails to instill fear in him from the beginning. In the essay, “Harry Potter, the Phoenix: The Hero’s Fiery Trail,” Travis Prinzi explains, “The Dark Arts, and Voldemort himself, are the nursery demon of the entire culture—

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<sup>79</sup> There are countless examples of Harry being an underdog or misfit throughout each book in the series. This chapter will not provide an exhaustive list, but will explore those examples which are the strongest, or which display the David and Goliath effect of disadvantages working as advantages the best.

<sup>80</sup> Tom Marvolo Riddle sheds his common name to take on a name that eventually spreads awe and terror amongst the wizarding world, enough so that witches and wizards fear to even speak his name. Wolosky claims, “Voldemort’s name is a mark—not a revelation—a way to hide from himself and others and thus to intimidate and gain power over them” (15).

the thing young ones are taught to fear the most . . . [but] Harry, . . . says the name from the first time he hears it; right from the start, the story's hero has taken a braver stance towards the nursery demon than the majority of the Wizarding World" (127). While every wizard child grows up hearing about the terrors of Lord Voldemort—or He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named—Harry's Muggle upbringing spares him that fear.

Throughout his first year, however, his friends and peers discourage Harry from using Voldemort's name. After he and his friends prevent Voldemort from stealing the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry begins to correct himself by saying to Dumbledore, "I've been thinking . . . Sir — even if the Stone's gone, Vol-, I mean, You-Know-Who—" (SS 370), but Dumbledore quickly cuts him off and exclaims, "Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself" (SS 370). Once Voldemort returns, at the end of Harry's fourth year, Harry—like Dumbledore—encourages his friends and classmates to say Voldemort's name to give them courage and confidence when dealing with the reality of the Dark Lord's return. Voldemort continues to imbue fear in the wizarding world because he, as Wolosky explains, "weaves taboos around the saying of his name . . . [which] is another aspect of Voldemort's attempt to play god" (15). Being able to speak Voldemort's name without fear provides Harry with a valuable tool. Just like David plays to his own strengths and fails to give Goliath the satisfaction of playing by the usual rules, so Harry does not give in to Voldemort's name game.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> To the wizarding world, Voldemort appears to be an almost indestructible giant, but according to Gladwell, even giants have their weaknesses. Goliath likely suffered from a pituitary gland disease called acromegaly, which causes extreme growth and vision problems. His size was certainly threatening in hand-to-hand combat, but David does not give Goliath the chance to engage in the warfare that he is used to (DG 14). Gladwell explains: "What the Israelites saw, from high on the ridge, was an intimidating giant. In reality, the very thing that gave the giant his size was also the source of his greatest weakness . . . The powerful and the strong are not always what they seem" (DG 14-5).

Another aspect of Harry's life that marks him as an underdog is his lightning bolt scar. His scar denotes his having been touched by a powerful, evil curse.<sup>82</sup> The lightning bolt scar sets him apart from the rest of the wizarding world as the Boy Who Lived and eventually, the Chosen One, making him famous, but also making him an outsider. While living in the Dursley home, Harry is told that his parents died in a car crash and that he received his scar on that occasion. As Harry is not allowed to ask questions and is discouraged from ever mentioning his parents, the scar becomes an unspoken connection between him and them: "The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead that was shaped like a bolt of lightning. 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 gotten it" (SS 25). Harry's scar links him to the wizarding world before he knows of its existence. Hagrid even uses Harry's scar as backing for when he reveals Harry's true magical identity. Hagrid exclaims, "Never wondered how you got that mark on yer forehead? That was no ordinary cut. That's what yeh get when a powerful, evil curse touches yeh — took care of yer mum an' dad an' yer house, even — but it didn't work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Harry" (SS 69). Thus, Harry's scar acts as a symbol of the horror he survived, marking him as distinguishably famous.

He hardly hungers for the attention that his scar brings, however, and often views it as something that sets him apart from his peers in a negative way. On several occasions, Harry notices people glance up at his hairline to look at the legendary mark, and he wishes they would leave him alone. His scar constantly reminds him that because Voldemort decided to come after him, he will never enjoy the normal life that the majority of his classmates do. Harry's scar remains a permanent separation between him and the rest of the wizarding world, and on the whole, Harry sees this as a negative feature.

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<sup>82</sup> In fact, Harry is the only person to ever survive a Killing Curse.

However, while Harry's scar serves as a painful reminder of the past, it comes with a unique set of advantages that turn his experience as an outsider into a powerful weapon against Voldemort. According to Dumbledore, "Scars can come in handy" (SS 19), and he explains to McGonagall that even if he could remove Harry's scar, he would not. For underdogs, being close to something traumatic or scarring, but not being significantly harmed by it can produce a feeling of invincibility in the individual (DG 13). This invincibility is what Gladwell terms a "near miss" or a "remote miss" (DG 134). He explains, "[T]he same event can be profoundly damaging to one group while leaving another *better off*" (DG 134). Harry's scar is evidence of the first "near miss" of his life. It shows that he has survived something potentially fatal, but he has emerged better off; he has been given certain powers from his mother, a shield of sacrificial love, and powers from Voldemort, the ability to speak to snakes. Each time Harry meets Voldemort, in his first four years, he escapes somehow with another "near miss" to push him towards success. Harry tempts this feeling of invincibility as he actively tries to thwart whatever threat appears.<sup>83</sup> His scar also acts as a warning for whenever Voldemort is near or feels a particularly powerful feeling.<sup>84</sup> While his scar marks him as different from those around him, it provides him with a momentary feeling of invincibility and valuable insight into Voldemort's whereabouts and feelings.

Harry is deemed extraordinary in the wizarding world before he enters it, but he truly begins to feel the effects of being an outsider in his second year. After learning he is a wizard and a unique part of a completely different world, he spends his first summer at Privet Drive

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<sup>83</sup> The threat in his first year is Voldemort trying to get the Sorcerer's Stone. Of course, most of the year, Harry and his friends suspect Snape, but the real culprit is Voldemort acting through Professor Quirrell. The threat in his second year is Tom Riddle's diary, or the part of Voldemort's soul that resided in the diary Horcrux. In his third year, Sirius Black appears to be the threat, but the true Servant of the Dark Lord ends up being Peter Pettigrew—also known as Wormtail or Scabbers. And in his fourth year, Voldemort remains the threat once again, but Barty Crouch, Jr.—disguised as Alastor Moody, the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor—orchestrates most of the action against Harry by adding his name to the Goblet of Fire and helping him reach the Triwizard Cup.

<sup>84</sup> This becomes more pronounced after Voldemort returns to full power at the end of Harry's fourth year.

without any contact from his new world. Although he had certainly felt alone living in the cupboard under the stairs before he knew Hogwarts existed, Harry's loneliness is heightened now that he actually has people to miss: "Harry missed his best friend, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. They, however, didn't seem to be missing him at all. Neither of them had written to him all summer, even though Ron has said he was going to ask Harry to come and stay" (CS 7).<sup>85</sup> Of course, Harry later learns that Dobby, the house-elf, has been stealing the letters from his friends in hopes of discouraging Harry from returning to Hogwarts. When he returns to Hogwarts, however, Harry becomes an outsider once more with the opening of the Chamber of Secrets.<sup>86</sup> Not only is he accused of being the culprit, but all of the evidence seems to be pointing to him too.

During a dueling club match, Harry accidentally reveals to a number of his classmates that he is a Parselmouth.<sup>87</sup> He tells the snake that Malfoy conjures to leave Justin Finch-Fletchley alone, not realizing that to do this, he has to speak in a different language. Harry's command is brave, indeed, but his peers think differently. Ron exclaims, "You're a Parselmouth. Why didn't you tell us?" (CS 195). Because Harry is so new to the wizarding world, he just assumes that being able to talk to snakes is part of being a wizard. He does not understand the loaded history behind such a gift, but Ron responds, "Harry, this is bad" (CS 196). Hermione provides a more

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<sup>85</sup> Harry's cousin, Dudley, uses Harry's loneliness to tease him. And eventually, the teasing, while easy to ignore at the beginning of the summer, starts to make him doubt further: "but Dudley had said the very thing Harry had been thinking himself ... maybe he *didn't* have any friends at Hogwarts..." (CS 10).

<sup>86</sup> As Harry hears the basilisk through the walls, he, Ron, and Hermione appear at the scene of the crime. Argus Filch accuses Harry of writing the eerie message—"THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE" (CS 138)—by exclaiming, "He did it, he did it! . . . You saw what he wrote on the wall! He found – in my office – he knows I'm a – I'm a – . . . He knows I'm a Squib<sup>86!</sup>" (CS 142). Filch assumes that because Harry saw something questionable in his office, he is acting out a prejudice that the heir of Slytherin would employ. Not only is he marked as prejudiced, but Harry hardly wants to admit that what led him to the hallway with the writing on the wall was "a bodiless voice no one but he could hear" (CS 143).

<sup>87</sup> Snape offers to get rid of the snake, yet Lockhart cannot help but step in and attempt to show off his magical abilities: "the snake, instead of vanishing, flew ten feet into the air and fall back to the floor with a loud smack. Enraged, hissing furiously, it slithered straight toward Justin Finch-Fletchley and raised itself again, fangs exposed, poised to strike" (CS 194). As Harry has already spoken to a snake once before, he bravely calls the snake off by shouting, "Leave him alone!" (CS 194).

complete reason for why Harry's language gift is an issue: "It matters . . . because being able to talk to snakes was what Salazar Slytherin was famous for. That's why the symbol of Slytherin House is a serpent" (CS 196). Having accidentally revealed this "gift," Harry incriminates himself as the most likely suspect in the Chamber of Secrets crime. Throughout the rest of *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry, Ron, and Hermione do everything they can to clear Harry's name. However, even after the heir of Slytherin is caught, Harry's ability to speak Parseltongue follows him as a negative mark. In his fourth year, Rita Skeeter uses Parseltongue as a strike against Harry in her piece on his entering the Triwizard Tournament, and Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic, deems Harry untrustworthy because of it. In an essay on Otherness in the *Harry Potter* series, Giselle Liza Antol points out, "Rowling suggests here the irony of their [Skeeter's and Fudge's] bigotry. In the same way that witches are ostracized in the Muggle world for having the rare gift of being able to perform magic, members of wizarding society censure Harry for his linguistic gift" (169). While Harry struggles with being isolated and shunned amidst the halls of Hogwarts, speaking Parseltongue further separates him from the rest of the wizarding world.

Although Harry feels alone and isolated during the summer and at the beginning of the term, his friendships with Ron and Hermione strengthen by their willingness to help clear Harry's name and solve the Chamber of Secrets mystery.<sup>88</sup> They bond through the difficult task of brewing the Polyjuice Potion, and, yet again, Ron and Hermione help Harry with his ultimate goal of defeating Voldemort. Hermione provides the final piece of evidence that Harry needs

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<sup>88</sup> Harry certainly suffers isolation from his peers, but this spurs him to attempt to discover who the true heir of Slytherin is in order to stop the attacks and clear his name. Harry becomes connected with the Chamber of Secrets in several ways: he can hear the basilisk hissing Parseltongue through the pipes, he is discovered as being a Parselmouth, and he has a hunch that Draco Malfoy—who has shown his hatred towards Muggleborns from the beginning—is behind the attacks. These connections—along with sheer curiosity—prompt Harry and his friends to do everything they can to solve the Chamber of Secrets mystery. They ask their professors about the Chamber, they scour the library, and they brew a Polyjuice Potion to ask Malfoy outright if he is the culprit. As Harry has finally discovered a place where he belongs, being ostracized and isolated from his wizarding world peers creates the desire for him to figure out who the heir of Slytherin truly is and how to make the attacks stop.

before he makes his journey to the Chamber. Although she is petrified by the basilisk, she holds the final clue in her hands. When Harry and Ron visit her in the hospital wing, they realize that she is clenching a page torn from a library book. The page details what type of monster is in the Chamber of Secrets, and her inscription at the bottom of the page—“Pipes” (CS 290)—explains how the large snake has been getting around the school undetected. Even in her petrified state, Hermione provides valuable information for the quest to find the Chamber. Ron accompanies Harry down to the Chamber as far as he can go, but the two are separated when a Memory Charm goes awry and the cave wall comes crashing down.<sup>89</sup> Although Harry must enter the Chamber alone, his friends stand by him as far as they can, and they come through for the second year in a row. Ron and Hermione believe Harry when he hears a bodiless voice, they do not ignore him when he is discovered as a Parselmouth, and they do whatever they can to aid him in his mission. When the rest of Harry’s classmates question his involvement with the Chamber of Secrets and isolate him because of their suspicions, Ron and Hermione stay true.

Harry’s ability to speak Parseltongue, while a seeming disadvantage at first, also becomes a valuable link to Voldemort. Harry worries that the Sorting Hat should have put him in Slytherin because of his obvious ties to the dark house. He confesses to Dumbledore, “The Sorting Hat told me I’d – I’d have done well in Slytherin. Everyone thought *I* was Slytherin’s heir for a while . . . because I can speak Parseltongue” (CS 332). To which Dumbledore replies, “You can speak Parseltongue, Harry . . . because Lord Voldemort – who *is* the last remaining

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<sup>89</sup> Professor Lockhart also accompanies Harry and Ron into the Chamber, and as he is a phony, who only stole great stories from other witches and wizards, modified their memories, and passed off their courageous feats as his own, he attempts to do the same to Harry and Ron. However, when Harry and Ron discover Lockhart is a fake, Harry disarms him and forces him to lead the way down to the Chamber. Whilst in the Chamber, Lockhart resorts to stealing Ron’s wand in order to avoid any danger and once again take the glory for himself. After he feigns a fainting spell, and plunges for Ron’s wand, Lockhart exclaims, “The adventure ends here, boys! . . . I shall take a bit of this skin back up to the school, tell them I was too late to save the girl, and that you two *tragically* lost your minds at the sight of her mangled body—say good-bye to your memories!” (CS 303). Unfortunately for Lockhart, Ron’s wand had been snapped in half at the start of the term and hardly produced a decent spell the entire year. Lockhart’s Memory Charm backfires, and he loses his own memory in the process.

ancestor of Salazar Slythering – can speak Parseltongue. Unless I’m much mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar. Not something he intended to do, I’m sure” (CS 332-3). Voldemort accidentally makes Harry his seventh Horcrux, and, in doing so, a part of his soul goes into Harry. While Harry is protected from Voldemort through his mother’s love, the bit of Voldemort’s soul that resides in him allows him to speak Parseltongue. This enables Harry to hear the basilisk, open the Chamber of Secrets, and, eventually, understand exchanges between Voldemort and Nagini, his snake. This link to Voldemort appears to put Harry at a disadvantage, but through his choices and his fight for good, Harry distances himself from Voldemort, making the underdog effect work in his favor.

In his third and fourth years, Harry is again isolated from his peers because of various threats to his life. In his third year, he begins seeing the Grim death omen everywhere, he faints whenever a Dementor comes around, and he is warned that the mass murderer and escaped prisoner, Sirius Black, is after him. In his fourth year, he is mysteriously entered into the Triwizard tournament, despite various security measures that Dumbledore imposes precisely to keep wizards under the age of seventeen out. These desperate circumstances force Harry to employ a specific underdog strategy: hard work. Gladwell explains that underdogs have to find their own way to succeed, and this way usually involves a slight adjustment to the norm and extra practice. He states, “To play by David’s rules you have to be desperate. You have to be so *bad* that you have no choice” (DG 34). Gladwell uses the example of scrappy basketball teams using the full court press to defeat giants of opponents; this style of play has not become popular, despite its incredible results, and the reason why is because “[u]nderdog strategies are *hard*” (32).<sup>90</sup> Harry knows that he must overcome the effect of the Dementors, so he works tirelessly

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<sup>90</sup> Gladwell uses the example of Vivek Ranadive’s seventh and eighth grade girls’ basketball team. Ranadive became the coach of his daughter’s team. And these girls were a genuine group of misfits: “They weren’t all that

with Professor Lupin to learn the *Patronus* Charm. When he discovers that Sirius Black was the one to betray his parents, he abandons his fears about being Black's target and seeks to avenge his parents' death: "For the first time in his life, he wanted his wand back in his hand, not to defend himself, but to attack . . . to kill" (PA 339). For the Triwizard tournament, Harry first has to deal with the jealousy from Ron before he can give the first task his full focus. And even when he discovers what the first task is, he must rely on others to help him practice for and face the challenge. Because Harry is more disadvantaged than the others around him, he has to compensate by working extra hard to succeed.

At the end of Harry's fourth year, however, he goes through a significant transformation and coming-of-age moment that he seems unable to recover from. When he witnesses Cedric Diggory's death, Harry's experience with Voldemort is no longer a "near miss"; Prinzi argues, "The death of Cedric, on the other hand—watching Voldemort kill someone just because he was there—wrecked him, plunged him into grief he had never known before" (138). The Harry in *The Order of the Phoenix* is a much darker, troubled young man. Prinzi continues, "He's gone from our innocent, easily-lovable hero to a sarcastic, angry, impatient kid. He can see thestrals, which means he has fully experienced the pain of watching someone die. He isolates himself and snaps at those closest to him—a natural subconscious, survival-minded reaction to the realization that death can come at any moment, even to those closest to you" (138). The feeling of invincibility through a "near miss" is no longer possible for Harry. He spends the better part of

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tall. They couldn't shoot. They weren't particularly adept at dribbling. They were not the sort who played pickup games at the playground every evening . . . His team was made up of, as Ranadive put it, 'little blond girls'" (DG 20). In order for this team of misfits to have any chance in the world of seventh and eighth grade basketball, they were going to have to fight. Ranadive had the girls run and run and run, and their go-to play was the full court press. More often than not, they won because they worked hard and they played the press. Ranadive's daughter said, "We would press and steal, and do that over and over again. It made people so nervous. There were teams that were a lot better than us, that had been playing a long time, and we would beat them" (DG 27).

his fifth year brooding around and he never fully expresses to anyone just how much Cedric's death has affected him until Ron and Hermione suggest he teach them defensive spells:

*You don't know what it's like! You—neither of you—you've never had to face him [Voldemort], have you? You think it's just memorizing a bunch of spells and throwing them at him, like you're in class or something? The whole time you know there's nothing between you and dying except your own—your own brain or guts or whatever—like you can think straight when you know you're about a second from being murdered, or tortured, or watching your friends die . . . and you two sit there acting like I'm a clever little boy to be standing here, alive, like Diggory was stupid, like he messed up – you just don't get it, that could just as easily have been me, it would have been if Voldemort hadn't needed me. (OP 327-8)*

He finally confides in Ron and Hermione what has changed him. What once was a “near miss” became much closer to a direct hit. Before, Harry's only experience with death had been subconscious: “he was so young, he never experienced the conscious grief of having lost loved ones” (Prinzi 138). As Diggory becomes somewhat of a friend through their shared competition in the Triwizard Tournament, Harry actually experiences a tangible and memorable loss of someone, and he loses the last part of his innocence in the process.

Harry is severely broken down before he can defeat the greatest giant of the wizarding world. For the next two years,<sup>91</sup> Harry deals with the loss of Cedric, Sirius, and eventually, Dumbledore; and the weight of all of these losses is necessary to tear Harry down so that he can rise from the ashes and transform. Rowling drastically changes her story formula with the fourth book, and this formula change greatly affects her hero: “*Goblet of Fire* was the first book of the

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<sup>91</sup> His fifth and sixth years at Hogwarts.

*Harry Potter* series in which good did not prevail in the end. Year 5 would end with Harry's horrendous mistake, resulting in Sirius's death, and year 6 would end with the murder of Albus Dumbledore" (Prinzi 129). These formula changes point to an important shift in Harry's maturing process. Harry has already faced dark horrors in his past, but he has never faced something as close or as real as this. He sees flashes and memories of the night that Voldemort killed his parents, but seeing Voldemort kill Cedric simply because he is the spare, makes the ruthlessness of Voldemort a reality. Harry, who has gone through more grief in his first fourteen years than any of his peers must go through just a little bit more in order to become Voldemort's ultimate opponent. Misty Hook makes a valid comparison between Harry's grief and a phoenix: "it burns him up only to help him emerge a stronger, better person" (92). Harry's fifth and sixth years are marked by immense grief and hurt—Harry sees a friend die, he loses his beloved godfather, and his mentor and Headmaster is murdered right before his eyes—but he emerges willing and almost able<sup>92</sup> to face Voldemort.

In his final year, Harry has transformed from a young boy just trying to survive under his aunt and uncle's roof, to a grown man ready to take on the challenge of the darkest wizard of all time. His journey through experiences and situations that appear to place him at a disadvantage actually work in his favor, as they force him to compensate in other ways. Hook argues that Harry comes out of his grieving period with an identity change. She explains, "By going through the process of reconstructing the meaning of loss, you necessarily reconstruct who you are. You become different, better even" (Hook 98). This is precisely what Gladwell means by underdogs rising out of their disadvantages and coming out on the other side better. As he grows up and learns more about his destiny, he either must accept the challenge or back down. Although he

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<sup>92</sup> He cannot face Voldemort yet because he spends his last year finding and destroying Horcruxes—the first step to defeating the giant.

does not want to accept his fate at first, through the transformative process of being an underdog, he rises to the challenge: “As the fire of grief rises in him, Harry completes his transformative journey, the one powered by unfathomable loss, trauma, and grief, and it is this that ultimately makes the prophecy come true” (Hook 100). Not facing Voldemort would be out of character for Harry, and playing by Voldemort’s rules would be detrimental. So, Harry must use the underdog weapon that he has developed: having something worth fighting for.

As Harry accepts his fate, Dumbledore gives him the final tools he needs to succeed: he gives him the reins. Just before Dumbledore dies, the cup passes from the master to the student. Before Dumbledore and Harry travel to the cave, Harry assures Ron and Hermione, “I’ll be fine, I’ll be with Dumbledore” (*HBP* 552), but later, as Dumbledore and Harry return, Dumbledore shows how the roles have switched; he states, “I am not worried Harry . . . I am with you” (*HBP* 578). Dumbledore’s work has finished and now Harry must track down the rest of the Horcruxes and be the one to finish the Dark Lord for good. He, Ron, and Hermione work together to find and destroy the Horcruxes, but his final realization is that he is the last Horcrux. Prinzi notes that with this realization, “Harry is plunged straightway into a series of events (Fred’s death; Snape’s death; the ‘Prince’s Tale’; the walk into the forest) that will bring him to his final heroic transformation: the willing embrace of death on behalf of the world” (Prinzi 133). This heroic act of sacrificial love surpasses that of his mother’s because he sacrifices himself for the entire wizarding world. He transforms from a scrawny, misfit kid, to the Chosen One who defeats the Dark Lord.

Throughout the series, Harry deals with his many marks of being an underdog. Most of the elements that make him an underdog are outside of his control, and through the difficult environments of being orphaned, isolated, and broken down, Harry is able to emerge a better,

stronger wizard, capable of fighting against the most evil wizard of all time. He works tirelessly to overcome the obstacles set before him, and whenever he is beaten down, he comes back stronger. Part of his appeal as the main character is that he is not a perfect hero, but a flawed and seemingly weak one. He relies on a great deal of help from others and he uses what he can to his advantage. His encounters with Voldemort early on may produce a feeling of invincibility in him, but when he witnesses a friend die, he breaks down. This breaking works similarly to a phoenix's eruption into flames, only to result in a rebirth from the ashes. Harry's belief that he has something worth fighting for spurs him towards working hard to defeat Voldemort. Because of the many seeming disadvantages of The Boy Who Lived, Harry is equipped with the right number of advantages to succeed.

## Conclusion

### The Phenomenon Continues

Ever since the *Harry Potter* series reached its tipping point in 2000, it has clearly made a cultural impact. It has spurred discussion boards, fan fiction, conferences, movie midnight premieres, a theme park installment, and an array of *Harry Potter* exclusive merchandise. And while the marketing, franchise, and business aspects of the series are undeniable, what truly made this powerful series of literature tip when it did and what makes it continue to maintain a presence in the popular and literary worlds is the strength of Rowling's story. One author states, "The continued popularity of Harry Potter stems, at least in part, from the power and universality of its message. Rowling succeeded in creating an alternative world that is so real, and so compelling, that it makes you want to become a part of it" (Belser). The three theories that Gladwell popularized—tipping points, outliers, and underdogs—serve as a strong explanations for the reasons why the *Harry Potter* series has had such a popular and powerful effect, with the strongest one being those aspects that make Harry, the character, simultaneously relatable and heroic. Essentially, the elements that made the *Harry Potter series* reach a tipping point, and that make Harry Potter an outlier and underdog, all contribute to the success of the series and the character as having sparked a literary phenomenon today.

While the tipping point of the *Harry Potter* series needed elements such as "The Law of the Few" and "The Power of Context," "The Stickiness Factor" proves to be the reason the series has had such a long-lasting effect and presence. "The Stickiness Factor" of *Harry Potter* contains archetypal, familiar elements that tap into the universal human consciousness and allow for readers to relate and make connections. Harry partakes in the archetypal hero's journey, traveling from his normal, miserable life to a magical world where he is equipped to battle the evil one.

Other popular culture examples of the archetypal hero's journey include series like *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hunger Games*, *X-Men*, and *The Pirates of the Caribbean*. In each series, the hero—whether it be an orphan boy from a desert planet, a small, hairy-footed hobbit, or a girl oppressed by her government—must leave the status quo; accept a challenge of some sort; undergo transformations through trials; engage in battle or a fight; and return to normal life, not quite the same as before. This journey remains an archetype for a reason; the hero's journey does not simply reside in fictional, magical worlds, but in everyday human existence. In a TED-Ed video on archetypal heroes, Matthew Winkler explains that humans relate to archetypes because they engage in this sort of journey throughout their lives: "The hero's journey myth exists in all human cultures and keeps getting updated because we humans reflect on our world through symbolic stories of our own lives" ("What Makes a Hero?"). Stories like *Harry Potter* remind readers that ordinary people can achieve greatness through friendship, loyalty, determination, and love. While Harry's world is fictional, the elements and themes that mirror everyday life and the general human consciousness make the series a powerful contribution to the literary world.

The theories of outliers and underdogs fall under "The Stickiness Factor" of the series as well, because they contribute to Harry's hero's journey. As an outlier, Harry is given special advantages through circumstances outside his control and through the patrons and friends that push him towards success. However, Harry cannot completely rely on being an outlier to help him succeed; he controls his destiny through his choices. And while he is responsible for his choices, the elements that contribute to him being an outlier certainly help him make those choices. As an underdog, Harry is also equipped with advantages through being forced to overcome great obstacles. Having the support of an outlier and pushing through trials as an

underdog give Harry the opportunities he needs to defeat Voldemort.

These theories are true of the human condition as well, and help explain that what makes the *Harry Potter* series so compelling is its truth. Despite situations or support that make outliers, people are all underdogs in need of redemption. Just as David used his unique abilities to slay Goliath, ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary things. Each chapter in Gladwell's *David and Goliath* discusses a certain person or group of people who have had seeming weaknesses turn out to provide them with great advantages. From people suffering from dyslexia who become CEOs to a misfit girls' basketball team that only wins with the full-court press, working to overcome a weakness can build an immense amount of strength. Some other biblical examples of God using seemingly weak people—like David to defeat Goliath—include Moses and Jeremiah. When God called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, Moses replied, “Oh my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoke to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue” (*English Standard Version*, Exodus 4:10). Similarly, Jeremiah resisted God's call as well: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth” (*ESV*, Jer. 1:6). Both men saw their weaknesses as crippling, but God used both of them despite their weaknesses. Through human weakness, God turns what people see as disadvantages into something beautiful and powerful.

At the last battle between Harry and Voldemort, Harry gives Voldemort the opportunity to turn his weakness—his inability to understand or accept love—into a strength. After Voldemort declares that Dumbeldore's final plan has failed and that the Elder Wand belongs to the Dark Lord, Harry states, “You're right. But before you try to kill me, I'd advise you to think about what you've done . . . Think, and try for some remorse, Riddle . . . It's your one last chance . . . it's all you've got left” (*DH* 741). Harry offers Voldemort the chance for redemption.

And while Voldemort refuses, Harry shows that he understands just how important the underdog situation can be, and that despite weaknesses, greatness often comes from the struggle.

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