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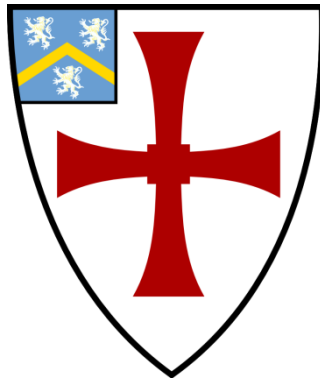
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**THE ILLUSIONS OF REALITY:  
Blurring the Line between Fantasy and Reality in  
J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Novels**

by

**Larissa Jane Adamson**

BA Music (Hons), Dunelm

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education**

**Department of Education**

**University of Durham**

**March 2015**

# Abstract

## The Illusions of Reality: Blurring the Line between Fantasy and Reality in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Novels

Larissa J. Adamson

The principal objective of this thesis was to study Rowling's Potterverse and other literature to: explore examples of illusions of reality; evaluate these illusions wherever appropriate against philosophical, psychological, scientific, theological and other considerations; assess their impact on reality, and whether they advance the appreciation, establishment or resolution of questions about reality.

The topics of: Potter as a hidden world, Mirrors, Senses, the Mind, Time, the expanding world of Harry Potter, Death, Identity and existence (King's Cross) have been explored, drawing on ideas presented in the *Harry Potter* novels and supported by the topics stated above. Potter and other fantasy genre literature aid discussion of some difficult and complex aspects of reality by presenting characters who actively wish to discuss these issues.

The numerous sources studied for this thesis present many interesting and diverse opinions. However, while interesting, a minority can be characterised as being unsupported personal opinions of particular individuals, which have been appropriately considered as such.

Fantasy highlights some illusions of reality, but the discussion of the above topics has led to the conclusion that while, like Potter, there may be inconsistencies in life, we find continuity and meaning from our memories, senses, mind, identity, etc., that allows us to believe in reality.

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# List of Abbreviations

## **Original Abbreviation**

## **Abbreviation Used**

### Harry Potter Novels and Films

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

*Philosopher's Stone*

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

*Chamber of Secrets*

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

*Prisoner of Azkaban*

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

*Goblet of Fire*

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

*Order of the Phoenix*

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

*Half-Blood Prince*

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

*Deathly Hallows (Part 1, Part 2 for film adaptations)*

### Other

Defence Against the Dark Arts

*DADA*



## Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## Acknowledgements

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## Preface

The nature of reality has always been a topic of debate amongst scientists, mathematicians, philosophers and theologians. We all live in what we believe to be 'reality' but can never be sure whether this is definitively true. The *Harry Potter* series by J.K Rowling, in particular, blurs the line between myth, fantasy and reality.

Like most children, and indeed many adults, I followed the Potter series from its beginning; when I was eight years of age *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (Philosopher's Stone)*, released two years previously, was one of the first books I read alone. The second book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Chamber of Secrets)*, was published a year later, parts of which I was unable to understand owing to its slow pace. I stopped reading it but six months later I reread and understood it.

So absorbed had I become with the *Harry Potter* novels that, just like Harry, I truly expected to receive a letter in the post from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry on my eleventh birthday. In fact I once became convinced that it had been lost in the post, or maybe Errol, the Weasley family's unreliable owl featured in the novels, had been responsible for its delivery.

Books three to seven were subsequently released at one or two year intervals. Like *Chamber of Secrets*, I found the pacing of book five, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (Order of the Phoenix)*, particularly slow and struggled to retain interest. While visiting a bookstore in USA, I discovered an American audiobook of book four, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Goblet of Fire)*. Unlike the UK version, it was read by actor and voice artist Jim Dale who cleverly voiced and acted each character individually (all 134 of them), adding another dimension to the story. This excellent rendition of the book sparked my interest and I subsequently became an avid fan of the Potter series and have all seven *Harry Potter* novels and Jim Dale Audiobooks which I continue to both read and play. Therefore, I grew up with the Potter novels and films. As the principal characters depicted in the films

were of similar ages to me, I felt involved in the franchise, as did a majority of my school classmates and countless other children of my age, world-wide.

Being introduced to the Potter novels at such an early age, I found them somewhat daunting; the print was small, some long words were used and Rowling's concept of magic wasn't one generally appreciated. The complexity and seriousness of the issues surrounding 'The Boy Who Lived' are not entirely comprehensible to young children. In fact, it was not until I studied the 'Harry Potter and the Age of Illusion' module at Durham University, that I began to fully appreciate and evaluate the significant range and depth of topics portrayed throughout the Potter series.

I had a grasp of reality and appreciated the difference between dreaming, nightmares and daydreams, but until reading, beginning to understand and investigating the Potter series, I had never experienced the notion of blurring the line between two realities. The possibility that another world could exist within our own hadn't really occurred to, let alone been considered by, most young children. *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis is a series of seven fantasy novels widely read by younger children. However, this is in "another world", described in the first novel in the series, *The Magician's Nephew*. Similarly, I became aware that scientists were exploring whether suitable conditions existed on other planets to support forms of life as we know it, but that is a completely different reality hidden from and not working alongside my reality.

Reading the Potter series as a young child, I had minimal knowledge of death, a significant topic in the novels. Aged four, the first death in my life was my grandpa (my Dad's father) but I have little recollection of him. However, in 2003 when my other granddad (my Mum's father) died, the same year as *Order of the Phoenix* was released, I began to appreciate the meaning of death. This could also be a factor contributing to reasons why this book is my least favourite. Further, the fact that Harry had grown up without parents had not occurred to me until some friends lost their parents. Further, the wisdom of Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore can only be fully appreciated when someone has experienced more of life and tragedy, as indeed have Harry and Dumbledore.

When I first began reading the Potter series my reality was very similar to that of Harry; I had no concept of magic or evil in the world. The Potter series may be a helpful aid with which children *should* grow up, enabling them to discover the world through Harry's eyes and understand, from 'a safe distance', such topics as evil and death. The perspective of an adult reading Potter novels is undoubtedly different to that of a child, just as mine is extremely different now because I already know and appreciate the events leading to the end: I know all the spoilers and the characters and yet that concept is in itself fascinating. Individuals with their own realities can enter an alternative, magical reality through the Potter novels, and perceive and interpret their reality differently. When entering a fictional reality we are, in some way, gaining an appreciation of our own reality; especially as Rowling is from our reality, whether by nationality or a connection through some of her life experiences. She writes about flawed and thereby very *real* people, perhaps through whom we connect.

Various themes run through the Potter stories that relate to us as human beings. However, the notion of reality is a big topic. By definition, the magical world is hidden from us and so could be occurring at the same time; this happens daily in our reality without our knowledge. For example, since age seven years I have visited Orlando, Florida almost annually at different times of year. The moment I step off the aeroplane I feel at home and, despite a year having passed for both me and Orlando, immediately adapt to the routine there. For example, new Theme Park attractions may have been built in the year since I last visited, or some aspect of my life may have drastically changed, but the reality of Orlando remains the same to me and I recognise things there as easily as I do at home. This became clear to me in 2012 while visiting a restaurant en route to the airport I was served by a friendly and pleasant waitress. Travelling to the airport in the following two years, I returned to that restaurant and met the same waitress. During the intervening years many things would have changed in our respective lives, but in that moment it was as though no time had passed because our realities were identical to the previous years; I probably even ordered the same food. Similarly, upon returning home, I seamlessly resume my home and university routines. It only occasionally dawns on me that Florida's Theme Park attractions are open daily. I even have apps on my phone that indicate wait times for various attractions, and yet it never occurs to me that *real*

people are actually queuing. It is almost as if the attractions are frozen in time until I return the following year. The phrase “like no time has passed” comes to mind.

The notion that other realities are occurring simultaneously all over the world is too extensive to consider. I’m reminded of the opening scene in the film *Love Actually* (2003), with numerous individuals at an airport arrivals gate. They are there for their own reasons concerning their own reality. Similarly on a train, some people alight at a station before the train’s final destination for their own reasons connected with the reality they are living.

Everywhere in our world, different realities happen that are entirely viewable. As mentioned previously, the Wizarding World is hidden from the Muggle (non-magical) world and we would not know it, even if it did exist, which raises the following questions:

- Is the Wizarding World of Harry Potter real?
- Are the distortions of reality featured in Rowling’s novels, such as the Mirror of Erised and the Time-Turner, informing us something about how we actually view our reality?
- Can fiction help us answer questions about reality?
- What do we consider real?

For example, in the ‘Hogwarts Sorting Ceremony’ at the commencement of the *Harry Potter* module at Durham University, students are allocated houses; it is a real sorting ceremony because on the module the houses have meaning, just as they have in Hogwarts. Seminars can be arranged by house, individuals earn points for their house and a house ultimately wins the House Cup. It is theatre with a purpose.

It is also worthy of mention that reality plays an important part in our identity; how we view ourselves, what we value and what are our beliefs. If we ever discovered that we were not real, but merely a character in a dream, that would alter everything we believed about ourselves.

The illusions presented in science fiction and fantasy genre novels and films, can be examined and compared to the 'real' world, and whether they agree with science and philosophers in defining reality. Rowling has provided the guidelines and rules by which many of the illusions presented in the Potter novels work; for example the Pensieve<sup>1</sup>. However, it is intriguing that scientists and philosophers regard the concept of thought-sharing to be a matter of consciousness. This also relates to how we view our minds; could someone readily access our thoughts? What does this say about our identity? Further, if your mind could be accessed and controlled, how could you be certain that this world is real?

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Rowling's Pottermore and other literature to explore examples of illusions of reality. Wherever appropriate, these illusions are evaluated against philosophical, psychological, scientific and theological considerations. Their impact on reality is assessed together with how they affect our appreciation, establishment or resolution of uncertainties about reality.

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<sup>1</sup> A magical object for storing, sharing and reviewing memories

## Introduction

*“We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already...”*

*(Rowling, 2008)*

The magical world of *Harry Potter* was first presented in a series of seven novels written by author J.K. Rowling (1965- ). They tell the story of Harry Potter, a young wizard whose parents are killed by Lord Voldemort, the greatest dark wizard of all time. Harry is famous for being the only person alive to have survived the Killing Curse (“Avada Kedavra”). Why Voldemort wanted him dead, how he survived and the magical world to which these characters belong are all absorbing aspects of *Harry Potter*. Throughout the story, Harry attends ‘Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry’ whose Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, protects and guides Harry towards his destiny: to destroy Voldemort and thereby save the Wizarding World.

There is a difference between the Wizarding World which contains the stories from the Potter novels, and the greater *Potterverse*. Rowling created the world of *Harry Potter* and through her novels released her ideas to our world; those who have read the novels, made films based upon them or became involved in Potter in some form, affects the *Potterverse*. The *Potterverse* can therefore be described as the ever-expanding world of *Harry Potter* embracing, amongst others things: the novels; Fan Fiction, discussed in Chapter Three; film adaptations; Pottermore; and Universal Studios’ theme park attractions in Florida, discussed in Chapter Six. A defining point with the Potter novels and *Potterverse* is that while the world has accepted and still invests heavily in them, Potter is not definitive truth; it remains a work of fiction, and thereby contains contradictions both in the plot and the overall world. However, rather than restricting examination of Potter as merely a piece of fantasy literature, the fact that it is definitively not true allows us to evaluate the limits of the fantasy genre in terms of reality.

The Potter novels are generally regarded as ‘Children’s Literature’, a classification that has been heavily criticised, especially as the series progresses into darker material and more intense issues, such as Murder and Death. It incorporates



both the fantasy genre, “school story” and a “coming-of-age tale”. Philologist Johann Morgenstern (1770-1852), presented a child’s emotional or psychological development into adulthood as a ‘Bildungsroman’, a specific type of “coming-of-age tale”.

The fantasy genre has been popular with young readers because “There is no end to the places fantasy can take us.” (Abanes, 2002, p.20) This is mainly attributable to the use of magic, magical creatures and, importantly, the ability to travel to another world. While this is included in other fantasy series, such as C.S. Lewis’ (1898-1963) *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis, 2001) and J.R.R. Tolkien’s (1892-1973) *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954), the Potterverse differs in that the ‘other’ world is not separated from our own Muggle (non-magic) world, but is contained and hidden within it. This concept makes the Potterverse worthy of study; being hidden within our world it must be influenced by the Muggle world and, in turn, the Wizarding World must be influenced by our world.

Developing this concept, scientists and authors have discussed the impact of fantasy on the reader and how they interpret this in reality. Child Psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim (1904-1990) wrote about fantasy novels and how children perceive and interact with them. In the Master’s Thesis, *Defending the Harry Potter Series from Detractors and Defenders* (Vehkanen, 2006), Johanna Vehkanen (n.d.) adopts Bettelheim’s research to support the use of Potter as an important educational and philosophical tool. Bettelheim (1989) comments that children:

...intuitively comprehend that although these stories are *un-real*, they are not *un-true*; that while what these stories tell about does not happen in fact, it must happen as inner experience and personal development; that [fantasy] tales depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence. (p.73)

That is, fantasy stories such as the Potter novels can be unrealistic in their setting, but the messages depicted can be translated into everyday life and reality. Similarly, in 2011 evolutionary biologist and atheist Richard Dawkins (1941- ) asserted that Rowling’s use of magic is “Supernatural” or “Fictional Magic” where “we all know this kind of magic is just fiction and does not happen in reality.” (p.20) It may be that because fantasy novels such as Potter present scenarios that we know

cannot happen in reality, they allow us to better understand our own reality by being able to compare the two. This is also made more thought-provoking in the Potter series by the fact that the world is hidden within our own.

The Potter series raises big questions on several issues, such as death, thoughts, memories and reality, etc. The novels expand our understanding of these, allowing the reader to view the Potterverse and their own reality through different eyes. Philosopher and clinical psychologist Marilyn Wedge (n.d.), in 1996, comments: "The activity of the artist is likened to someone walking around with a mirror and reflecting the natural world, then presenting the mirror reflections as true reality." (p.8) That is, fantasy stories hold a mirror up to our own reality, making obvious changes that cause us to question aspects of our lives. We should not reject the fantasy nature of the Potterverse or the fictional aspect of the fiction genre.

Occasionally, fiction will be based on something from our world, but can be distorted under the fantasy genre. Therefore, stories about other realities can open our eyes to other possibilities and, in particular, help us to perceive our world differently. It could be considered that this is merely an extension of the illusion of the reality in which we live every day; but what is the 'illusion of reality'? Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggested that we live in what is known as "Consensus Reality": the reality that most people agree is 'real' and can be the reality of a specific religion, culture or social group. Arguably, this is the reality in which we all grow up and establishes our individual beliefs, whether religious or otherwise. As discussed later, we all experience life differently and accumulate and add our own experiences and differing beliefs onto our reality, and thus move from Consensus Reality to our own reality. However, consensus reality also maintains that this world in which we live is reality, a belief that unites most people. Our personal reality and Consensus Reality however, are argued to be merely an interpretation of real, "True Reality". Therefore, Illusions of Reality are the objects, beliefs or issues in everyday life that can confuse us into creating our personal reality or our consensus reality. In the fantasy genre, illusions are part of consensus or personal reality; it is only when we consider them in terms of our 'normal' (or Muggle) reality that we see that they are illusions, or they would be if they existed in our world.

What does this mean in terms of *Harry Potter*? During the Battle of Hogwarts in *Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007), Harry allows Voldemort to attack him with the Killing Curse intending to die for the friends he loves. Instead of dying, Harry finds himself in King's Cross station and is greeted by Albus Dumbledore, the deceased Headmaster of Hogwarts. Seemingly trapped in a world between the living and the dead, suggested by many to be Limbo, a conversation between Harry and Dumbledore culminates in Harry asking: "Tell me one last thing, is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579). Dumbledore responds with one of the most intriguing and complex statements of the Potter series: "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579) Rowling stated that her seventeen years writing the Potter series had been building to this conversation between Harry and Dumbledore. This conversation is therefore significant, not only to the scene at King's Cross, or even the entire Potter series, but to the reader and to Rowling herself.

Part of the lure of a fantasy world is that entering such a world "...is to step outside reality and expect things to be different." (Childhood) Every human has the desire, some more than others, to know whether something is real, yet philosophers and scientists alike have struggled to definitively state that the existence we are living is reality. Why does reality matter? Reality raises questions concerning existence and truth. Dawkins criticises the view that reality is a term for existence, because existence is a very vague, loose term. Dinosaurs once existed and the stars we see at night appear to exist to us in our reality on earth but, in the reality of the universe, they may have burnt out centuries ago. Reality is defined by author and lucid dreaming specialist Rebecca Turner (1984- ) as physical existence, "the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them." (Turner, n.d.) If the world in which we live isn't real, then nothing we know or believe is true. According to Yuasa (n.d.), Real life is "life as it is lived in reality, involving unwelcome as well as welcome experiences, as distinct from a fictional or idealised world." (Yuasa, 2014) Such definitions, however, do not assist in proving that this world in which we live is reality; if it is not real, what does that signify about us as human beings and how we perceive reality?

Fantasy and reality are considered two separate and distinct entities and account is seldom taken of the line between them being blurred. *Harry Potter* is an example of literature in which this line is blurred. Therefore, the principal objective of this thesis is to study Rowling's Potterverse and other literature to: explore examples of illusions of reality; evaluate these illusions wherever appropriate against philosophical, psychological, scientific, theological and other considerations; assess their impact on reality, and whether they advance the appreciation, establishment or resolution of questions about reality.

In fictional stories, especially those of fantasy, the reader could imagine their own particular interpretation of an object or scene therefore, wherever appropriate, illustrations are incorporated throughout this thesis to assist in describing that object or scene in relation to reality. These illustrations seek to direct the argument and, in Chapter Seven, to highlight the curious nature of reality with regard to photographic images.

The numerous sources utilised in this thesis have been fully evaluated. Potter is a worldwide phenomenon and this has led to a vast amount of information being written and discussed. However, Potter literature is relatively new, and the topic of reality is thereby a developing topic of interest. Scholars who have written extensively on Potter ('Potter Scholars') are, like the general public, only providing opinions on Rowling's world, albeit possibly presenting more cogent arguments than the general public because, like this thesis, they have taken into account the work and opinions of Philosophers, Psychologists, Scientists and other professionals in the formulation of reasoned arguments. Therefore, all such material has been evaluated as being valid opinions and not necessarily definitive truth. Part of the phenomenon of *Harry Potter* was that it unleashed great creativity, stimulating discussion and opinions of the themes in the story. While many such opinions about Potter are not intended to be scientific arguments, they have not been disregarded, although the provenance of these opinions and arguments cannot be validated.

This thesis is written on the basis that readers will have a rudimentary knowledge of Potter, but in the interest of clarity, supplementary detail is presented in footnotes. This thesis is structured in three distinct sections each consisting of

several chapters; the themes discussed can appear in more than a single chapter because of interlinking Potter themes. It is an intriguing aspect of the Potter series that one theme can lead to several others. Similarly, while seeking to address a particular issue about the Potterverse, several others may appear which, possibly, cannot be answered. The initial section is the Potterverse as a Hidden World, which outlines the importance of the Potter series, followed by Section 2, 'Distorted World', which discusses how reality can be distorted or manipulated and how this is portrayed in the Potterverse. Finally, in Section 3, 'Between Two Worlds', topics that could be considered to be between the fantasy and real worlds are discussed, such as the strong Potter theme of Death and Identity and, in particular, what these topics mean to us in reality and how we use them to relate to reality.

# Section One: The Hidden World

## Chapter One: A Hidden World

*“Of course, it’s very hard to convict anyone because no Muggle would admit their key keeps shrinking – they’ll insist they just keep losing it. Bless them, they’ll go to any length to ignore magic, even if it’s staring them in the face.”*

*(Rowling, 1998, p.34)*

*Harry Potter* and stories about other realities alert us to the possibility of their existence, stimulating us to examine our world differently. The Potterverse is perhaps the most curious example, as it sheds light on the notion that there could be another world hidden within our own. It provides greater awareness and better understanding of our own reality, while highlighting how quickly we dismiss strange occurrences in our world.

Differing from Narnia (C.S. Lewis) or Middle-Earth (Tolkien), Rowling’s Wizarding World and Potterverse is a world not completely separate from our own. The Wizarding World “...exists right under the nose of the Muggle world and is in constant interaction with it, even if Muggles don’t realise it.” (Prinzi, 2009, p.26) Rowling’s Wizarding World has a government, community, schools and, as in our world, each country has a leader, the Minister of Magic. The Wizarding World is thereby entirely functional and self-sufficient while being hidden within our own world. To ensure that the Muggle world remains unaware of the Wizarding World, the ‘Statute of Secrecy’ is in place, the existence of which implies that Muggles “can and in fact do, regularly cross paths with the Wizarding World.” (Prinzi, 2009, pp26-27)

Rowling introduces the idea of the Potterverse being real in *The Other Minister* chapter in *Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling, 2005), which discusses the relationship between the Muggle Prime Minister and the Minister of Magic, who are introduced when they are elected. Cornelius Fudge<sup>2</sup> tells the Prime Minister “The Minister for Magic only reveals him or herself to the Muggle Prime Minister of the day.” (Rowling, 2005, p.12) The Prime Minister quite logically asks why he hasn’t

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<sup>2</sup> Minister of Magic in all *Potter* novels from *Philosopher’s Stone* to *Half-Blood Prince*.

been warned by a previous Minister, to which Fudge replies “My dear Prime Minister, are *you* ever going to tell anybody?” (Rowling, 2005, p.12) Fudge mentions that the Muggle world would think that their Prime Minister had gone mad if he ever suggested the existence of a world of magic. Indeed when the Prime Minister first observes a portrait informing him that he is to meet the Minister for Magic, he thinks that he is either mad or that the exhaustingly long election campaign has caused him to hallucinate. For example, we would never know if the current UK Prime Minister and the Minister for Magic held meetings because by definition the Wizarding World is magically hidden, and nobody would believe that such meetings ever took place.

Like many fictional stories involving other worlds, portals interlink the Wizarding World and the Muggle World. Some portals, such as the Leaky Cauldron<sup>3</sup> and the Knight Bus<sup>4</sup>, can be seen only by members of the magical world whereas others, such as: Platform 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub><sup>5</sup>; the entrance to St. Mungo’s<sup>6</sup>; the phone box and toilets into the Ministry; and 12 Grimmauld Place<sup>7</sup>, require knowledge in order for them to be accessed, see Figure 1 (below).

The Wizarding World is a fully functioning world; it is not a parallel universe as in *Coraline* (Gaiman, 2002) where main character Coraline’s “Other Mother”, who has buttons for eyes, lives, or as in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 1998) where Tom can move between different eras. Regarding the Mirror of Erised (Chapter Two), truth and knowledge are crucial to accessing the Wizarding World; all portals into the world require awareness of the world’s existence to achieve access. As the reader, we could consider that we have obtained a portal into the magical world. Although physically hidden to Muggles “The Wizarding World is a secret society that is entered only through necessary rites of passage. It is not exclusive; anyone with the gift can join, whether Muggle – or wizard – born.” (Whited, 2002, p.69)

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<sup>3</sup> The Wizarding pub that acts as a portal to ‘Diagon Alley’ where Hogwarts students buy their school robes and books.

<sup>4</sup> Magical transportation for wizards.

<sup>5</sup> Where the Hogwarts Express leaves from King’s Cross Station.

<sup>6</sup> St Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. The wizarding hospital.

<sup>7</sup> The Headquarters for the Defence Against the Dark Arts society called ‘The Order of the Phoenix’, founded by Albus Dumbledore. Muggles have accepted that Grimmauld Place was numbered incorrectly because Number 12 is hidden between numbers 11 and 13.

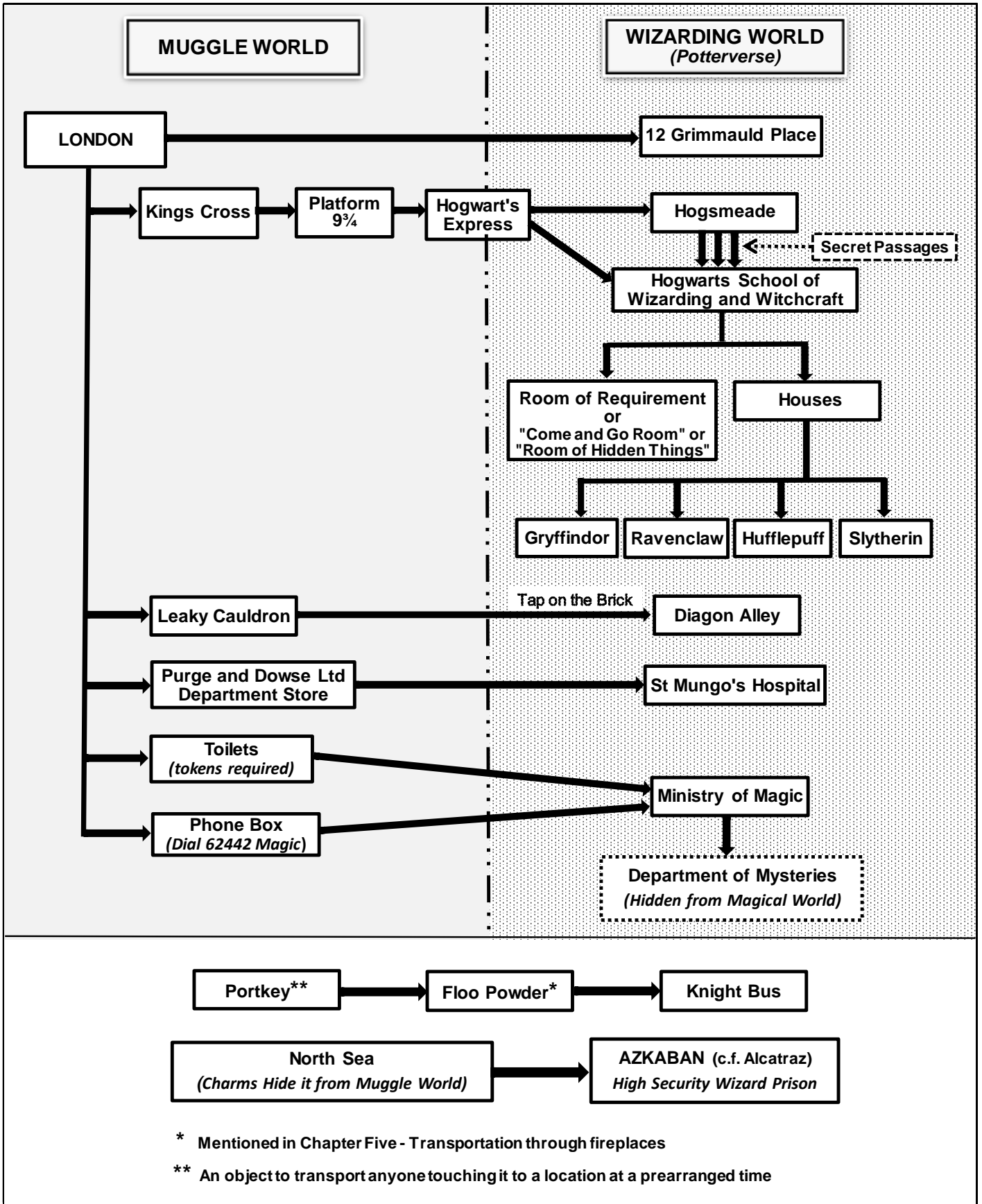


Figure 1: The Many Realities and Portals of Rowling's Wizarding World



The Potterverse constantly interacts with our Muggle world. When large groups of witches and wizards gather, measures must be taken to protect the security of the Wizarding World, for example during wizarding sports events such as the Quidditch<sup>8</sup> World Cup. The implications are that spells are placed on areas to disguise their appearance to Muggles, for example Muggles see Hogwarts Castle as a ruin. Like Harry's Invisibility Cloak, the Wizarding World is protected and concealed.

The Invisibility Cloak is a deceptive object that allows the wearer to remain invisible while still being heard from beneath it, but anything falling onto the cloak remains visible thereby negating the Cloak's invisibility. The Cloak is also transparent to some, for example, to Mad-Eye Moody<sup>9</sup>, who has a magical eye. Harry also suspects that Mrs. Norris<sup>10</sup> can either see through the cloak or that it does not work on cats. Similarly in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Hatty, one of the protagonists, is seemingly the only person who can see Tom in the garden, although it is later revealed that Abel the gardener can also see him. Hatty becomes unable to see Tom as she grows older and becomes disinterested in him, suggesting that belief is needed for him to be seen.

Portrayals of the Invisibility Cloak in the film adaptations of the Potter novels could be seen as representing the relationship between the Muggle and Wizarding World. For example, in *Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus, 2001), Hogwarts Potions Master, Severus Snape, appears to sense Harry's presence under the Invisibility Cloak and reaches out as though attempting to touch him. It is the sensation of something being out there just beyond your perceptions. It could be construed that the Wizarding World, or indeed other worlds, is similar to the invisibility cloak; out there just beyond our perceptions where we are unable to see it.

Considering the Wizarding and Muggle Worlds, the term 'Other Worlds' does not merely refer to another physical world. Comparing Harry to his best friend Ron Weasley, Harry was brought up by Muggles and Ron by Wizards, living completely

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<sup>8</sup> Sport in the Wizarding World played on brooms.

<sup>9</sup> One of Hogwarts Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers.

<sup>10</sup> The cat of Argus Filch, the Hogwarts caretaker.

different existences before meeting at Hogwarts. Critiquing the film *Inception* (Nolan, 2010), philosopher Botz-Bornstein (1964- ) defines 'Other Worlds' as "...another way that existence could have been." (Betz-Bornstein, 2011, p.216) Harry's existence would have been completely different had he been raised by his parents in the Wizarding World. It is intriguing that we are only told about Harry's upbringing because, as Muggles, we completely understand this perspective; it would be interesting to learn how different Ron's upbringing would have been. In fact, we get a glimpse into a child being raised in the magical world in *Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000) when Harry walks through the campsite at the Quidditch World Cup. Young children play with their parent's wands in much the same way as a Muggle child would play with a parent's mobile phone or keys. While Harry and his close friend Hermione attended a Muggle Primary school, the nature of education for young witches and wizards before Hogwarts is never revealed. This is another aspect of the Wizarding World hidden from Muggles.

This concept of 'Other Worlds' as being another existence has been explored in many fictional stories. A popular example is *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995), in which toys come to life when a human leaves the room. The film portrays a functioning society with a hierarchy based on a child's favourite toy whose *raison d'être* is to make that child happy. Like the Potterverse, we would never know if this actually occurs because the entire point of them coming to life is that they do so in the absence of humans. By definition, the toy's real existence is hidden from humans just as the Potterverse is hidden from Muggles.

Other realities exist within our own; people live different realities daily, although their paths inevitably cross. The possibility of other worlds existing alongside our own is a concept discussed in Author Philip Pullman's (1946- ) *Dark Materials* trilogy (Pullman, 2011). In the second book, *The Subtle Knife* (Pullman, 2007), the Subtle Knife is an object able to "cut" a window into another world. The book describes two protagonists, Lyra and Will, travelling between worlds through windows that appear in random locations, allowing people to travel into another world. Physicists believe that our universe may not be the only one in existence, but is there an alternative 'us' in another universe? A quantum mechanics theory, the "Many-worlds interpretation" (Clark, 2014), suggests that there are occasions when,

in another universe, history has developed in a different way; an alternative reality was created after initially following our reality.

Rowling's Potterverse presents a world in which different realities take place, all within our own world. As shown in Figure 1, while Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, St. Mungo's, etc., are hidden from the Muggle world, there are also areas hidden from the Wizarding World. For example, the Department of Mysteries is hidden from wizards, even those working at the Ministry of Magic. Workers in the Department of Mysteries are referred to as an "Unspeakable" as they are forbidden from discussing their work. Some rooms in the Department are introduced in *Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003): the "Time Room" where the Ministry studies time and keeps Time Turners<sup>11</sup>; rooms containing Brains, Prophecies, Love and Space; and the Death Chamber which contains a veil linking this world with the world or place of death, discussed further in Chapter Seven. These rooms deal with aspects of reality that are difficult to explain. The Mind and Time are discussed in Chapters Four and Five respectively. However, Love and Death in any fiction story, and arguably in our reality, represent the limits of magic and reality. Even in the Wizarding World it is impossible to bring anyone back from the dead or to make someone love you. The Department of Mysteries is attempting to understand issues that cannot be explained in the Muggle world and, because the Department is hidden even within the Wizarding World, nor can these issues be understood in the magical world.

There is much secrecy in the Wizarding World; even the Wizarding schools are hidden from both the Muggle and Wizarding Worlds. In a similar way to 12 Grimmauld Place, the schools of magic<sup>12</sup> must be revealed to someone in order for them to be located. Hidden within Hogwarts, the Room of Requirement, seen in Figure 1, can only be entered when anyone in need of something, for example a place to hide an object, walks past the room three times. The room then opens "...equipped for the seeker's needs." (Rowling, 2003, p.343) Designed to protect the user and to conceal the room's nature, the Room of Requirement cannot be plotted

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<sup>11</sup> An object that allows the wearer to go back in time.

<sup>12</sup> Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Durmstrang Institute and Beauxbatons Academy of Magic.

on any map of Hogwarts and does not allow anyone to break into it while the room is in use.

Through Harry's story, we have been given a portal into the Wizarding World that allows us to view our world differently by appreciating a hidden world within our own. However, because we see everything through Harry's eyes, our portal to the Wizarding World is restricted. In *Philosopher's Stone*, before arriving at Hogwarts, Hagrid<sup>13</sup> has instilled in both the reader and Harry prejudices against Slytherin, one of the school houses. Rowling (1997) comments on this at the school Sorting Ceremony: "Perhaps it was Harry's imagination, after all he'd heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked like an unpleasant lot." (p.89) The fact that Lord Voldemort is the Heir of Slytherin only increases the reader's prejudice, and it is only as the series develops that the reader realises not everybody in Slytherin is a follower of Voldemort, called Death Eaters. The all-Slytherin Malfoy family, whose youngest son Draco despises Harry, were followers of Voldemort but proved that family was more important to them than power. Slytherin's Professor Snape also stopped working for Voldemort when he planned to murder the woman Snape loved. These are examples of why Dumbledore suggests that Sorting into Hogwarts houses shouldn't happen at age eleven<sup>14</sup>. Rowling teaches the reader the lesson of never to judge on appearances or allow someone to plant an opinion or thought in your mind because, just as Cobb<sup>15</sup> states in *Inception*, ideas can grow to define you and can control your reality, much as the reader realises when Snape's true identity is revealed in *Deathly Hallows*.

The Potterverse is neither an ideal nor completely made up world. The "...Potter books explode the fantasy genre by clinging too close to "reality"." (Kern, 2003, p.191) Several fantasy stories are fascinating because they take us to another world very different from our own, such as Narnia, Wonderland and Oz. These worlds are "enough like, but also enough different from, our own world, to raise intriguing questions about our familiar world, and about whether we really understand it." (Matthews, 2004, p.178) The fact that by definition the Potterverse is

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<sup>13</sup> Rubeus Hagrid, the half-giant game keeper of Hogwarts.

<sup>14</sup> "I sometimes think we Sort too soon." (Rowling, 2007, p.545)

<sup>15</sup> Dom Cobb. Main protagonist of the film, *Inception*.

hidden from Muggles opens our eyes to the possibility that there could be other worlds within or alongside our own, but we just cannot perceive them because we are not meant to know of their existence. Therefore, the Potterverse, or a world like it, could exist because we would never know. This issue is discussed in *Order of the Phoenix*.

In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry is on trial accused of using magic outside school, which is forbidden under Wizarding laws. The reader understands he did in order to protect both himself<sup>16</sup> and his cousin Dudley from Dementors<sup>17</sup>, but in his trial, Harry could not prove that Dementors were present because his only witness was his Muggle cousin. This was problematic as Muggles cannot see Dementors, an issue on which Fudge questions Harry. “He’s [...] decided Dementors would make a very nice little cover story, [...]. Muggles can’t see Dementors, can they, boy? Highly convenient...” (Rowling, 2003, p.130) This statement from Fudge implies that, just as Dudley cannot see Dementors, as Muggles we would not know whether the Wizarding World exists because it is hidden from us. In *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows* we see how the presence of Dementors creates fog and general despair amongst Muggles. Having been given a portal into the Wizarding World, the reader understands that Dementors are causing the problem, but Muggles associate the fog with strange weather and the mood resulting from this.

Having created a world hidden within our own, Rowling has made us question whether odd occurrences that we dismiss in our world, such as fog and Dementors, could actually indicate another world, as Wolosky (2010) comments: “If the magic world mirrors the Muggle one, the Muggle one in turn is penetrated by magic.” (p.26) Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) argued that we always try to drive away ideas in order to “avoid any responsibility for it” (Richmond, n.d.) Continuing, he states that the more you try to drive something away, whether an idea or a memory, the more likely it is to return. This topic will be discussed in Chapter Two, in respect of how shedding light on something isn’t always good and may reveal something

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<sup>16</sup> Underage witches and wizards (below seventeen years of age) are allowed to use magic in life-threatening circumstances.

<sup>17</sup> Dementors are soulless creatures that suck the happiness out of any environment creating despair. Guarding the Wizarding prison, Azkaban, they carry out the wizarding equivalent of the death sentence for convicted prisoners by sucking a person’s soul out through their mouth.

best left hidden in the dark. Maybe this applies to alternative realities and parallel universes.

In her novel *Just Listen* (2007), writer and teacher *Sarah Dessen* (1970- ), suggests that light and dark are not distinctly different categories:

...once the difference between light and dark had been basic. One was good, one bad. Suddenly, [...] things weren't so clear. The dark was still a mystery, something hidden, something to be scared of, but I'd come to fear the light too. It was where everything was revealed, or seemed to be. Eyes closed, I saw only the blackness, reminding me of this one thing. The most deep of my secrets. Eyes open, there was only the world that didn't know it, bright, inescapable and, somehow, still there. (Dessen, 2007, p.274)

Dessen is suggesting that light and dark are not clear-cut issues, such as one being good and the other bad or that light reveals everything. The world of light has no perception of a secret hidden in darkness, yet life continues whilst being influenced by the darkness. Once the Wizarding World is mentioned to a person, its influences will be seen everywhere; in the same way you cannot stop knowing something once you know it. Should you try to forget about something without properly dealing with it, it will only return.

This thought of desperately seeking to drive something away is true of Harry's Muggle relatives, the Dursleys<sup>18</sup>, who "do everything in their power to seal their home against Harry's magical presence. Theirs is a struggle to keep out any world other than their own. They guard the borders of their own reality like a tightly shut box." (Wolosky, 2010, p.6) The Dursley family prides itself on being normal, but from the first chapter of *Philosopher's Stone* when the reader is still relatively unaware of the Wizarding World's existence, Vernon Dursley suggests that he is aware of another world. For example, he appears to know that the strange people outside his workplace emanate from the Wizarding World, and once he hears the name "Potter" he is sure the other world is interacting with his ordinary world and life. The family's dark secret, of having magical relations, is infiltrating the light of their everyday life. Despite their best efforts, "magic penetrates the tidy [...] Dursley world." (Wolosky,

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<sup>18</sup> Vernon Dursley, his wife Petunia and son Dudley. Petunia was Harry's mother's sister. She is given custody of Harry by Dumbledore.

2010, p.7) such as Mrs. Figg, the cat-obsessed neighbour with whom the Dursleys leave Harry, is in fact a Squib<sup>19</sup>. Another example is that Sirius Black<sup>20</sup> is initially introduced on the Muggle news as an extremely dangerous, escaped convict, but Vernon immediately states that they were not informed from where he had escaped. In fact Black escaped from Azkaban, another example of the Minister of Magic interacting with the Muggle Prime Minister.

The Dursleys must be contrasted against their Wizarding World alternative, the Weasley family, particularly Ron's father, Arthur, who is obsessed with Muggles. "If the Dursleys offer a severely normal view with no room for magic, the Weasleys offer a magic view into the Muggle world." (Wolosky, 2010, p.7) Arthur works in the 'Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office' at the Ministry of Magic which focuses on magic being used on everyday objects, while seeking to ensure that such objects do not end up in the hands of Muggles and, if they do, dealing with the situation appropriately. When asked by Harry why Muggles cannot hear the Knight Bus, the Bus conductor Stan Shunpike retorts: "Them! Don' listen properly, do they? Don' look properly either, never notice nuffink, they don'." (Rowling, 1999, p.32) Arthur implies something similar to that in the title quote of this chapter, that Muggles will never admit the presence of magic. As Muggles, both Shunpike and Arthur suggest that we are overlooking the obvious signs of magic. As human beings we may dismiss odd occurrences simply because they may seem improbable, and tend to apply the power of reason to decide on reality. If indeed we are being unobservant, as Arthur and Shunpike suggest, it is conceivable that magic or other worlds exist, even if they are hidden from us; we are just missing signs of their existence.

Setting aside the issue of whether other hidden worlds exist in our reality, it is noteworthy that many characters in the Potterverse have concealed some aspects of their personality. Harry is not the perfect hero; he is as flawed as anybody, for example when he performs the Unforgivable Curses<sup>21</sup>. There are several characters that we assume to be bad but who transpire to be good and vice versa including,

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<sup>19</sup> A non-magical child with wizarding parents.

<sup>20</sup> Sirius Black. Harry's father (James) was Black's best friend and is Harry's Godfather.

<sup>21</sup> Unforgivable Curses: The Killing Curse – "Avada Kedavra"; Cruciatius Curse (Torture Curse) – "Crucio"; and Imperius Curse (Curse that places victim under caster's control) – "Imperio"

inter alia Snape, Dumbledore, Black, Fudge and Dolores Umbridge<sup>22</sup>. This pattern is prominent regarding Hogwarts' teachers of Defence Against the Dark Arts (DADA). Every year during his time at Hogwarts, Harry has a different DADA teacher, all of whom have something to hide and attempt to attack Harry. In *Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997) chapter "The Man With Two Faces", Quirinus Quirrell, DADA teacher in Harry's first year reveals his secret and gives accurate descriptions of all DADA teachers. Quirrell was hiding Lord Voldemort at the back of his head (literally the man with two faces) and on Voldemort's orders tries to kill Harry. Gilderoy Lockhart, Harry's second year DADA teacher, is revealed as a fraud, having attained his fame by taking credit for the achievements of other wizards and attempts to wipe Harry's memory, just as he did to those wizards who threatened to reveal him. Harry's third year DADA teacher, Remus Lupin, was a werewolf and Alastor Moody, his fourth year DADA teacher, transpired to be Barty Crouch Jr., a Death Eater who was believed to have died in Azkaban years earlier. Perhaps the most sinister of DADA teachers was Dolores Umbridge, who arrived at Hogwarts in Harry's fifth year. She was extremely unpleasant, using potions to force the truth from students and, for punishment, make them write lines in their own blood with a quill that scratched these lines into the back of their hand. She also sent Dementors after Harry and his cousin, Dudley.

Undeniably, Severus Snape who became DADA teacher in Harry's sixth year, is the most intriguing character in terms of hidden identity and secrets. From the onset, the reader is led to believe that Snape despised Harry; it is later revealed that it was in fact Harry's father, James Potter, whom he resented. The reader and Harry believe Snape shows his true colours when he kills Dumbledore in *Half-Blood Prince*, however, it is revealed that Snape, a Death Eater, loved Harry's mother, Lily Potter, and for that reason was working with Dumbledore to protect Harry after Lily was murdered by Voldemort. Dumbledore's death was planned and Snape even managed to convince Voldemort, who could detect when somebody was lying, that he was spying on Dumbledore, when in reality it was Voldemort on whom he was spying. In *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry learns of Voldemort's past and his transformation from Tom Riddle into Lord Voldemort. It is apparent that Riddle is the real "Man with

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<sup>22</sup> A witch who works as Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic.



Two Faces”, who despises both his father, Tom Riddle sr., for being a Muggle and his witch mother, Merope Gaunt, for dying and leaving him to be raised in a Muggle orphanage. Dumbledore comments that Riddle soon “shed his name [...] and created the mask of “Lord Voldemort” behind which he has hidden for so long.” (Rowling, 2005, p.259) It is also revealed that Riddle (Lord Voldemort) sought to be appointed DADA teacher, but was twice refused and, ever since, Dumbledore has “never been able to keep a Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher for longer than a year since [he] refused the post to Lord Voldemort.” (Rowling, 2005, p.418) What is striking about these characters is that they appear as normal flawed people who make mistakes. Perhaps more than the magical element of the world it is this that makes the Potterverse so intriguing to the reader. In a world where physical strength is not an issue, as magic doesn’t distinguish between male and female, it could be suggested that we are invested in the lives of very ‘real’ characters. Even though the events take place in a hidden world, we relate to those inhabiting that world because they are human and living their lives as we do, albeit in a different world.

“The wizard world exists only in relation to the “real” world, echoing/mirroring all its customs and discourse, and thus reflects our Muggle world – transformed by narrative.” (Behr, 2003, p.261) Theologian Kate Behr (n.d.) suggests that the magical world is very similar to our world, and is influenced by it. The Wizarding World mirrors our world in taking ideas from it and changing them for magical purposes that, in turn, allows us to see our world through different eyes, as Wedge suggests (in Introduction). When something is hidden or unknown, it can allow the imagination to run wild, filling in the blanks. Arguably, part of the reason why horror films can be frightening is that imagination is required to fill in or anticipate parts of the story, usually the more sinister aspects. Perhaps the Wizarding World being hidden from our reality not only opens our eyes to the concept that another world could coexist within ours, but that it also allows us to create parts of Harry’s story ourselves. Despite being a work of fantasy fiction, many individuals continue to contribute to Harry’s story making his world more real to us than the seven novels Rowling authored.

## Section Two: The Distorted World

### Chapter Two: Mirrors

*“...this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible.”*

*(Rowling, 1997, p.157)*

The *Harry Potter and the Age of Illusion* module at Durham University explores how a fantasy world, supposedly hidden within our own, can relate to and mirror our world. Having suggested that the Potterverse could exist without us realising, it is also conceivable that by presenting us with Illusions of Reality, Rowling may be suggesting something about our own reality. The illusion of Mirrors is important both as objects in themselves and, by implication, the Wizarding and Muggle worlds mirroring each other in some way.

Mirrors work by reflecting light to illuminate and provide a true image of the viewer; it sends a visual message back to the viewer in the same way as Potter does to its audience. Since the 1500s, mirrors have been portrayed in paintings for a variety of reasons; for example, a painting of a room containing a mirror inferred that the occupant was wealthy. Painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), in his work *The Music Lesson*, Figure 2, portrays a man and woman around a virginal. Although the woman's back faces the viewer, her facial reflection is visible in a wall mirror behind the virginal, providing a true reflection of the woman's face as it would appear to the viewer or artist. In some paintings, such as *The Rokeby Venus* by Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), the mirrored reflection is not a true image; the viewer sees the reflection that would be expected from behind Venus

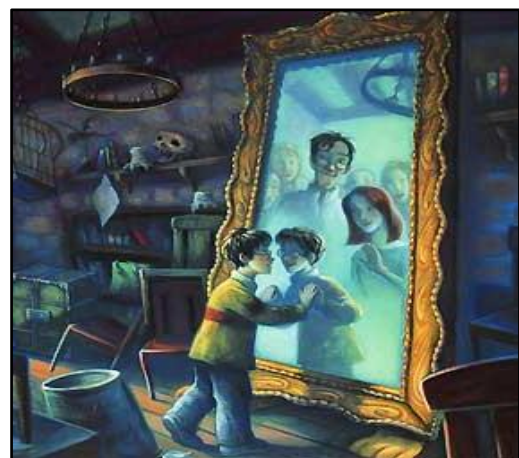


**Figure 2: Vermeer's *The Music Lesson***  
Courtesy of Royal Collection, London (Vermeer)

with her face being reflected directly back. Researchers into this, Venus Effect, suggest “that artists deliberately manipulated these images to create the impression we get when looking at ourselves in the mirror.” (Munger, 2009) That is, by mirroring an object or person gives you reality. In a portrait, an artist might bring out some key features of his subject and make the image exactly as we see it. Similarly, Potter may be understood and akin to our own reality as we perceive it, and also reveals our own world in a new light.

Shedding light implies revealing or perhaps uncovering the truth about something. If mirrors shed light on us as we stand before them it follows that they are presenting a true reflection of how we appear. There are numerous examples of mirrors in fiction that extend beyond mirrors of our reality, yet they portray the truth in some form, for example, the Mirror of Galadriel from *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. This mirror is a silver basin of water that presents the viewer with images of the future if the viewer continued along a certain path. By deviating or making a different decision, the basin’s image would change since the future would also change. “What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be.” (Tolkien, 2005, p.362) The mirror could significantly alter a person’s perception of reality. However, Galadriel does emphasise that the mirror only shows the truth as it is at present because the future can always change. It is shedding light on a possible reality, not necessarily the reality that is to come; it could merely be an illusion.

The Mirror of Erised (Figure 3) from *Philosopher’s Stone* is undoubtedly the most interesting mirror in the Potter series and one of the more curious mirrors in fiction. The caption above the mirror “Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi” translates: “I show not your face but your heart’s desire.”<sup>23</sup> The word “Erised” is desire written backwards, and the purpose of The Mirror of Erised is to reveal the



**Figure 3: The Mirror of Erised**  
Courtesy of (McDavid, 2012)

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<sup>23</sup> The caption above the mirror is a mirror reflection of the “translation”.

viewer's deepest desire. Harry observes himself surrounded by the parents he never knew, while Ron sees himself outshining his four elder siblings. Describing the mirror, Dumbledore states: "The happiest man on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is." (Rowling, 1997, p.156) Despite the magical nature of the Mirror of Erised, it could be argued that all mirrors are like Erised. "Ultimately, what we see in them depends on what we bring to them." (Anderson, 2007, p.4) That is, a normal mirror can only shed light on what it is presented. Here Rowling has offered readers a distortion of a regular mirror and has made us question an important aspect of mirrors: are we happy with what we see in them and is what we are seeing real? The Mirror of Erised highlights the issue of whether anyone could look into the Mirror of Erised, or indeed a normal, Muggle mirror, and observe themselves "exactly as he is". Despite the Mirror of Erised showing its viewer a different image to that seen reflected in a mirror, the point remains valid.

Does anyone look into a mirror and see a true reflection? Is there such a thing as "the happiest man on earth"? Is it possible to desire nothing? The most logical answer to all is negative, because although we may accept that something we want is not needed or impractical, it does not mean that we do not desire something. Also, Dumbledore's suggestion that it would have to be "the happiest man on earth" who would see himself normally in the mirror is worthy of evaluation. Happiness does not necessarily mean that you lack desire for something more or different; it can be defined as a short-term feeling, "Good fortune or luck in life or in a particular affair; success; prosperity." (Cytowic, 2013) However, like knowledge, differing definitions exist. Philosopher Richard Rorty (1931-2007) described happiness as "...the desirable effect of a life well lived, a life in which we continuously make the most of our freedom, including the freedom to change and reinvent our goals when we feel the need or find the opportunity to do so." (Kuipers, 2013, p.175) This could be defined as contentment, such as: "Having one's desire bound by what one has [...] not disturbed by the desire of anything more, or of anything different..." (Cytowic, 2013) Dumbledore may be referring to this difference between happiness and contentment, and that happiness is temporary. Would the image in the mirror change for Ron when he becomes a Prefect? We do not know, but in order for someone to

see themselves exactly as they are, they should be the most contented person on earth.

Relating to this point, Daniel Kahneman (1934- ), renowned specialist in the psychology of happiness, emotional happiness, decision-making and life satisfaction, realised there is a difference between happiness and satisfaction and that what makes someone happy would not necessarily bring satisfaction. He asserts that by thinking about something, you automatically exaggerate its importance commenting:

...the standard state for people is 'mildly pleasant'. Negative emotions are quite rare, and extremely positive emotions are rare. But people are mildly pleased most of the time, they're mildly tired a lot of the time, and they wish they were somewhere else a substantial part of the time – but mostly they're mildly pleased. (Gallup Business Journal, 2005)

He suggests that people are mainly content yet very rarely happy.

Regardless of whether the happiest or most contented individual sees themselves exactly as they are when standing before the Mirror of Erised, Dumbledore's warning to Harry in the opening quote of this chapter would mean the same. Dumbledore's statement explains that other wizards have become hypnotised by the Mirror of Erised and are no longer able to discern between reality and the mirror image presented to them. In a similar way to the group in the basement of Yusuf's<sup>24</sup> drug store in *Inception*, they no longer go there to dream; "They come to be woken up. The dream has become their reality." Both statements suggest that once light has been shed on a person's deepest desire, fantasies or dreams, it is almost impossible for them to forget or distinguish between what is real and what they believe to be real. Sometimes, interpreting secrets and desires does not reveal truth, but can uncover other mysteries that may transpire to have been better left unrevealed.

Both philosophical and practical questions are raised by Dumbledore's acknowledgement that neither truth nor knowledge can be gained from the Mirror of Erised. Knowledge could be considered as a belief for which we have solid evidence,

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<sup>24</sup> Yusuf. Team member in *Inception*, who creates the drugs required to enter a three layer deep dream world.

and is true. However, there are varying definitions and opinions of knowledge, highlighted by Dumbledore's assertion that knowledge and truth were unconnected. Individually defining one can lead to the other being used to substantiate that definition, as Klein (2004) demonstrates: "Our knowledge is a true account of the way of the world. If we fail to identify the actual features of the world and instead dwell on mere appearances, then we fail to find knowledge or truth." (p.103) Rorty rejects the concept of knowledge acquisition through "mental mirroring of a mind-external world" (Ramberg, 2007) and "knowledge as accuracy of representation..." (Rorty, 1979, p.12) as Klein suggests, highlighting further the complexity of defining 'knowledge'.

From the mirror of Erised, we can question whether a normal mirror gives the viewer knowledge or truth? Arguably it does. It can provide knowledge of your appearance or, for example, provide knowledge of the injury if you have cut your face. Truth however is a difficult factor to relate to normal mirrors and raises the question of what we actually see in them, a topic discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Does the Mirror of Erised provide knowledge or truth? "...the mirror does offer us one truth – it shows us what we actually deeply and desperately desire." (Klein, 2004, p.103) It could be considered that this assertion applies to knowledge rather than truth, the mirror providing the knowledge of what we desperately desire. The truth is that we desire something at the outset and the mirror provides knowledge on what this is. When Dumbledore refers to knowledge and truth, what does he actually mean? By truth, he clearly means the image is false, not in terms of what the person desires because that is the purpose of the mirror, rather that the mirror does not show truth about reality. Similarly, the mirror does not provide knowledge of reality or future predictions but merely sheds light on a person's desires, and does not reflect reality as in a normal mirror. This is why Dumbledore warns Harry: "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live..." (Rowling, 1997, p.157) Dumbledore advises Harry and the reader not to become like the people dreaming in Yusuf's basement, who no longer go there to dream, but to be awakened. Dumbledore warns not to live a life of fantasy, dreams or "what ifs", as by dwelling on this you will miss out on the present, 'real', reality. Is Dumbledore hinting that he actually sees something else in

the mirror? He might see his reunited family, just as Harry saw his, or perhaps because he accepts that the image in the mirror is not real, does he actually see people giving him “woollen socks” (Rowling, 1997, p.157)<sup>25</sup>?

Dumbledore’s statement about knowledge and truth raises questions about what we actually see in mirrors. Do we see what is actually there or what we wish to see? Photographer Duncan Davidson (1970- ) discussed on Ted Talks<sup>26</sup> how we perceive photographs of ourselves, arguing that our perception of the world is actually drawn from our memories and our perception of continuity, a topic discussed in Chapter Four. Davidson states that we have a very personal view of ourselves, shared by no one else, emphasising that we dislike any photograph of ourselves that does not match our perception or expectations. Our photographic image may appear almost right, albeit not quite the same as our image as seen in mirror reflections, and we therefore reject such photographs. He concludes that if we reject an image that others consider an accurate photograph, we should have trusted them because they are better placed to judge our appearance. This suggests that we are basing our appearance on an inaccurate image portrayed in a mirror. If mirrors are intended to shed light on our personal image, yet we sometimes do not recognise ourselves in photographs, are we in fact seeing an *accurate* image in the mirror? In 1964, psychiatrists Arthur Traub (1912- n.d.) and J. Orbach (n.d.) studied this theory, by designing the “adjustable body-distorting mirror” that distorted the reflection of a person’s physical size. When subjects were asked to identify their correct, accurate mirror image “Many subjects declare [...] that they have forgotten precisely what they look like.” (Anderson, 2007, p.6)

It cannot be denied that mirrors can be deceptive, even in their appearance. “Mirrors are visually trickery because they give perceivers an illusion of transparency, the exact opposite of what they are in their physical reality.” (Rochat & Zahavi, 2010) Some mirrors “are intended to manipulate” (Anderson, 2007, p.6) Perhaps, in the same way, the Potterverse mirrors our reality by showing it in a

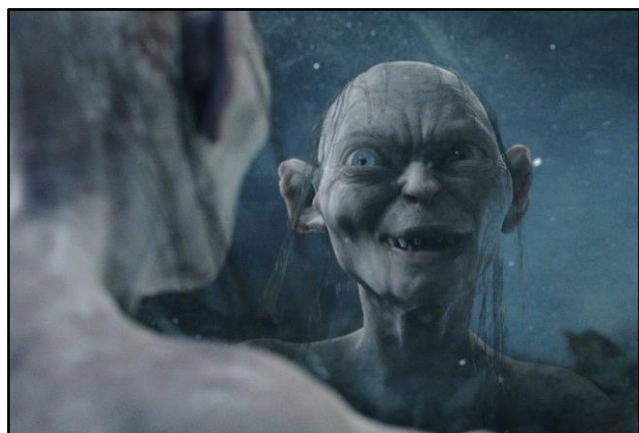
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<sup>25</sup> When Harry asks what Dumbledore sees in the Mirror of Erised, Dumbledore replies: “I? I see myself holding a pair of thick, woollen socks.” Harry stared. “One can never have enough socks,” said Dumbledore. “Another Christmas has come and gone and I didn’t get a single pair. People will insist on giving me books.” (Rowling, 1997, p.157)

<sup>26</sup> A Conference where individuals from different walks of life debate various issues.

different light. Mirrors shed light on us by distorting the reflection it was presented in reality, and showing it in a different light. If mirrors are not reflecting an accurate image, they must be highlighting something else about us. For example, “Although no department stores will admit it, rumour has it that they sometimes use slightly convex mirrors that make people look slimmer.” (Anderson, 2007, p.6) The mirrors have been distorted to show someone in an improved light, distorting reality to make a customer look and feel good, thereby increasing sales income for the store. This concept is portrayed in author Hans Christian Andersen’s (1805-1875) *The Snow Queen*. Evil Trolls make a mirror that distorts the reflection of anything before it, reflecting only the bad things about people and distorting the world reflected in the mirror. The Troll’s intend to take the mirror to Heaven to deceive God and the angels, but it breaks sending shards of glass plummeting to earth falling into people’s eyes and hearts. The hearts of victims were frozen and glass penetrating a person’s eye caused them to become like the original mirror, able to see only the bad and ugly in people and objects. In this context, the mirror viewed through human eyes distorts reality, removing a person’s belief while implanting a negative view of the world. The shards of glass act as a portal between a person’s real views and what they perceive, distorting their sight to influence their feelings. In a way, the Mirror of Erised shows its viewer a distorted version of reality by shedding light on a person’s deepest desire. Do you see your true self in mirrors or is the reflection merely a distortion around which we base our lives and feelings?

This concept of a person having two distinct, inseparable personalities has been used in novels and films whenever a character is depicted as having a split personality. The ‘evil’ side of the personality is often portrayed as the person’s reflection in a mirror or water. For example, in *Spiderman* (Raimi, 2002), the Green Goblin, the bad side of actor Willem Dafoe’s dual character, is shown as his reflection when he stands before



**Figure 4: Gollum reflected in the water, persuading Sméagol to murder Frodo and Sam in order to take the Ring.**

Screenshot from *The Two Towers* film (Jackson, 2002)



a mirror. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* film adaptation (Jackson, 2002), the dual character of Sméagol<sup>27</sup> and Gollum, is portrayed as a reflection in a river when Gollum cannot be controlled, see Figure 4. In the film adaptation of *Philosopher's Stone*, while Quirrell faces Harry with his back to the Mirror of Erised, Voldemort's face is revealed as a reflection in the mirror suggesting that mirrors do reveal and shed light on reality. These portrayals imply that a mirror can shed light on another side of ourselves; we are sometimes confronted by a different reality, a different person to that whom we believed ourselves to be.

Psychologist and researcher into reflections and mirrors, Giovanni Caputo (1961), comments: "Mirrors are, by definition, virtually perfect "imitators" of the observer's own bodily face, since mirror feedback is instantaneous in time." (Caputo, 2013) He conducted an experiment (Caputo, 2010) involving fifty individuals into what they could see as a reflection in a mirror when sitting in a dimly lit room.

Relating to Mirror of Erised he discovered that, just as Harry observed, some individuals could see "the faces of parents, or ancestors, and some saw the faces of strangers..." (Walters, 2010) Caputo was investigating the "Bloody Mary Illusion", an old folklore regarding mirrors in which Mary was shunned for having a baby out of wedlock. The townspeople murdered her baby and then burned Mary alive. Before lighting the fire beneath her, a woman taunted Mary with her reflection that showed that she was no longer beautiful. Mary vowed that they would all be cursed and a week after she died,



**Figure 5: Illustration from a Halloween greeting card. Pictures such as this have been suggested to relate to the "Bloody Mary" legend.**

Courtesy of (Ellis, 2004, p.152)

the mirror held by that woman shattered causing her death. Further, following Mary's death, all the townspeople strangely died of a mysterious illness. The story is now told as a ghost story and suggests if someone in a dimly lit room speaks Mary's name into a mirror Mary will appear in that mirror, and

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<sup>27</sup> Sméagol was once similar to a Hobbit. However, he found the one ring of power and keeps it for over 500 years. The ring poisons his mind over time. Gollum is Sméagol influenced by the ring.

if she believes that she is being taunted the mirror will shatter, or the person taunting her will be dragged into the mirror. In Caputo's experiment he comments that although his volunteers were unaware of the story, two-thirds of them reported seeing a deformed face in the reflection. Figure 5 suggests the "Bloody Mary Illusion" as it portrays a woman holding a candle to a mirror. She sees a reflected image of her future husband alongside her and the shadow of a witch on the wall which could be interpreted as being that of Mary. Therefore, it could be suggested that although the Mirror of Erised is a magical mirror in a fantasy novel, the phenomenon that Harry witnesses when looking into that mirror could, according to Caputo, be quite plausible or 'real'.

Additionally, Caputo researched into whether we recognise ourselves more quickly in mirrors, photographs or videos, and discovered that children recognise themselves in photographs before their own mirrored reflection. This relates to the myth of Narcissus in Greek mythology. Unable to recognise his own reflection in a body of water, believing it to be a water spirit, he fell in love with it and died being unable to leave his reflection. Anthropologist Edmund Carpenter (1922-2011) presented mirrors to an isolated tribe and was surprised that "Like Narcissus, they were left numb, totally fascinated by their own reflections: indeed the myth of Narcissus may refer to this phenomenon." (Rochat & Zahavi, 2010) Carpenter's experiment and Narcissus suggest that we can be easily manipulated by mirrors into forgetting reality. If we are unable to recognise our mirrored reflections, we miss the reality of who we are, something as simple as how we appear being crucial to this.

The use of water as a mirror is a curious concept, since ripples can distort any reflected image and it is not until they completely subside that a clear 'real' reflection is obtained. Similarly, in *Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Hermione, Ron and Griphook the Goblin<sup>28</sup> encounter a waterfall in Gringotts Bank while attempting to break into the wealthy Lestrangle family vault. The water in Gringotts waterfall reveals bad intentions within the bank. Known as the 'Thief's Downfall' it removes any enchantment or form of concealment attempted by anyone entering the waterfall. Should any such concealment or enchantment be attempted and discovered, the

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<sup>28</sup> Griphook worked in Gringotts Wizarding Bank.

perpetrators of this dishonest conduct are also revealed, causing both the waterfall to remove the enchantments and the mine cart to derail and crash towards the floor, possibly with the intent to kill passengers. Perhaps, shedding light on something actually reveals a darker side, and the use of a mirror in films represents confronting your dark side.

Scepticism over what we see in mirrors feeds into the reaction against the Enlightenment (17<sup>th</sup> Century); this was all about light. As mirrors receive and reflect light, scepticism about them suggests that we don't always understand things purely by shedding light on them. Shedding too much light doesn't always help; for example, Rembrandt's *Clowes Self-Portrait* (1639), Figure 6, depicts a man whose face is half in light and half in darkness. The idea of half a face being in the light suggests that this brings out something important in human beings; we have a dark side, and over-obsession with light will obstruct reality.



**Figure 6: Rembrandt's *Clowes Self-Portrait***  
Courtesy of (Rijn)

The Greek mythological monster Medusa was an ugly woman with venomous snakes for hair. According to Roman poet Publius Ovid (43BC-AD17/18), Medusa once had beautiful hair which changed to snakes as punishment for an indiscretion. Any person looking directly at Medusa would turn to stone, so to avoid this fate Perseus used her reflection in a polished shield to approach and decapitate her. Similarly, the Basilisk, the King of Serpents in *Chamber of Secrets* "has a murderous stare, and all who are fixed with the beam of its eye shall suffer instant death." (Rowling, 1998, p.215) Both Medusa and the Basilisk used their eyes to incapacitate victims. However, like Perseus, none of the students of Hogwarts died because they never looked directly at the serpent. For example, Mrs. Norris (Filch's cat) only saw the reflection of the basilisk in water on the floor and Hermione had been using a mirror to look around corners. These events illustrate the use of a mirror's reflection as protection to avoid the consequences of looking directly at the 'real' creature.

While a reflection sheds light on reality, or is intended to, the Medusa myth suggests that a reflection can provide protection from reality. According to Roman history, a reflection was an individual's soul and thereby a reflection of their true self. Romans also believed that breaking a mirror damaged an individual's soul, the origin of the superstition that breaking a mirror brings seven years bad luck. The belief that mirrors portrayed the soul also led to superstitions surrounding death. In a room where there has been a recent death, mirrors must either be covered or face a wall, otherwise the deceased person's soul would be lost. Mirrors could thereby be described as a spiritual portal. This could be the case when Harry stands before the Mirror of Erised and sees himself with his deceased parents. Designed to produce a clear reflection, a mirror should show reality, but in the above examples the mirror reflects the soul, not physical reality. It is an illusion of reality, and mirrors are used frequently for entertainment because of this ability to distort reality.

Anything placed between two mirrors has multiple reflections that appear to go on, seemingly forever, creating the effect of a mirror within a mirror. All reflections appear to respond to movements of the object or person being reflected. The main character in Children's Laureate Anne Fine's (1947-) novel, *Bad Dreams*, tells others that she wishes to be the woman on the covers of old Christmas albums who is depicted reading a book, the cover of which has a picture of herself reading the same book on the cover of the book that she is reading. The image goes on and on until it is no longer visible. She describes this as a "girl who's reading all the other lives in from the outside." (Fine, 2000, p.12) Each of these girls is living in their own reality but is reflecting another. Theoretical physicist Brian Greene (1963-) comments on this concept of reality in discussing mirrors within mirrors (face-to-face mirrors): "Sometimes I would imagine an irreverent me way down the line who refused to fall into place, disrupting the steady progression and creating a new reality that informed the ones that followed." (Greene, 2011, p.3) If the mirror within a mirror effect could be described as different realities, this directly links to the world of Potter being a world within a world. Similarly, if mirrors are intended to shed light on reality, the concept presented by Greene of a reflection creating a new reality by defying 'normality' suggests that mirrors can distort or change reality, in the same way that Rowling has taken our reality and distorted it to defy normality.



**Figure 7: Ariadne Creating the Mirror within a Mirror Effect**  
Scene from *Inception* (Nolan, 2010)

A well-known scene in the film *Inception* shows character Ariadne<sup>29</sup> creating the mirror within a mirror effect, going on ad infinitum (Figure 7). However, it is curious that the mirror shatters when she reaches out to touch it. Does the mirror break because Ariadne touches it or because she has reached the breaking or end point of her creativity? That is, does reaching out to touch suggest she seeks to establish whether the image is real? When it breaks it reinforces the view that it is not reality, confirmed throughout the film by the fact that Ariadne is always certain of reality. However, the idea of mirrors shedding light on matters is also suggested in *Inception*.

During the film's main dream Eames, the forger, is hired to impersonate and imitate unsuspecting lawyer Peter Browning to obtain information from his Godson, Robert Fischer, the wealthy heir to a family business. As Eames prepares to become Browning (Figure 8), a mirror is angled to facilitate a face-to-face mirror effect. His reflection is seen in two of the mirrors (1), but this gradually changes with two reflections becoming Browning (2), until all the reflections become Browning while Eames remains the same in reality (3), and finally (4) Eames becomes Browning in the reality of the dream but the mirror reflection reveals his true identity.

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<sup>29</sup> An architect hired to design three dream layer mazes.



**Figure 8: Eames Becoming Browning in the Dream.**  
 Scene from *Inception* (Nolan, 2010) White arrow indicates the real person in the dream.

This is also shown later when Eames impersonates someone else. While mirrors create the same effect as Ariadne in Figure 7, amongst the many false reflections only one of them is Eames (Figure 9). The characters often discuss how to disguise the limits of the dream through use of paradoxes, for example the Penrose staircase, and shortcuts around the maze structure they create. Does Eames conceal his real identity in the reflection? This would make sense from the standpoint that mirrors shed light on the truth, and while part of the forgery is concealed the truth is still revealed.



**Figure 9: Eames' True Identity Being Revealed in a Reflection.**  
 Scene from *Inception* (Nolan, 2010)

There are also occasions, however, when mirrors are used to conceal the truth by manipulating our perception. Harry's use of the Mirror of Erised at the end of *Philosopher's Stone* is an example of this and also supports the notion, mentioned above, that happiness not contentment is crucial to using the mirror. For that moment in time, it was Harry's deepest desire to find the Philosopher's Stone before Voldemort, who wished to use the power of the stone to make the Elixir of Life, while Harry does not wish to use it in any way. As Harry looks into the mirror, he finds that the stone has been transferred into his pocket; Dumbledore had designed the mirror with the stone hidden within it so it could only be removed by someone not seeking it for personal gain.

In reality, a House or Maze of Mirrors is designed as a puzzle, the multiple reflections making it difficult to identify the correct path. This is compounded by the use of Concave and Convex mirrors to distort the person's reflection, and altering the perception of distance as individuals can appear closer (concave) or farther away (convex) from the mirror. It also affects our sense of direction, because concentrating on whether a reflection is real or not can distract from seeking an exit. Similarly, the Mirror of Erised manipulates the psychology of the viewer, suggesting why Dumbledore warns that the mirror would offer "neither knowledge or truth". Just as a maze of mirrors can cause loss of sense of direction, the Mirror of Erised could do so regarding reality. If mirrors are used as illusions, what does this tell us about reality?

Lewis Carroll's (1830-1898) *Alice through the Looking Glass* and Sirius' mirror in *Harry Potter* are examples of mirrors being used as portals. Sirius gives Harry a two-way mirror that enables two individuals, wherever they are, to see and talk to each other through the mirrors. Sirius and James Potter used them while in separate detentions. Possibly the mirrors are linked with a 'Protean Charm', that can interlink objects through a common purpose. In our reality, the two mirrors could be viewed in a manner similar to Skype, as a form of instant messaging with a webcam sending 'real time' images. In *Alice through the Looking Glass*, the mirror is a physical portal allowing Alice to enter Wonderland. Her experiences are today known as a

neurological medical condition, 'Alice in Wonderland syndrome'<sup>30</sup>, which affects vision and distorts perception whereby an individual senses that their surroundings are either shrinking or growing. AIWS suggests that mirrors can disturb our view of reality. The concept suggested by Carroll of stepping through a mirror has either shed light on or possibly distorted in some people's minds whether this is plausible. In reality, there are very few examples of mirrors being used as portals. It could be argued that a so-called one-way (alternatively named two-way mirror) is used as a portal. Superficially, it has the appearance of a normal mirror with a dark, coated side and a reflective side that, in the light, has the appearance of a normal mirror. On the light side a reflection can be seen whereas on the dark side it acts as a window enabling someone to see-through, unobserved by someone on the light side. This example reinforces the concept that a light side also has a dark side and, in this case, the dark side conceals anything on that side. We tend to trust that a mirror provides us with a true representation of our appearance, but whether this is fact in reality is questionable. Mirrors can be designed to manipulate the reflected image and, as previously discussed, sometimes shedding light on something does not necessarily improve it.

In ancient times, rudimentary mirrors were made from polished metal, but quality glass was necessary to manufacture the good mirrors widely available today. When mirrors were first discovered, it must have been an exciting prospect for individuals to obtain visual self-reflections. Mirrors are featured in literature, possibly because of the realisation that a totally accurate reflection is not easily obtained, and many could be no more than a distortion. The desire for an accurate reflection is fantasy in itself. Mirrors in literature, such as *Harry Potter*, appear to be seeking to dispel that fantasy by presenting an obvious distortion, such as the Mirror of Erised, because in reality we know that a truly accurate reflection is not possible. This desire for accuracy is problematic since the ability to see things first hand makes an individual believe that they are in the real world, whereas in fact it proves no such thing; it could all be fantasy.

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<sup>30</sup> Discovered in 1955 by British psychiatrist John Todd; known as Todd's syndrome or Lilliputian Hallucinations.



It is undeniable that individuals use mirrors as a means of shedding light on their own image; how they appear in 'reality'. We trust that a mirror does this but, as Sirius says to Harry in the *Order of the Phoenix* film, "We both have light and dark"; just as the world isn't subdivided into good and bad people, we have both within us. Perhaps, by shedding light on an object like a mirror in the belief that it reflects reality, we are merely highlighting the fact that there are still many questions remaining unanswered. In the same way, the more we discuss aspects of reality, the more we shed light on the fact that there are many aspects of reality that we still do not understand, and possibly never will. We can present theories for identifying reality, but we may find that these are just as flawed as those seeking to discover the answers. We think that a mirror portrays reality, but sometimes it doesn't. We perceive our world through our senses. Could they be wrong too?

## Chapter Three: Senses

*“It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of something peculiar – a cat reading a map. [...] Mr. Dursley didn’t realise what he had seen [...] he jerked his head around to look again. There was a tabby cat standing on the corner [...] but there wasn’t a map in sight. What could he have been thinking of? It must have been a trick of the light.”*  
(Rowling, 1997, p.2)

Establishing that mirrors can be deceiving questions how we perceive our world and reality. This links directly to Dumbledore’s warning about the Mirror of Erised: “...this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth.” (Rowling, 1997, p.157) How we perceive reality and gain knowledge and truth are closely linked to our five senses. The *Harry Potter* novels do not provide many examples of manipulation of the senses, but when studying the Potterverse (or the external effect of Potter), it is evident that how we interpret this is related to the senses.

We use our senses to navigate the world about us; the world that we believe is reality. From both the Potterverse and indeed magic entertainment in our world, we know that truth, knowledge and confidence in reality, are dependent upon the key senses of sight and touch. For example, extraordinary magicians such as Steven Frayne (1982- ) (aka Dynamo) perform magical illusions that seem impossible and yet, when witnessed first-hand, audiences are overwhelmed by them and are compelled to believe; he is so convincing. The sense of touch also seems crucial to many in determining reality. The question “is it real?” often precedes reaching out to touch something. These two senses appear pivotal in shedding light on reality, and also our decision to believe in reality.

Empiricist John Locke (1632-1704) believed that only our experiences give us knowledge of reality. Essentially, Locke and other Empiricists believed that “all ideas originate from sense data.” (Soccio, 2007, p.293) If true, it follows that “no two people will have the same knowledge, and as long as people ground their beliefs in their sense data, nobody’s beliefs are “better” or “truer” than anyone else’s.” (LaFave, 2006) It is evident that some believe we rely upon our senses to shed light

on and determine reality. As mentioned previously, sometimes revealing truth does not necessarily shed light on information but can raise more questions than it answers. We clearly rely on the senses we use for daily activities to establish reality. Is there a problem with this?

It was discussed in Chapter Two that what we observe in mirrors may not be reality. However, it may be our senses that are being fooled and giving us a distorted view or illusion of reality. The word illusion has been mentioned previously, but when it comes to our senses, it is important to understand its definition. An illusion can be defined as: “an instance of a wrong or misinterpreted perception of a sensory experience.” (Prezi, 2014) That is, it is being deceived that creates an incorrect notion of reality. In creating a false impression of reality, are our senses incorrectly acquiring data or are they incorrectly transmitting it to the brain? This is a crucial problem created through reliance on the senses; there are objects that cannot be perceived by using only human senses. Richard Dawkins noted that our senses are insufficiently strong for some concepts, and argued that if we based our existence on what we can perceive through only our senses then we would have to conclude that bacteria and distant galaxies, for example, do not exist simply because we can't see them, being either too small or too distant. However, he continues that as we better understand technology, we can use it to extend our senses beyond ordinary limits to conclude that galaxies and bacteria do exist. Technology can therefore help us expand our perceptions and provide greater knowledge of this 'reality'.

Another problem regarding the senses was presented by Philosopher George Berkeley (1685-1753). One of life's great conundrums: “If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” Berkeley suggests that “The objects of sense exist only when they are perceived” (Philosophy Archive, n.d.) That is, something does not exist unless it is being perceived by someone. Therefore, applying this to the example of the forest tree falling, the tree and the sound created should it fall do not actually exist unless a human is around to perceive (hear, smell, touch or see) it. Berkeley's arguments all centre on the material world not existing, but instead only ideas and our perceptions exist. This led to Berkeley's famous phrase “Esse est percipi: To be is to be perceived.” (Soccio, 2007, p.300) Therefore, according to Berkeley, an object or person only exists if they are being perceived

with the senses. Contrary to this, the Laws of Physics categorically demonstrate that the tree would make a sound even if nobody was around to hear it. A standing tree has 'Potential energy', a function of its height and mass; the taller the tree and the larger its trunk and branches, the greater the potential energy. All moving objects have kinetic energy, so during the tree's fall its potential energy converts into 'moving' kinetic energy. The laws of physics decree that energy can be neither created nor destroyed, but converts into another form. When the tree is stationary on the ground it no longer has potential or kinetic energy which has all been converted into heat or sound energy. Virtually all the tree's energy converts into sound, regardless of whether anyone can hear it. Therefore, Berkeley's assertion is not supported by fact. However, Berkeley questions the difference and relationship between perception and reality. With the tree falling in the forest the riddle points towards one equalling the other; that is perception means something exists and the main function of the senses is to establish existence. However, the senses can be deceived. A well-known example is when a straight pencil placed upright in glass of water appears bent, and moving it from the side of the glass to the centre creates the illusion of a broken pencil. The pencil has not changed when it enters the water but our eyes (sense of sight) inform the brain that the object is no longer straight or solid, but actually bent or broken. The pencil appears that way because light refracts under water creating the impression of a bent or broken object. Relating to topics discussed in Chapter Two, light can indeed distort the world, feeding false information to the senses and giving the brain a distorted view of reality.

It is debateable whether our eyes can be fooled and difficult to say if the senses are accurate. Many 'magic' tricks rely on redirecting the eye to somewhere unrelated to the trick. This is also known as misdirection, an example being Magician Burling Hull's (1889-1982) 'Svengali' deck of cards. The tricks performed rely on the audience accepting two basic assumptions: that they have a choice of card they select and that a real, normal deck of cards is being used. Based on these assumptions, the mind can convince the eyes and vice versa that the magic is real, illustrating that the mind can also contribute to distorting reality. However, as mentioned previously, we tend to rely on our eyes to establish reality. Do the eyes accurately see and perceive reality? Psychologists Daniel Simons (1969- ) and Daniel Levin (1964- ) investigated the visual "blind spot" (or Scotoma) everyone

possesses. It was discovered that "...there is a spot on the light-sensitive retina at the back of the eye where light is not detected because it is where the optic nerve sends visual information to the brain." (Highfield, 2002, p.176) Therefore, we do not actually see everything that we perceive because the eye does not process a complete image. Simons and Levin concluded that "Either we do not notice the blind spot, or else the brain 'fills it in' by extrapolating from visual information picked up from around the spot." (Highfield, 2002, p.177) For example, a straight line going through the blind spot will be converted into a continuous line by the brain because logic dictates that the line continues. The brain therefore relies on context, for example, leaving some letters out of words in a sentence, provided the first and last letters are there the brain will recognise the words (Typoglycemia). Another example is Stop Motion Animation where animators move models a single frame at a time. There are twenty-four frames a second and "The brain fills the gaps between the pictures and gives us the illusion of movement." (Fraps, The Blind Spot- Part Two, n.d.).

The Blind Spot also relates to how we view ourselves in mirrors. Photographer Duncan Davidson (1970- ) said we reject photographs not matching up to how we perceive ourselves in mirrors, stating that others were better placed to judge how we looked. Similarly, philosopher Douglas Soccio (2007) states "...we overlook the gaps between different perceptions [...] I assume that because my face looks "the same" this morning as yesterday morning, it has existed continuously all night (and at other times) when I had no perception of it." (p.309) He implies that our reality is no more than a sense of continuity based on our memories of things we've perceived and our current perception matching it. Because my reflection looks the same as it did yesterday I assume, quite logically, that it is indeed my face, and this continuity suggests to me that I am living in reality. My reality is based on senses and memory of previous perceptions. However, as will be discussed regarding the Mind, in Chapter Four, memory may be as flawed and susceptible to being deceived as our senses appear to be. Further, time does not necessarily prove the validity of memory, but could actually hinder it.

With regard to the Potterverse the story is incomplete. There are aspects that are never resolved: we are not told what happens to some characters, and some

events in the novels are never explained. For example, it is still not entirely clear how and why Harry defeats Voldemort. The reader is required to fill in several blanks in the story based on our assumptions of what happened. Indeed, there are many works of Fan Fiction<sup>31</sup> that deal with those aspects of the Potter story that were not fully explained; for instance, what happened after Voldemort was defeated at Hogwarts. That is, we make assumptions or jump to conclusions in much the same way as many characters in *Chamber of Secrets* assume that, because Harry can talk to snakes in a language called Parseltongue, he is the heir of Salazar Slytherin<sup>32</sup> and therefore attacks students. Hermione logically suggests that since Slytherin lived thousands of years ago, it is not possible to determine whether Harry was his heir. Similarly, the reader will make assumptions about what happened to Voldemort's supporters after his death. We know from the Epilogue of *Deathly Hallows* that antagonist Draco Malfoy is fit and happy, but it is never explained whether he faced punishment for his involvement with Voldemort. In reality, we do the same; we make assumptions based upon such information that we have in order to make sense of something in our minds. This is discussed under the topic of false memories in Chapter Four. Debatably, as humans we need a beginning and an end to events in order to make sense of them and the mind and the senses are equally involved in creating a false image of reality.

If the senses do not receive accurate data from 'reality' this surely means that it can create new and false images. Scientist Roger Highfield (1958- ) comments that our senses are similar to the Imperius Curse from the Potterverse that allows the individual casting the spell to completely control another person. In a way, the entire body works like this; "...when a person is asked to lift his finger, he becomes aware of the urge to move some 300 milliseconds 'after' brain activity to trigger the movement." (Highfield, 2002, p.197) Highfield comments that the brain also creates distortion because the senses do not pick up all of the available data and can distort reality by creating hallucinations or illusions.

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<sup>31</sup> Stories written by Fans of a literature, films, famous people, about the characters or world the story is set in.

<sup>32</sup> The founder of Slytherin house who could also talk to snakes.



**Figure 10: Image of Plato's Cave.** Courtesy of (Blogspot, n.d.)

Plato's Cave (c.424BC-347BC), Figure 10, is a metaphor for knowledge and ignorance that discusses how we perceive reality and decide to believe in it. Prisoners are tied up inside a cave facing a wall on to which puppet shadows from a fire are cast. The prisoners only see the shadows, not the puppets or their operators. Socrates (c. 470BC-399 BC) suggested that if a prisoner was freed and informed that the shadows were not real and shown the world outside the cave, upon returning to the cave he would inform the remaining prisoners of what he had seen and that they were not seeing reality. Being unable to see and identify with the outside world he describes, the prisoners would disbelieve him. The story of Plato's Cave also relates to mirrors in the sense that shedding light on something is not always a good thing. The prisoner returning to the cave and the darkness must deal with the other prisoners who have not seen the light (literally); the shadows are their reality.

The prisoners simply can't imagine a world different from the two-dimensional dark and bright appearances in front of them. Are we like the prisoners? True, we can distinguish between shadows and real objects, but how real are the objects we consider to be real? (Wenmackers, 2011, p.12)

What if our world is just a massive Plato's Cave, and our perceptions are just "...a faint inkling of a far richer reality that flickers beyond reach" (Greene, 2011, p.238)? *The Matrix* films (Brothers, 1999) consider a situation similar to Plato's Cave, questioning whether our world exists, or is a mere simulation. This is touched upon in *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* an English translation of selected Persian

poems by poet Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883): “For in and out, about, below, ‘Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show, Play’d in a Box whose Candle is the Sun, Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.” (FitzGerald, 1993) This relates to Plato’s Cave and the belief that life is nothing but shadows on a wall and we are all, unwillingly, taking part in a shadow-show. If we are merely relying on our sense of sight to establish reality, then life could be just a shadow that we perceive to be a world.

“Although all five senses contribute to our perception of the outer world, vision dominates.” (Fraps, *The Blind Spot – Part One*, 1998) It is true that many rely upon our sense of sight to determine whether something is real. The sense of touch is probably next, which not only grounds us in reality but also aids those with impaired vision to establish their physical surroundings. Can we ever know if our senses are distorting our view of reality? We have seen cases where we know they are, for example the pencil in water. However, with regard to the blind spot in our eyes, it becomes clear that we use logic and our minds to make sense of any distortions with which we are presented. There are undoubtedly times when our senses perceive something that we know cannot be true. For example, a phantom limb when a person experiences a sensation that an amputated limb is still attached to the body, caused mainly by the nerve endings. Pain can be experienced and affected individuals can even attempt to perform an action, for example picking up something when the appropriate limb no longer exists. Another example is the frequent occurrence of mishearing a person and instead hearing something completely different to what was said. We hear something but logic tells us that they didn’t say that and so we question it by asking the person to repeat themselves.

Our mind processes information received from our senses to establish reality; we could refer to this as logic. It could be suggested that our minds go through a similar process to that which Professor Kirke offers the four siblings in his care in C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). When two of the siblings, Peter and Susan, do not believe that their sister Lucy has been to Narnia, the Professor says:

There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn’t tell lies and it is obvious



she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth. (Lewis, 1950, p.47)

Perhaps our mind undergoes the same process. However, the senses do not necessarily lie or distort reality, but simply do not process all information. This is where the mind comes in.

Our sense of sight provides the most extensive information on the external world, transferring this information to the brain so when we actually 'see' something, "we actually see the effect the rays reaching our eyes form in our brain by being converted into electric signals. When we say "we see" we actually observe the electrical signals in our brain." (spacetruth2012, 2012) Our entire lives are therefore based on electrical signals formed by the brain that we assume to be reality. If we believe that our senses are merely there to create electrical signals for the brain to interpret, this alters how we view reality. If this theory is correct, there is an external world and a world of perceptions formed within our brain which we rely upon to determine reality. This causes the problem: if we cannot reach the external world, how can we know or be sure that it actually exists? The simple answer is that we cannot be sure that this world is real. The only reality we know and understand is the "world of perceptions we live within our minds." (spacetruth2012, 2012) This supports the Brain-in-a-Vat argument, where a person's brain could be removed and wired to a computer programmed to provide the impulses normally received by the brain. Essentially, a "virtual reality" is created and, arguably, if the senses do nothing more than send signals to the brain, a virtual reality is what we are all living. Physicist Andrew Thomas (2007) states:

The person with the disembodied brain would continue to have perfectly normal conscious experiences without these being related to objects or events in the real world. It would be impossible for the person to discover the reality of their simulated world.

If this is possible, then it is also possible that our entire world is nothing more than a computer simulation. We could all be simulated characters, such as in *The Sims*, by Electronic Arts (EA), an 'artificial life' game in which it is possible to create, almost design, people and their lives, and control their actions. How do we know whether or not someone is controlling us to perform our actions? Our lives could be nothing more than entertainment to someone, like in *The Sims*. Such Games are

sometimes termed “God games” and it understandable why. However, the brain-in-a-vat argument has been rejected by scientists because it is untestable. In other words, just as Rowling’s magical world is hidden from us, if we lived in a computer simulated world, being run by God or someone else, we would never know because we cannot prove it. We also cannot prove whether God exists and, again like Potter, perhaps this is by design. If our senses do nothing more than transmit electrical signals to the brain for it to create a reality, this theory makes a clear point: all perceptions are ideas from, and can only exist in, the mind. We are therefore being deluded into believing that there is a world beyond our mind. We cannot be sure from where the signals emanate; they may not be coming from anywhere, not even from an artificial source such as the brain-in-a-vat argument. This is something on which René Descartes (1596-1650) commented and attempted to resolve, and will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Aside from our five senses we do sense other things. For example, when walking into a room you can immediately sense whether two people there have had an argument. We are able to sense tension even if nothing is said and their body language is neutral. Many musicians cannot tolerate silence because it is ‘too loud’; this seems ludicrous to many but silence does have a deafening ring to it. The same can be said about disagreements creating tension and a deafening silence. It’s not something that can be measured but as humans we do pick up on atmospheres. The Déjà vu moment is another interesting phenomenon regarding senses. This is a moment when you believe that you have relived something that you may have experienced previously: a conversation, a thought process or even just a sensation. Sometimes other senses trigger recollections, such as smell and sounds bringing about memories of past events. However, a problem with Déjà vu moments is that they sometimes occur in both dreams and reality and it can be difficult to recollect which happened first.

Berkeley states, “to exist is to be thought about: Nothing, not even an unthinking thing, can exist unless something perceives it.” (Soccio, 2007, p.300) He insists that our senses are the means by which we grasp reality and, in fact, the only way by which we can know whether something exists. Our senses affect the way we think, so if our senses are perceiving distortions it follows that the mind might also be

being deceived. Alternatively, if the brain-in-a-vat argument is true, our senses are serving no purpose other than to send electric signals to the brain, which creates a perception of reality. Everything we know could be being created by the brain. This world could be, as Harry asks Dumbledore at King's Cross, happening inside our head. Can we be sure that our thoughts and memories are therefore real? What if this is not reality, but a dream? If senses establish reality, the mind may be just as distorted.

## Chapter Four: The Mind: Memories, Thoughts and Dreams

*“For in dreams, we enter a world that’s entirely our own. Let them swim in the deepest ocean or glide over the highest cloud.”*

*(Cuarón, 2004)*

Memories and thoughts take place in the mind. They form a crucial part of our individual identity and communities. Through memories, we can remember our past and events that led us to the present moment, while our thoughts give us the ability to formulate new ideas and move towards the future. As discussed in Chapter Three, our senses, that send messages to the brain to establish reality, can be easily deceived. Alternatively, if we believe in the brain-in-a-vat argument, the mind is creating an image of the world from the electric signals picked up by the senses. Regardless of which theory is followed, if our senses are not obtaining correct impressions of this world, it follows that the information the brain interprets might not be correct or real.

If the mind is processing incorrect information, parts of the brain that we believe establish reality, such as thoughts and memories, may also not be real. To further consider this it is necessary to understand the difference between thoughts and memories. Fundamentally, memories, thoughts and even the imagination are all based upon and concerned with reality and how we establish it. Memories remember an occurrence, but thoughts can direct you there. Therefore, thoughts are the brain processing information and allocating it to the past, present and future, whereas memories only deal with the past but can nevertheless still be recalled and analysed. When studying memories it becomes apparent that there is no solid proof or evidence that our world is real, and there are many problems with memory.

Memories are defined as “the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information.” (Shankar, 2014) If the brain is likened to a computer processor, then the mind is the Random-access memory (RAM), which in itself is a section of the brain. Certain parts of the brain deal with memory, subdivided into long and short-term memory. Short-term memories become long-term through repetition.

There are many different types of memory and several theories on its role. Philosopher Amy Kind (1974- ) comments, (Kind, 2010), that there are three different types of memory: Know-how memory which is the memory of skills, for example driving and musical instrument playing; Factual memory which is remembering things that have been learnt; and Experiential memory which are memories from a first person view point, usually the memories of events. Know-how memories could also be considered “Muscle memory” where a sufficiently repeated task transfers the muscle and motor movements into the long-term memory. Quite often, musicians who haven’t played their instrument or a particular piece of music for a while will say that their fingers know what they are doing while the brain doesn’t. In contrast, Philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859-1941), concluded that intuition aided our understanding of reality more than science, and that there are only two types of memory, “memories of habit” and “memories of personal events” (Shores, 2010, p.204). Memories of habit and Kind’s Know-how memories are similar as they remember how to do something, and memories of personal events are like experiential memory. Perhaps Bergson is combining Kind’s Factual memory with “memories of habit” because in order for some facts to remain in the brain they must be learnt and repeated in order to remain in the memory, as with any habit.

Having established that there are different memory types, does not explain the nature of memories, and Philosophers have varying opinions on this. Plato (427-347 BCE) believed that memories were like “a wax tablet whose etchings were imprinted upon our souls...” (Shores, 2010, p.198), while John Locke considered memory to be ideas that were being stored. Plato implies that memories are a crucial part of our personality and identity, and define who we are. The analogies of Plato and Locke suggest that memories are not permanent. Memories are constantly being wiped clean and reused on Plato’s wax tablet, and Locke’s concept implies that we constantly stock up ideas, some of which we would eventually need to forget to avoid our memories from becoming too full to recall anything. Memories are important to people, and the suggestion that memory is not permanent can be distressing; they are our constant grip on reality. Memories are personal as we recall our journey through life bringing us to the present.

We make ourselves through our memories; after all, what we know is dependent on what we remember. On a deeper level, memory fulfils a desire

we have to go back to the start, to understand where we have come from. (Shores, 2010, pp198-199)

Memory is crucial to our understanding of reality; through past memories we respond to the present which in turn influences our future. However, are we relying on an unreliable source to establish our reality?

It is generally believed that our memory worsens as we age; we may have problems remembering events, people and sometimes how to undertake simple tasks. However, it could be that we may not remember anything correctly, regardless of our age. In *Half-Blood Prince*, while learning about Voldemort's past, Harry and Dumbledore revisit a memory of Horace Slughorn, a teacher at Hogwarts. In the Pensieve (discussed later in this chapter), Harry notices a strange occurrence. While viewing the scene, "The whole room was suddenly filled with a thick white fog..." (Rowling, 2005, p.346) and everything becomes distorted. Dumbledore comments, "...that memory has been tampered with" (Rowling, 2005, p.347) and explains that Slughorn still has the original, unadulterated, memory inside him. When Harry asks why Slughorn has changed his memory, Dumbledore replies:

Because, I think, he is ashamed of what he remembers. He has tried to rework the memory to show himself in a better light, obliterating those parts which he does not wish me to see. It is, as you will have noticed, very crudely done, and this is all to the good, for it shows that the true memory is still there beneath the alterations. (Rowling, 2005, p.248)

Slughorn has hidden the original memory because he seeks to erase his guilt. In reality, wittingly or otherwise, we all distort our memories. Having been in trouble at school, children will generally give their parents a different version of the event to appear better than they necessarily were. Why do we do this? Is it because, like Slughorn, we want other people to only see us in a good light? In a similar way to Rembrandt's *Clowes Self-Portrait* (1639) (Figure 6) in Chapter Two, do we wish only the light side of us to be seen and so move memories of doing something bad to our dark side where they cannot be seen? We all forget things over time and sometimes only believe the parts of memories we have told others rather than the entire event. What Dumbledore implies is that memory tells the truth. It is impossible to hide information within our memories because those who have fabricated the memory will be aware. The fog appearing in the memory is the physical sign of tampering.

Similarly, in *Order of the Phoenix*, when Harry sees into Snape's memories he learns for himself that his father "had been every bit as arrogant as Snape had always told him." (Rowling, 2003, p.573) However, the argument that a person will always know that they've tampered with their memories might not necessarily be true. Stories told by compulsive liars often seem unlikely yet may never be completely unrealistic; they could under some circumstances be true and could happen in reality. Unlike stories that incorporate impossible elements presented as fact, known as tall tales, the tendency to lie and fabricate is part of a compulsive liar's personality. There have been cases where a person lives their lies for so long that they do not believe the truth, even when presented with undeniable evidence. This condition, the 'False Memory Syndrome', is so severe and entrenched that the person could even pass a lie detector test, described later in this chapter. Memories can therefore be fabricated and believed in reality. The Potterverse presents an ideal where a person cannot convince others with their fabrications, because it is apparent to recipients of the story, somewhat like fog entering a supposedly normal scene.

Under stressful circumstances our memory can be selective in what it remembers mainly because of what psychologists refer to as "Schemas"; described as knowledge that allows us to create certain expectations about everyday life. For example, we have schemas about going to school or the cinema. Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen (1958- ) suggests that because of Schemas, the mind will select certain details of a situation and thereby "memories are distorted to fit with our existing expectations [...] to help us fill gaps in our memory by making a best guess." (Robert Smyth Academy, 2006) In general, having a selective memory means being able to remember some facts while conveniently or inconveniently forgetting others. When we are angry at a person we quite often forget all the good times spent with them and focus mainly on the bad in order to support or justify how we feel at that moment in time. Scientists have discovered that selective memory does actually exist. Psychologist Gerd Thomas Waldhauser (n.d.) commented, "...the more often information is suppressed, the more difficult it becomes to retrieve it." (The Telegraph, 2011) An experiment conducted by Waldhauser concluded that repressing memories for a long time can result in the brain forgetting or removing them altogether. "...it is important for us to remember that our memory of the past is really our *version* of the past, and not necessarily at all how things actually were."

(Shores, 2010, p.202) A further consideration is that we can be selective regarding what we chose to remember, especially as we age, and find that past information is no longer necessary or important. This is distinct from amnesia in which an individual tends to forget things that they would normally expect or need to recall.

Cognitive psychologist, Elizabeth Loftus (1944- ), studied false memories in detail, stating “As humans we are capable of developing memories of ideas that other people think occurred. Just being exposed to credible information can lead you down this path.” (Highfield, 2002, pp185-186) She implies that we are constructing reality from what we assume are *our* memories when, in fact, we could be siphoning ideas from others and accepting them as our own. This is possible because we can forget events very quickly. In the Wizarding World, memories can be completely wiped clean or obliterated. In *Chamber of Secrets*, Gilderoy Lockhart casts a memory charm (“Oblivate!”) and the wand backfires erasing his memories and he can no longer remember who he is. The parents of Harry’s friend Neville Longbottom<sup>33</sup> have also lost their memories as a consequence of being tortured into insanity from the Cruciatus Curse. They remain permanently in St. Mungo’s Hospital where they are visited by Neville despite them not knowing who he is. Barty Crouch sr.<sup>34</sup> is driven mad by Voldemort’s Imperius Curse, which makes him talk to a nearby tree thinking it to be his assistant. He also talks as though his wife and son are still alive but then seems to remember reality and tells Harry that he needs to see Dumbledore. In reality, we all forget things, big and small, and sometimes entire events from our past. In fact we do not start remembering until the age of about three/four; everything beforehand is snapshots of images. We remember snippets of our past and even then we cannot be sure that we are remembering the actual event or what someone has told us about it. In reality, however, there is no way to forget completely except from serious head trauma and, even then, fragments of memory are still recalled; we may just forget our relationship to someone or a specific event. However, the problem with being informed of past events is that it corrupts your own memory of them, which Elizabeth Loftus studies extensively.

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<sup>33</sup> Aurors (Dark wizard catchers) Frank and Alice Longbottom.

<sup>34</sup> Bartemius "Barty" Crouch Senior. Worked in the Ministry of Magic’s Department of Magical Law Enforcement. He was going to be Minister of Magic until his son (Barty Crouch Jr.) was discovered to be a Death Eater. Crouch Jr. was one of the death eaters who tortured the Longbottoms.



Loftus studies memories, especially false memories, in which she became interested when an innocent man, Steve Titus (1950-1986), was convicted of rape because he was similar in appearance to the man who actually committed the crime. The rape victim swore on the witness stand that she was attacked by Titus; she was mistaken. With the later introduction of DNA testing, over 300 innocent people were found to have been wrongly convicted, 75% of whom due to faulty or false memories. Loftus studied the Titus case out of fascination with how the victim could be so absolutely positive in their incorrect recollections. Loftus states that people believe memory to work like a recording device that accurately reflects reality and which can be readily played-back when questions relating to that memory are posed. This is not true; in fact our memories are “reconstructive. Memory works a little bit more like a Wikipedia page, you can go in there and change it, but so can other people.” (TED, 2013) If we feed individuals wrong information about an event, they grow to believe in the distorted facts, as frequently demonstrated in today’s media. When a crime has been committed those involved are requested to provide witness statements. With the passage of time, police involvement, media and the court of public opinion, statements can change in a way that answers or protects, depending upon what an individual is being accused. For example, during the investigation into the 1996 murder of six-year old JonBenét Ramsey (1990-1996), the police and a majority of the public were convinced that she had been murdered by her parents. During interviews the parents, especially Mrs. Ramsey, became increasingly defiant, verbally aggressive and self-protective. It wasn’t until later advances in DNA, some twelve years after the murder and after the death of Mrs. Ramsey, that the parents were cleared of involvement. However, public opinion and the police had so restricted the investigation that no other suspects were sought. The court of public opinion, based on information reported by the media, made assumptions and believed the parents to be guilty; it became impossible for the Ramseys to be seen in any other way. They retaliated against public accusations, but false information and intense police interrogations had caused them to remember some aspects of the police’s inaccurate version of events, and their story would never be the same. It was that inconsistency in their memories that caused the public to assume them guilty. In hindsight, it can be seen that the Ramseys did not murder their daughter, but the memory of them being accused remains and we may always wonder. Unfortunately,

like reality and memories, the whole truth may never be known. After investigating JonBenét's murder, journalist Bill Kurtis (1940- ) commented:

In the end, the strongest contribution to history made by this case could be that it stands for a new principle of law. In court, the presumption of innocence prevails, but in the court of public opinion, the presumption of guilt is stronger. (dennisa6, 2008)

That is, once that seed of guilt had been planted in our minds, it can spread to the extent that we no longer see reality. Influenced by information we have been fed, the real memory of events fades and is overtaken by the false memory, defining us as people and what we believe. Similarly, Loftus comments that memories are a crucial part of our identity, in the same way that the Ramseys will probably always remember their last day with JonBenét. I have personal memories of aspects of the Ramsey case and have viewed countless documentaries, films and interviews regarding it, and I cannot distinguish between factual documentaries and interviews, and a fictional television adaptation of the case. The truth is sometimes not revealed from memories; it may be there, but so too is much fiction.

False and implanted memories are also seen in the Potterverse when a False Memory charm plants a fake memory into the mind of the victim. Tom Riddle (Voldemort) uses this on his grandfather Marvolo Gaunt, and house-elf Hokey, to conceal his murders; he plants a memory in their minds that they, not he, committed the murders. However, as suggested by Slughorn's tampered memory, mentioned earlier in this chapter, memories do not lie and because Dumbledore was able to extract the original memory from Riddle's victims shows they remained aware of the original event. The Potterverse presents us with a belief that memories in the magical world do not lie and, when viewed, any tampering or attempt at concealment becomes apparent. However, there is an example of an image being planted into someone's head where knowledge and logic would render it unreliable. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry's vision of Sirius Black being tortured in the Department of Mysteries is, as Hermione suggests, incredibly unlikely given the circumstances; Sirius is a wanted man in hiding, it is the middle of the day when Harry has this vision and the Ministry of Magic would be full of people. Logically, Harry's dream seems unlikely, however, Voldemort understands that an emotional connection makes an idea stronger, something commented on in *Inception*. It is the same in

reality; if we have an emotional connection to something or someone then our recollections of an event are stronger, although hindsight can also blur and distort that memory. You can remember a scene with a former friend with whom you were once perfectly happy but now dislike, and your current feelings would taint that memory and prevent you from recalling things in exactly the same way. However, the Potterverse also complicates this. In *Deathly Hallows* Hermione plants false memories into the minds of her parents, so they forget about her and move to Australia to protect themselves from the Death Eaters. Because Dumbledore was able to extract the real memories from Marvolo and Hokey, a reader will assume that the spell is reversible, but in the film adaptation of *Deathly Hallows* (Yates, 2010), Hermione uses the spell “Oblivate”, the memory-wiping charm which, because of the fate that befell Gilderoy Lockhart, we know is not reversible .

Hypnosis can be employed to extract suppressed memories, although Loftus argues against this, discussed later in this chapter. The Potterverse provides examples of hypnosis that are completely different from our reality. Usually in films, hypnosis has been used to control another person, an approach taken in the Potterverse with the Imperius Curse. As mentioned in Chapter Two, in Rowling’s novels the Imperius Curse is an undetectable and powerful spell that enables the caster to control a victim. In fact we are informed that many of Voldemort’s supporters, such as Lucius Malfoy<sup>35</sup>, convinced the Ministry that they only did Voldemort’s bidding because they were under the influence of his Imperius Curse, and escaped punishment once Voldemort had disappeared. However, as the spell cannot be detected it is difficult to know who is being untruthful. Viktor Krum, one of the champions of the Tri-Wizard Tournament<sup>36</sup>, is put under the Imperius Curse during the final tournament task in a maze. Other than Harry, Krum must ensure that all champions cannot complete the task. In *Goblet of Fire*, Krum uses another unforgivable curse on another champion; Harry knows this deed is out of character and realises that Krum is bewitched. However, the film adaptation of *Goblet of Fire* (Newell, 2005) shows Krum to be enchanted, but this contradicts the premise that the curse is undetectable. Harry witnesses Krum attacking one of the champions and

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<sup>35</sup> Father of Draco Malfoy.

<sup>36</sup> A competition held between the three magical schools: Hogwarts, Durmstrang and Beauxbatons. One champion is selected to represent each school and takes part in three tasks testing different aspects of their magical ability.

is overheard by Krum who turns his wand on him. Krum's eyes are glazed over, like cloudy contact lenses, giving the impression that he is unaware of his actions (Figure 11), and suggesting that something is literally preventing him from seeing reality. The Imperius Curse raises the question of whether it is controlling the mind, body, or both. Moody places the Imperius Curse on Harry who can hear Moody's instructions in his head, which Harry's body immediately obeys. However, Harry can dispel the Curse by reasoning with Moody's voice in his head that seeks to control him. We could assume that through control of the mind the entire body is actually being controlled.



**Figure 11: Imperius Curse on Krum**  
Goblet of Fire film screenshot (Newell, 2005)

False memories are very common and Loftus found that we sometimes acquire others memories as our own. This is crucial to the understanding of False Memory Syndrome:

...a condition in which a person's identity and interpersonal relationships are centred around a memory of traumatic experience which is objectively false but in which the person strongly *believes*. Note that the syndrome is not characterised by false memories as such. We all have memories that are inaccurate." (McHugh, 2008, p.66)

We cannot even be sure that we are remembering an event:

...we may only be remembering another memory [...] and so on back to what may or may not have been a real incident originally. Memories of memories of memories can become progressively distorted<sup>37</sup>. There is good evidence that some of our most vivid memories are actually *false* memories. (Wedge, 1996, p.185)

Pure suggestion can make you believe anything and cause you to adopt ideas and memories of others as your own, which subsequently develop into something that you can no longer see as false; it will become your reality. This begs the

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<sup>37</sup> A similar idea to that of Greene regarding face-to-face mirrors and one reflection creating a new reality by refusing to conform, mentioned in Chapter Two (p.38) (Greene, 2011, p.3)

question whether memories can be preserved in their original form. The Potterverse has some suggestions.

In *Chamber of Secrets* we are introduced to Tom Riddle's diary. A normal diary in our reality records memories through the written word, but Riddle's diary does far more; a fragment of Voldemort's soul resides within the diary that preserves his sixteen year old self. When Ginny Weasley<sup>38</sup> begins to write in the diary, Riddle gains strength from her emotions. A curious feature of Riddle's diary is that, despite being a memory, he can interact with people in present reality and can also transport Harry into the diary to view one of Riddle's memories. In reality, when we re-read a diary we can usually recollect particular events in our mind in the same way as Harry views the scene from Riddle's memory. However, while we may metaphorically pour our souls into writing our diary, it would be far-fetched to say that as a result of doing so part of our soul lives in the diary. Nobody would trust a diary that writes back to you in the manner of Riddle's diary. As Arthur Weasley says, "Never trust anything that can think for itself *if you can't see where it keeps its brain.*" (Rowling, 1998, p.242)

Like replaying a memory in your head, we tend to remember a person's voice even if we no longer recall how they look, especially if we were very young when we last saw that person. It is apparent that emotions play a crucial part in memory. Following an argument with someone, we can sometimes remember how that person looked more than how they sounded. Memories of events caught on camera are also deceiving. Remembering an event such as your grandfather sitting in a particular chair can have many additions. For example, if he was sitting because he was ill and couldn't play with you as a child, and you then saw video footage of your grandmother playing ball with you, these two separate events could be mistakenly assumed to occur at the same time. You may have no recollection of playing ball with your grandmother but it is there on video, and is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

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<sup>38</sup> Ron's younger sister.

With the passage of time we tend to forget earlier memories. The Pensieve in the Potterverse overcomes this problem by enabling memories to be siphoned off and preserved, allowing a person to review them at a later time, (Figure 12).

Dumbledore uses the Pensieve to find links and patterns from memories. “I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind.” (Rowling, 2000, pp518-519) It allows someone to free their mind and



**Figure 13: Dumbledore presenting Harry with a Preserved Memory.**

Screenshot from *Half-Blood Prince* (Yates, 2009)

create more space, implying that the mind is like a computer hard drive that slows down if too much data is stored. The Pensieve also allows anyone’s memories to be visited by others. As previously mentioned, according to Amy Kind personal memories are Experimental memories, but when placed into the Pensieve they can be viewed by others. It is never explained whether the scene can be viewed from a different vantage point; for example, the opposite end of the room to where you originally sat and hear conversations taking place there, or are you still only aware of those things of which you were aware at that time? In reality, many people would appreciate the ability to remove memories, allowing space for new ones (Figure 13).

However, the Pensieve does pose an interesting question about sharing memories; once a thought is shared, whose memory is it? In our reality, once you have shared a memory with someone, they too will acquire that memory, making your original



**Figure 12: Slughorn removing a Memory**

Screenshot from *Half-Blood Prince* (Yates, 2009)

memory no longer exclusively yours. Given how we rely upon memories to establish reality, sharing them could be considered dangerous. In *Inception*, you cannot allow anyone to touch your totem, an object that keeps track of reality; perhaps sharing memories has the same problem. Cobb’s totem is a spinning top that will never topple whilst he is in a dream, and also provides reassurance that he is not in someone else’s dream. There are two main problems with this: you cannot be sure you are not in your own dream because you know how your totem works and can

therefore manipulate it to behave in any way that you wish. Further, Cobb admits another flaw; his totem belonged to his deceased wife, Mal. Perhaps knowing someone else's memory in detail can confuse your perception of reality and, after the passage of time, there is no way of discerning whether that memory was originally your own.

Ariadne is advised by Cobb never to use memories in dreams because it becomes extremely difficult to ascertain the difference between dream and reality. In a crucial scene, Ariadne discovers that Cobb has used a lift in his dreams to store memories of his deceased wife and other memories he wishes to change. Ariadne realises that Cobb is attempting to keep his wife alive in his dreams by using memories of her. This becomes clear when Cobb confronts the projection of his wife in a dream and she says "you don't believe in one reality anymore" and "I'm the only thing you do believe in". His memories and occupation of working in dreams have led him to question reality.

As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, memory is important in establishing reality because it provides continuity. "Given how our identity depends on our memories, can we ever be sure of who we really are if we can't rely on what we remember?" (Highfield, 2002, p.184) Although we may remember a particular scene in our minds, hindsight and others factors will always be tapped into the memory, making it unreliable as a recollection of past events. There is no doubt that memory is important to us because "...what is an experience to us without the memory of it afterward? Memory of an experience needs a context in order to be meaningful to us..." (Shores 2010, p.208) But the problem is we cannot remember an event in its original form without it becoming clouded or distorted by hindsight, emotion and even input from others. We rely upon our memories for reality, a concept discussed in *Dark City* (Proyas, 1998) in which, every night, aliens freeze time and inject new memories into a person's head and rebuild their surroundings to correspond with these new memories. The aliens are seeking to understand what makes a human soul. Quite logically, they assume that because our memories provide us with continuity, and are arguably crucial to our identity, they are what make a human soul. However, the protagonist points out that it is our emotions that make us who we are. Many philosophical arguments about the soul suggest that it is emotion and not

memory that separate us from machines. Debatably, memory is something that can be created but there will always be gaps, and there are issues that we will still forget. On the other hand, emotions are very difficult to forget; they generally change, not stop and start. Just as the mind fills in the Blind spot, described in Chapter Three, maybe memories are the same. They are distorted because the thought processes of the mind that lead to memories are also distorted.

There is a hypothesis that suggests all our senses simply send electrical signals to the brain, from which the brain creates reality. Our thoughts are incredibly powerful in fact "...thoughts can leave deeper scarring than almost anything else..." (Rowling, 2003, p.746) Thoughts are powerful and potentially dangerous. They are powerful because they become ideas that can possess and obsess a person. Ideas can grow to define who we are, what we believe, and become part of an identity upon which a person will continuously act. When distinguishing between thoughts and memories there is a key difference. Memories are recalling a past event, whereas thoughts could be considered to be "...just like speaking without making noises." (Nida-Rümelin, 2010, p.2) There are occasions when individuals will have conversations with another person inside their head and state something out loud. There is also the case when reading, writing and typing, when a voice inside our head appears to be reading to us. Very rarely is it your own voice that you hear. For example, if after listening to the *Harry Potter* audiobooks you then re-read the novels, within your head you may hear the audiobook voice (in the case of Jim Dale, the individual voices of the characters) reading along with you. It is also clear that memories and thoughts are linked. Quite often thoughts can lead us to memories, and memories can affect present thoughts. With memories and thoughts, the past, present and future are combined inside our mind.

The Potterverse gives an example of this in the art of Occlumency and Legilimency. Snape comments to Harry:

The mind is not a book, to be opened at will and examined at leisure. Thoughts are not etched on the inside of skulls, to be perused by an invader. The mind is a complex and many-layered thing [...] however, [...] those who have mastered Legilimency are able [...] to delve into the minds of their victims and interpret their findings... (Rowling, 2003, p.469)



Thoughts are less permanent than memories, but do we ever think of memories as being etched on the inside of our skull? Although this agrees with Plato's view of memories being a wax tablet, the mind is reusable and old memories can be forgotten to make room for the new. Although Snape speaks of thoughts, Occlumency really concerns memories. Harry relives memories during his Occlumency lessons but Snape explains that Occlumency is also crucial in being able to deceive convincingly: "The Dark Lord [...] knows when somebody is lying to him. Only those skilled at Occlumency are able to shut down those feelings and memories that contradict the lie, and so can utter falsehoods in his presence without detection." (Rowling, 2003, p.469) That is, the ability to close down certain areas of your mind means that you can tell lies without being detected. Occlumency is a branch of magic that involves clearing your head of thoughts and emotions so that a person (A Legilimens) cannot access your mind. Legilimency on the other hand is "the ability to extract feelings and memories from another person's mind..." (Rowling, 2003, p.468) This power is further explained in the *Order of the Phoenix* film (Yates, 2007). Snape states that a Legilimens can control the mind, "Read it, [...] unhinge it. In the past it was often the Dark Lord's pleasure to invade the minds of his victims, creating visions designed to torture them into madness." The danger of allowing someone to access your thoughts is that they could plant an idea inside your head which could influence your actions. According to the Potterverse, the mind is easily 'accessed' when the individual is asleep. Sleep is meant to be a safe and restful place, during which you do not expect to be attacked. This is the whole premise of *Inception*.

*Inception* presents the concepts of Extraction (stealing an idea) and Inception (implanting an idea) while a victim is, sometimes unwillingly, sharing a dream with others. *Inception* draws on very real ideas. To 'implant' an idea into someone's mind all you need are "...words and willing ears. To make them stick requires [...] indoctrination through repetition..." (Andersen, 2011, p.43) Unfortunately, this suggests that even our thoughts might not be our own because we can be easily influenced by others. Every day we are bombarded with information some of which initially becomes thought which we can commit to memory; despite allowing someone to plant an idea into our mind, this is basically how we learn anything. The alphabet was presented to us at a young age, but we remembered it. However, it

could be argued that we found a reason for learning the alphabet because it assisted us to read and write, just as that information aided us to pass examinations. On the other hand, it is a worrying concept that we are absorbing information that may not actually be correct and yet we recall it as though it was.

Descartes considered thoughts to be our own when they are related to the senses. He knew that the senses could be deceived, for example the pencil in water experiment described in Chapter Three. Something on which we can be certain is that we cannot doubt our own existence. Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum" (I think therefore I am) is based on the assumption that our senses are incorrect and the world may not be real. Therefore, "No rational person can doubt his or her own existence as a conscious thinking entity - while being aware of thinking about anything." (Soccio, 2007, p.275) Descartes concluded that mental existence is more real than physical bodily experience, but our thoughts are definitely ours. That is, our ability to think about our existence automatically means that we exist, and our thoughts are our own.

There is also debate on whether language prohibits our ability to perceive reality. Our entire world is made up of words, each having a definition or meaning. As humans it appears that we need to understand and find meaning in everything we do, otherwise life seems pointless. In society, we need to understand definitions to explain a situation. Would we still be able to communicate if we did not understand definitions of words? That is debatable because it:

...depends on what you mean by thought. Can you experience sensations, impressions, feelings without language? Yes, and very few would argue otherwise. But there is a difference between being able to experience, say, pain or light, and possessing the concepts "pain" and "light". (Okrent, 2013)

As language is a crucial aspect of our lives, could we think without it?

If language were somehow to be taken from us tomorrow, would we still be able to think? Of course we would, the process of assessment and evaluation is conceptual and so whilst we would have no way of divulging our thoughts, the process would still exist. (Debate.org)

It is also worth noting in what language a multilingual person thinks. An example of this in Potter is when Harry thinks in English, yet automatically speaks Parseltongue when confronted by a snake.

Rorty asserts that language and words are "...tools with which we cope with the world." (West, 1981) Language is how we relay information from our brain to the outside world and need not be vocal, for example sign language and musical scores are non-verbal languages. Arguably, we can experience emotion and sensations without language because these are acquired by the senses and the brain. Language provides us with the ability to translate information acquired and express it in words. Undeniably we think in words, which are the means by which we express ourselves and present our ideas in reality.

From Plato's Cave, in Chapter Three, it was apparent that shedding light on something is not always a good thing. The same could be said about words. Dumbledore comments that words are "our most inexhaustible source of magic." (Yates, 2011) Words have the power to hurt and comfort, enrage or calm, confess or lie. They are very powerful, the downside to which is that you cannot withdraw words once spoken or written. You may add more words seeking to condone, correct or apologise for something untoward that has been said, but you cannot unsay something. Winston Churchill (1874-1965) commented "We are monsters of the unsaid words, but slaves of those we let slip out." (Think Exist, n.d.) Similarly, when a stone is thrown into a pond, it instantly vanishes but the ripples created continue and extend far beyond the spot where the stone entered the water. Words have their limits because they only deal with the present: they cannot change events, they cannot change themselves and we cannot change each other's words. As humans we are bound to the reality in which we have been placed; words are exactly the same. Language is a curious issue to debate in the context of reality, yet it is only through language that we can discuss our views on reality. In fact, it is only through language that we can understand and make sense of reality and its concept. Philosopher, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) "was concerned with the power of words to create in our minds illusory realities, [...] that do not really exist. He believed that this power of language often stood in the way of our perceiving objective reality." (Wedge, 1996, p.33)

Another concept that is difficult to disprove is whether we are living in a dream. Arguably, we only perceive dreams as being unreal and our world as real because of our perception of continuity in this world. However, we can readily live and function in an unreal world while dreaming, therefore it follows that we could also be doing the same while 'awake', but just in a longer dream. Like *Inception*, we could merely be on a different layer of dreaming. In the film we assume that reality is when Cobb is trying to return home to his children. There are also arguments that the entire film is a dream and his wife was correct in saying they must die to return to reality. Dream Researchers Allan Hobson (1933- ) and Robert McCarley (1937- ) suggest that dreams are the result of:

...random electrical brain impulses that pulled imagery from traces of experience stored in the memory [...] they do not form the stories that we remember as our dreams. Instead, our waking minds, in trying to make sense of the imagery, create the stories without our even realising it – simply because the brain wants to make sense of what it has experienced. (Obringer, 2013)

This is logical for us as humans. A partial reason why memories are so important to us is because we wish there to be meaning in an event.

In contrast to dreams which Hobson and McCarley suggest are fragments of memory, it could be argued that daydreams are controlled by our thoughts. We often decide to daydream and can control about what we are thinking. We can also decide when to stop daydreaming and return to reality. This does occur in lucid dreaming, which is unusual. However, some debate whether there is any difference between dreams and daydreams: "Your sleeping and your waking dreams have different forms, and that is all. Their content is the same. They are your protest against reality, and your fixed and insane idea that you can change it." (Peace, 1976, p.376) Another argument suggesting that we could be living in a dream is that we do not always remember them, much as we cannot always remember events early in life. Scientific studies into the Hippocampus, a large section of the brain that transfers short-term memory to long-term memory, have shown that dreams:

...are not coded in the hippocampus in quite the same way as wide-awake conscious experiences, so it could be that people have dreams during other

states of sleep but just can't remember their dreams from those states because they don't wake up until after the last state of REM sleep." (Wenmackers, 2011, p.28)

It is conceivable that we do not remember earlier memories because we were occupying a different dream state to the one in which we are at present.

In the Potterverse, Harry's dreams are visions of real-life events. In one 'dream', Harry witnesses Voldemort's attack on Mr. Weasley and views it from Voldemort's standpoint. This makes Harry feel incredibly guilty as he believes that it was he and not Voldemort who attacked Mr. Weasley. This is why Harry is taught Occlumency, in an attempt to protect his mind while sleeping. However, Harry is unable to control the dreams and being asleep makes it easier for Voldemort to implant the false vision, in the form of a dream, of Sirius being attacked in his head.

An issue raised in *Inception* is that the creation of true inspiration is impossible; someone can always trace an idea back to source and the subject will always know that the idea being implanted wasn't originally their own. This leads Harry to unnecessarily visit the Ministry of Magic to rescue Sirius. Several of Harry's vision-like dreams have indeed been real and he therefore assumes that the vision of Sirius is also real, which Voldemort exploits. Harry even says to Hermione, "I'm not having nightmares, I'm not just dreaming! What d'you think all the Occlumency was for, why d'you think Dumbledore wanted me prevented from seeing these things? Because they're REAL..." (Rowling, 2003, p.647) Another issue in *Inception* is that Cobb realises that ideas implanted in the brain are more successful when they have an emotional link. Brain-based research confirms this, which also relates to Harry's vision of Sirius. Voldemort knew that Harry would attempt to help Sirius knowing that he views him "as a mixture of father and brother." (Rowling, 2003, p.732) *Inception* raises the question of how do we know when we are not asleep? This would change everything we know about reality. What if this entire world and our lives are nothing more than illusions or dreams? Maybe we are all like the people in Yusuf's basement, sharing a dream; the dream has become our reality and perhaps we cannot awaken. This leads on to, "...if we can't be sure we are even awake, what can we be sure of?" (Miller, 2012, p.64); anything we believe to be true could actually be a dream. If we think that this is all a dream, even simple matters of

'fact' are questioned. For example, we accept that  $1+1=2$  by logic and definition; it was how we were taught arithmetic. But if this is a dream, how do we know for certain that this logic and arithmetic still apply? The simple answer is we don't because "anything that is false could be dreamed to be true – so, it seems, we can be certain of nothing at all." (Miller, 2012, p.64)

Descartes assumed that we can never doubt our own existence. *Inception* raises another aspect to this. Cobb's deceased wife Mal knows that she exists, but believes the world she currently occupies is not real. While Descartes' theory means we can be sure of our thoughts and existence, this cannot prove that the world about us exists or that we are not dreaming.

The certainty of our own private existence does, however, not prove that there's a material world. The world we experience could still be a dream. We could be the victim of a dream who makes us believe that all of this real. (Wenmackers, 2011, p.14)

However, Descartes attempted to explain how the world had to be real through his belief in a perfect being, God, who could not have been created by an imperfect being such as himself or any of us. If the world is not real, God is deceiving us or allowing deception, both of which could not be possible because this would imply imperfection and God is perfect (or a fraud). Through his theory, Descartes concluded that we can actually trust our senses, something argued against in Chapter Three. However, his theory is reliant upon two key beliefs: that God exists, and that a less perfect being cannot create something more perfect. This is a problem as man (supposedly imperfect beings) can now build equipment possibly more capable than themselves, for example, a scientist building a robot. However, the question of which is the more perfect, a human or robot, could be hotly debated, but according to Descartes' theory this is irrelevant and would not help us establish reality. There is also the problem that belief in God is not a measurement, certainly not one that is definitive.

Whether or not we are living in a dream may not be an easy issue to resolve. As humans, we keep living this life because we do not know differently. If reality is all in the mind, that's what we've always known, so it is consistent. Arguably, reality is real enough for us despite there being no way to prove it. If we were to discover that

this reality is just a dream, this would probably initiate a chain reaction, culminating in questioning reality. Descartes stated that we could never be completely sure that we are not dreaming, however:

Even if we were to find out that our life is a dream, the problem would pop up again: we wouldn't be able to establish whether the level of reality at which the dreamer lives is itself a dream or a projection. (Wenmackers, 2011, pp13-14)  
Indeed, even pragmatism "asserts that we should not think of ways to doubt things that we seem to just intuitively know and would otherwise accept without question."  
(Miller, 2012, p.71)

If reality is all in the mind, dreams pose the question of in what reality are we living. Dreams open our eyes to the fact that we can enter other realities, as does the conversation between Harry and Dumbledore at King's Cross Station (in Chapter Nine), but they also make us question whether we can return to reality. Further, we do not know whether time changes with the reality. As suggested in *Inception*, the duration of dreams become longer the deeper the dream level. Our sense or perception of time is in our mind and this too affects our memory, as mentioned earlier in this chapter with regard to forgetting. Is time as distorted as the senses because they are all dealt with in the mind? It could be said that time makes our memories unreliable sources, as it is impossible to remember an event without being influenced by information we have acquired since that event. Perhaps how we perceive time actually supports the notion that this world is sufficiently real for us to live and accept.

## Chapter Five: Time

*“Time is making fools of us again”*

*(Rowling, 2005, p.259)*

The word time is widely used without too much thought being given to its definition: “Once upon a time”, “Time is money”, “Wasting time”, “Kill Time”, “Time flies”, “Try to save time”, and “Time on my hands” all refer to the mysterious measurement called ‘Time’. Theoretical physicist Brian Greene (1963- ) comments that when observing a river we can say that time flows endlessly to the next moment, like time continuously flows towards the future. We tend to think of time as past, present and future which brings its own complications. Does the future already exist or are we still creating it? Is the past gone and forgotten? As we cannot remember events before we were about three/four, or even some from just a few years ago, it is easy to state that the past is forgotten. However, how we perceive time is all in the mind, where memories are stored. From Chapter Four we know that the mind can be distorted; is time the same?

How we perceive time is worthy of investigation. When undergraduates state the reasons why they wish to attend university, perhaps one of the principal reasons is that they need a degree and the associated education to secure a specific job; that is a degree being a means to an end. You could argue that this view is entirely acceptable. Similarly we could possibly view our entire existence as a means to an end. That is, we are doing A for the sake of B, B for the sake of C, and continuing this until we die. Do we ever really enjoy our time on earth just for its own merit or are we simply passing through stages of life in order to get by? This could be seen as a crucial issue with time.

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) commented: “This is how philosophers should greet each other: ‘Take your time!’” (DuckRabbit, 2007) We tend to think of time as something linear and sequential and it seems that we never pause sufficiently to appreciate reality. It could be reasoned that English literature, such as *Harry Potter*, challenges this notion of time by suggesting that it does not need to be



understood so rudimentarily. The notion of time is not fixed and we are not constantly chasing it. In fact we can change time and appreciate it.

We define time as “the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole.” (DicLib.com, n.d.) Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) considered time as something we need in order to experience life. He viewed it as a sense; it does not exist by itself but is a way of interacting with the world. Therefore, we could reason that time is in our minds, and how we understand our experiences.

When we mention time we tend to refer to duration not space, and attempt to understand time by measuring it. Clocks are used to accurately measure time. Time is a constant in our lives and we therefore measure it against a constant base. Our earth rotation is a constant, predictable measure of time; one rotation on its axis every day of twenty-four hours and once around the sun to create our 365 day year. Repetition forms a clock, from which you can reason that anything with repetitive motion can be a time-piece or clock. Time is divided into hours, minutes and seconds. “Then, we must ask, what is between any two seconds? Smaller units of time. What are between these smaller units? Even smaller units of time. And this can go on forever.” (Westmoreland, 2010, p.174) In fact, the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Colorado uses a caesium atom, the so-called atomic clock, which oscillates at greater than nine billion times a second to measure time with extreme accuracy.

Before the invention of clocks, the sun was used to indicate the time of day. This begs the question of whether time is placing restrictions upon us. There is no denying that time involves movement; we are always moving forward in time. Physicist Stephen Hawking (1942- ) states, “There is no unique absolute time, but instead each individual has his own personal measure of time that depends on where he is and how he is moving.” (Peterson & Peterson, 2005, p.207) This agreed with Philosopher Aristotle’s (384-322 BCE) assertion that time was related to movement, as our senses perceive movement and we therefore assume that time has passed.

Physicist and mathematician Isaac Newton (1642-1727) suggested that time always changes at the same rate, but theoretical physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955) considered this to be incorrect. Time is experienced individually; everyone has their own private time that runs at its own speed. While standing still, you are not travelling through space but are travelling through time. That is, motion through space affects the passage of time. In 1971, the Hafele-Keating experiment was conducted by Physicist Joseph Hafele (1933- ) and astronomer Richard Keating (1931-2005), to test Einstein's Theory of Relativity. This involved installing atomic clocks on aeroplanes and identical clocks on the ground. The aeroplanes flew twice around the world, first travelling easterly and then westerly, and at the end of the experiment times on the airborne clocks differed from the static clocks on the ground, albeit by only one hundred billionth of a second. This supported Einstein's theory that motion impacted on the passage of time. Realising that space and time could not be considered as separate entities, Einstein combined them in what he called "Space-time". This led him to realise that the past, present and future that we see as being different, may in fact be an illusion. We all have a different notion of what is happening at a particular moment in time, because of how motion and time are affected. Two individuals, one moving the other stationary, will have different perceptions of what is now (the present). According to Einstein's theory, one person could be seen to be in the past in relation to another person's present, and vice versa. It is therefore impossible to definitively state that we are all living in the present, at the same time. The past, present and future all exist and have equal degrees of reality. This led to Einstein's famous quote "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one." (The Telegraph, 2012) Is time a continuous flow or a series of snapshot images, like stop-motion animation, and are we merely seeing an illusion of movement over time? There is also the problem that clocks give the time of day, but not what time is itself, or even where we are in time. In reality, time could be restricting us by making us focus our lives around a measuring instrument, and while we may not consider that time rules our lives, in reality it does.

Time is present in reality and in our minds. Highfield (2002) has commented that the brain processes different perceptions at different speeds. For example, it processes motion more quickly than colour. The fact that the brain takes different times to process different information from the senses further suggests that the mind

may be distorting reality by not gathering all available information. However, we tend to think of time in terms of travelling through it, either accelerating to the future or returning to the past.

It could be argued that by living in reality we are all time travellers “...moving 1 second per second through time.” (Andrews, 2014) The concept of time travel has been a common theme in the science fiction genre, and indeed the entire premise of some films, such as Inventor and Film-maker James Cameron’s (1954- ) *The Terminator* series (Cameron, 1984-2003). The possibility of going back in time to change the future is an appealing notion to many; as we can travel from place to place why can’t we do the same with time, and travel to another reality? Time travel is possible in Potter although it is not widely broadcast. Hermione uses a Time-Turner (Figure 14), an hourglass-like device that can turn time back an hour, enabling her to go back in time to attend several classes scheduled simultaneously. Hermione is secretly given the Time-Turner on condition that she uses it only for her studies as there are strict WIZARDING laws about changing time. Hermione explains this to Harry in *Prisoner of*



**Figure 14: The Time Turner**  
*Prisoner of Azkaban* film screenshot (Cuarón, 2004)

*Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999) when they go back in time to save Sirius Black and Buckbeak the Hippogriff<sup>39</sup>, “We’re breaking one of the most important wizarding laws! Nobody’s supposed to change time, nobody!” (Rowling, 1999, pp291-292)

The main issue with time travel in reality is whether it makes sense or is even possible. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione mentions in a statement to Harry what is known as ‘The Grandfather Paradox’, a paradox of time travel created by writer René Barjavel (1911-1985). Hermione states: “...you might even attack yourself! [...] awful things have happened when wizards have meddled with time...loads of them ended up killing their past or future selves by mistake!” (Rowling, 1999, p.292) The Grandfather Paradox suggests that you can travel back in time and kill your

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<sup>39</sup> A Hippogriff is a creature resembling a winged horse but with the head of an eagle.

grandfather and therefore neither your parent nor you were born, which in itself would prevent going back in time to kill your grandfather since you wouldn't exist. Physicist Igor Novikov (1935- ) developed the 'Novikov Self-Consistency Principle' as a means of solving problems of paradoxes in time travel. His theory states that it is impossible to change past events; to travel back in time, history must remain unchanged. For example, nobody could go back in time to prevent President Kennedy from being assassinated or the Titanic sinking because this would involve rewriting history. In a similar way, when Harry and Hermione go back in time in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, they must not change anything that happened and remain hidden from others, especially their earlier selves, shown in Figure 15.



**Figure 15: Hermione in the Foreground has gone back in time, observes Harry, Ron and Hermione from three hours earlier.**  
Scene from *Prisoner of Azkaban* film (Cuarón, 2004).

On the Pottermore website (Rowling J. K., 2012), Eloise Mintumble, an Unspeakable from the Department of Mysteries not mentioned in the novels, was killed during a time travel experiment, showing that even in the Wizarding World, time travel and the Time-Turner have limits. According to Mintumble's story, it is impossible to use the Time-Turner to travel back by more than a few hours. Unfortunately, Mintumble became trapped for five centuries and had aged by that amount of time when she returned to reality, and consequently died. Hermione only uses the Time-Turner to facilitate taking extra lessons, which suggests that time-travel is only used for inconsequential activities. However, in *Prisoner of Azkaban* you could argue that it was not trivial to go back in time to save the two innocent lives of Sirius Black and Buckbeak. Despite this, Rowling cleverly disguises the time travel. For example, Harry, Ron, and Hermione never see Buckbeak being beheaded but merely hear the sound of an axe, later explained as the executioner throwing his

axe down in rage. This is also taken further in the film adaptation (Cuarón, 2004) with Hermione imitating a wolf howl to save Harry from Remus Lupin. The rescue of Sirius and Buckbeak obeys the Novikov Self-Consistency Principle because when they go back in time the past has not changed.

The question of whether time travel is even possible is difficult to resolve. In films, a time machine has been used to transport people back in time, but in order that no paradoxes are created from the time travel, it is impossible to go back to a time before the time machine was invented. You can travel to the future and return to the present but not the past and then back to the future. According to Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, an Einstein-Rosen bridge (or Wormhole) could be used for time travel as a shortcut through space. A Wormhole is essentially a tunnel, each end of which is at a different point in time. There is much conjecture about this and Hawking states that it is not possible to use wormholes as time travel, just as developing a functioning time machine is *almost* impossible. The association of time with movement suggests that it is possible to move to a different time. As every individual has their own reality and, according to Hawking, their own individual perception of time, time travel need not be to the past or the future but could instead be someone else's reality or time. This is suggested in the Potterverse through the use of Floo powder, see Figure 1, which facilitates travel between fireplaces. In *Goblet of Fire* and *Order of the Phoenix* it is shown to be also possible for only your head to appear in a Floo network fireplace while the rest of your body remains at the original location. In reality we do something similar to this when contacting someone in another country that is on a different time zone, or indeed if we travel to another country. Travelling to North America, which depending on location is anywhere between five and eight hours behind UK time, hours appear to be gained when travelling westwards. Returning easterly to the UK the hours gained on the outbound flight are lost. Travelling to another country on a different time zone is moving to a different reality of time. It can also be difficult to imagine that going on holiday to the same location every year over several years that time has passed there, just as it has for you. Although you may step back into the holiday routine as readily as a daily routine at home, time has still moved on. The roads on which you drive will be a year older, the hotel staff will be a year older, etc., but because we have been living our reality in our own time and our societies' communal time, we do not realise that time

still passes 'normally' in the other reality. While on an aeroplane it could be reasoned that you are travelling at a different time to that in both the country of origin and the destination. Time on an aeroplane is viewed in terms of hours; how many hours until you arrive at your destination or how many hours on the aeroplane? We very rarely think of time in this way in reality.

There are many theories on the feasibility of Time Travel. According to Philosopher Augustine (354-430), time travel is not possible:

How can the past and future be when the past no longer is and the future is not yet? As for the present, if it were always present and never moved on to become the past, it would not be time but eternity. (Silberstein, 2004, p.193)

The "Tenseless" Theory of Time suggests that past, present and future are all real which supports the possibility of time travel. However, the main problem with time travel is whether you believe that time is fixed and, if it is, then it is not possible to change the past.

It is evident in reality that time rules our lives. Entering a railway station you will inevitably see more than one person running for a train. That person is being controlled by time, or the lack of it. In fact wherever transportation services start, there will be people chasing time. Professional YouTuber<sup>40</sup> Bryarly Bishop (1990-), comments on this in her poem *Going All In*: "What gives me nightmares is the fear that I'm moving too slow to keep up with life, Which I suspect moves just like light. No matter how fast I go, I'll never catch up." (Bishop, 2013) In *Deathly Hallows*, one of the crucial points about King's Cross when Harry and Dumbledore have their conversation about reality, is the absence of other people in a normally bustling station and that they don't appear to have time restraints imposed on them to complete the conversation. This could lead to the argument that the scene is not reality because it is not bound and restricted by the "Time" of reality.

It is interesting that rail travel actually played a key role in a discovery of time. We care greatly and can be obsessive about how long it will take us to reach our destination, and whether a service is on time. During the early days of rail travel,

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<sup>40</sup> Maker of educational and other videos and posts them on YouTube.

time was a serious problem; every city had their measure of time, noon being when the sun was highest in the sky. Therefore, when travelling across time zones trains would regard the time at the destination as the time at point of origin. That is, the time at any particular moment in your journey, would be the current time where the train service originated. With railway expansion and with more different “times”, this method was both confusing and potentially dangerous, making it essential to coordinate time, especially for places interconnected by a single-track railroad. This highlights the necessity to fix time. However, several fiction novels explore the concept of time not being fixed. In the children’s fantasy novel, *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 1998), questions are raised concerning Time and Reality. Tom stays with distant relatives and one night the grandfather clock chimes thirteen times at midnight, not twelve. On investigation Tom finds that a large garden has mysteriously appeared outside where no garden had previously existed. He befriends Hatty, a girl who lives in the house, and every night at midnight visits her in the garden. He begins to realise that she grows older with every visit until she is fully grown and can no longer see Tom physically. It transpires that Hatty, now an elderly lady, still lives in the house in reality, and somehow (it is never explained) whenever she was thinking about her past late at night, the garden would reappear in reality and Tom could interact with her as a child. Tom has somehow infiltrated her memories.

This story and the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis deal with “Time Slip”, something common in fantasy and science fiction and used mainly in the 1950s, whereby characters travel back in time in a particular way, for example, through a wardrobe. ‘Objective reality’ is a philosophical concept related to Reality and Truth; in this context ‘Objective’ meaning not being influenced by your own feelings or prejudices. For example, as Tom gets to know and befriends Hatty, his objectivity decreases as does the possibility that he will be believed. Similarly, in Narnia time works differently compared to reality. Regardless of time spent in Narnia, upon returning to our world no time has passed. Once back in our world, Narnia’s clock keeps ticking and there is great confusion throughout the series on how much time has actually elapsed. For example, one year passes for the children between *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian* while, in Narnia, centuries have passed. However, a year also passes in our time between *Prince Caspian* and

*The Voyage of the Dawn Trader*, while three years pass in Narnia. There is no logic to the time but it must be strange for the people of Narnia to lose their adult Kings and Queens only for them to turn up as children centuries later. In Narnia, it is possible to go back to youth and return in the future, but only because you have come from another world. Neither of these novels rejects the fact that time is fixed in our world and reality, suggesting only that time works differently in other worlds.

We cannot categorically state that reality feels permanently fixed. However, time can move according to our circumstances and perhaps the stressfulness of a particular situation. For example, practical music examinations, especially at higher grades, are of about forty-five minutes duration, but for the candidate the time passes incredibly quickly. It follows that depending on circumstances we can lose track of physical time; the Potterverse presents us with an example of this. At the Quidditch World Cup, Harry views the game through his Omnioculars, binoculars that can slow down the action and give a running commentary. Watching the game at half-speed, Harry misses a goal made by his team and Hermione says, “Harry, if you’re not going to watch at normal speed, you’re going to miss things!” (Rowling, 2000, p.97) Harry was viewing the game at a different time to everyone else and was hearing reality while viewing the past.

It could be reasoned that our entire existence is dictated by time: we celebrate our birthday every year, which monitors how much time we have lived: when someone dies young we talk about how little time they had on earth. We can never rid ourselves of time. “One obvious way to free yourself from time is to throw away your Muggle watch. This might free you from some social obligations, but time itself continues on its merry way.” (Hancock & Gardner, 2006, p.159) While you may refuse to be bound by time, this does not mean that others will do likewise or that time will stop; time cannot be held back. If your watch gains or loses a second or a minute we can argue that we are living in a different reality to everyone else. However, it depends on how you view the present in relation to the past. Are events that happened yesterday in the past? By definition, maybe, but to us they are a time not too long ago. Again the Potterverse informs us about how we should view time. The Weasley family have a clock (Figure 16) that has a hand for every member of the family. The clock shows locations where family members might be at a particular



moment, but is without numerals and is thereby “completely useless if you wanted to know the time, but otherwise very informative.” (Rowling, 2000, p.135) It does not tell us anything about the difference between Muggle and Wizarding World time but “does precisely what a real watch should do: it tells you where you are and what you are doing in relation to what the people



**Figure 16: Image of the Weasley Clock**  
*Chamber of Secrets* film screenshot (Columbus, 2002)

you are concerned with are doing.” (Hancock & Gardner, 2006, p.157) This suggests that time itself is unimportant, and what really matters is our family and where they are in relation to us in reality. This is probably our biggest problem with time. We never know how much of it we have remaining to spend with a person. Inevitably there is a time when you will have a last Christmas or Birthday with someone but, other than those with terminal illnesses, you are usually unaware of it at the time. In some cases we may wish we had more time to spend with people. In fact, while we sometimes resent it, the passage of time is crucial and part of everyday life. We are always thinking about time. Our memories are thinking of a different time, and even something that happened only yesterday is a different time to now. We also make plans for the future, which is another time when we do not know exactly what reality will be.

The Weasley Clock presents a mirror to reality. It suggests that time does not matter but that people in our reality do. Indeed if our senses are receiving incorrect data, and the mind is thereby giving us a distorted world, the only aspect on which we can be sure are our relationships. If this world is nothing but a distortion, that would change how we view everything. However, it is the people around us that make this world real enough. We believe in relationships and so we believe in reality.

## Section Three: Between Two Worlds

### Chapter Six: The Reality of Harry Potter

*“There will be books written about Harry – every child in our world will know his name!”*

*(Rowling, 1997, p.15)*

It has been established from Section Two, ‘The Distorted World’, that the world about us can be distorted. We do not know whether mirrors show us the truth, or whether our senses perceive the truth and even transmit the correct signals and knowledge about our world to the brain. Everything upon which we rely to establish reality might not be real, and our every action might be controlled by parameters set by someone playing a real-life computer game, similar to EA Games’ *Sims*. However, the Potterverse is giving us a different perspective on our world. The possibility of magic removes the normality we associate with our world but, despite this, the magical world functions seamlessly as indeed does our own. Through studying the Potterverse and other fantasy lands presented to us in fiction, we begin to perceive our world differently allowing other worlds to act as a mirror to our reality.

Does it therefore matter whether our perception of reality is true? Philosopher Robert Nozick (1938- ) performed an experiment that involved making a selection between simulated and living realities. He suggested that we could “plug-in” to a machine that would give us all the experiences to which we would be exposed in reality. He wished to know “not whether we would use the Machine for some temporary fun, but whether we would and should be willing to plug into it as a replacement of life?” (Klein, 2004, p.98) The machine concept is akin to living in reality, which we are not physically living despite feeling as though we are. In reality we are plugged into a machine that affects the appropriate areas of the brain to give the illusion of reality.

Would it be wrong to deprive a person of knowing the truth about the world, even if we offer him a better though simulated world? Would you agree to leave the world behind completely, to live in a more exciting game world, or to avoid ever feeling pain again? (Wenmackers, 2011, p.19)

The machine may appeal to some but would we be disturbed if it wasn't real? Life through the machine would not be real; it would simply be a life of appearances and perceptions. But isn't that what we live in reality? It could be reasoned that only if we became aware of being "plugged in" would we have an issue, and indeed without our knowledge we could already be "plugged into" a simulated world. Nozick concluded that we do not plug into the experience machine because "we want to *be* a certain way, to be a certain sort of person." (Klein, 2004, p.100) That is, we actually wish to experience life in our own way. Perhaps even if plugged into a machine that mimics reality we would know that the world is not real, with which we could never be satisfied. Like Cobb's wife, Mal, in *Inception* it would drive us mad not knowing whether our world is real.

It could be suggested that Harry finds the Mirror of Erised meaningful because he believes that reflected in it he can see his parents. There is always more value in actual experiences because as humans we wish to live and interact with reality. In *Inception*, Cobb says that living in Limbo was initially fun but after a while knowing it wasn't real made living there impossible. We live in a world in which some believe in an existence beyond it and the reality we are currently living. Many believe that when they leave this life they will go to Heaven. Does this affect how we perceive reality? If we lived in a world where there are no indications, no religion say, that suggested a life beyond this, would we think differently? It could be suggested that without hints of a higher level of reality we would be satisfied with what we have. We would have to "accept our existence on the level we happen to be at, in the knowledge that we can't know its ultimate status" (Wenmackers, 2011, p.19), and would be satisfied with this reality because it is all we know.

Potter has raised some interesting issues regarding how fiction can make us relate to reality. However, it is important to search beyond the novels and the story itself, to the broader picture that the Potterverse has infiltrated. That is, the way that *Harry Potter* has actually changed our reality. Potter has already become much more than a story; a generation of children grew up as the Potter novels were being released, which few others can claim. It provides its reader with a source of escapism that allows us to view a more dangerous and exciting world from a safe

distance. Undeniably Potter will have left an impact on reality, but the question is how much?

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Wizarding world is different to other novels involving other worlds because, by definition, it is hidden and therefore we would not know whether it existed within our world. However, it is worth exploring the influence of *Harry Potter* as a concept, brand and media form.

The characters of *Harry Potter* are very real individuals in our minds. An example is when Harry feels like an outsider at Hogwarts, just as experienced by many children when starting a new school. “He does not belong to the Muggle world because he has magical powers [...] Neither does he belong in the magical world because of his lack of knowledge about magic and its powers...” (Alwandi, 2012) Harry manages to find friends in whom he can confide, as people usually do, and he is able to find his place in society. In the Potter novels, it is also apparent that situations do not always work out as hoped. Being friends with Harry Potter comes at a price, including the possibility of getting hurt. Through plot misdirection, Rowling also leads us to believe that there are good and bad characters, who are clearly separated and defined. However, occasionally, some good characters turn out to be bad, such as Quirrell or Crouch, mentioned previously, and bad characters are shown to be good. This misdirection is a common ploy used by illusionists in reality. Horace Slughorn, mentioned in Chapter Four, is a good example of this misdirection. He is ashamed of past deeds and so manipulates his own memories to erase his guilt. Part of being human is to make and learn from mistakes. While heroic and brave, Snape is not a pleasant character and not someone with whom you could become friends. It is also noteworthy that Harry’s view of Snape has similarities in our world when a person reacts to another whom they dislike. For example, when you have a disagreement with someone, this will influence your interpretation of everything they say. Similarly, Harry’s view of Snape is based on his initial impression and is further influenced by Snape’s obvious dislike of him. This initial impression of Snape continues to affect Harry’s arguments, something on which Lupin comments: “You are determined to hate him, Harry, and I understand; with James as your father, with Sirius as your godfather, you have inherited an old prejudice.” (Rowling, 2005, p.312) The reader also inherits this prejudice.

It is apparent that *Harry Potter* also deals with real lessons and issues. English Professor and author Lana Whited (n.d.) comments on Dumbledore's belief that Voldemort should be referred to by name instead of "You Know Who" or "He who must not be named". Dumbledore comments: "Call him Voldemort Harry, fear of a name only increases fear of the thing itself." (Rowling, 1997, p.216) It is a very *real* lesson of facing a fear rather than allowing it to control you. It is interesting to note that in *Deathly Hallows*, the Death Eater's become wise to this and put a spell on Voldemort's name because the only people using it would be followers of Dumbledore. Without fear, Voldemort does not have as much power over his victims or arguably his followers. Therefore calling evil by his name is an important lesson Harry learns very early because, while terrified of Voldemort, he courageously faces him on several occasions. Ultimately, Harry feels comfortable enough to do as Dumbledore does and call Voldemort by his real name, Tom Riddle, which is such a normal name that arguably nobody could be afraid of him. Dumbledore's statement is therefore one of overcoming a fear and eventually overpowering it.

Issues raised in *Harry Potter* are real to the extent that children and adults can learn from them. Topics such as Death, Love, Evil and Forgiveness can be difficult to discuss, but "Rowling approaches these issues, describes them and portrays adults who want to talk about them." (Whited, 2002, p.87) The openness of characters such as Dumbledore provides a very positive message to *Harry Potter* readers, "...children realise that difficult situations are a part of life and that it is okay to openly discuss whatever troubles them." (Whited, 2002, p.87) In this sense, *Harry Potter* and the Potterverse are real and, unlike other fantasy stories, deal with moral dilemmas and difficult topics and issues.

With a popular series such as *Harry Potter*, the reader becomes part of the story and to an extent feels they have ownership over parts of it. This can inevitably result in some disapproving of film adaptations of *Harry Potter*. Directors and producers by and large seek to make the film adaptations of popular novels understandable to the non-book reader. Changes and omissions are inevitable and, while a whole new audience is created, there are those who dislike any deviation from the book irrespective of the reasons. However, as the Potter novels are very

long, it would be difficult for any adaptation of them to be completely faithful. This notwithstanding, film adaptations do create a new reality for the source material. Rowling's Potterverse is brought to life but some aspects of the story are changed. After viewing *Harry Potter* films some will then read or re-read the novels with fresh eyes. Those who had not read the Potter novels before seeing the films will have a different reality in their minds should they subsequently read the novels, in comparison with those who had first read the novels. While a new reality is created, it begs the question whether or not film adaptations are good. Watching a film can generally aid or encourage reading the source novels, but problems are created if the film deviates far from the story or theme of the novels. For example, Dobby the house-elf is almost completely eradicated from the films. To fans of the Potterverse, an announcement such as "...the role of Dobby will be played by Neville Longbottom..." (Nel, 2003, p.282) ruins the film adaptation for them because changes will carry-over to later films, storylines and even characters. The most obvious example of this is in the film, *Deathly Hallows Part 2* (Yates, 2011), where Neville gives an emotional, Hollywood-like speech about Harry having gone but still living on in their hearts. The personality and character of Neville portrayed in the novels would never make such a speech, and his actual words<sup>41</sup> to Voldemort accurately reflect this. Inevitably, films cannot process as much detail as novels, but for other aspects they can be beneficial, such as having appropriate music and reducing long detailed paragraphs to a single facial expression.

Film Directors and Scriptwriters have a tendency to overdramatise battles and fights rather than adhere strictly to the text of novels, even when it is possible to do so. For example, the final battle between Harry and Voldemort in *Deathly Hallows* takes place in the Great Hall of Hogwarts Castle and is over very quickly. In the film adaptation, however, Voldemort chases Harry through the castle, they exchange insults at the top of the Astronomy tower, then fly around the castle in a haze of black smoke and finally land in the courtyard before crawling along the ground to grab their wands. Scenes such as these are shown extensively in the film's trailers leading to online critics referring to them as the "obligatory trailer shot". Incorrect as the films may be, the biggest problem many had at the end of *Deathly Hallows Part 2*

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<sup>41</sup> "I'll join you when hell freezes over, Dumbledore's Army!" (Rowling, 2007, p.586)

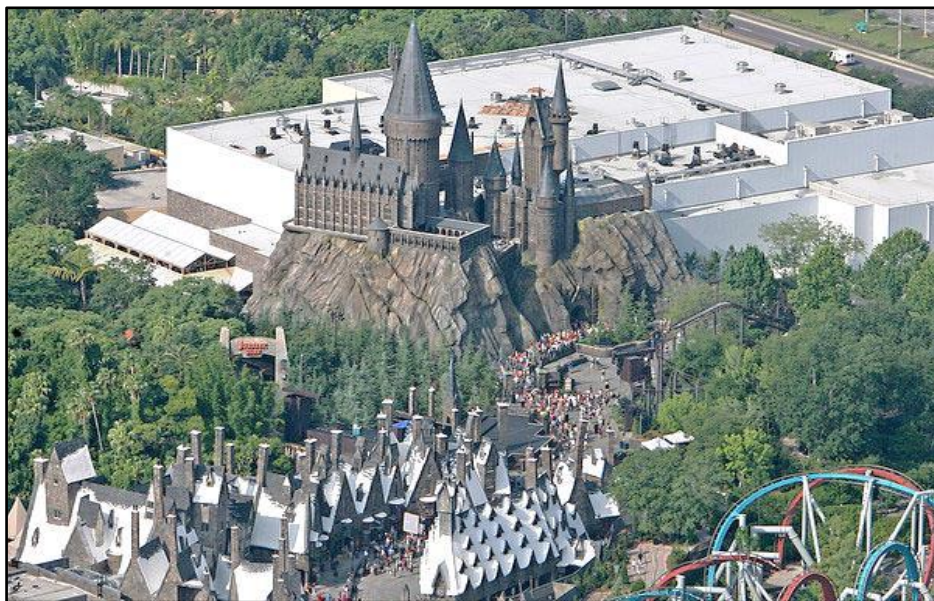
was that Voldemort's body appears to explode, whereas the book describes how his body is moved into a separate room after his death. In further contrast to the novels where Harry utters the disarming spell ("Expelliarmus") and Voldemort the Killing Curse, the film shows both Harry and Voldemort casting non-verbal spells at each other. While the book's description of Voldemort's death is rather complex and difficult to understand after a single reading, it could be suggested that both Rowling and the film adaptation were attempting to disguise the moral problems and implications of famous hero, Harry Potter, actually killing someone. In Hollywood's defence, Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter are the main focus of seven novels, eight films and a worldwide phenomenon, so the villain must be killed in a dramatic manner.

Author Donald Miller (1971- ) discusses this tendency to overdramatise in his book *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years* (Miller, 2009) When he was approached to have his book, *Blue Like Jazz* (Miller, 2003) made into a film, he discovered that emotion and character motivation were important in writing for screen rather than long written descriptions that can be readily accommodated in novels. Aspects of stories are therefore rewritten or modified to convey emotion and the character required in film. While this may be acceptable for fiction novels, it can become unacceptable when portraying historical events or real people in film. Doubtless, films can aid education of historical events but changes impacting on them for purely dramatic effect, is tantamount to rewriting history; a notorious example being the film *Braveheart* (Gibson, 1995). Among others, Scottish Historian, Sharon Krossa (n.d), noted eighteen historical errors in just the first two-three minutes of the film, and stated that *Braveheart* "is a work of fantasy, not history". (Ablett, et al., 2014). The most critical error is the main character named Braveheart in reality, "...wasn't even called Braveheart. That name is actually credited to Robert the Bruce..." (Saathoff, 2011) Unfortunately, many regard the film as an entirely factual portrayal of history. Much like anything else, with historical events everyone has an opinion on individuals, actions and events.

People import too much emotional baggage into the formulation of their histories to leave much room for impartiality. One brief event can take on thousands of different meanings when all sorts of people impose their own variations of the truth upon it. (Damen, 2013)

This is also true of *Harry Potter*. As Rowling's world is neither complete nor explained in every possible detail, the audience is left to fill in some of the gaps. As we have real emotions about the story and characters, and only Rowling knows the absolute truth about her world, there are numerous interpretations of the Potterverse, all of them unique and very few impartial.

With any popular series, such as Potter, there will always be those who seek more from them or wish the story to expand by exploring ideas and aspects not discussed as thoroughly as some would desire in the novels. This led to Fan Fiction. Potter fan fiction is unusual in that it takes place in the Potterverse magical world, but because it is unofficial and unapproved by Rowling, it arguably takes place outside the world about which it centres debate.



**Figure 17: The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Universal Studios, Orlando, Florida.**

Courtesy of (Traveler.com, 2010)

While the films and Fan Fiction create new Potterverse realities, the creation of the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* attraction in Universal Studios, Orlando, Florida uniquely creates yet another reality (Figure 17). The Warner Brothers Studio Tour in London is part of the ever expanding 'Muggle Potterverse' and extensions of Rowling's world, but comprises only the sets used in the films. In contrast, the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* in Orlando is treated like the real Potterverse.



Attraction personnel undertake their roles as though they were in Hogsmeade and that the Castle is real, and several of them are British, as in the novels.

With the Potterverse now expanding to include theme park attractions, a series of new realities is being created. The novels have been made into films, extending the literature reality of the Potterverse into a visual reality with the theme park attractions, creating a new physical reality of the Potterverse. Despite being based on the films, visitors assume that the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* is actually book-based, yet none of the characters from the novels are in Orlando; only the environment is recreated in our physical reality. We could therefore suggest that the Potterverse is real because we, the audience, continue to augment it in reality, expanding the stories and physically creating a world that can be visited and experienced. These attractions bring the reality of *Harry Potter* to us, a world into which we can physically enter. Relating to this point, some locations used during the film-making have also introduced the world of Potter into our reality, including: classroom scenes in Durham Cathedral, a game of Quidditch in Alnwick Castle, scenes in York station and the Glenfinnan viaduct and Glencoe. With these, the world of Potter has infiltrated many aspects of reality. It could be contended that aspects of the life of a Durham University student are not dissimilar to that portrayed in Hogwarts, for example, being assigned to a college that becomes your base and family, and competing against other colleges. The Formal Dinners with a high table and gowns are not too dissimilar to a feast in Hogwarts Castle. There is also the *Harry Potter and the Age of Illusion* module at Durham University, the first lecture taking place in the Great Hall of Durham Castle and where each student is sorted into a Hogwarts house. While it is not the *real* Hogwarts Sorting Ceremony, it is the closest we have and is indeed a real sorting ceremony. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Potterverse and Muggle world are in constant interaction, despite the Magical world described in Rowling's novels being just a work of fiction.

The film adaptations of *Harry Potter* were still being produced while the last two Potter novels were being written and released. As the films were bringing the Wizarding World to life visually, it is apparent that our own visual images of the characters, say for example Snape and Harry, were respectively replaced by actors Alan Rickman (1946- ) and Daniel Radcliffe (1989- ). In reading the later novels we

could visualise the film characters, but it is not known whether Rowling was also considering the actors while writing these novels. Did her image of Snape remain unchanged in later novels or, when writing dialogue for him, was she thinking about Rickman's delivery of Snape's lines? Likewise, were the actors still playing the same characters towards the end of film-making? Was Alan Rickman still portraying Snape, or was he playing Alan Rickman playing Snape from previous films? As the Potter book characters are well-known to us, our perception of the actors depicting them would become more critical as the series progressed.

Novelist Sebastian Faulks (1953- ) suggests that fictional characters are sometimes more important than members of our own family, perhaps because many people try reality and find it wanting. University students often do not view their life at university as the 'real world' but merely a freer place than school and home, en route to ultimate freedom in the real world. Perhaps the fantasy genre is so appealing because "One can sometimes write far more truth in presenting a fantasy world than in describing the real world." (Barrs, 2003) Fantasy allows us several things: to escape from reality, to deal with difficult issues from a 'safe' distance, and perhaps a way to see our reality differently.

Different individuals have contrasting opinions on Harry Potter as a person. For Rowling, his creator, he is a very real person but to many, he is simply a character from a popular fantasy series. *Harry Potter* is not only a widely discussed piece of literature, but also a brand and a franchise. To some, actor Daniel Radcliffe is Harry Potter. Radcliffe's performance will undoubtedly differ from how we view Harry Potter, and how he is presented in the novels. Seemingly aware that many think of him as Harry Potter, Radcliffe has sought to pursue diverse acting roles so as not to become typecast. He also declined an offer to film scenes for the Diagon Alley expansion at the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* in Orlando (Ramisetti, 2014) stating that he wished to distance himself from the role, but for which, ironically, he may be relatively unknown. This leads to an interesting point regarding Radcliffe as Harry Potter. Whether he will ever move on from Potter in the minds of the public is debatable, but for now Radcliffe has moved on from Potter films and it is therefore intriguing to consider whether he is still regarded as Harry in his subsequent roles. Does the public view him as playing Harry or, even more strangely, is Harry Potter

now an actor? As we have seen Radcliffe in the same Potter role for over ten years, do we view his later work as being that of Harry Potter now making a living as a professional actor?

Considering the Potterverse as a work of fiction, from the first chapter of *Philosopher's Stone*, it is apparent that the story is the beginning of something exciting. There is so much mystery surrounding what has happened to Harry, and why he is cared for by his Aunt and Uncle is not properly explained until much later, in Rowling's fifth novel, *Order of the Phoenix*. During this mysterious first chapter Professor McGonagall, a teacher of Hogwarts, states: "There will be books written about Harry – every child in our world will know his name!" (Rowling, 1997, p.15) McGonagall couldn't have been more correct in saying this about Harry Potter. Even those who have never read the Potter novels will know of Harry Potter. It is curious that in Rowling's Potterverse everyone knows his name, and so do very many even outside that in the Muggle world.

There is no doubt that the moral lessons and issues discussed in *Harry Potter* are real. However, is *Harry Potter* real? It is true of any book that you enter into a different world when you read it; a different reality. Each story has its own rules regardless of whether it is set in a reality that is ours or a new one like *Harry Potter*. Characters in a book never die, something discussed in Chapter Seven. If you reread *Philosopher's Stone*, Dumbledore is alive and the reader has knowledge of Snape's real identity; a reread of earlier Potter novels might reveal more clues that were previously missed. Against this logic, Voldemort, the death-fearing antagonist, has achieved his goal because he will still be talked about and will never die.

Like all good literature, *Harry Potter* is real because it was something new and compelling to read; it taught us lessons and made us feel real emotions. Credit must be given to Rowling who clearly knew when to end the series and did so at a logical point. However, "Harry's story would not end in July, 2007. Like all great stories, it will never end as long as there are those who wish to read it." (Thomas, 2009, p.337) For those who wish it, *Harry Potter* is and always will be real.

## Chapter Seven: Capturing Reality: Videos, Photographic Images and Death

*“You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don’t recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble?”*

*(Rowling, 1999, p.312)*

Characters in a literature series such as *Harry Potter* can become immortal. After death, a character is alive again every time the book is read. The Potterverse is so complex and its characters so unpredictable that, with the benefit of hindsight, a reread of the series allows for some of the story’s nuances and details to be filled in which provides greater depth to the story. Photographic images and videos could also immortalise people. When viewing an old video of family members who have since passed away, they appear alive again as though preserved forever. Perhaps in some way the purpose of photographs and videos is to capture reality.

Death is a very important theme in the Potterverse which Rowling has stated to be the main theme throughout her novels. From the beginning of *Philosopher’s Stone*, the reader is introduced to the death of Harry’s parents, upon which Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* (Bettelheim, 1989) comments: “...many fairy stories begin with the death of a mother or father; in these tales the death of the parent creates the most agonising problems, as it (or the fear of it) does in real life.” (Bettelheim, 1989, p.8) Rowling is addressing a ‘real’ fear in reality, but goes further with the power of magic adding an interesting aspect to an individual’s death.

When taking a photograph it is sometimes difficult to consider what it is we seek to capture, whether a memory, a special moment, an occasion, an individual or just reality? This is similar to the Pensieve scene, described in Chapter Four, in which everyone will have different recollections of a particular day or event. Photographed groups will live different realities before and after an image is taken, but everyone’s reality merges at that moment the image was taken. The political thriller film *Vantage Point* (Travis, 2008), explores this concept of when different realities occur simultaneously. The plot is relatively simple; someone attempts to assassinate the President of the United States. However, the film presents that

scene from eight different perspectives, each of which reveals a new layer of the story as the different realities combine in a moment. In the Wizarding World, photographs are moving video-like images, not stationary images. Harry first encounters this in *Philosopher's Stone* while viewing the cards collected with chocolate frogs that he and Ron were eating. An image of Dumbledore on the card vanishes, and Ron remarks: "Well, you can't expect him to hang around all day" (Rowling, 1997, p.77). Similarly, images in the Wizarding newspaper, *The Daily Prophet*, are all moving.

Portraits in the Wizarding World are also moving images, and the individuals portrayed could visit the occupant of another portrait and interact with students in the school. In the Muggle world, there are images in which the eyes appear to follow the viewer's movements, but this feature has been taken one step further in the Wizarding World. The headmaster's office at Hogwarts has portraits of all previous headmasters and, in *Order of the Phoenix*, the reader learns that individuals in portraits can visit another portrait of themselves hung in a different location. This is crucial in *Deathly Hallows* as the portrait of previous Headmaster, Phineas Nigellus, moves between his portrait in Hogwarts to that of him in Grimmauld Place. Dumbledore's portrait is also seen giving Snape instructions in *Deathly Hallows*. It is apparent that some portraits have been displayed in the office for some time and while unable to comment on the events in the present time, they are nevertheless alive in the sense that they move and can interact with each other. This is quite unlike anything we see in our reality.

In reality, once an image has been captured there are several issues to be considered. Since the development of photo-editing software, images can be altered, ranging from changing the lighting to completely altering the background or even a person's features. Indeed, illustrations in magazines are not necessarily original images; women are made to look thinner, imperfections erased and anything that may seem out of place obliterated. The truth about photography now is that we can no longer see "how photography lies." (Appel, 2006) A true image is often hidden deep down beneath layers of editing and it is difficult to categorically state that an image captures reality when, in reality, it may not. This links back to the idea

expressed in Chapter One that a person's true identity can be hidden deep down, Snape being a prime example.



**Figure 18: Group Photograph Taken c.1997**

Another interesting point about capturing reality is when an image is viewed many years after it was taken. Studying photographs of yesteryear can be interesting because of the direction individual lives may have since taken. The photograph above (Figure 18) shows a group of friends and their children taken around 1997. Now in 2015, it is astonishing to consider the many changes that have occurred during the intervening period. Two of the children in the photograph lost both parents three years apart, two of the husbands (including the photographer) had strokes, one of the girls bullied another and one of the girls now works as a dancer on cruise ships. In the moment that photograph was taken, nobody had any notion of how their lives would develop. With the benefit of hindsight, it can be distressing to realise how two of the children were so happy pictured with their parents, not knowing that within seventeen years they would be orphaned. A married couple who later divorced are captured in a time and reality when they were happily married. Similarly, the parents who died will be alive in that photograph, forever frozen in time. Photographs capture different realities, but as more years pass less of the picture lives in the present.

This must be even stranger in the Wizarding World with moving images, as Harry discovers in *Order of the Phoenix* when Moody shows him a photograph of the

original members of the Order of the Phoenix. Since the photograph was taken many individuals were murdered, including Harry's parents. Harry is neither impressed nor intrigued by the photograph, indeed he is shocked by it. Rowling writes that Harry:

...did not know why it had been such a shock; he had seen pictures of his parents before, [...] but to have them sprung on him like that, when he was least expecting it...no one would like that, [...] And then, to see them surrounded by all those other happy faces [...] waving happily out of the photograph forever more, not knowing that they were doomed... (Rowling, 2003, p.159)

Although a moving picture might have seemed disturbing to Harry, in our reality we will capture video film of since deceased relatives. Deceased actors and actresses are forever captured on film; it has been said that actors never truly die. For example, actor Richard Griffiths (1947-2013) played Harry's Uncle Vernon in all but the last Potter film, relives whenever the films are replayed. While it is true that the films in which they appear will live on forever, and their actions will be captured in that reality and frozen in time, writer Jackson Barnett (c.1995-) disagrees, stating "I thought that [...] Richard Griffiths would always be around to shove Harry in a cupboard under the stairs. [...] however, I realised [...] Richard Griffiths won't shove Harry Potter into the cupboard under the stairs – Vernon Dursley will." (Barnett, 2014) Barnett suggests that actors do in fact die, but the characters they portray never do, in the same way as characters in a book never really die. He continues, "The actors were never their characters. The actors were multi-talented, multi-dimensional people; and the characters they left behind cannot encompass an actor's complexity. An actor's work will live forever..." (Barnett, 2014) Despite this, for members of a deceased actor's family to see them on screen after death must be traumatic, especially so for Richard Griffiths' family as his final film was released after his death. For his family, it must have seemed as though he was alive again for the duration of the film. In the same way, watching old home videos in which deceased family members are alive again is strange; we are struck by the reality that they may have been gone for many years yet are still alive in the footage. We look at deceased family members on screen and think about how much reality has changed since it was captured by that video. After viewing we must return to reality, but the grief and loss can affect you all over again. In her book *The Truth About Forever* (2004) Sarah Dessen comments: "You never get used to it, the idea of someone

being gone. Just when you think it's reconciled, accepted, someone points it out to you, and it just hits you all over again..." (Dessen, 2004, p.78)

Although Identity will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight, it is worth noting that death does affect our identity and reality. It is undeniable that the death of someone we know can cause us to reassess our lives. Perhaps it is the fact that someone else's reality has changed so much that we appreciate our own even more. Indeed, the notion of death is sometimes sufficient motivation for us to reflect upon what is important in our reality. In *Harry Potter*, the death of a character has a clear affect on Harry and the reader, forcing Harry to reassess his life. However, in several stories it is notable that the major influence is killed off, for example, Gandalf (*Lord of the Rings*), Aslan (*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*) and Dumbledore (*Half-Blood Prince*) so that the respective heroes, Frodo (*Lord of the Rings*), Peter Pevensie (*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*) and Harry Potter, can decide whether or not to continue with their respective tasks. Therefore, death is a motivation. This is also clear in reality when some laws are passed following a death, for example, "Sarah's Law" was legislated following the murder of eight-year old Sarah Payne in 2000. While the primary objective of the law was to prevent another child from being murdered, through it the victims of crime are remembered and families feel that their family member did not die in vain and perhaps will never be forgotten.

It is interesting that women who have suffered the death of a child will still refer to themselves as mothers, the implication being that just because you lost your child does not change your identity; you remain a parent to that child. This was expressed by Romy Rosemont (1975- ) an actress on Fox television's series *Glee*. When actor Cory Monteith (1982-2013) died, it was decided that his character would die off-screen and discussed in a future episode. During an emotional scene where Rosemont, Monteith's on-screen mother, was sorting out his clothes she comments to her husband about mothers who lose their children:

How do they wake up every day? [...] But you do wake up. And for just a second, you forget. And then [...] you remember. And it's like getting that call again and again, every time. You don't get to stop waking up. You have to

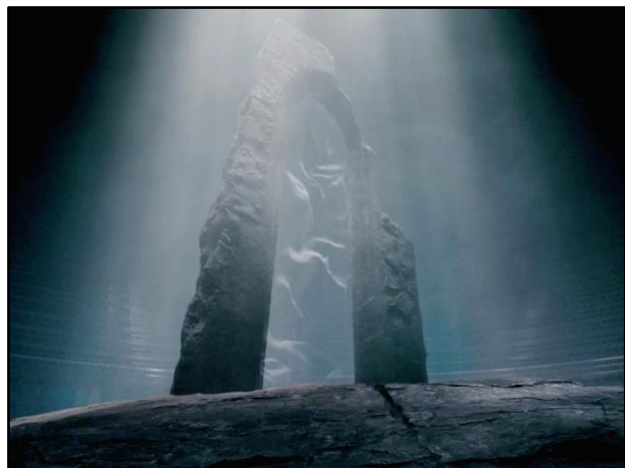


keep on being a parent even though you don't [...] have a child anymore.  
(Keller, 2013)

She makes a point mentioned in Sarah Dessen's earlier quote that something will remind you of reality, which will strike you all over again. Rosemont suggests, what many would agree in terms of grief, that you sometimes don't want to wake up but instead wait for the world to right itself and for the pain to diminish. But you will wake up. Her statement that she is still a parent is the most striking; she is still a mother despite no longer having a living child. Similarly, when interviewed following the death of well-known Conservationist Steve Irwin (1962-2006), his wife Terri Irwin (1964- ) remarked that she told her two children about his death but emphasised "We are still a family." While two children who have a mother is still a family, it is more difficult to understand how a parent losing their only child still makes them a parent; however, this comes down to identity. It is the belief that despite that part of your life having gone, the fact that you had a child hasn't changed and you still have instincts associated with parenthood. Also, just because a child loses a parent doesn't mean they don't have a mother and father, or that they are any less the son or daughter of that parent. Death cannot change identity, it merely makes us adapt to the new reality to which we are presented.

Although photographs and videos can forever capture a deceased person in time, it is not the only way by which they are captured in reality. Bryarly Bishop in her poem *Going All In* states: "From ancestors, long dead, who live a breath every time someone says their name – But means me instead." (Bishop, 2013) She implies that by simply mentioning a dead person in conversation, they are somehow brought back and live a little in reality while you discuss them. Following this argument, it could be said that people never truly die since they live on in the memories of their loved ones. Bishop also suggests that part of our relatives live on in us. This could be true as our DNA will contain traces from our ancestors, and there may be similarities in appearance, personality and other characteristics. You rarely forget the voice of a loved one, even if they passed away many years ago while you were young; memories of our loved ones, never really die. Unfortunately, the bodily remains are sometimes forgotten, a fact clearly apparent in every cemetery which will contain unkempt and unloved graves because the deceased are forgotten by later generations. The physical reminders of death are often very easily forgotten.

Death is a common theme throughout the Potter series, from the death of Harry's parents in the first chapter of the first book, *Philosopher's Stone*, until the penultimate chapter of the final book, *Deathly Hallows*, where evil is finally defeated. In interview, Rowling has stated that her own mother's death is on every page of the Potter series<sup>42</sup>, and had she not died the series would not be the way it is. Having witnessed death, Harry and his friends Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood, have captured reality in their minds which has an interesting consequence in the Wizarding World. While first year students at Hogwarts travel across the lake to reach Hogwarts, the remaining students are driven to the school in what appear to be horseless carriages. However, upon returning to school in *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry can see strange horses, Thestrals<sup>43</sup>, pulling the carriages which are visible only to someone who has witnessed death. Also, Harry and Luna hear voices from beyond the Veil in the Ministry of Magic, an archway between the living and the dead. The Veil (Figure 19) is described as a curtained arch standing in the middle of the 'Death Chamber' in the Department of Mysteries, a room dedicated to the study of death. Similar to "Aslan's Country" in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, once a person passes through the veil, they cannot return, just as in reality there is no return once a person has died. On Pottermore, Rowling reveals that provided a person believes in an afterlife, they can hear voices from the other side of the veil; the voices are of people whispering to their loved ones on the other side. Rowling has cleverly given the reader a physical barrier representing a line between life and death.



**Figure 19: The Veil in the Death Chamber of the Department of Mysteries**  
*Order of the Phoenix* film screenshot (Yates, 2007)

The likelihood of not returning to this world was mentioned by Nearly Headless Nick, a Hogwarts ghost. The ghosts in *Harry Potter* are a physical

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<sup>42</sup> Rowling's mother passed away in 1990 after suffering from multiple sclerosis. Rowling had already started writing the first Potter novel but never told her mother. (Greig, 2006)

<sup>43</sup> Winged horses with a skeleton body.

representation of death, which retain the same form as before death. For example, one of the younger ghosts, Moaning Myrtle, was a student at Hogwarts and her ghostly image always appears in the school uniform she wore when she died. While discussing becoming a ghost with Harry, Nick says, "I know nothing of the secrets of death Harry, for I chose my feeble imitation of life instead." (Rowling, 2003, p.759) Ghosts appear to exist between the two worlds of life and death, as they appear in their deceased form yet are able to interact with living people in reality. Philosopher Scott Sehon (1963- ) argued that this was probably why being a ghost never appealed to Voldemort because "it is a form of immortality devoid of real physical contact and, more important for Voldemort, devoid of power." (Sehon, 2010, p.12) In our reality, the likelihood of ghosts is questionable, let alone those that could somehow capture a reality from the past. Any investigation into ghosts is difficult because:

...there is not one universally agreed-upon definition of what a ghost is. Some believe that they are spirits of the dead who for whatever reason get "lost" on their way to The Other Side; others claim that ghosts are instead telepathic entities projected into the world from our minds. (Radford, 2013)

Within *Harry Potter*, ghosts are spirits that have decided to remain behind rather than "going on". Moaning Myrtle suggests this to Harry when she tells him how she died. "My whole body sort of seized up and then I was floating away [...] And then I came back again. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby, you see." (Rowling, 1998, p.221) The main problem in accepting the existence of ghosts in our world is their physical appearance. "...are ghosts material or not? Either they can move through solid objects without disturbing them, or they can slam doors shut and throw objects across the room. Logically and physically, it's one or the other." (Radford, 2013) It is also questionable whether ghosts are real:

It is widely claimed that Albert Einstein suggested a scientific basis for the reality of ghosts; if energy cannot be created or destroyed but only change form, what happens to our body's energy when we die? Could that somehow be manifested as a ghost? (Radford, 2013)

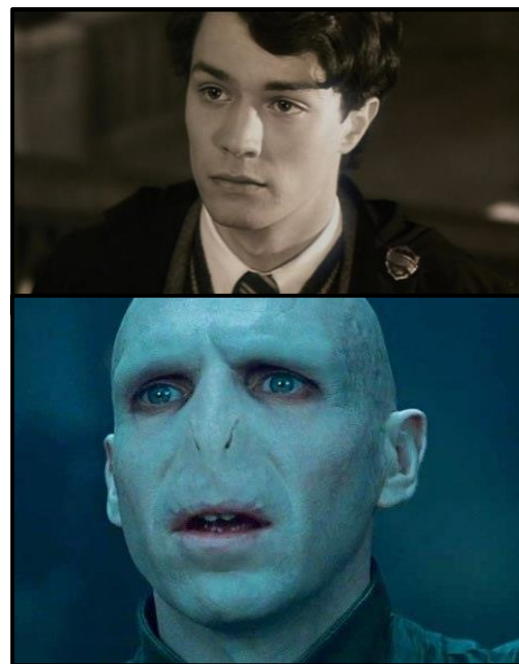
This links to the hypothesis expressed in Chapter Three that if there is no energy remaining, it having been converted into another form. The energy of a tree falling in a forest converts into mainly sound so logically the energy from a body must go somewhere too, arguably back into the environment as heat. Immediately after

death the body begins to turn cold, and organisms like bacteria and enzymes, already in a body, begin the process of body decay.

From the Potterverse, ideas are expressed regarding the soul and how this relates to a person's identity. The Dementors, black-cloaked creatures that guard the wizard prison, are soulless and drain happiness, peace and hope from an environment. They can extract a person's soul through their mouth, an action known as the Dementors Kiss. From this we know that having a soul is crucial to becoming a ghost, or indeed to any kind of life. This is

also apparent through Voldemort's Horcruxes, fragments of his soul hidden within various objects which enables him to survive death should his body be attacked. In *Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore tells Harry that Voldemort's longevity is due to his Horcruxes. However, similarities exist between Rowling's Horcruxes and Tolkien's 'Ring of Power' in *The Lord of the Rings*, where the Dark Lord Sauron's life is linked to the One Ring requiring destruction to kill Sauron. This story is predated by Russian folktale, 'Koschei the Deathless', in which a man "maintained his life and immortality through the removal of his soul." (Stone, 2015) Like Voldemort, Koschei hid his soul in

an object (needle) and an animal (duck and rabbit) although, during a murderous act, in Rowling's Horcruxes the soul is split, not intact. Voldemort's first murder being having Moaning Myrtle killed<sup>44</sup>, and the only way the soul can be repaired is through remorse. According to Hermione, this is incredibly painful: "You've got to really feel what you've done. [...] Apparently the pain of it can destroy you." (Rowling, 2007, p.89) Making multiple Horcruxes also causes physical disfigurement and Voldemort's appearance worsens dramatically when he splits his soul. Tom Riddle, the young



**Figure 20: Top - Tom Riddle aged sixteen. Bottom - Fifty years later as Lord Voldemort**

Screenshots from (Top) *Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus, 2002) and (Bottom) *Deathly Hallows Part 2* (Yates, 2011)

<sup>44</sup> From her death he created his first Horcrux, which was also so he could remember opening the Chamber of Secrets when he was at school.

Voldemort, was a handsome boy; Voldemort is an ugly, disfigured man (Figure 20). There is an apparent causal relationship between Voldemort's disfigurement (dehumanising) and murder, since the act of murder is in itself dehumanising. It is debatable whether the Horcruxes contradict the Dementors kiss<sup>45</sup>. Voldemort cannot be killed because of his Horcruxes, and the Dementors kiss drains the soul out of the victim while leaving them alive, albeit as an empty, soulless creature just like the Dementors. It therefore, follows that the soul cannot be the source of life and begs the question why the Horcruxes must be destroyed to kill Voldemort? Perhaps destroying the Horcruxes reduces Voldemort to a less than human state, although this is in better condition than the victim of a Dementors kiss. It is noteworthy that the Tom Riddle that emitted from the diary (*Chamber of Secrets*), was physically how he looked when he was a sixteen-year old Hogwarts student. While he has knowledge of future events, that Voldemort's present-day body would know, his sixteen-year old self is the physical form of a different, past reality. As Voldemort made his Horcruxes by murdering selected individuals, he is actually capturing his reality at the time of committing the murders. In the same way, in our reality serial killers have been known to save an item of clothing or other item from their victims, almost like a trophy reminder or 'souvenir' of their crime. This also reminds us that our memories are not accurate and reliable, mentioned in Chapter Four, and in fact Voldemort's Horcruxes serve as a physical reminder of murders that he considers to be of greatest importance.

A significant feature of Voldemort's Horcruxes is that they are his key to immortality. More than anything else he fears death from which he has gained protection by creating his Horcruxes, in much the same way as photographs and videos of relatives and friends ensure that they will live on. However, Jackson Barnett makes an interesting point:

Horcruxes are for the illiterate. If you want to live forever, write. If you write, there will always be a close proximity between you and your reader, whether they read what you've written when you're fifty years old or fifty years after you've died. (Barnett, 2014)

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<sup>45</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, there are contradictions in Potter.

*Harry Potter* novels will continue to be read and Rowling's characters will thereby never die. However, Dumbledore says to Harry that people we have loved and lost never leave us.

You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself plainly when you have need of him. (Rowling, 1999, p.312)

What Dumbledore suggests is that the people we have lost are forever captured by us in reality. When we remember people, they are alive for that moment, and whenever we view photographs or watch videos of them, we restore part of them back to life in our reality. They remain part of our reality and part of our identity.

## Chapter Eight: Reality and Identity

*“In the maze, you’ll find no dragons or creatures of the deep. Instead, you’ll face something even more challenging. You see, people change in the maze. Oh, find the cup if you can, but be very wary, you could just lose yourselves along the way.”*

*(Newell, 2005)*

“Who am I?” This is a question many may ask themselves at some point in their lives. We are not the same person as we were at five-years of age: our appearance has changed; we act differently; our identity has changed; and we have different priorities, thoughts, relationships and problems. In effect, our lives are considerably different from when we were children. Indeed, if asked when young to describe ourselves, our description and the words we used would differ to how we would now describe ourselves. Bryarly Bishop comments on this in her video “Identi-Me” saying she prefers to describe herself “...with verbs. Nouns are fixed and I’m constantly changing, so for me identity is something that you do, not something that you are.” (Bishop, 2014) This creates an interesting question about our identity and reality. If our identity is always changing, do we also view reality differently, and if reality changes, does our identity change too?

Bishop hints to Philosopher John Locke’s (1632-1704) definition of a person: “a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and place.” (Eberl, 2004, p.201) In the Pottermore, Harry constantly changes and adapts to events around him. However, there are very clear messages about reality during the Triwizard Tournament in *Goblet of Fire*. Despite being three years younger than the other champions, Harry is selected as a fourth champion<sup>46</sup> and it becomes apparent that he must reassess who he is in the competition. For the first task, involving confronting a dragon, Moody advises Harry, “I’m just going to give you some good, general advice. And the first bit is – *play to your strengths*.” (Rowling, 2000, p.301) Harry must identify what he is able to do as an individual and must play to his

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<sup>46</sup> Barty Crouch Jr, a Death Eater, has disguised himself at Mad Eye Moody, the DADA teacher and entered Harry into the competition so that Voldemort could use his blood to return to his body. Harry is entered as a champion so that if Voldemort murdered him, it would appear accidental due to the dangerous nature of the tournament and not because Voldemort had returned.

strengths to succeed in the first task. By his actions during the tournament, it becomes clear that Harry is a *good* person.

Harry's rescue of the other hostages who were trapped underwater, [...] sharing information with other contestants to keep the competition fair, and then sharing the Triwizard victory [...] begin to define his particular form of moral heroism as one that extends beyond the ability to win... (Wolosky, 2010, pp29-30)

That is, more than anything, Harry strives to finish the tournament alive and to ensure that everyone participates fairly. Despite wishing that no contestant is hurt, Harry is unsuccessful as he persuades Cedric<sup>47</sup> to take the Triwizard cup with him, resulting in Cedric's murder<sup>48</sup>. Throughout *Goblet of Fire*, the head teachers of other participating schools sought to assist their champion to win. Being scrupulous and fair, Dumbledore does not aid his two students as he values the cooperation between different schools more than a desire to win. This is expressed in a statement he makes in the *Goblet of Fire* film before the third task which involves finding the Triwizard cup in a maze:

In the maze, you'll find no dragons or creatures of the deep. Instead, you'll face something even more challenging. You see, people change in the maze. Oh, find the cup if you can, but be very wary, you could just lose yourselves along the way. (Newell, 2005)

Dumbledore implies that once in the maze the desire to win will overpower the champions who will forget everything good within themselves. Dumbledore says "find the cup if you can" emphasising that winning is not the most important factor; like Harry, he wishes for everyone to finish alive and safe. Harry never loses himself while competing in the tournament.

Perhaps unintentionally, Dumbledore's final comment about losing yourself along the way is what a director of a film or author of a book seeks to achieve. Generally, we regard a film or book as good when we have managed to lose ourselves in the story and characters. It therefore appears that losing your identity under some circumstances can be either good or bad depending on the situation.

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<sup>47</sup> Hufflepuff Hogwarts student and the other Hogwarts champion in the Triwizard champion.

<sup>48</sup> The cup transports both Harry and Cedric to a graveyard where Voldemort is waiting. This is the moment when the Potter novels became darker as Voldemort orders for Cedric to be killed because he was with Harry. "*Kill the spare*" (Rowling, 2000, p.553)



As discussed in Chapter Seven, death impacts greatly on reality, and we are not the same person following the death of someone dear to us. It is however interesting that when someone does die, quite often outsiders will only remember how that person died and not how that person was in life. Similarly, if we read an item of news about a young person dying, we would tend to think about their death far more than them as a person. When actor Cory Monteith died of substance abuse, many discussed drug addiction and criticised Monteith for taking drugs. From the *Glee* episode, *The Quarterback*, mentioned previously, in which the death of his character was discussed, his on-screen brother states:

Everyone wants to talk about how he died [...] but who cares? One moment in his whole life; I care more about how he lived, and anyone who has a problem with that should remember that he was my brother. (Hill, 2013)

This statement makes clear that, despite circumstances, Monteith's character had an identity other than how he died. The episode focuses on his family and friends who are left behind to deal with their grief and to reassess their place in the world without their friend. Commenting on still being a parent despite losing a child, Monteith's on-screen mother also highlights that there is much more to a person than how they died. Although your identity alters with the absence of someone dear to you, be it by death or separation, it does not change the past and your identity is still connected with that person.

Author Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials* (Pullman, 2011) provides a clear image of an identity changing with circumstances. In the world Pullman creates, every person has a Daemon which takes the form of an animal, shown in Figure 21. This is a person's soul and conscience, but external to the body. As children grow up, their daemon's form changes according to the circumstances, as Bishop suggests earlier, but when the child becomes a teenager, the daemon will begin to "settle" on a form that is intended to be the embodiment of its owner. In his



**Figure 21: Character Marisa Coulter and her Daemon, Golden Monkey.**  
Image from *Northern Lights* film, an adaptation (Weitz, 2007)

*Northern Lights*, Pullman comments that “Nobody can pretend to be someone they are not.” (Pullman, 2007) Taking the form of an animal causes an individual’s personality or identity to be assumed, which could lead to prejudice based on the animal form taken by the daemon.

The Potterverse also provides insight into how our prejudices affect our identity<sup>49</sup>. In the Wizarding world, prejudices exist between wizards and magical creatures, such as goblins and house elves. There is also prejudice amongst wizards depending on their ancestry; Draco Malfoy judges Ron and his family as being blood-traitors and Hermione for being Muggle-born. However, in *Deathly Hallows*, the Malfoy family prove that their family identity is more important to them than their blood status; while they identify themselves as Pure-blood wizards<sup>50</sup> this matters less to them than their family identity. Similarly, rich wizards have house elves working in their homes. With some wizards, including Barty Crouch Sr., there is clear distinction between the treatment of wizards and *slaves*, on which Sirius Black comments: “If you want to know what a man’s like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals.” (Rowling, 2000, p.456) He is undoubtedly correct because your identity does change with circumstances and we can become a different person depending on the company we keep; talking with parents may reveal more about your identity than speaking to a friend, which would differ as your personality changes accordingly. You are someone’s child, friend, adversary, etc., your identity being all of these, the most appropriate aspect being revealed when you are with a particular person. For example, Harry changes when with his friends Ron and Hermione individually, than when together, as discussed in *Goblet of Fire*. “Harry liked Hermione very much, but she just wasn’t the same as Ron. There was much less laughter, and a lot more hanging around in the library when Hermione was your best friend.” (Rowling, 2000, p.278)

In our reality, there is also the issue of our real-life and online identities being different. There are some individuals whose online identity, on say social media sites, makes you question whether you really know them in real life. Perhaps this difference is because you do not need to interact with people online as you would in

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<sup>49</sup> (Brown, 2008) Discusses Prejudice in the Potterverse.

<sup>50</sup> Wizards from all magic heritage.

reality. Face-to-face communication automatically brings out a different person and identity compared to speaking on the telephone or writing a letter or email. Words can be misinterpreted so easily that perhaps we are more careful about how our personality and identity are perceived online than in real life. However, online identity is somewhat artificial; a “context-mediated activity.” (Durante, 2011)

The difference between personality and identity is a topic worthy of discussion. For example, Harry Potter is kind and thoughtful, which are internal, mental factors and qualities of a person. However, being British, his name being Harry and being the son of James and Lily Potter are all external factors in the sense that they can never change. It therefore follows that our genetics are part of our identity. We inherit genes from our ancestors and these create family traits that can form a crucial part of family identity. Our inherited genes and identity could be construed as people (our ancestors) never truly dying as they live on within us. This raises an interesting question when evaluating the impact of human genetic engineering, the ability to select particular genes to create desirable traits in a person rather than to allow natural genetics to take their course. Not only does it perhaps weaken the genetic line, but it begs the question of whether the parent is deciding on the identity of their child. In a sense, is their personal identity being removed?

Our personal identity is also crucial to understanding how we view and perceive reality. Psychologist Andrew Solomon (1963- ) spoke about his depression and commented on anti-depressant medication: “...if I have to take medication, is that medication making me more fully myself or is it making me someone else? And how do I feel about it if it’s making me someone else?” (TED, 2013) Solomon questions how medication is adjusting how he feels within himself, seemingly implying that the medication is giving him a false identity. However, medically, the implication here is that a false identity may not necessarily be a bad thing if your original identity is not one that you like or is bad for you psychologically. The view that medication is making you someone you are not also relates to the questions on identity expressed above. If our identity is always changing, do we view reality differently; and if reality changes, does our identity change with it? If the anti-depressant medication is causing a change in identity, then does this create a change in reality? By altering the brain through the use of hormones and chemicals

in medication to cure depression, are we in effect altering reality? This also questions the placebo effect whereby in believing your reality will change for the better, does our reality naturally follow your identity's example? A case of this in Potter is when Harry tricks Ron into believing that a drink he had gave him before a Quidditch match contained Felix Felicis, a potion known as Liquid Luck, which improves the prospects of achieving your tasks. In fact, Harry did not spike Ron's drink with the potion but made him think that he had, making Ron feel lucky throughout the match resulting in a win for their house, Gryffindor. Similarly, when an argument has been resolved, because your reality has been resolved to an extent, your identity alters to accommodate the revised situation.

In *Your Reality is an Illusion* (Dern, 2011), spiritualist and writer Natasha Dern (c.1960) comments on how our identity is crucial to understanding how we perceive reality: "Could it be that reality is not an illusion but *our version* of reality is an illusion? In other words, none of us are perceiving reality of what it is but rather for what we wish to be." (Dern, 2011) This could support the suggestion that Harry's conversation with Dumbledore at King's Cross was inside his head, discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine. If Harry had wished to have a final conversation with Dumbledore then it follows that his 'near-death experience' at King's Cross was only in his head. This also relates back to a suggestion made in Chapter Two, that our senses and mind are incorrectly creating reality. Also, as individuals, we perceive and interpret reality differently, as demonstrated in everyday life when three people in a conversation can each interpret it differently. An occasion where one person is offended by a statement is subjective to them, while another person may not be offended. In fact, the state of being offended has everything to do with you as an individual identity or individual culture, religion, etc.; it remains that we cannot be certain, let alone prove, whether we are collectively viewing the same reality. We each view reality through our own eyes from the standpoint of our upbringing, beliefs, and sometimes with the benefit of hindsight. Indeed, Novelist Marcel Pagnol (1895-1974) commented that "people find it so hard to be happy because they always see the past better than it was, the present worse than it is, and the future less resolved than it will be." (Think Exist, n.d.) Namely, we impose our own views and thoughts on the world, upon which Dern comments:

When we begin to understand the difference between reality and that which we impose upon it through our own thoughts, choices and beliefs, we will be made to realise that much of our despair, anger or pain was fuelled by these misperceptions. (Dern, 2011)

The Potterverse also teaches us a very important lesson in respect of personal identity. In a statement Dumbledore makes to Harry in *Chamber of Secrets*: “It is our choices, Harry, that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities.” (Rowling, 1998, p.245) Dumbledore suggests that it is what we decide to do that determines who we are and our identity. Choices reflect the character we now have and shape the character we will have. The choices Harry must make during a crisis demonstrate the type of person he is, for example, being unwilling to leave the remaining hostages in the second task of the Triwizard tournament and his decision to tell Cedric about the first task. These all say more about Harry’s identity than the fact that he flew on a broomstick for the first task. Choices are rooted in our personal identity. This is difficult to define because our personality and identity change through life experiences. How can we be sure we are the same person? Gilderoy Lockhart is a good example of this problem. Having lost all his memories when the memory charm he cast backfired, has his personal identity also gone? However, we see in *Order of the Phoenix* that he retains some previous tendencies, such as his propensity to sign autographs, something on which the Healer (nurse) of St. Mungo’s comments: “Gilderoy does seem to be getting back some of himself...” (Rowling, 2003, p.452) What the Healer suggests is that aspects of Lockhart’s identity have recovered, such as his fame for which others sought his autograph, although this was not part of his birth identity, just as Harry wasn’t famous at birth. Harry’s fame originated from when Voldemort failed to kill him, and yet the name ‘Harry Potter’ in the Wizarding world automatically makes some assume an identity for Harry, that of a hero. This brings us to the question of whether our identity is a label that society applies to people, similar to a stereotype or whether identity is just an illusion.

Reality creates an interesting dilemma with respect to identity. There may be times when we question why we were given our particular role in life. Some will argue that they are real because they are themselves, similar to Descartes’ argument mentioned in Chapter Four, demonstrated in the Potterverse through the

Polyjuice potion that allows a person to assume the physical appearance of another while retaining their own identity. They do not own the knowledge of the other person, and cannot read their mind as they are merely imitating or impersonating them. Dern refers to a quote by poet T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) “‘Humankind cannot bear very much reality’,” that we cling to our illusions even if they contradict the obvious” (Dern, 2011) That is, as humans, we cannot tolerate reality and will therefore believe illusions rather than pursue ultimate reality. This seems obvious because if our reality is not real, there would be little point in seeking to attain set goals or progress in life. However, Dern points out that we do not know any different with regard to reality.

As human beings we are conditioned (illusions) to hold onto culture, religion, tradition and politics even at the expense of our well-being. From these elements our identity is shaped, and how this identity expresses itself is unique to each of us. Only time will tell if this identity is congruent with the essential self. In other words, illusions are learned and then passed on. (Dern, 2011)

She suggests<sup>51</sup> that this world feels real to us and because we have little evidence to suggest that it is not real, we believe in this reality. It is a similar argument many give for the existence of God; there is no proof that he doesn't exist, therefore it is more reasonable to accept that he does. We shape our identity with reality, and each varies with the other; this is the knowledge we pass on. While many would be shocked if this world transpired not to be real, arguably some would still continue living life to the fullest because the world is real enough to them and it is all they have ever known. Humans have been surviving in this reality for millions of years, and it seems only death can stop us from continuing that belief.

Our identity is also linked to our appearance through which we all learn to identify ourselves although, in Chapter Two, there is reference to some being unable to recognise themselves in mirrors, such as Narcissus. That is, appearance becomes part of our identity. Similarly, old superstitions regarding the soul, also mentioned in Chapter Two, suggest that our identity and physical appearance are one and the same. It is conceivable that memory is an important factor in

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<sup>51</sup> As discussed in Introduction and discussed in Discussions and Conclusions some sources are based on a person's considered opinion.

determining reality, mentioned in Chapter Four and in the establishment of identity. Garver (2005) comments:

Outside evidence could establish that a memory is probably true. In that case, we could trust that the person with memory is *probably* the person who had the earlier experience. But that means we can only trust our own identity over time on the basis of outside evidence. That I exist over time is at best only probable. Don't I know myself better than that? (p.189)

Kant proposed theories on reality that appear to support this, stipulating that there were two types of reality, "Phenomenal" and "Noumenal". According to Kant:

...our knowledge is *formed* by two things: our actual experiences *and* the mind's faculties of judgement. If Kant is correct, then we cannot know reality as it is. We can know reality only as it is organised by human understanding. (Soccio, 2007, p.332)

Phenomenal reality is the reality of our actual experiences and Noumenal is generally known as "objective reality"<sup>52</sup>. Kant's theory implies that reality is only as we understand it, which relates to Dern's suggestion that reality is merely what we have learned it to be, and we will never understand further.

We can never truly establish whether our identity is something that harnesses us to reality and establishes truth. This world could be entirely in our head; this is the ultimate question about reality and leads to the most intriguing conversation of the Potterverse: that between Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore at King's Cross Station.

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<sup>52</sup> This is reality that is not established by our perceptions.

## Chapter Nine: King's Cross Station

*"We are in King's Cross, you say? I think that if you decided not to go back, you would be able to...let's say...board a train."*

*"And where would it take me?"*

*"On."*

*(Rowling, 2007, p.578)*

The conversation between Harry and Dumbledore at King's Cross in Chapter thirty-five of *Deathly Hallows* is one of the most intriguing of the entire *Harry Potter* series. During the final battle of Hogwarts, understanding that he must be killed in order for Voldemort to be defeated, Harry willingly walks into the Forbidden Forest<sup>53</sup> to meet him. Harry does not defend himself and Voldemort casts the Killing Curse and, in so doing, destroys the Horcrux protected by Harry. Following this incident, Harry "wakes up" in King's Cross (Figure 22) where he is greeted by deceased Headmaster Dumbledore who informs Harry that he is not dead and can choose to either return to Hogwarts or to travel on. At the end of this encounter Harry asks the simple question, whether the conversation he has been having is real, to which Dumbledore responds: "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579) Dumbledore's statement is confusing and difficult to comprehend and few clues are offered in *Deathly Hallows*.



**Figure 22: Harry and Dumbledore at King's Cross Station.**

Image from *Deathly Hallows Part 2* (Yates, 2011).

As the reader has always viewed the Potterverse through Harry's eyes, we have the same view and subjectivity as Harry, even to the extent of believing in his prejudices. Further, the reader has also been present when Harry has shared Voldemort's mind. In Harry's vision-like dreams, the reader is positioned with Harry,

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<sup>53</sup> The forest on the Hogwarts grounds that is off-limits to all students.



and can observe what he sees from Voldemort's view-point. Therefore, this book chapter could be describing events within Harry's head.

The reasoning behind King's Cross Station being the venue for this conversation to occur is interesting. Why did Rowling decide upon this location? King's Cross is a portal from our Muggle world into the Wizarding World (Figure 1). Throughout the entire seven-book series, for the reader and for Hogwarts students, Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$  has generally been the gateway to Hogwarts, Hogsmeade and the Wizarding World. Again Harry must decide whether to return to Hogwarts, but should he decide not to return to the present 'real' world (where the battle of Hogwarts is ongoing) then he "would be able to [...] board a train." (Rowling, 2007, p.578) Therefore, "It is entirely appropriate that Rowling chose King's Cross as Harry's perception of this mysterious realm, because King's Cross functions in the series as the most powerful symbol of the barrier/gateway between the two worlds." (Prinzi, 2009, p.35) King's Cross is a portal, a place where the Muggle and Wizarding worlds meet.

Potter scholars have stated that Rowling's Wizarding world is uncomfortably close to our 'real' Muggle world, but in this scene two other 'worlds' appear to be meeting; the living and the dead. Perhaps this is supported by the almost-destroyed Voldemort appearing at King's Cross in a form of a small disfigured child. Why else would he be there? With his soul severely mutilated due to his past murders, he is close to death. When able-bodied, his fear of death caused him to create his Horcruxes that caused his deformation (as shown in Figure 20) and ultimately rendered him a weak, repulsive creature-like figure lying under a bench (Figure 23). Voldemort is helpless and Harry's immediate reaction is one of pity, but Dumbledore informs him that the creature is beyond help. Despite being at King's Cross too, the death-fearing Voldemort appears not to have the same choice as Harry, that of boarding a train. In his weakened stated, he could not board a train to death even if he wanted.



**Figure 23: Voldemort's Disfigured Soul under a bench in King's Cross Station.**

*Deathly Hallows Part 2* screenshot (Yates, 2011)

The Muggle and Wizarding worlds are uncomfortably close to one another, as described in Chapter One, and confirmed by the fact that a deceased Headmaster can converse with the apparently alive Harry. This relates back to the Deathly Hallows<sup>54</sup>, in particular ‘The Tale of the Three Brothers’<sup>55</sup>. Could Harry’s arrival at King’s Cross be what the third brother ultimately did? After years of evading Death (just as Harry evades Voldemort), they “...greeted Death as an old friend, and went with him gladly, and, as equals, they departed this life.” (Rowling, 2007, p.332) Anticipating meeting death, Harry is greeted by his old friend Dumbledore who presents another choice; to board a train onwards (presumably into death) or to return to Hogwarts and attempt to defeat Voldemort forever. Again Dumbledore presents Harry with the choice “...between what is right, and what is easy...” (Rowling, 2000, p.628), see Chapter Eight<sup>56</sup>.

It is not unusual to feature a railway station in fiction. In our ‘real’ world, railway stations are locations from where people can take or return from a journey. A train therefore is a symbol of a journey. Just as Harry must make a decision whether to continue his journey or to return to Hogwarts, in Tolkien’s *Leaf by Niggle*, Niggle is at a railway station and forced into making a journey for which he is neither prepared nor wishes to take. He ends up in an institution that could be interpreted as purgatory. He is subsequently allowed to leave the institution and returns to the railway station where he travels to a place that is suggested as being heaven. Like Harry with King’s Cross, Niggle does not know where he would be taken by the train; the Porter tells Niggle, “I don’t think they have fixed its name yet [...] But you’ll find it all right.” (Tolkien, 2009, p.109) The railway station in *Leaf by Niggle* appears to be a portal, like that in *Deathly Hallows*. Similarly, in C.S Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*,

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<sup>54</sup> Three magical objects: Elder Wand, the most powerful wand in existence, The Resurrection Stone, allows its owner to bring back a ghost-like image of deceased loved ones, The Cloak of Invisibility, believed to be Harry’s cloak which renders the wearer invisible. Harry is believed to be a descendent of the original owner of the cloak in the story of the three brothers.

<sup>55</sup> The story is originally a children’s story but is believed by some to be based on a true story of an ancient Wizarding family. The story is about three brothers who cheat death (who takes on a physical form) and are rewarded by him. With the three magical objects (The Deathly Hallows) as gifts, each item owned by one of the brothers. The story continues with how death wins over the owner of the Elder Wand and Resurrection Stone and ends with the third brother removing the cloak and willingly going with death at the end of his life.

<sup>56</sup> Dumbledore’s statement: “It is our choices, Harry, that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities.” (Rowling, 1998, p.245)

specific portals exist between worlds and Rowling may have been influenced by the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Platform 9¾ can be closed<sup>57</sup>, as revealed in *Chamber of Secrets*, and similarly the back of the wardrobe that reveals Narnia isn't always there, as Lucy Pevensie<sup>58</sup> discovers when she attempts to show her siblings where she has been. This concept is also portrayed in C S Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew* in which 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Figure 24) is a place with portals in the form of pools that provide transport from the wood into another world, but only if Uncle Andrew's green magical rings are worn.



Figure 24: *The Wood Between the Worlds*.  
Courtesy of (Irete, 2010)

These portals only appear to work if someone has knowledge of their magic. It is interesting to note, however, that Harry never mentions Platform 9¾ specifically, only King's Cross station, possibly to prevent the reader from assuming that he is returning to Hogwarts, which he would be if he was on Platform 9¾. Harry is just in a railway station, a version of which being from where the Pevensie children are taken to Narnia in *Prince Caspian*.

Digory and Polly in the *Narnia* series have a similar experience to Harry when they travel to their version of King's Cross (Aslan's Country). Although never directly mentioned, Harry is no longer in any physical pain from the lightning-bolt scar on his forehead, presumably his scar does not hurt while in King's Cross, and nor does he require his glasses with which he has always disliked. The elderly Digory and Polly, together with the Pevensie children, are involved in a train crash in *The Last Battle*, and no longer feel old after their arrival in Narnia. A train is also used as a means to die in *Inception*: "You're waiting for a train [...] You know where you hope this train will take you, but you can't know for sure. But it doesn't matter, because we'll be together." (Nolan, 2010) Cobb uses a train to kill himself and his wife as they

<sup>57</sup> To prevent Harry from returning to Hogwarts, Dobby the house elf locks the barrier between platforms 9 and 10 so that Harry and Ron cannot get through onto Platform 9 ¾.

<sup>58</sup> The youngest of the four siblings, and the first to discover the entrance to Narnia through the wardrobe

lie on the track in order to escape Limbo and awaken from their dream state and return to reality. To some extent, trains are definitive. A destination of a train travelling to London King's Cross is fixed and cannot be changed, nor can its route. The driver is constrained by rails in travelling the destination and can only start and stop the train and control its speed. It is a philosophical question of who is freer, the driver of a train or a bus? A bus driver to some extent has more freedom because while limited as to where he stops to allow passengers on and off, he has it within his power to change the route, although he has an obligation to passengers to be at certain places at scheduled times. The train driver has no such freedom. This is demonstrated in *Inception* when a freight train suddenly enters the dream those within it, particularly the dreamer, then have little or no control over the environment.

A railway station represents a journey. Before trains were invented, travelling was limited to short journeys, but the invention of railways made it possible to travel more widely by rail. This ability to travel is akin to an adventure. For Harry, it is the possibility of travelling to his death "the next great adventure" (Rowling, 1997, p.215). King's Cross in reality is an image of the most grey, hassled, banal reality. It is a busy place where multiple realities meet, with everyone travelling for their own reason or purpose. *Harry Potter* captures this in *Philosopher's Stone* as Harry struggles to locate Platform 9¾. Mrs. Weasley comments that the railway station is "packed with Muggles, of course" (Rowling, 1997, p.69). Adding to the confusion is a hidden platform that reveals the Wizarding world that, as suggested by Arthur Weasley and Stan Shunpike in Chapter One, we as Muggles do not notice.

Only the Hogwarts Express uses Platform 9¾. Small stations, such as Oxford, have only two platforms one for Northbound trains the other for Southbound. In larger stations, such as York, Newcastle or London King's Cross, there are several platforms and, at a glance, it is initially difficult to ascertain the particular destinations of the various trains. As Harry is at King's Cross station, it is debateable whether he has more options than the two presented by Dumbledore, each leading to a different reality that would create a new identity for Harry. Dumbledore emphasises that choices define a person and that we are free to make our own decisions. However, it is debatable how much freedom of choice Harry really has, since if he returns to the Forbidden Forest there is no guarantee that Voldemort will

be defeated. Following this discussion with Dumbledore, Harry returns to the forest and is fortunate that Draco's mother, Narcissa, had been selected to establish whether or not Harry was dead. As she sought to find her own son back at Hogwarts, rather than betraying Harry, she lied to Voldemort and allowed Harry to survive. The easier option would have been to take a train at King's Cross. Conceivably, Harry meets Dumbledore at King's Cross as it is the portal to the Wizarding world and, for this chapter of *Deathly Hallows*, a portal between this world and the next.

A further issue is why was it that Dumbledore met Harry at King's Cross? An explanation could be that Harry's experience with Dumbledore at King's Cross is a near-death experience, a particular characteristic of which is: "Meeting Others – Encounters with 'spirits' of people one has known who have died." (Eysenck & Sargent, 1982, p.160) Should it be a near-death experience, the scene creates an interesting dilemma. From personal accounts, mentioned in Eysenck & Sargent, 1982, it appears that the experience happens inside a person's head, but to the individual it is a very *real* experience. This is exactly the issue for which Harry seeks clarification at the end of the King's Cross Chapter in *Deathly Hallows*.

However, this argument of King's Cross being a near-death experience does not resolve why Dumbledore was the "spirit" (mentioned above) that greeted Harry, and not his parents or godfather. Throughout *Deathly Hallows*, Harry questions whether Dumbledore really cared about him. If the reader believes that Dumbledore did care for Harry then the King's Cross station meeting is probably real and explains Dumbledore's presence. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore admitted that because he cared too much about Harry, he had withheld information:

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 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. (Rowling, 2003, p.739)

Throughout *Deathly Hallows*, Hermione reminds Harry that Dumbledore cared for and even loved him, but Harry remains sceptical. Having admitted that he cared more for Harry's happiness than him knowing the truth, the reader cannot forget that

Dumbledore concealed the truth from Harry regarding the Horcruxes<sup>59</sup> and neglected to tell him that he would have to die.

Dumbledore's past deeds created doubt over the extent to which he cared for Harry. Craving power he sought the Deathly Hallows to achieve domination over Muggles, believing this to be for the greater good. It was only when his sister was inadvertently killed during a confrontation with his younger brother and best friend that he reconsidered his actions. From the above quote, (Rowling, 2003, p.739), the impression is given that Dumbledore thought more about Harry than the greater good. Conversely, neglecting to tell Harry that he must die in order for Voldemort to be defeated could be construed as a definition of 'the greater good'. Ultimately, if Harry died, Voldemort could be destroyed and this would prevent the deaths of many more individuals. Dumbledore's decision is logical, but this is not the nature of the Dumbledore we have known over seven novels.

It is also worth considering why Dumbledore should wish to linger at King's Cross if he did not indeed care for Harry. Perhaps Dumbledore's feelings for Harry did not extend to any more or less than he did any other student; Harry could merely receive greater involvement and attention from his Headmaster because he is 'Famous Harry Potter'. Another possibility, however, could be that Dumbledore's obligation to Harry stemmed from guilt, and he sought Harry's forgiveness. It was Dumbledore who went to the orphanage<sup>60</sup> and told Tom Riddle that he was a wizard, and introduced him to the Wizarding world. Dumbledore admits to Harry that he had no way of knowing what Riddle would become: "Did I know that I had just met the most dangerous Dark wizard of all time? [...] No, I had no idea that he was to grow up to be what he is." (Rowling, 2005, p.258) However, Riddle became Lord Voldemort who murdered Harry's parents<sup>61</sup>. It is difficult to understand whether Dumbledore cares for Harry out of guilt as a result of this or whether through his

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<sup>59</sup> While Dumbledore informed Harry that there were Horcruxes to destroy, he neglected to tell Harry that one of them was Harry himself. When Voldemort failed to kill Harry as a baby, the curse rebounded upon Voldemort and caused a piece of his soul to become attached to the only living thing in the destroyed house, which was Harry.

<sup>60</sup> Chapter Thirteen of *Half-Blood Prince* is called 'The Secret Riddle' where Dumbledore shows Harry his memory of meeting Tom Riddle and informing him that he is a wizard and coming to Hogwarts.

<sup>61</sup> Because he believed this would be fulfilling the Prophecy made shortly before Harry was born, mentioned in Footnote number 66 in Discussions and Conclusions Chapter.

responsibilities as a teacher. We are unaware of whether any other students who died in the Battle of Hogwarts were similarly greeted by their old Headmaster, although it seems unlikely. It is also possible that because Dumbledore gave Harry the knowledge he needed to die, it was only right that he should meet him.

Harry and Dumbledore have much unresolved business: Harry was not informed of the sacrifice he must make, that Dumbledore had previously desired the Hallows, or even that the Hallows existed. This is quite accurately portrayed in the film adaptation in which King's Cross is shown as being a very light environment. The background is white and both Harry and Dumbledore wear light clothing relating back to the concept of light (Chapter Two), representing truth and enlightenment (Figures 6 and 25). Dumbledore had to shed light on his reasons for concealing facts from Harry and needed to explain himself, clear his conscience and apologise to Harry. This raises the issue of whether Dumbledore merely went to King's Cross to talk to Harry or, perhaps, he has been stuck in Limbo deciding whether to wait for Harry to explain himself, or go on to be with his family. That is, has Dumbledore ever "gone on" (Rowling, 2003, p.759) and found peace in death?



Figure 25: Dumbledore and Harry in the 'Bright' King's Cross  
Image from *Deathly Hallows* (Yates, 2011)

In C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*, everyone gathers in Aslan's Country awaiting Aslan's arrival in order for him to resolve various matters. It is difficult to imagine any other character meeting Harry at King's Cross. Undoubtedly many readers would have been fascinated had Harry met Snape, but that would have been completely out of Snape's character and Harry had already made peace with him. Dumbledore has always been Harry's mentor, knows about the Deathly Hallows and Horcruxes and needed to explain himself to Harry. The decision to have Dumbledore meet Harry is therefore highly logical.

Being his Professor and mentor, Harry clearly feels able to ask Dumbledore the questions many readers were and are still asking; was King's Cross real or did it all happen inside Harry's head? Harry is asking a very obvious, human question; we

desire to know whether something we are experiencing is real or a dream. King's Cross is undoubtedly significant and the decision that Harry must make is very real; he must decide between life and death, should he proceed to be reunited with his deceased family or return to Hogwarts to defeat Voldemort? Harry's words reveal that he has only these two options: "Harry has taken the two options to be exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The truth of one means the falsehood of the other. But Dumbledore assures him that they aren't inconsistent at all." (Prinzi, 2009, p.188) Harry suggests that if everything happened inside his head then it cannot be real.

The meeting at King's Cross is clearly for Harry's benefit, and Dumbledore even declares "This is, as they say, *your party*" (Rowling, 2007, p.570) Reawakening in the forbidden forest, Harry concludes that he and Voldemort had "fallen briefly unconscious and both of them had now returned..." (Rowling, 2007, p.581) They were both in King's Cross in some physical form, while their mortal, 'real-life' bodies, lie motionless in the forest for an undisclosed period of time, as the Death Eaters don't appear to have reacted or come to Voldemort's aid. The fact that Harry and Voldemort were present in King's Cross supports the belief that everything happened inside Harry's head as, while dreaming, we indeed appear in a physical form. Voldemort's reluctance to approach Harry and establish whether or not he was dead could suggest that Voldemort was present at King's Cross and therefore suspects that Harry is not dead. If he was not present at King's Cross, this fear could be justified by the fact that Voldemort was not supposed to fall to the ground when he cast the Killing Curse on Harry, indicating that everything is not as it should be. It is unclear whether Voldemort could hear the conversation between Dumbledore and Harry at King's Cross station. However, he had no choice but to return because part of his mutilated soul still lives inside his own body meaning that, for the moment, he is alive.

It is noticeable that Harry does not learn anything new from Dumbledore. For example, Dumbledore rarely gives Harry an answer to his queries, responding with "But you already know" (Rowling, 2007, p.567) or "Go on!" (Rowling, 2007, p.567) Even later there are elements of Dumbledore's dialogue in response to Harry that seem too idealistic or perfect. In Chapter eighteen of *Deathly Hallows*, Hermione and



Harry argue over Dumbledore's character and Harry comments "The Dumbledore we thought we knew..." (Rowling, 2007, p.294) to which Hermione says, "Harry, I'm sorry, but I think the real reason you're so angry is that Dumbledore never told you any of this himself" (Rowling, 2007, p.295) to which Harry agrees. The Dumbledore in King's Cross is obviously well aware of Harry's feelings and so holds nothing back, becoming quite emotional. Is this not the remorseful response the angry Harry would wish from Dumbledore, or is this the *real* Dumbledore who, using the words from *Inception*, has "become an old man, filled with regret" and, as Hermione suggested, changed when he had lost everything? It could easily be the 'real' Dumbledore that the reader and Harry have respected and trusted throughout Rowling's novels, or a projection of what Harry and the reader would wish Dumbledore to be following the revelations about him in *Deathly Hallows*. New sides of Dumbledore's character were presented to the reader, and to Harry too; completely out of character for the gentle Dumbledore we knew, being dead he was unable to defend himself, and the meeting at King's Cross may have been his opportunity.

Historian and author Edmund Kern (1963- ) commented that the fact that Harry learned nothing new from Dumbledore supports the view that the events at King's Cross were just inside his head and, thereby, King's Cross is a dreamlike hallucination where Harry, through a vision of Dumbledore, tells himself what he knows already.

This scene is also confusing insofar as it is never again discussed, and Harry elects never to mention his conversation with Dumbledore to anyone. Like Cobb at the end of *Inception*, while his totum spins he rushes to his children and the film cuts before the viewer can ascertain whether the totum topples. Therefore, the viewer never learns whether that scene is real; the same applies to King's Cross. Film Director Christopher Nolan (1970- ) suggests that Cobb's love of his children matters more to him than his desire to know whether it is reality. He has returned home to them and has seen their faces, and that is sufficient for him; he chose his living children and not the projection of his dead wife from his dreams. Harry returns from King's Cross to save the friends he loves, *choosing* love for his friends in the present rather than questioning reality at King's Cross, and beyond. Both Harry and Cobb decide to return, in effect following Dumbledore's assertion:

Do not pity the dead [...] Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love. By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart. If that seems to you a worthy goal, then we say goodbye for the present. (Rowling, 2007, p.578)

Harry has previously made decisions to pursue what is real in the Potter series, which has taught the reader valuable lessons about reality and existence. He knew that the ghost-like images of his parents, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin from the Resurrection Stone were not real and, therefore, chose not to search for the stone after he dropped it in the Forbidden Forest. Similarly, Harry does not search for the Mirror of Erised after it had been moved; he decides to live and not dwell on what he sees in the mirror. Dumbledore's response to Harry<sup>62</sup> questions how we perceive reality. We tend to believe that dreams occur just inside our head and are not real but are distinct from reality. Dumbledore's statement relates directly to Descartes (mentioned in Chapters Three and Four) who questioned whether a person could be sure that ideas in their mind were definitely their own. By questioning whether the conversation is real, Harry is seeking clarification that the scenario hasn't been planted in his head and thereby is not real, and is devoid of meaning. Dumbledore points out that there isn't a definitive line between reality and what is inside your head. Similarly, in the *Order of the Phoenix* film when Sirius tells Harry that the world isn't divided between good people and Death Eaters, "we've all got both light and dark inside us." Commenting on dreams and reality, physicist and philosopher Sylvia Wenmackers (c.1979-) states:

The way our brain works allows us to keep track of only one level of reality at a time. So, from our subjective point of view, reality is a relative concept: our mental experiences are equally real on each level we have access to. (Wenmackers, 2011, p.20)

We all claim to know when we are awake but, occasionally, we will experience such a vivid dream that we become extremely confused and, on awakening, question where we are and what actually happened in 'real life'. It is evident that "reality is not limited to the information one gathers with the five senses." (Prinzi, 2009, p.13) While we must believe in reality, we may question it at times, but this

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<sup>62</sup> "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579)

world is probably sufficiently real for us to believe in it. Dumbledore's comment: "It is our choices, [...] that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities." (Rowling, 1998, p.245) is not only true for Harry, but also in 'real' life. It is easy for us to simply accept that this world is real, although it is right to ask questions and healthy for us to doubt it occasionally. Like Harry, we can decide what to believe. This choice is an important "argument for the view that King's Cross really happened. It happened, because Rowling wants us to choose to believe it happened." (Prinzi, 2009, pp38-39) Whether the scene at King's Cross actually happened to Harry may be an unanswerable question. However, "something does not have to be factually real for it to have real meaning and truth..." (Prinzi, 2009, p.36) Regardless of whether the scene is real, the conversation between Harry and Dumbledore is very real in terms of the meaning and understanding Harry obtains.

King's Cross aside, Potter as a work of fantasy has raised questions about reality. "During the course of 4000 pages, Rowling has created things that are happening inside our heads – fictive things, not factual – which nevertheless, have truths within them and have their own reality." (Thomas, 2009, p.333) To Potterverse fans the characters are real, the lessons we learn from the series are certainly real and the issues raised are real. Dumbledore suggests that things happening inside the mind and brain can actually be real body experiences too, not either one or the other. In conversation with J.K Rowling, Daniel Radcliffe said:

It's interesting if you start to think for a moment not about these characters being characters, but if you think about [...] the lives the characters actually have within the books, and the fact that to a certain level because they exist in the collective consciousness of a generation, they *do* exist. (ravenclawdavid, 2013)

Certainly, having worked with the characters for almost twenty years, they do exist for Rowling. The character of Harry Potter exists and is real to us, the reader. If Harry Potter or any character from the series walked into a room, we would converse with them and ask about their experiences because we 'know' them, some probably more so than some members of our extended family. Despite being from a work of fiction the characters have their individual traits, not too dissimilar to people we know. Many will have experienced a school teacher like Snape or Umbridge, and everyone will have a key influence in their life, like Dumbledore, from whom they can

seek advice. The characters represent real people to us because they are human. They are as flawed as any of us and even Dumbledore and Harry are not entirely good; but it goes further than this. While the characters could conceivably be similar to people in our own reality, because of the success of the Potter world, they are real to us. While walking around *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* in Orlando, visitors don't say "This looks like Dumbledore's office", rather "This is Dumbledore's office". He is a real person to them whose office is instantly recognisable as a real place. Therefore, the characters emanating from Rowling's head and whom we visualise in our own minds have infiltrated our Muggle world; we know them, we recognise them and they are real, which is the very point that Dumbledore makes.

Ultimately Harry has a choice. Not many people in reality have the option to decide whether to live or die while waiting for a train at the King's Cross station, as depicted in Chapter thirty-five of *Deathly Hallows*. In reality, people decide whether to live or die every day; life is a choice we make whenever we get out of bed. There's something mundane about it and, in the same way, there is something equally mundane about railway stations. But just like life, railway stations involve a journey. Harry asks, "Tell me one last thing, is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579) Harry seeks guidance or direction as to the choice and journey he must make. Dumbledore's response is like answering yes to an either/or question; he doesn't help Harry or the reader to answer the question. "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579) Dumbledore is telling Harry and the reader to believe in reality if you perceive it as real. Philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1911) makes a comment in his work on life and our actions that appears to support what Dumbledore asserts:

Because life *demand*s a response, *demand*s action, we have no choice but to believe *something*. Life presents us with [...] *forced options*. We must make decisions whether or not we want to or not (even "not deciding" is a decision). [...] We are compelled to decide and then act, and reason is not a sufficient force for action. We do not act on what we understand. (Soccio, 2007, p.445)

James is suggesting that whether or not this is reality, because we are presented with life, decisions and actions must be made around how to live it and we are therefore compelled to believe this is reality. Debatably, a life presenting

decisions and actions when that life isn't real would be completely meaningless. Therefore, as humans, in order for us to make sense of this situation in which we find ourselves, we must believe it to be real. We may never understand whether this world is real, just as Harry may never know whether his conversation with Dumbledore at King's Cross is real, but he still acts on what Dumbledore has told him in that situation, in the same way that we act on what authority tells us. We act on what our parents, teachers, colleagues, the law, etc., tell us to do. That is how reality works.

Tell me one last thing; is this life and world real, or has this been happening inside my head? Dumbledore would probably answer these questions just as he does at King's Cross. Of course it's happening inside my head because it is my reality and my life, but why on earth should that mean it is not real? Dumbledore suggests we need to believe in reality to make it real. That is, if you consider that you are living in reality, believe it and live it. Like the spinning top at the end of *Inception* we, the viewer, the reader or individual must decide for ourselves in what we believe and what is real.

## Discussions and Conclusions

*“No story lives unless someone wants to listen. The stories we love best do live in us forever. So whether you come back by page or by the big screen, Hogwarts will always be there to welcome you home.”*

*(Rowling, 2011)*

The story of *Harry Potter* has become more than a series of novels for children. The mere fact that a generation of children born since about 1990 grew up with the story and characters of *Harry Potter*, is something few other series have done, and highlights that Potter is different to virtually everything that preceded it.

Potter has educational benefits as Theologian and Author, Travis Prinzi (1979- ) comments:

...the reader stands at Platform 9¾ and the space between the text and the reader is the Hogwarts Express. When readers choose to board that train, to crack open and enjoy a *Harry Potter* story, we enter a magical experience that will inform our own lives. (Prinzi, 2009, p.41)

Fiction is describing ‘real’ issues and, through added media coverage, stimulates discussion. As mentioned in Chapter 6 (p.86) “Rowling approaches these issues, describes them and portrays adults who want to talk about them.” (Whited, 2002, p.87) When entering her world, Rowling has asked readers to trust and accept both her and certain aspects of her world as though they are fact. However, Potter is not strict and definitive truth but this does not mean that it is not interesting and worthy of study. Indeed, “The unreal metaphors and symbols of the story become the raw materials to experiment with reality.” (Black, 2003, p.240)

As Potter is not definitive truth, there are inconsistencies which tend to be of little consequence because the Potter stories portray an environment that focuses on emotion, and not always logic. We emotionally invest in the characters which allow some inconsistencies to go unnoticed or unchallenged; for example the forgotten Time-Turner in the *Deathly Hallows* book. Admittedly, many film viewers only realised this on release of *Deathly Hallows Part 2* (Yates, 2011), where Professor McGonagall asked Harry whether he needed anything before the final battle, to

which Harry responded “Time, as much as you can get me.” Undeniably, it is a credit to Rowling that some individuals care sufficiently about the Potter stories to seek to establish accurate dates of events she has portrayed, and in the process of so doing minor inconsistencies were discovered. Despite this, Potter continues to draw many into its world.

In producing this thesis, the opinions of others were invaluable, and the origins and basis of the various theories and concepts postulated have been evaluated. However, evaluation of some of the numerous sources studied proved somewhat difficult because they are inevitably influenced by personal views, prejudices, or religious beliefs. For example, Natasha Dern writes about Buddhism, spirituality, reality and other aspects of existence. Her approach to topics such as reality stems from her opinion as a woman, a person of a specific religious background and even someone from a specific country and culture. Mentioned in Chapter Eight, Dern summarises a T.S. Eliot quote<sup>63</sup> and suggests that humans cannot tolerate reality. While some may struggle with their everyday reality, many do not and in fact enjoy their reality. This is her opinion which could be regarded as an oversimplified generalisation, and tantamount to constructing an argument to reach a pre-determined conclusion. Likewise, Descartes’ phrase “I think, therefore I am” could be reasoned to be an oversimplified argument for our existence in reality.

It is open to question whether Potter is an opinion piece:

...if authors were all trying to faithfully represent the world as they perceived it, why would we expect their perceptions to be any more universally true than anyone else’s? Just like the rest of us, authors see a limited slice of the world, made up of their own experiences and the re-told experiences of their acquaintances. There’s no reason we should expect that slice of the world to be a representative one. (Galef, 2010)

This gives rise to a point raised in Chapter Six that only Rowling knew the “Absolute Truth” (page 89) of her world, a claim that could be regarded as contentious because of the relationship between the *Harry Potter* novels and the ever-expanding Potterverse. The Potterverse is now undeniably larger than the

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<sup>63</sup> “Humankind cannot bear very much reality” (Dern, 2011)

novels; while Rowling presented us with the concept thereafter: the films, directors, actors, creators of theme park attractions, Fan Fiction writers, readers of Potter novels, authors of the increasing number of novels analysing Potter and even the reader of this thesis, all affect and contribute to the expansion of the Potterverse. The scope of the Potter novels is limited insofar as the magical world is only viewed through Harry's eyes, and is thereby conditioned by his emotions, prejudices and interests. Do the novels actually reveal the true story of Harry Potter? Since many fans would wish Rowling to rewrite the series from the vantage point of someone other than Harry, it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the world of *Harry Potter* begins and ends with Rowling. It is open to serious question whether our reality begins and ends with someone else, and whether this deprives us of having a purpose or meaning to our own life.

With any opinion piece, such as this thesis, it is inevitable that another individual could critique it based upon their *own* opinion. As more contribute to the discussion, greater resolution on the various topics presented in *Harry Potter* could be obtained. Ultimately, opinions expressed are the personal beliefs of many individuals from different walks of life, including scientific career professionals and those following particular religious doctrines. This is especially important when discussing reality, on which Sociologist Bruno Latour (1947- ) comments: "Is reality something like God, the topic for a confession reached after a long and intimate discussion? Are there people on earth who *don't* believe in reality?" (Latour, n.d.) This statement encompasses the main conclusion of this thesis: despite the illusions of reality that exist in this world, and highlighted in the fantasy genre, as humans we believe in reality. Philosopher Bart Engelen (1980- ) supports this conclusion: "Rather than trying to justify our basic belief in reality, we should treat it as an unavoidable habit of our minds without which our lives wouldn't make sense." (Engelen, 2010, p.121)

This belief in reality could be what makes reading enjoyable. While reading fantasy novels can provide a form of escapism, an author must ensure that people wish to buy the book and read their story. Paramount to the achievement of this is that the characters and the world in which they live are interesting and understandable. If a person cannot believe in the world in which a story is set, then



the underpinning structure of the story has failed. This is known as “Suspension of Disbelief” whereby the audience must ignore, or suspend their disbelief, about aspects of a story that may not be plausible in our world. For example, for *Harry Potter* to be successful the nature of a hidden world with its own government, culture and the use of magic, had to be accepted, just as the success of writer Stephenie Meyer’s (1973- ) popular *Twilight* novel series (Meyer, 2005-2008) relied on the reader’s acceptance of vampires living amongst us. In other words, we must become absorbed in the fictional world sufficiently to stop evaluating reality and merely perceive the information we are given. The world or stage upon which a story is set is as crucial as the characters involved, and part of Potter’s appeal is that, magic notwithstanding, the story can be considered to be quite realistic. While this may seem unlikely, it is notable that *good* characters in Potter do not evade death. Indeed, the first war of the magical world<sup>64</sup> culminated in the death of Harry’s parents, and in the second war another wizard boy became orphaned<sup>65</sup>. In light of this, whether real or fictional, we must believe in the reality, and it is important to summarise and resolve key issues presented in this thesis.

The principal objective of this thesis was to study Rowling’s Potterverse and other literature to: explore examples of illusions of reality; evaluate these illusions wherever appropriate against philosophical, psychological, scientific, theological and other considerations; assess their impact on reality and whether they advance the appreciation, establishment or resolution of questions about reality. In addition to evaluating illusions of reality within Potter, this thesis also sought to better understand the Potterverse as an interesting thought-provoking work of fiction, and in terms of the brand and the phenomenon that it has become.

Throughout this thesis many issues and theories have been considered. Some arguments and discussions are complex and can seem at times incomprehensible, partly because the Potter series often raises more questions than can be answered. This realisation was the conclusion of the *Harry Potter and the Age of Illusion* module at Durham University. Perhaps this is why the fascination with

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<sup>64</sup> When Voldemort disappeared after failing to kill Harry at the beginning of *Philosopher’s Stone*.

<sup>65</sup> When Voldemort is killed in *Deathly Hallows* which ends the second war, Remus Lupin and his wife are killed in the battle while their son is still an infant.

*Harry Potter* continues, whereas interest in other fantasy stories such as *Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* has diminished somewhat.

The *Harry Potter* novels triggered an investigation to discover and evaluate the impact on reality of the following: Mirrors, the Senses, the Mind, Time, Death, Identity and Existence. Rowling has given her Wizarding World a clear structure and set of rules that govern its existence and interaction with our Muggle world. This thesis began by evaluating Potter as a Hidden World (Chapter One). Since the Ministry of Magic has ensured that, as Muggles, we remain unaware of its existence, we would be unaware of whether or not the world in which Harry's story takes place is real. It is apparent that Harry's world is so close yet quite distinct from our own world, and that the two worlds must therefore be in constant interaction. Therefore, it follows that Potter sheds light on our reality. Potter suggests that our reflection in a mirror does not present us with a true image of ourselves. This is where the nature of continuity in reality relating to the visual Blind Spot, must be explored, as discussed in Chapter Three. If a person's reflection is the same as you remember it on the previous day, then we assume that it is that person in the same reality; this continuity makes us believe in reality. We tend to believe in our senses because we have nothing else to inform us of reality.

The five senses make us feel that the world is real. Seeing the solidity of the objects around us, and feeling their impact of the five senses, it is hard to deny the validity of what we see. Everything looks real, and therefore, we never stop to question this reality. (Sasson, 2013)

However, to be wholly reliant on a single sense can be flawed, since by itself it is insufficient to establish reality; senses of touch and sight are crucial to us in this regard. Eyesight enables us to observe what we believe to be real, but this can be misleading (e.g. mirages) and so we also use our sense of touch to confirm the reality of what we see. Placing ourselves in the situation of the prisoners in Plato's Cave, if we were suddenly made aware of another completely different reality to our own, without sensory perceptions of that reality, we would in all probability disbelieve it. Reverting to the suggestion that the memory of our reflection provides continuity and that we therefore believe in reality, it has been discussed that memory is the "promise of permanence" (Shores, 2010, p.199) as our memories are constantly informing us of, and are shaping, the present allowing us to discover meaning in

reality. When Slughorn tampers with his memory he is seeking to convince himself to believe in a different reality. Like memory, the notion of time also enables us to find meaning in our experiences in reality, indeed expressions such as “Time is a healer” and “Only time will tell” suggest this. By dividing time into twenty-four days, seven-day weeks, twelve-month years and 365 day years, we are providing continuity in reality based on our knowledge of numbers, days and months. While breaking down time in this way makes it easier for us to accept, are we in fact attempting to make sense of this reality and convince ourselves that it is true and real? Considering the implications of our world being distorted, we “accept our existence on a level at which we happen to be at, in the knowledge that we can’t know its ultimate status.” (Wenmackers, 2011, p.19). That is, we believe in reality simply because we do not know anything different.

The success and appeal of fantasy is that it allows us to become involved in a world quite different from our own and provides another reality in which we can believe. Indeed, while the existence of *Harry Potter’s* world is highly unlikely, we are nevertheless free to believe in it. When we believe in the world of fantasy, we begin to appreciate that “One can sometimes write far more truth in presenting a fantasy world than in describing the real world.” (Barrs, 2003) Through fantasy, we may begin to believe a little more in this reality. We attempt to capture reality recollected in photographs and seek to find meaning in it. In a sense, we are also attempting to prove reality by capturing it, as discussed in Chapter Seven. Finding meaning in life and reality gives us something in which to believe and the issue of identity is linked to this. How our experiences define our identity is discussed in Chapter Eight. However, having decided on a particular course in the past, it would be interesting to reflect on where an alternative path may have led. An example of this in Potter is that Harry was not the only possible target of Voldemort’s attacks. The Prophecy predicting Voldemort’s demise<sup>66</sup> did not specifically relate to Harry as an individual, but could have referred to Neville Longbottom. It is interesting to consider the potential outcome had Voldemort singled out Neville as his target rather than Harry,

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<sup>66</sup> The Prophecy about Harry and Voldemort that also applied to Neville: “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...” (Rowling, 2003, p.741)

because Neville emerges as having superior leadership qualities. Overviewing the novels, it becomes apparent that in defeating Voldemort, Harry required much good fortune. With the benefit of hindsight it may be interesting to dwell on these events but it cannot change reality and, while we can speculate that reality would have been *better* by proceeding down a particular path, we must believe in the reality we are living. Regardless of circumstances, that is the conclusion to which we return. The conclusion that we must believe in reality stems from the conversation between Harry and Dumbledore at King's Cross. Harry's question to Dumbledore<sup>67</sup> is undoubtedly one we have all asked ourselves about our reality and Dumbledore's response<sup>68</sup>, despite seemingly confusing, may actually be incredibly simple. He suggests that it was irrelevant whether the reality Harry was currently experiencing was real or happening inside his head, just so long as he believed it to be real and meaningful.

Mentioned throughout this thesis is the premise that in order to believe in reality our lives must have meaning. In most literature and films there is a clear three act structure with a cast of characters dealing with a fundamental issue that revolves around there being a beginning, middle and end. Could life be viewed in the same way? In life some can deal with reality while others do not because, like in some films, not everybody's life will be structured in three acts principally because there is a degree of variation between characters, a conflict and the story. The success of literature or a film can be attributed to aspects that are undisclosed, where reader or audience interpretation fills in the voids. *Inception* is an example of a film in which the ending is intentionally left to viewer interpretation. For example, when Cobb leaves his top spinning on the table, the scene cuts before the audience can observe whether it was about to topple, thereby leaving unresolved whether the scene was reality or a dream. The ending depends on the audience's view of the characters, the story and fundamental conflict. However, given that the entire premise of the film is of a character being confused between dreams and reality, this was probably an appropriate way to end such a story. Potter is incomplete and, on occasions, the reader must fill in the blanks. In so doing, our own unique perception of the book or

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<sup>67</sup> "Tell me one last thing, is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579)

<sup>68</sup> "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579)

film is being created, and some aspects of the story can mean whatever you chose. Can this also apply to reality? With the benefit of hindsight certain aspects of reality are meaningful to us, with an added gloss of individual interpretation. An event in a particular individual's life can mean something entirely different to another person.

In terms of life having meaning, many stories (including the Potter novels) are based on emotion and at times this alone can compensate for the lack of a strong 'three act' structure. Internet critic Doug Walker (1981- ), aka 'The Nostalgia Critic' comments in his editorial '*Is it right to Nitpick?*' that films are illusions, aspects of which do not make sense "just like any illusion in life." (League of Super Critics, 2013) This also illuminates why Potter has some inconsistencies, but also relates to reality in the sense that there may be some events in our lives that we are unable to comprehend. After viewing a film that focusses on seeking answers to key issues, as in *Inception*, there may be occasions when such questions remain unresolved causing audiences to become frustrated. In such cases, however, the message the film director may be seeking to convey is that sometimes the answer is not meant to be revealed. Perhaps this is the same with issues regarding reality, and why we can sometimes find it so frustrating or emotionally unfulfilling.

With regard to Engelen's assertion that reality is an unavoidable habit of our minds (mentioned on p.129), in order for us to make sense of life we find some continuity in reality and, because of that, we believe in that reality. This also relates to an issue discussed in Chapters Two and Eight, that because someone looks or feels the same as they did the previous day they assume that they are the same person living in the same reality. We understand that there could be inconsistencies in reality that make us question its nature, as we do with literature such as the *Potter* novels. However, in a similar manner to the Blind Spot, discussed in Chapter Three, it is possible that we are filling in gaps with credible or logical assumptions as suggested in *Inception*. Cobb argues that in dreams we create and perceive our world simultaneously and because our brain does this so well, we do not realise this is occurring; perhaps reality is the same.

This reality is therefore real enough. Extending Engelen's argument by comparing our world to that of watching a film, teacher-psychologist Remez Sasson (n.d.) states:

What happens to you when you watch an interesting, absorbing film on the television and then suddenly there are commercials? You are snapped out of the illusion to the world around you. When you are sleeping and dreaming, and someone wakes you up, you feel thrown out of one world to a different one. It is the same in the life we call reality. It is possible to wake up from it. (Sasson, 2013)

If reality is an unavoidable habit from which we cannot awaken, it is probably easier on our minds to simply accept it. As Dumbledore says to Harry, "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live..." (Rowling, 1997, p.157) Perhaps this comment directly links to Dumbledore's statement at King's Cross: "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p.579) Undoubtedly, if we continuously sought to establish whether this world is real we would become totally bewildered, and for our own soundness of mind we must believe in reality. The protagonist of writer Anne Fine's *Bad Dreams* contends that: "Real life is supposed to be real, and I like my world to be solid around me." (Fine, 2000, p.26) Perhaps this is the logic we should all adopt to believe in reality. Ultimately we believe in our reality. While it may be imperfect, our reality is sufficiently real and is all we will ever know.

There are numerous theories about reality and whether we live in the only reality. While this topic might lead to an interesting discussion, it could also pose potentially unanswerable questions. Fantasy literature, such as Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, is attempting to question some of our perceptions of reality. However, if we dwelt upon: dreams, the nature of death, our identity and whether our mind corrupts our perceptions of reality, then the outcome would be that we struggle with everyday existence and life generally, or perhaps end up like Cobb in *Inception*, no longer believing in only one reality. Soccio comments that philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who studied the philosophy of literature and psychotherapy, suggested that people should accept *facticity*, namely:

...facts about our unique way of Being. One of these is *thrownness*, the brute fact that nothing explains our existence. We exist without any explanation, no

matter how hard we try to make it otherwise. When we acknowledge this aspect of our facticity, we understand [...] that we have been thrown into the world without any explanation of why. We are in the world and then we are not. (Soccio, 2007, p.518)

That is, we accept that we will never understand the purpose of our existence because that is the way it is intended. Just as Rowling invites her reader to accept certain concepts and information as truth, we must do the same with our existence and reality. It is unclear whether this is because of the continuity of reality that we experience in everyday life or whether it is easier to just believe in reality. Possibly, we accept this because it conforms to our understanding of a 'three act' structure. We have been dealt a particular set of cards that we call life, and must live according to the *rules*. In a way, when we experience troubles it is as though we understand the limits of the rules of the game in which we are participants, sometimes unwillingly.

It could be concluded that *Harry Potter* has brought to our attention the illusions of reality taking place around us. In a world where magic is normal the illusions presented to us by Rowling, such as the Mirror of Erised, appear strange only because they are unlike anything we have encountered in our reality. Rowling has shown us that wizards think the Muggle world is too simple<sup>69</sup> and perhaps she is making a valid point. The Wizarding world is undoubtedly complicated, and some wizards do not understand the jobs or beliefs of other witches and wizards<sup>70</sup>; the same can be said in our world. However, the main difference between the Muggle and Wizarding worlds is that things happen more quickly in the latter because of magic. Commenting on this as he picks a lock without the use of magic, Fred Weasley states: "A lot of wizards think it's a waste of time, knowing this sort of Muggle trick, but we feel they're skills worth learning, even if they are a bit slow." (Rowling, 1998, p.25) Perhaps, like the Anne Fine quote above regarding the real world being solid around us, we like our lives to be simple and most people are content in the knowledge that many questions about life cannot be understood, reality being one of them. But this reality is the only thing we know and is a constant

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<sup>69</sup> In *Goblet of Fire* when the Weasley family send a letter to Harry's muggle relatives they cover the envelope with stamps because they do not understand that one or two would be enough.

<sup>70</sup> The Department of Mysteries is hidden to those wizards who do not work in the department, as mentioned in Figure 1 in Chapter One.

in our lives. Regardless of changes around us, whether they be: relationships, jobs, our own body, or the world we inhabit, our *reality* remains the same. It could just be the only factor upon which we can rely.

As the Potter literature is comparatively recent, sources relating to reality will continue to be produced, potentially leading to further examination of the nature of reality. Further study could be focused on any of the individual topics presented in this thesis. A further aspect worthy of deeper investigation is the relationship between the reader and the text. While *Harry Potter* has triggered questions regarding reality, investigation into the power of literature over the mind could prove especially interesting.

During research for this thesis, several interesting and often difficult theories and opinions have been encountered. Like *Harry Potter*, it could be said that I am now standing at King's Cross station, presented with a choice of a journey. Some of the topics addressed in this thesis are worthy of deeper investigation, including issues relating to Love, Death and Reality which would also lead to study of Forgiveness, Atonement and Redemption in *Harry Potter*.

We understand that there are occasional inconsistencies in life, together with unresolved issues relating to our existence and reality. Nevertheless, the main message of the Potter stories is that love conquers all and that good triumphs over evil. This belief carries Harry through many struggles and decisions. Although there are times when, like Harry, we perhaps wish to be someone else with a different life, we maintain a belief in this reality because there are no other options available to us. Flawed as they may be, our senses, the mind, time, appearance, identity and life experiences enable us to maintain our connection to this reality. However much we deny or attempt to understand it, all of the topics explored and discussed in this thesis direct us to the conscious state and reality that we are living. To deny this reality would be to question everything. Perhaps this reality is an illusion or merely contains illusions of reality. Paraphrasing Dumbledore's<sup>71</sup> words, to a well organised mind, this world is an adventure and anything that follows this reality will be another

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<sup>71</sup> "To the well organised mind, death is but the next great adventure." (Rowling, 1997, p.215)



great adventure. Whether real or happening inside our heads, reality, be it fictional, magical or Muggle, is an adventure, and we should all embrace and believe in it because by so doing, why shouldn't it be real? Where then does this knowledge lead us? The same place as Dumbledore tells Harry at King's Cross, "On." (Rowling, 2007, p.578)

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