AN IMMORTAL SCIENCE: ALCHEMY'S ROLE IN *HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS*

by

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I chose *Hallows* above any other novel in the series because it holds a stronger connection with alchemy than any of those before it. *Hallows* provides a density of alchemical symbols and imagery that far outshines any of its predecessors. In fact, Rowling introduces many new alchemical symbols into the series with *Hallows*, and I believe she "saves the best for last" in this respect. *Hallows* is unique because it functions as the Rubedo novel of the *Harry Potter* series while also serving as a representation of the complete alchemical cycle (Nigredo, Albedo, Rubedo) within itself. This capacity makes the alchemy in *Hallows* more pronounced than in earlier novels. Furthermore, *Hallows* is the first novel in the series to feature scripture from the Bible. With a Christian thread in the narrative, *Hallows* provides a means of exploration for the connection between a simultaneously alchemical and Christian narrative. Finally, *Hallows* centers much attention on the dynamic between Harry, Hermione, and Ron. I focus on this dynamic and pull from what Rowling says she may "never use in the books" to show how each character carries out his or her respective alchemical duties. In short, *Hallows* is the most

concentrated example of Rowling's alchemical pen, and its place as the finale of her series cements it as the basis for my study.

AN IMMORTAL SCIENCE: ALCHEMY'S ROLE IN *HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS*

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DEDICATIONS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Billy and Lesa Angel. Their guidance and support in all areas of my life has given me the confidence to complete six years of English study. The values of hard work and determination that they have instilled in me will always be something that I can count on. I am immensely grateful to them for all that they do.

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Let the Games Begin

Few critics of the *Harry Potter* series have addressed alchemy as an important theme of J.K. Rowling's seven-part narrative. In light of the author's own words, however, a close study of the subject's presence and influence in the series seems prudent now that the story has come to a close. Speaking about the presence of alchemy in her books, Rowling says, "I've learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy. Perhaps much of it I'll never use in the books, but I have to know what magic can and cannot do in order to set the parameters and establish the stories' internal logic" (HeraldScotland.com). In choosing alchemy to set the parameters of what her narrative can and cannot do, Rowling gives me an opportunity to fully examine what role alchemy plays in the finale of her series. Furthermore, Rowling's declaration allows me to uncover what elements of the narrative were constructed on an alchemical platform and discover just how far her "ridiculous" knowledge of alchemical concepts goes in terms of narrative influence in *Deathly Hallows*.

Rowling's words make an alchemical study of her entire seven-part series relevant, but my work focuses on what I feel is the culmination of alchemical technique in the series with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.* I chose *Hallows* above any other novel in the series because it holds a stronger connection with alchemy than any of those before it. *Hallows* provides a density of alchemical symbols and imagery that far outshines any of its predecessors. In fact, Rowling introduces many new alchemical symbols into the series with *Hallows,* and I believe she "saves the best for last" in this respect. *Hallows* is unique because it functions as the Rubedo novel of the *Harry Potter* series while also serving as a representation of the complete

alchemical cycle (Nigredo, Albedo, Rubedo) within itself. This capacity makes the alchemy in *Hallows* more pronounced than in earlier novels. Furthermore, *Hallows* is the first novel in the series to feature scripture from the Bible. With a Christian thread in the narrative, *Hallows* provides a means of exploration for the connection between a simultaneously alchemical and Christian narrative. Finally, *Hallows* centers much attention on the dynamic between Harry, Hermione, and Ron. I focus on this dynamic and pull from what Rowling says she may "never use in the books" to show how each character carries out his or her respective alchemical duties. In short, *Hallows* is the most concentrated example of Rowling's alchemical pen, and its place as the finale of her series cements it as the basis for my study.

While many critics have written on the *Harry Potter* series, few have given such close attention to alchemy as a possible narrative influence as Amy Wygant and John Granger. Wygant notes the use of alchemical imagery in the series but claims that the possibility of an alchemical reading of the text is "surprisingly diffuse" (182). She argues that alchemy is not a determining factor in the reader's overall perception of the story because the text can "lose its alchemical specificity and assume another name without damaging the plot's internal coherence or its immense appeal to readers" (182). My work, however, shows Rowling's "alchemical specificity" to be central (if not responsible for) the structure of *Hallows*. I find that without alchemical parameters, *Hallows* would have been an entirely different novel. On the other side of the Hermetic polemic, John Granger outlines the strong influence that alchemy has on the first five novels in the *Harry Potter* series in his article, "The Alchemist's Tale." Granger's work focuses mostly on alchemical symbolism, but he notes that the books (1-5) show a "design akin and parallel to the stages of the alchemical work" (Granger). Granger also hints at themes of

spiritual truth and transformation to be the result of Rowling's alchemical pen, but many other critics have approached these same motifs with no concern for their alchemical connection in the series.

Kate Behr says that Rowling works her literary magic "through transformation—a significant element in the narrative structure across the novel series and a repeated theme at the heart of the story" (257). She notes that readers are transformed along with Harry as he grows from "innocent schoolboy" to "knowledgeable adult" (265). Behr finds the theme of transformation to be prevalent throughout the series but names *Deathly Hallows* to be the place where the "greatest transformations occur" (268). Farah Mendlesohn concentrates on the elements responsible for the transformation that takes place as Harry matures. She finds that Hermione and Ron have much to do with Harry's progression and success in the series, writing that Harry's triumphs rest "on the attributes of his companions" (164). Mary Pharr agrees, adding that, "Harry needs both perspectives." "The friendship itself," she notes, "helps Harry grow toward maturity" (62).

While Behr notes a transformation element present in the series, she neglects the role of alchemy as the catalyst for that transformation. My work shows that personal transformation was the central aim of many alchemists. With *Hallows*, Harry becomes the matter to be transformed, and the reader (like the alchemist stooped over his Alembic) is transformed as well. Mendlesohn's idea of Harry's success resting on the attributes of his companions is crucial to my study because it exposes the critical role of alchemical sulfur (Ron) and mercury (Hermione) in

the book. Pharr's stance relates to the idea I introduce in chapter one that Harry relies on the unique hermetic traits of his companions in order to become the redeemer of the novel.

Rebecca L. Stephens writes about the religious objections concerning *Harry Potter*. She finds a divide among the church community in terms of the *Harry Potter* novels, noting "the more moderate groups see Harry Potter's witchcraft as metaphorical and, that view opens the books up to interpretation for spiritual groups whereas, the more extreme end sees the series' witchcraft as literal and, therefore, inappropriate for Christian readers" (24). Danielle Tumminio believes much can be gained from a religious study of the series. She says that the books are far from any kind of religious allegory but maintains that they "could still uphold Christian themes" (72). Arguing that love is the "God-figure" in the series, Tumminio finds that Rowling "makes an effort to show that God is both a very real presence and a very challenging one" (76). I bring alchemy into the conversation that Stephens and Tumminio are having by exploring how the book's use of esoteric alchemy brings forth ideas of Christian meaning and logic, instead of witchcraft and paganism. Chapter three of my project exhibits how the "God-figure" of the series is not love, but Harry himself, and his role as such shows the book to be consistent with certain Christian themes.

Speaking in terms of symbol and metaphor in the series, Sharon Black argues that many of the experiences in the books are symbolic in nature. She maintains that their appeal in the novel stems from the way that they depict the act of growing up (or maturing) in a hero's footsteps. In her words, "Harry Potter … is a set of modern symbols for the processes and truths that have been represented by hero and journey symbols through the ages" (244). She finds that

readers are able to “achieve real world understanding through Harry’s unreal solutions” in the book (244). For Black, Harry’s encounters with things such as class hierarchies and death in the wizard world symbolize authentic human truths on earth. While much of the imagery Rowling employs may be modern, my work in chapter two shows that many of the symbols present are traditional alchemical symbols in English literature.

Katherine Grimes, too, notes the symbolic nature of Harry’s exploits in the books. In particular, Grimes finds the symbolic deaths and rebirths that occur in the series to hold special meaning for readers. With death representing the “endings of phases in the children’s lives,” Grimes argues that young readers are able to understand the capriciousness of death: “As we identify with the hero, we feel a bit invincible, learning to cope with the deaths of others but feeling protected from our own mortality” (104). Rebirth, on the other hand, is understood as “periods in their own lives, with their infancy and childhood behind them and their anticipation of adulthood” (104). Grimes never addresses alchemy as being responsible for the themes of death and rebirth in the books, but my argument in chapters two and three shows how these ideas of mortality and regeneration are central to Harry’s story not only as a representation of phases in children’s lives, but as an alchemical piece of literature as well.

With the exception of John Granger and Amy Wygant, few of the critics mentioned apply an alchemical reading to *Deathly Hallows*. Granger provides readers with a glimpse of how alchemy works through *The Order of the Phoenix*, but his article never reaches the final novel in its analysis. As a result, the true capacity of alchemy’s role in the culmination of a seven-part saga is never fully fleshed out. Mendlesohn and Pharr are writing about a series in its infancy,

and the themes that they discuss seem to focus on the development and maturation of a child. Harry is all grown up now and his development as a character is completed with the end of *Deathly Hallows*. Now that the narrative is complete, my job is to uncover the alchemical pattern in Rowling's final novel and, in doing so, depict how themes of transformation, religion, and symbolism are still relevant to a study of *Harry Potter*.

In chapter one, I focus on the characters in *Deathly Hallows* that are specifically designed (with respect to appearance and function) for an alchemical narrative. Specifically, this chapter introduces the idea of Harry as the "Philosopher's Stone" of the novel, and Ron and Hermione as alchemical sulfur and mercury. Using Lyndy Abraham's *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, as well as other sources on hermeticism, this section explains the boundaries of alchemy as a science and explores how the elements and processes of this sacred art are displayed through character and narrative design in the novel. Because Ron and Hermione are instrumental catalysts in the changes that take place in Harry, I discuss how Rowling constructs each of them to fill his or her particular alchemical roles. With Harry, I explain how his role as the book's "Prima Materia" puts him at the mercy of the alchemical cycle, eventually leading him through the Nigredo, Albedo, and Rubedo stages of alchemy on his journey to defeat Lord Voldemort. I also investigate how Rowling uses character pairs or doppelgangers in the book to connote a sense of polarity, or conflict. In order to set the stage for proceeding chapters, I introduce the idea of transformation as a theme that is central to the story as a maturation tale, and an alchemical narrative.

With chapter two I take a close look at the specifically alchemical symbols and images that Rowling selects for her final novel. I note which images she carries over from earlier novels and pay special attention to the symbols that are new to *Hallows*. Certain symbols function as literal objects in the text, while others serve to capture a symbolic action taking place, and I differentiate between the effects that each has on the story. In particular, Rowling takes careful attention in designing her settings so that they depict a particular stage of the alchemical cycle. I show how environment and atmosphere are key players in the alchemical imagery of *Hallows*. Furthermore, I explore how the symbols and images used in *Hallows* depict a theme of transformation that is central to both the aims of alchemy and Rowling's narrative. Much of chapter two revolves around the dense grouping of symbols used in the epilogue. Besides indicating which stage of the alchemical cycle the story is in during the epilogue, Rowling chooses certain symbols that are new to the series to create a sort of revitalized Eden with the novel's close. With Harry as the novel's Philosopher's Stone, the images and symbols used in *Hallows* (with particular attention to the epilogue) show that Harry's transformation is complete and his perfection realized.

Chapter three establishes a connection between alchemy's aims and the ideals of Christianity as they are expressed in *Deathly Hallows*. I position Harry as a Christological figure in the text, but I am careful not to interpret the novel as a simple religious allegory. With no clear representation of God in the text, I argue that *Hallows* exhibits Christian meaning and influence without ever appearing to be simple moral allegory. I associate the three stages of alchemy (Nigredo, Albedo, Rubedo) with the nativity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, respectively. I show how Harry, as a Christ-like shadow, goes through his own sort of nativity,

crucifixion, and resurrection in the novel, and I express how each is likened to a specific alchemical process. In regards to detailing how *Hallows* is Christian literature, I also specify the ways in which it is not. Rowling makes a few detours from the Christian narrative in her novel, and my work shows how these differences prevent a successful religious allegory.

With an apparent connection between Christian literature and children's fantasy in *Hallows*, Rowling's readers come from far and wide to immerse themselves in the imaginative transformation and struggle to believe that is Harry's journey. In a sense, everyone hopes to conquer the nadirs of life and end up in a place where "all was well" (759). *Deathly Hallows* allows readers such an experience through identification with Harry.

Chapter One: Transformation and Alchemical Characters in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

> "The Harry Potter novels are popular because they satisfy our psychological needs. Male or female, child or adolescent or adult, we identify with this boy. He is good but not perfect. He is trying to find out who he is."
>
> - M. Katherine Grimes

In order to perform a close analysis of the alchemy at work in *Deathly Hallows* one must first establish the science's presence in the books beyond just circumstance. The first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, highlights alchemy's role in the story directly in its title. The Philosopher's Stone was said to be "the much sought-after goal of the opus alchymicum and the most famous of all alchemical ideas" (Abraham 145). Noting that the stone, a symbol of human transformation and resolution, was the "much sought-after goal" of the adept's Great Work, one can stipulate that the *Harry Potter* series is also concerned with setting and reaching such a goal in the end. Amy Wygant, however, believes that a search for such a goal in the text is exhaustive. Writing about the presence of alchemy in the series, Wygant argues that the possibilities for an alchemical reading are both "extremely forceful and surprisingly diffuse" (182). However, Rowling's own words seem to make Wygant's claim of a "diffuse" alchemical reading of *Harry Potter* seem somewhat unfounded. Rowling says:

> I've never wanted to be a witch, but an alchemist, now that's a different matter. To invent this wizarding world, I've learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy. Perhaps much of it I'll never use in the books, but I have to know what magic can and cannot do in order to set the parameters and establish the stories' internal logic. (Simpson)

I will argue that alchemy's role in establishing the narrative arc of the *Harry Potter* series is far from "diffuse." On the contrary, I feel alchemy's role in determining the "internal logic" of the series reaches its climax in *Deathly Hallows* as the culmination of Rowling's careful alchemical planning and character development successfully bring closure to an alchemical pattern that she sets in motion with the title of her first book.[1]

Because Rowling is an author-alchemist, one of her main concerns in writing the *Harry Potter* series is imbedding the idea of personal transformation into the text. Harry transforms little-by-little as the stories progress, but his most important transformation doesn't occur until *Deathly Hallows*. Kate Behr touches on transformation in the text as "a significant element in the narrative structure across the novel series and a repeated theme at the heart of the story" (257). As Behr hints at transformation being located at the "heart" of the series, she never addresses the possibility of alchemy as the "pulse" behind the transformations taking place in the story. Granger understands the possible match between alchemy and narrative transformation because, as he says, "alchemy and literature are a match because they both endeavor to transform the human person" (Granger). While both critics are aware of the importance of transformation in

[1] *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is the title of the first novel in the series. Abraham calls the Philosopher's Stone the "most famous of all alchemical ideas" possessing the power to "transform the earthly man into an illumined philosopher" (145). Therefore, the role of transformation in *Deathly Hallows* can be seen as both a means of boyhood maturation and alchemical progression.

the *Harry Potter* series, only Granger takes note of the alchemical influence in Rowling's writing. My project will pick up where Behr began and Granger left off, performing a complete examination of alchemy's presence and effect in the last novel of the series, *Deathly Hallows*.

Beyond the mention of traditional alchemical figures such as Hermione in the text, Rowling gives careful attention to the way that she develops her story's characters so that they assume specific alchemical functions. Many of the characters are given names which hold historical significance in the practice of alchemy. Harry's godfather in the series, Sirius Black, has a surname that John Granger says literally stands for the Nigredo of the Great Work (Granger).[2] Lyndy Abraham's *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* provides an account for the use of the word "black" in alchemical literature. Abraham says that "black" is "the colour which signifies the onset of the nigredo, the dissolution or death and putrefaction of the old form of body of the metal (or the stone's matter) at the beginning of the opus" (26). Here, Rowling uses black both as a color and as an alchemical marker for the death, loss, and dissolution that Harry will experience as Prima Materia during the Nigredo stage of *Deathly Hallows*.[3]

Harry takes on the alchemical role of the "Prima Materia" in chapters nine through eighteen. This is quite an important role for Harry to assume in the book because it shapes him as the hero and savior of mankind. In a sense, Harry as Prima Materia must become the Alpha and Omega of the book. It is his job as the vehicle of transformation to bring resolution to the chaotic

[2] Jacques Sadoul notes that "the great work is not a single operation, but consists of three completely separate parts" (209). Those three parts are "Nigredo," "Albedo," and "Rubedo."

[3] Harry serves as the novel's Prima Materia because he is the main character. He is also the vehicle through which all transformation is achieved in *Deathly Hallows.*

wizard world, ultimately returning it to its own state of Edenic perfection. Abraham explains the role of the Prima Materia in alchemy:

> First matter, the original, pure substance from which it was believed the universe was created and into which it might again be resolved. The alchemical prima materia is the receptive matter upon which the forms of all things were thought to be imprinted in the process of creation … In alchemy the prima materia or first matter from which the universe was created is identical with the substance which constitutes the soul in its original pure state. (153-55)

In order for Harry to become the Philosopher's Stone, then, he must be transformed from lead to gold, from sin and failure to redeeming virtue. Harry must lose most of the characteristics that identify him. He must be broken down to his purest form before he can become the union of opposites, the ultimate resolution of contrary forces that is the Philosopher's Stone.[4] It must not be forgotten, however, that Harry must also transform from a boy to a man as he moves from lead to gold. With the stages of the Great Work in mind, Rowling uses her alchemical knowledge to associate the changes that Harry undergoes in the Alembic with the normal process of maturation for any other boy. Grimes notes that "young adolescents see in the series some means of coming to terms with the real world" (90). So, as Harry comes to terms with his place as the savior of humanity, he also comes to terms with the feelings of being an adolescent in the "real world."

[4] Abraham writes, "Alchemy is based on the hermetic view that man had become divided within himself, separated into two sexes, at the fall in the garden of Eden and could only regain his integral Adamic state when the opposing forces within him were reconciled" (36-7).

Harry begins his journey of self-maturation, both literally and alchemically, when Rowling thrusts him into the Nigredo of the novel in chapters nine through eighteen. Hermetically speaking, the Nigredo is concerned with "dissolving and disintegrating, breaking down the physique of substance to free the 'divine breath' or quintessential spirit within it" (Nicholl 4). In terms of Harry's maturation as a normal boy, the Nigredo can be read to symbolize the normal struggles that many teenagers goes through in their lives as they search for their true identities as adults. Many teenagers experience struggles for their own identities as they grow up trying to look and act like the most popular and accepted persons around them. Harry experiences the loss of his own identity in another way as his connection with Voldemort forces him to assume the characteristics of someone other than himself. Soon after escaping the clan of Death Eaters who stormed into the wedding of Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour, Harry is overtaken by the connection that he holds with Voldemort in the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead: "Harry had given a cry of pain: His scar had burned again as someone flashed across his mind like a bright light on blue water. He saw a large shadow and felt a fury that was not his own pound through his body, violent and brief as an electric shock" (172). On the surface, the "large shadow" in Harry's mind reflects the defining physical characteristics of the "black stage" (or Nigredo) of the Great Work. The "large shadow" symbolizes the dissolution or blurring of characteristics that define who Harry is. More important, however, the fury that consumes Harry is "not his own." As Harry's mind is taken over by Voldemort early in the novel he has no power to control it. The rage that burns inside of Harry's enemy is transferred to his own mind. The feelings that he would normally be able to experience are washed away, pushed to the side so that his connection with Lord Voldemort may play on his emotions.

In the normal world, the minds of adolescents are constantly bombarded by beliefs that are not their own. Insert the "popular crowd" for "Voldemort" in the above passage, and the line separating maturation as a "real boy" and maturation as the Philosopher's Stone begins to blur. The alchemical changes that Harry undergoes in the Alembic actually become clearer when read alongside the event of growing-up. As young readers journey along with Harry they are able to associate themselves with the Prima Materia that is Harry, and even though the subject in question is a child, Grimes says that the effect is not lost with adult readers. She writes, "It is the child with whom we identify, even as adults. For it is the child, and the child in us, who still has hope that the animal, the weak, mortal part of the person, will pass, leaving the immortal soul, the connection with God" (108). Therefore, the alchemical processes that coincide with maturation and the search for one's identity are things which readers can already relate to. They are, in many respects, the same thing. Harry's struggle is universal, and even though the alchemy of his journey may be hiding beneath the surface, its effect on the text is undeniable: "male or female, child or adolescent or adult, we identify with this boy. He is good but not perfect. He is trying to find out who he is" (Grimes 121).

Later in chapter nine, Harry's connection with Voldemort goes further than just his mind. In an explosion of agony, Harry "felt the rage that did not belong to him possess his soul" (174). Here, the intrusion into Harry's being reaches a new level as the removal of his defining characteristics occurs not only on a physical or mental level, but a spiritual one as well. Abraham says that traditional alchemists believed "there could be no regeneration without corruption" and that "nature could only be renewed after first dying away" (135). Harry is on his way to "dying

away" as Voldemort takes control of him on at least three different levels (mind, body and soul) during the onset of the novel's Nigredo. Mentally, Harry is corrupted as "someone flashes" through his mind. Physically, Harry is corrupted "with trembling hands" and a "pounding head." Metaphysically, Harry is corrupted by Voldemort as an unknown rage possesses his soul.[5] Together, the triple corruption that Harry experiences in the aptly named "House of Black" signifies the alchemical influence on the design and development of Harry's character, as well as the novel's narrative structure.

Harry continues to be broken down from a mental standpoint as his faith in Dumbledore, a mentor and protector of Harry throughout the novels, is shattered by those around him. A good portion of the Nigredo in *Deathly Hallows* is built around Harry's connection with Dumbledore. As an orphan, Harry was forced to grow up with his aunt and uncle. Treated much more like an animal than a human by his surrogate family, Harry begins to believe that he doesn't quite belong in the normal world. Upon receiving his letter of admission from Hogwarts, Harry is whisked away from his life under the cupboard. Arriving in the wizard world, Harry is immediately taken under the wing of Professor Dumbledore. Dumbledore becomes a father figure for Harry as he spends his time at school. Eventually, the two become full partners in the fight against Voldemort before Dumbledore is murdered atop the Astronomy Tower, leaving Harry's image of the man pristine, one of God-like purity. All that Harry thought he knew about

[5] Abraham explains the importance of alchemy on a metaphysical level. She writes: "Alchemy operates at a metaphysical as well as a physical level. The alchemist is concerned not only with the transmutation of base metal into gold, but most importantly with the transformation of the natural or earthly man into the illumined philosopher. The process of purifying the imperfect metal was analogous to the purification of man's soul and body …" (154-55).

his mentor soon comes crashing down as the relationship they had built over a six year period is exposed as a farce by those around him.[6]

In chapter ten Harry reflects on what was said about Dumbledore at the wedding: "the accusations he had heard from Muriel at the wedding seemed to have nested in his brain like diseased things, infecting his memories of the wizard he had idolized" (177).[7] Here, Harry begins to feel betrayed, not only because Dumbledore had kept so many things from him, but because the person who he had shaped himself to be was largely a model of all that was good in Dumbledore. Without the certainty of what symbolized goodness in his life, Harry is forced to question what he knows about himself.

Further reaching a state of dissolution, Harry encounters the nadir of the novel's Nigredo stage in chapter eighteen. "The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore" opens with an existential emptiness in Harry as "the pure, colorless vastness of the sky stretched over him, indifferent to him and his suffering" (350). At this point in the novel Harry has lost his best friend, Ron, as well as his faith in Dumbledore. It is important to note that Harry is losing the things which define who he is in these Nigredo chapters. Harry is a young man, and as a result he depends on his friends and guardians to create and stabilize the image of who he believes himself to be. As he loses these elements of his life the stability of his character begins to fold. When the things

[6] It is important to note that the Dumbledore biography that Rita Skeeter authors is mostly a fabrication.

[7] Abraham's dictionary of alchemical imagery briefly mentions disease: "All metals were perceived to be potential gold, and the impurities which they contracted in the mines of the earth where they were formed were thought of as a state of disease or leprosy which could be cured by the perfect medicine or Philosopher's Stone" (123). Here, Harry is the initial unclean body of the Stone, the Prima Materia which is said to suffer from leprosy and must be cleansed.

that Harry has built himself up on begin to crumble, he is forced to search for his own true identity from the inside out, instead of relying on external influences. The things that make up Harry, then, become the most essential qualities that he possesses. As David Jones says, "it is not his family that allows Harry to discover who he is – it is his experience in making moral distinctions" (194). Harry is struggling to let go of his adolescent image in chapter eighteen as he finishes reading Dumbledore's biography:

> Some inner certainty had crashed down inside him; it was exactly as he had felt after Ron left. He had trusted Dumbledore, believed him the embodiment of goodness and wisdom. All was ashes: How much more could he lose? Ron, Dumbledore, the phoenix wand. (360)[8]

At this point Harry can lose no more; he has been reduced to the bare bones of his character. All that remains of Harry is Harry. The Prima Materia has been achieved. The Nigredo is complete.

Having lost his best friend during the Nigredo of the novel it becomes clear just how important Ron and Hermione are in Harry's transformation. Farah Mendlesohn suggests that Harry's success in the books rests on the attributes of his companions (164). Hermetically speaking, this observation compliments the role of Ron and Hermione as alchemical agents in Harry's transformation. Without Ron as sulfur and Hermione as mercury, Harry would never be

[8] That Rowling chose "All was ashes" to complete Harry's dissolution is very important. Abraham says that ash is "the incorruptible substance left in the alembic after the matter of the Stone has been subjected to the purgatorial fire" (12). Harry has become "incorruptible" at this point. The fact that Harry has been reduced to ashes shows that Rowling has successfully completed the Nigredo of her novel. The Prima Materia (Harry) is now ready to undergo the second stage of the Great Work.

able to reach the state of Prima Materia that he does early on in the books or become the resolution of all contraries as he does by book's end. Mendlesohn argues that one of the roles of the hero's companions is to "provide their skills to enable the hero to achieve specific things for which the *hero* and not they take the prize" (164). While she may not have had the process of alchemy in mind when making such an observation, Mendlesohn still sees the role of Ron and Hermione in Harry's transformation as one of vital importance. She, like many readers, will notice the process of alchemy taking place through maturation and companionship, perhaps without even knowing that the two concepts work in unison. The specific "skills" that Mendlesohn notes as traditional qualities of the hero's companions in fantasy literature also fit the qualities of hermetic mercury and sulfur. As Prima Materia in the Great Work, Harry exhibits the qualities of the catalytic agents introduced to him. Where Mendlesohn sees Harry being "taught new skills" by his companions, an alchemical reading finds Harry taking on the qualities of the agents (mercury and sulfur) as he reacts with them in the Alembic. Pairing two different readings of the role of Harry's companions in the text leads to a similar conclusion. Interpreting Harry's personal growth as a result of Ron and Hermione's interaction with him (both as alchemical agents and as companions) agrees with both an alchemical reading and that of a traditional hero's tale.

Rowling's depiction of Harry's companions as alchemical agents is taken from a traditional understanding of hermetic mercury and sulfur. Linden says that metals were produced beneath the earth's surface from two "parent principles." Ron and Hermione serve as these principles for Harry during his transformation. Of the two "parent principles," Ron (sulfur) represents the qualities of "hotness, dryness and masculinity." Inversely, Hermione (mercury)

represents “coldness, moistness, and femininity” (15). Together, the two companions represent the catalyst for transformation that takes place in Harry; and, as Mendlesohn argues, the specific “attributes” of these companions are responsible for Harry’s growth and development throughout the novel.

Mendlesohn notes that Harry’s companions function as courtiers in the text, and claims that their talents are “by extension, their prince’s talents” (165). This “extension” can be read in reverse to represent the connection between Harry and his “parent principles” in the Alembic. Because Harry assumes the qualities of both Ron and Hermione during the Great Work, the talents of his disciples become his own. Just as a child obtains qualities from both the father and the mother, Harry has become the extension between his alchemical “parents,” representing a sort of triumvirate among the three. Mendlesohn goes on to say that the roles of Ron and Hermione in Harry’s life creates a “peculiarly passive hero to whom things happen, which he suffers and bears, but who rarely proceeds in a proactive manner” (165). It would seem, however, with the arrival of *Deathly Hallows* that she was a bit off the mark. By book’s end Rowling gives readers a version of a hero who has matured from the boy who used to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs to a selfless leader who “accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying” (720-1). Behr says that Harry’s attitude toward death at this point in the story is what “primarily changes the story, marking the most significant of all Rowling’s narrative transformations” (268). In the end, the connection created between Harry and his two companions have transformed him from a “peculiarly passive hero” to an active agent in victory. Without Ron or Hermione (and the specific qualities that they

possess), Harry could never have become hero. Through a closer look at Harry's faithful companions, the alchemical influence in the makeup of their characters becomes clear.

Beginning with sulfur, readers meet the fiery, short-tempered, red-headed Ronald Bilious Weasley, whose middle name displays a connection to the properties of philosophic sulphur. The Oxford English Dictionary defines one of the meanings of the word bilious to be, "choleric, wrathful, peevish, ill-tempered." Here, Rowling has given Ron a vernacular connection to the reagent sulfur before the audience knows who he is. Abraham says that "Sulphur is the hot, dry, active seed of metals, the male principle, Sol, in the opus alchymicum" (192-93). Comparing Harry's companions with Abraham's alchemical definitions of mercury and sulfur highlights each one's role as an alchemical agent in Harry's transformation.

Near the end of chapter fifteen a conversation takes place between Harry and Ron that displays nearly all of the qualities of philosophic sulfur. Ron and Harry have just gone over possible locations for the next Horocrux to be hiding when Ron loses his temper in a violent outburst directed at Harry. Ron says:

> It's not like I'm not having the time of my life here, you know, with my arm mangled and nothing to eat and freezing my backside off every night. I just hoped, you know, after we'd been running around a few weeks, we'd have achieved something … Don't expect me to skip up and down the tent because there's some other damn thing we've got to find. Just add it to the list of stuff you don't know … We thought you knew what you were

> doing! We thought Dumbledore had told you what to do, we thought you had a real plan! (306-7)

Ron is exhibiting all the hot-headed, highly reactive qualities of sulfur in this scene as he explodes with anger towards Harry. The volatile behavior of Ron is characteristic of the role of sulfur in the Great Work. Abraham's work shows that even Ron's anger and corrupt behavior are a sign of allegiance to his sulfuric character. She writes that "in its most primitive state sulphur is said to burn, consume and corrupt, and even have affinities with the devil" (193). Ron's similarities with the devil come shining through in this scene as he tries to lead Hermione against Harry saying, "Don't lie! You said it too, you said you were disappointed, you said you'd thought he had a bit more to go on than –" (308). Here, Ron has acted rashly. He has expressed himself in an extremely volatile manner towards Harry, and before he can even cool down enough to apologize for his actions, he storms off and leaves the two on their own for three and a half chapters. Clearly, this "hot, dry, active seed of metals" has had enough of the cold winter forest, and assuming his role as the "violent, corrosive substance" of the trio, he trots off into the darkness alone (Abraham 194). It is important to note that these periods of disagreement among Harry and his companions are crucial to Harry's alchemical development. Granger cites this importance in the series: "together, and more obviously, in their disagreements and separation, Harry's friendships with Ron and Hermione transform him from lead to gold" (Granger).

Ron's role as sulfur does not mean that he always has to be aggressive, angry, and hot-headed. In fact, transformation is vital to an alchemical reading of *Deathly Hallows.* Following suit with the progression of the alchemical opus, chapter nineteen presents Ron as a literal

symbol of light. Using the "Deluminator," Ron is able to re-connect with Harry and Hermione in the forest by actually becoming a ball of light. When asked how he used the Deluminator to return to the forest, Ron replies:

> The little ball of light was hovering there, waiting for me, and when I came out it bobbed along a bit and I followed it behind the shed and then it…well, it went inside me. It sort of floated toward me … right to my chest, and then—it just went straight through … I could feel it, it was hot. And once it was inside me I knew what I was supposed to do, I knew it would take me where I needed to go. (384-5)

Here, the story has progressed from the initial stages of the opus, and Ron has returned as a symbolic sun. Abraham's definition of sulfur explains the odd return of Ron as a ball of light beyond the parameters of fantastical literature. She writes, "at a more refined stage of the opus, sulphur is symbolized by the sun" (193). This means that Ron is successfully fulfilling his role as sulfur in the transformation of Harry. Where Ron serves as the hot-headed, active principle of reaction in the early stages of *Hallows*, he has now obtained the more refined qualities of alchemical sulfur. Through the process of his own dissolution in losing Harry and Hermione, Ron has become a more stable version of alchemical sulfur as realized by the "ball of light" that he becomes.

The female principle of Rowling's hermetic equation brings readers to the moon-goddess, Hermione.[9] Alchemically, Hermione serves as the inverse of Ron's character. Where Ron provides all the noise and action of a loud older brother to Harry, Hermione remains one of quiet determination. In a way, Hermione takes on an almost motherly role in Harry's transformation. Abraham defines mercury to be the "cold, moist, receptive, female seed of metals which must be united with the hot, dry, active masculine seed known as sulphur in order to create the philosopher's stone" (10). Therefore, it is Hermione's job to be the voice of reason in Harry's struggle to remain valiant in his quest against Voldemort. Hermione must provide Harry with constant guidance and understanding as he undergoes the different stages of the Great Work. Hermione assumes these mercurial roles as she leads Harry from his lofty ideas back to reason numerous times in the story. At one point, Harry has become obsessed with casting his quest for the Horcruxes aside in exchange for a journey to the graves of his dead family in Godric's Hollow. Hermione brings Harry back to earth as she uses her unending patience to talk Harry through his impulsive behavior. She tells Harry:

> I understand why you'd love to talk to her about your mum and dad, and Dumbledore too. But that wouldn't really help us in our quest for the Horcruxes, would it? … Harry, I know you really want to go to Godric's Hollow, but I'm scared, I'm scared at how easily those Death Eaters found us yesterday. It just makes me feel more than ever that we ought to avoid the place where your parents are buried, I'm sure they'd be expecting you to visit it. (184-85)

[9] John Read notes that according to the Chinese doctrine of "Yin-Yang," the elements of sulfur and mercury were associated with the opposing forces of the sky: "Sulfur, like Yang, was linked with the Sun; and mercury, like Yin, with the moon" (21).

Here, where Ron would have gladly bounded off into the woods with Harry on a whim, Hermione's mercurial character works to bring a sense of balance to Harry, further transforming him from "earthly man" to "illumined philosopher."

Hermione's role as mercury is to "dissolve fixed matter," and as the story progresses more instances of transformation surface through her interactions with Harry. Harry's confidence in *Deathly Hallows* comes from years of succeeding as the "chosen one" of the books. Time and time again he has gone up against extreme odds only to come through as victor in the end. But this success is not merely a result of Harry's heroic qualities. Each time Harry has experienced victory, Hermione has been right there beside him. Without her ability to dissolve the fixed ideas that Harry clings to so desperately in each novel, Harry would never be able to conquer his own mind. Hermione breaks down the false certainties that Harry's impulsive mind clings to later on in the story as he struggles to remain faithful to Dumbledore. Upon reading Rita Skeeter's fabricated version of Dumbledore's early life, Harry is easily swayed to accept the lies as truth. Believing that Dumbledore was never the man he pretended to be, Harry is ready to give up on his mentor's quest when Hermione brings him back to earth through one of her receptively cool-headed rationalizations. Assuming Dumbledore was in allegiance with the dark arts all along, Harry is exploding with frustration when Hermione exclaims:

> He changed, Harry, he changed! It's as simple as that! Maybe he did believe those things when he was seventeen, but the whole of the rest of his life was devoted to fighting the

> Dark Arts … Harry, I'm sorry, but I think the real reason you're so angry is that Dumbledore never told you any of this himself. (361)

Hermione tells Harry exactly what he needs to hear in this scene. Harry is far from the philosophical gold that he will become later on in the story, but it is now apparent that his realization as the opus of the alchemical work cannot come true without the agents of both sulfur and mercury to aid in his transformation. Ultimately, Harry cannot become the "divine love essence" that conquers Voldemort without imbuing the qualities of "divine wisdom" (Hermione) and "creative power" (Ron) first.[10]

With the extreme polarity present between Ron and Hermione in mind, it is important to notice the theme of contraries (or inverses) springing up in numerous other character pairs in the book. Abraham says that the marriage of opposite forces is one essential aim of the Great Work. In fact, uniting opposing forces was thought to be necessary in order to produce the Philosopher's Stone. Traditionally, this concept was called the "chemical wedding," and it was "one of the central images of the opus alchymicum and a crucial operation in the creation of the philosopher's stone." Abraham goes on to say that alchemists were "ultimately concerned with the union of substances, the reconciliation of opposites" and that "through this 'marriage' of opposites the goal of the opus, the production of gold and its metaphysical equivalent, was obtained" (35). Because the role of opposing forces is so important to the end result of the Great Work, Rowling has given readers a "quarreling couple" in Ron and Hermione, as well as a cornucopia of doppelgangers to serve as the "substances" which need resolving.

[10] Speaking of the Philosopher's Stone, Abraham writes, "It is the figure of light veiled in dark matter, that divine love essence which combines divine wisdom and creative power" (145).

Granger notes that the theme of unity in division has alchemical meaning in *Harry Potter*, and Rowling wastes no time in introducing one of these united pairs into *Hallows* (Alchemist's Tale). In chapter eight, aptly titled, "The Wedding," readers encounter a marriage between Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour. Alchemically speaking, Bill stands for England, sulfur, and the "Red King." Fleur Delacour, on the other hand, stands for France, mercury, and the "White Queen." Titus Burckhardt says "the marriage of Sulfur and Quicksilver, Sun and Moon, King and Queen, is the central symbol of alchemy" (149). Therefore, the wedding that takes place in the beginning of *Deathly Hallows* is a sure marker of the alchemical skeleton behind the story's structure. In beginning her novel with the "chemical wedding," Rowling has assured readers that they can expect contrary forces to be resolved as the Great Work approaches its end. Even before the wedding takes place there are signs that the work as a whole is successfully coming to an end. One example of this comes in chapter three as Harry makes amends with the surrogate family that has treated him so unfairly throughout his childhood. About to part ways forever, Dudley thanks Harry for saving his life from the Dementors with a bit of gratuitous mumbling. Astonished, Harry exclaims that even though it wasn't a proper thank-you, coming from Dudley it was like saying, "I love you" (41). Establishing an end to a seven-book long altercation, Rowling is letting her readers know early on that this novel will follow suit with its alchemical aims, eventually resolving all of the books contraries.

Rowling includes many character pairs which work as doppelgangers, or inverse shadows, in her work. Granger calls these pairs a direct example of Rowling's alchemical imagery, and they will all need to be resolved if she is to successfully complete the alchemical

pattern at work in *Deathly Hallows* (Alchemist's Tale). These opposing forces include, but are not limited to: Harry and Lord Voldemort; Dumbledore's Army and the Death Eaters; the muggle world and the wizard world; parents and children; teachers and students; Gryffindor and Slytherin houses (in three areas: Harry/Draco, Harry/Severus and Harry/Tom Riddle Jr.); Horcruxes and Hallows; mudbloods and purebloods; magical species and humans; and finally, the living and the dead. Once the novel reaches the Rubedo stage of the Great Work, these contraries all become resolved through Harry's triumph over Lord Voldemort and his followers. Readers witness this resolution as everyone gathers in the Great Hall to celebrate their victory:

> McGonagall had replaced the House tables, but nobody was sitting according to House anymore: All were jumbled together, teachers and pupils, ghosts and parents, centaurs and house-elves, and Firenze lay recovering in a corner, and Grawp peered in through a smashed window, and people were throwing food into his laughing mouth (745).

Here, all races are unified. Fused together by the bond of warfare, witches and wizards are able to forget the divide that existed among them before Voldemort's defeat. The class hierarchy that set the parameters of the magical world before the last battle has been absolved. Through the maturation of Harry, both psychological and alchemical, a great transformation has taken place. Equality is achieved, conflicts are resolved, and the return to Edenic perfection has been completed. Finally, after introducing the Philosopher's Stone nearly 4200 pages ago in her first book, Rowling's alchemical opus is realized in *Deathly Hallows*.[11]

[11] Calling it the "much sought-after goal of the opus alchymicum," Abraham says "The stone is the Arcanum of all arcane, possessing the power to perfect imperfection in all things, able to transmute base metals into pure gold and transform the earthly man into an illumined philosopher (145).

Chapter Two

Something Old and Something New: Alchemical Symbols in *Deathly Hallows*

> "The symbolism of a thing is its power to recall its higher reality, in the same way that a reflection or shadow can give us a fleeting glimpse of the object that casts it; and the best symbols—the only ones worthy to be used in sacred art—are those things which are most perfect of their kind, for they are the clearest reflections, the sharpest shadows, of the higher reality which is their archetype."
>
> - Martin Lings

Rowling's use of alchemy in the structural design of the *Harry Potter* novels goes beyond development of character and narrative progression. In using the sacred art as an influence for her seven-part work, Rowling employs many of the traditional alchemical symbols present in English literature. Introducing Hermetic emblems into her story as early as the title of her first book, Rowling's alchemical symbolism grows more pronounced in each novel, reaching its peak in *Deathly Hallows.*[12] Both John Granger and Geo Athena Trevarthen outline this technique as a determining factor in the overall success of the books. Trevarthen argues that "the fact that the books feel so fresh and yet resonate so powerfully owes something to the fact that while most people know nothing of alchemy, its symbols still strike a powerful chord" (137-8). John Granger agrees, adding that "by means of traditional methods and symbols, the alchemical artist offers our soul delight and dramatic release through archetypal and purifying experiences" (*How Harry Cast His Spell* 31). While both critics agree that the power of alchemical symbols in the

[12] The first novel of the series is titled, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.*

Harry Potter series is undeniable, neither examines the full breadth of Hermetic symbolism in *Deathly Hallows*.

This chapter performs an encyclopedic investigation of the symbols used in the final novel (noting which ones are carried over from earlier novels in the series and which ones are newly introduced) to determine the effect that each one has on the transformation that occurs by book's end. Certain symbols function as literal objects in *Hallows*, while others serve to capture a symbolic action taking place. Finally, as Granger outlines the final three novels in the series as the Nigredo (*Order of the Phoenix*), Albedo (*Half-Blood Prince*), and Rubedo (*Deathly Hallows*) of the Great Work, respectively, my project will show that the symbols used in *Deathly Hallows* actually allow the last novel to be read as its own cycle of the alchemical process because it contains symbols associated with all three stages of alchemy. I support this reading by providing evidence of a particularly high density of symbols in *Deathly Hallows*, and showing how those symbols work to create all three stages of alchemy in one book.

Although Rowling uses alchemical symbols in each of her seven novels, it becomes apparent that she is following the traditional three stage structure of the Great Work with the fifth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.* Positioning this novel as the Nigredo of the Great Work, Rowling brings readers into a world of darkness and loss. Abraham says that the Nigredo of the Great Work is "the initial, black stage of the opus alchymicum in which the body of the impure metal, the matter for the stone, or the old outmoded state of being is killed" (135). She goes on to say that symbols such as the skeleton, the severed head, and "all things black" are associated with this stage. Readers encounter many of these images early in the

novel. In chapter three, Harry is led to the House of Black (appropriately named for the Nigredo stage of the work) where he encounters the alchemical symbols of severed heads, black kings, and "all things black." During Harry's journey to Grimmauld Place, Rowling introduces Kingsley Shacklebolt, "the tall black wizard," into the fold (49). In Hermetic literature the black king is a symbol of the black stage of the work. Abraham says that "alchemists used the Ethiopian or black man to represent the blackened matter of the stone while it is still corrupt and unclean" (71). Therefore, besides providing the text with a black character, Kingsley serves as a symbol and indicator that *Phoenix*, as a whole, is the black stage of Harry's transformation. Readers meet Kingsley again in *Hallows*, but this time Rowling uses him as an indicator of the beginning of the Nigredo chapters.

Harry is enjoying the beautiful summer weather at Fleur and Bill's wedding when Kingsley returns to the series. In the form of his patronus, Kingsley ushers a sobering statement to the wedding party: "*The Ministry has fallen. Scrimgeour is dead. They are coming*" (159). Even though readers have not seen Kingsley since *Order of the Phoenix*, they know what to expect and associate with his presence because of the symbolic function of "all things black" that he serves in the fifth book. In bringing Kingsley back to the story, Rowling harnesses the power of a symbol to evoke an emotional response in her readers. With the audience already associating Kingsley with darkness, chaos, and struggle from the fifth book, his appearance in book seven serves to "strike a powerful chord" with readers, as Trevarthen says, leaving them with a sense of knowing anticipation for the Nigredo that is to come in Harry's final transformation. David Meakin outlines this function of alchemical symbols in literature:

> Individual elements of the symbolic system—just like different chess pieces—have no recognizable significance *per se* (anything might designate anything); what signifies are *functions* in a relational process designated to culminate in a predetermined apotheosis. Once this is understood, the symbols reveal their relations and their power, the latter depending wholly on the former. (26)

In choosing to use the symbol of the black king to mark the oncoming Nigredo chapters of *Hallows*, Rowling evokes the "relations" and "power" of Kingsley as a symbol from *Phoenix* and carries them over the span of two novels so that readers may recognize (subconsciously or not) the alchemical elements of a transformative narrative that come along with it.

The environment that Harry and his companions encounter in *Hallows* is an ongoing symbol of the stage of alchemy that he (and the narrative) is in. Similar to the character of Kingsley, the symbolic "power" of setting in *Hallows* intensifies from associations with earlier books in the series. The dark, black environment that encompasses Harry as he enters the "almost total darkness" of the House of Black with "a sweetish, rotting smell" in book five is nearly identical to the Nigredo surroundings of Godric's Hollow in book seven (60).[13] As Harry and Hermione step into Bathilda's house "it was pitch-black and smelled horrible: Harry had just made out a chamber pot protruding from under the bed before Bathilda closed the door and even that was swallowed by the darkness" (339).[14] Here, both surroundings exhibit the qualities of

[13] The "rotting smell" found in both book five and book seven is a symbol of the Nigredo stage in action. Abraham writes, "the advent of the stinking smell of graves is a sign that the process of putrefaction, which occurs at the initial stage known as the nigredo, is under way" (184).

[14] It is important to note Rowling's decision to use the act of swallowing or consuming in this scene. Abraham explains that "the image of devouring admirably expresses the violent nature of the opposing substances (or

what Abraham defines as the Nigredo in alchemy. The environment works as a marker for Harry's place in the alchemical cycle in both books, but it becomes a more meaningful symbol of Harry's dissolution in *Hallows* because readers recall its effect in previous books.

Rowling uses weather as an alchemical symbol as Harry enters the Albedo of his transformation in *Half-Blood Prince*. Because the Albedo stage revolves around the purification of the Prima Materia (Harry, in this case), *Prince* contains many images of wet, cold weather. Abraham names the landscape which alchemists use to represent the Albedo to be "cold, white, still and silver under the illumination of the moon" (185). The first paragraph of *Prince* reads, "even the weather was dismal; all this chilly mist in the middle of July….It wasn't right, it wasn't normal…." (2). Here, the wet, cold weather of the sixth novel strongly contrasts the hot, dry environment that burnt Harry's character down in *Phoenix*.[15] Rowling has finished with the Nigredo and is beginning to move Harry through the purification process. Abraham notes that the ablution Harry experiences in *Prince* symbolizes the stage "when the blackness of the nigredo is washed and purified into the whiteness of the albedo" (1). Therefore, the atmospheric shift from the scorched "blackness" of the fifth book, to the white, wet environment in the sixth, highlights Rowling's employment of alchemical symbols for structure and progression in the series. Rowling displays the same sort of transition between stages in *Deathly Hallows*, but in a much more pronounced way.

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qualities) and the paradoxical nature of the solve et coagula, the separation and union necessary for the creation of that pure new substance known to the alchemists as the philosopher's stone" (53). The image of consumption is commonplace in alchemical treatises, and it appears numerous times throughout *Deathly Hallows*.

[15] *The Order of the Phoenix* opens in a dry heat. The first sentence tells of "the hottest day of the summer so far" with lawns that lay "parched and yellowing" (1).

Harry is standing guard in the Forest of Dean when "the darkness deepened with the passing hours until it was virtually impenetrable" (365). Two paragraphs later, Rowling triggers the onset of the Albedo as "a bright silver light appeared right ahead of him, moving through the trees" (365). The dissimilarity between the "impenetrable" darkness of the forest and the "bright silver light" that appears through the trees is immediately noticeable having come after three long and dark chapters in the forest without Ron. Rowling makes the transition even more clearly in the following scene using a particularly dense grouping of alchemical symbols:

> And then the source of the light stepped out from behind an oak. It was a silver-white doe, moon-bright and dazzling, picking her way over the ground, still silent, and leaving no hoofprints in the fine powdering of snow. She stepped toward him, her beautiful head with its wide, long-lashed eyes held so high. (366)

A quick look at Abraham's *Dictionary* shows that the "oak," "silver-white doe," "moon," and "snow" are all symbols with alchemical meaning.[16] Even though the image of the deer has appeared before in the series (namely in book three), Rowling uses it here as a structural symbol to indicate the stage of alchemy that her narrative is in. Collectively, the symbols Harry encounters in this brief scene are all associated with light, purity, and cleanliness. The following chapter discusses how such symbols lend themselves to a spiritual reading of *Hallows*.

[16] According to Abraham's account of alchemical images in literature, the "oak" is "a name for the philosophical tree" (137). The "silver-white doe" is "one of the best known epithets of the alchemical Mercurius, also known as the deer, fawn and stag" (32). "Silver" is a "symbol of the Albedo, the pure white stage at which the stone and elixir are attained" (183). "White" is the defining color of the Albedo stage. The "moon" symbolizes "philosophical silver" as well as "the attainment of the perfect white stage, the albedo, where the matter of the stone reaches absolute purity" (119-20). Finally, "snow" is a symbol of the "pure white stage of the opus known as the albedo" (185).

Rowling uses the images of both water and light to transform Harry's character during the Albedo of *Hallows*. Literally, Harry is transformed by a "burst of white light" as Hermione attempts to keep his identity hidden from the "snatchers." As the spell washes over Harry, "he could feel his face swelling rapidly under his hands as heavy footfalls surrounded him" (446). Here, Harry is illumined by what Abraham calls the "divine spirit or solar ray" (186). Harry's transformation from a burst of "white light" is significant because of the way that his form changes shape. Harry is mutated by light as the spell "washes" over him. Here, the act of altering Harry's physical form is symbolic of the work that befalls the Philosopher's Stone during the Albedo of the Great Work.[17] In this scene, Rowling uses symbolic action instead of a literal emblem to convey her artistry. She returns to her arsenal of symbolic objects in the next scene as Harry and his friends are captured and led to Malfoy Manor.

A new alchemical symbol is introduced into the series as the trio reach their prison at the mansion: "Harry saw a ghostly white shape above him, and realized it was an albino peacock" (455). The white peacock's appearance in this scene seems a bit exotic at such a dark household as the Malfoy's, but alchemically the peacock serves as an awareness of where Harry is in his transformation.[18] Abraham says that "the appearance of the peacock's tail is a welcome sign that the matter is now purified and ready for re-animation by the illumined soul" (142).

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[17] Abraham says that "after the nigredo, the blackened body of the Stone is washed and purified by the mercurial water during the process of ablution" (141). Accordingly, the next stage in the Great Work contains the appearance of the "cauda pavonis." Rowling introduces this symbol immediately after Harry's transformation.

[18] Abraham describes the peacock's role in alchemy: "when the blackness of the nigredo is washed away, it is succeeded by the appearance of all the colours of the rainbow, which look like a peacock displaying its luminescent tail" (141-2).

Consequently, in giving readers such a strikingly conspicuous symbol of light in the midst of the dark manor, Rowling has prepared her readers, who may or may not be well-versed in alchemical concepts, to expect a change on the horizon, or at the very least become suspicious of the peacock's appearance and therefore actively engaged for the coming events.

It is important to note that Rowling's use of water as a symbol for purification is much more pronounced in *Hallows* than earlier novels. Where water appeared mostly as an environmental backdrop for the weather in *Prince*, Rowling brings Harry's encounter with water (and its apparent role as a catalyst for his transformation) to the forefront in *Hallows*. This is evident as Harry and his companions attempt to escape the "labyrinthine passages" of Gringotts Bank.[19] With the trio speeding down the tracks in a rogue mine car, "water filled Harry's eyes and mouth" as he is cleansed of his disguise by what Griphook calls "the thief's downfall" (534). "It washes away all enchantment, all magical concealment," says Griphook, and Harry immediately knew that it "had been more than water" that had transformed him back to his original state (534). Indeed, it is "more than water" that transforms Harry because the water itself serves both as a literal representation of purification and as a symbol of the hermetic stage that Harry is in. Furthermore, the act of cleansing Harry while he is underground is symbolic of the ablution that transpires in the alchemist's vessel.[20] Rowling's comprehension and employment of alchemical symbols such as water in *Hallows* gives readers the "imaginative experience of

[19] Rowling's use of "labyrinth" serves as another alchemical symbol. Abraham says that "alchemists use the image in a symbolic way to designate a place of confusion, geographical or mental, which has to be negotiated with great care in order to avoid becoming lost without thread or clue" (113). Rowling uses the image of a labyrinth two additional times in *Hallows.*

[20] Abraham notes that many alchemists alluded to the work with the stone taking place underground, and the Alembic is often referred to as a "tomb" or "grave" in alchemical treatises (90).

human transformation and perfection" that they seek in Harry (*Unlocking Harry Potter* 76). With her utilization of the traditional alchemical color palette, Rowling's symbolic artistry continues to grow stronger.

Speaking of the alchemical color spectrum, Titus Burckhardt says that "black is the absence of colour and light. White is purity; it is undivided light—light not broken down into colours. Red is the epitome of colour, its zenith and its point of greatest intensity" (182). Accordingly, the alchemical symbolism of *Hallows* reaches its "point of greatest intensity" in the closing chapters as the red stage of Harry's transformation is achieved and solidified by his realization as the Philosopher's Stone of all the novels. In order to highlight her narrative's completion, Rowling relies on an alchemical color scheme. Burckhardt notes that "the true essence of lead is gold," and because Harry is the Prima Materia (or lead) being transformed in the Alembic, the appearance of gold serves as a signal that Harry's journey is finally coming to an end (71).

Rowling begins using gold as a color indicator that *Hallows* is the final piece of Harry's narrative and alchemical transformation as early as the forth chapter. Harry's troop of protectors are about to drink a potion that will turn them all into his doppelgangers when we learn that this "essence of Harry" is a "clear, bright gold" (50). It is no mistake that Rowling chooses to depict Harry's character in liquid form as that of gold because as Abraham notes, "the philosopher's stone itself is sometimes referred to as 'gold,' while the elixir is sometimes symbolized by aurum potabile, drinkable gold" (88). Here, Harry is a symbol of both the Philosopher's Stone and the

elixir which it produces. Furthermore, the act of drinking the golden elixir is symbolic of the ritual that many adepts carried out at the end of their work.[21]

Again, in the chapter aptly titled, "The Wedding," Rowling presents her audience with a myriad of gold images. Highlighting *Hallows* as the close of her Great Work, and following suit with its alchemical cycle, Rowling gilds her own "chemical wedding" as a promise of things to come as Harry, like the groom in the wedding, will have to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others in order to become philosophical gold by book's end.[22] One particularly potent example of gold's role in this chapter comes in an early description of the event:

> Behind Harry, the entrance to the marquee revealed rows and rows of fragile golden chairs set on either side of a long purple carpet. The supporting poles were entwined with white and gold flowers. Fred and George had fastened an enormous bunch of golden balloons over the exact point where Bill and Fleur would shortly become husband and wife. (137-8)

Gold is everywhere in this chapter. In fact, Rowling uses the word gold (or one of its derivatives) exactly seventeen times throughout the course of twenty-two pages. This is substantial evidence

[21] Abraham notes that "the elixir is attained at the final stage of the rubedo" (165). Taking the substance into their bodies, many believed that the elixir could "transmute all base metal into pure gold, cure all disease, confer longevity, and resurrect the dead to eternal life" (165). Depicting Harry as a substance which cures all ailments and can reverse death, Rowling has given Harry the power to resolve all contrary forces. In this light, Harry can be read as a Christological figure, an idea that is discussed in the proceeding chapter.

[22] With the metaphor of the "chemical wedding," Rowling is placing emphasis on the death and rebirth that is marriage. As two parties are wed, each individual must die to their own personal concerns and be reborn in a unified sense with their opposite. The wedding metaphor works for the text because Harry must sacrifice himself for the benefit of others in order to be reborn as a new individual.

of the dense alchemical images that Rowling employs in her final novel. In *Hallows*, more so than in the previous novels, gold is an important symbol.

In her discussion of alchemical symbols used in *Harry Potter*, Trevarthen says that "while some of JK Rowling's use of alchemical symbols fits patterns and sequences, she also drops in alchemical symbols from time to time like street signs saying 'this is where we are'" (131). In the epilogue of *Hallows*, Rowling introduces three new symbols (autumn, the apple, and the image of a garden) to achieve both of these functions. Following the pattern of alchemy in her narrative, Rowling's epilogue brings her characters' stories to a close with a sense of Edenic perfection. She also gives readers a few "street signs" to know where the book's characters are in terms of the stages of alchemy. Using setting as a powerful indicator of place, Rowling opens the epilogue with a vision of serene tranquility: "autumn seemed to arrive suddenly that year. The morning of the first September was crisp and golden as an apple" (753). Here, the setting shows readers that the end of the work has arrived. With the attainment of "gold" in the opening line, the narrative receives a sense of accomplishment as well as completion.

Besides indicating "where we are" in the Great Work, the symbols used in the opening paragraph hold precise alchemical meaning in terms of the goal reached in *Hallows*. Opening with "autumn," the text follows suit with the seasonal progression of alchemy. Abraham calls autumn, "the season in which the opus alchymicum is accomplished, brought to fruition" (14). Each book has begun around autumn with the start of the school year, but *Hallows* is the first to introduce its audience to the season as a defining factor of setting. Located at the very beginning

of Harry's conclusion, autumn tells readers that a goal has been reached. Ending where each book before it has began, the *Harry Potter* series echoes a cyclical structure where an end leads to a new beginning. Fittingly, this narrative pattern leaves readers with the image of a circle in their minds.[23]

Returning to the idea of an atmospheric symbol, Rowling associates gold with environment for the first time in the series. That the morning was "golden" is extremely important to Rowling's alchemical narrative because with it comes the idea that a sense of perfection has been achieved, not just with one person or group of persons, but with the entirety of the wizard world. Golden in this sense implies that all the elements of the world—the morning, the September, the autumn—have become a vision of perfection. Having defeated Voldemort, Harry has restored order and purity to the entire narrative, not just himself.

The apple is also an important emblem. Because the morning of this particular autumn brings fruit that is "crisp" and "golden," readers are left with an image of a mythological garden, perhaps even Eden. Alchemists associated the image of such a garden to be the location where the Philosopher's Stone was found. Abraham says that "the mythological Hesperian gardens were a favorite symbol in alchemy, because they contained a tree that grew golden apples. The image of the golden apples was used by the alchemists to symbolize gold and the Philosopher's Stone" (101). In creating the image of such a garden in her epilogue, Rowling provides her audience with the "this is where we are" signs that Trevarthen notes, giving *Hallows* a sense of finality. Having arrived at a scene of divine perfection, Harry is no longer the agent being

[23] Abraham notes that the completed opus alchymicum is often "symbolized by a circle" (41).

transformed; he has reached perfection by this point in the novel, and the image of a fruitful and golden garden depicts a scene where everything has fallen into place and the work has been completed. With the introduction of new characters in the epilogue, Rowling completely fulfills her alchemical ambitions.

Hallows presents two new characters as symbols in the epilogue. Rose Weasley and Albus Severus Potter are the products of a successful alchemical ambition. Their presence in the novel signifies that a new beginning is possible through Harry's triumph. Using children as a vessel for the purity that was once lost in the land, their appearance at book's end implies a revitalized connection among the cosmos.

Rose Weasley's first name is an indicator that Harry successfully becomes the Philosopher's Stone after defeating Voldemort. Abraham calls the rose a "symbol of the goal of the opus alchymicum, the perfect red stone or elixir attained at the culmination of the rubedo" (173). Rose's appearance at the end of the novel shows that the Rubedo stage has been completed. Furthermore, the fact that Rose "blooms" in Rowling's mythological Hesperides at book's end is proof that the ultimate goal has been reached.[24]

Finally, Rowling leaves her audience with a hermaphroditic figure that symbolizes the resolution of all the book's contrary forces, and gives promise that the sense of divine perfection

[24] It is important to note that Rose is the child (or bloom) of Ron and Hermione. Ron and Hermione are the "quarrelling couple" of the novel, and having Rose as a child is a symbol of the contraries of philosophical mercury (Hermione) and philosophical sulfur (Ron) finally being resolved.

that Harry returns to the land will stay for years to come. Rowling names Harry's son "Albus Severus Potter" not because it is convenient for the already happy ending but because it captures the image of a unified future where the divide between Gryffindor and Slytherin no longer exists. Wizards and witches no longer need fear which house they are sorted into or whose blood runs in their veins because Harry has absolved all the book's prejudices. With Albus Severus Potter, all elements are united as one; unity and equality have been achieved. Also, it is no mistake that Albus' initials form the word "ASP." The serpent is the animal associated with the Slytherin house throughout each story, and with all of Rowling's alchemical pieces in agreement at this point, readers have no reason to doubt that Albus will be the first Slytherin in his family, effectively joining sides which no longer have any reason to stand in opposition. Albus, more than any other symbol in *Hallows*, gives readers a way to literally see the alchemical transformations in the book. He provides the audience with a symbol they can relate to: a way to understand the transformations, conflicts, and resolutions that occur.

With the son of Harry giving promise to a new world, one can't help but notice a sense of Christianity's own promise in the text. Harry sacrifices himself to save the lives of others in *Hallows*. He also gives his son to the world as a beacon of hope for an earthly paradise. Depicting Harry as a Christ-like figure, Rowling allows her novel to communicate Christian truth.

Chapter Three

Beneath the Surface: An Examination of the Christian Narrative in *Deathly Hallows*

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

- John 15:13 *KJV*

The practice of alchemy revolves around the act of transformation. Literally, the alchemist was concerned with creating gold from a base material such as lead. Esoterically, however, the alchemist's aim was to transform his soul along with the material in the Alembic so that he may regain the "Adamic" purity of mankind that was lost after the fall. C.G. Jung named this goal to be the "rebirth of the (spiritual) light from the darkness of Physis" (Schwartz-Salant 159). He believed the Great Work of the alchemists to be the "same work of redemption which God himself accomplished upon mankind through the example of Christ" (Jung 313). Stanton J. Linden agrees, adding that for many adepts, "the purely chemical operations and reactions occurring within their vessels symbolized deeper spiritual meanings" (9). The aim of this paper will be to examine the "deeper spiritual meanings" of *Deathly Hallows* as they appear through Rowling's employment of an alchemical story structure.

Specifically, this chapter provides a Christian reading of *Deathly Hallows* by connecting the three stages of alchemy (Nigredo, Albedo, and Rubedo) with the nativity, baptism, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ, respectively. Positioning Harry as the Prima Materia and eventual Philosopher's Stone of the novel, Harry begins to take the form of a Christological figure in the text. I resist the temptation to characterize Harry as an allegorical representation of

Christ. Instead, I examine how Harry functions multiple ways in the Christian narrative as a shadow of Christ, or everyday Christian. I also look at the problems that arise when attempting to give *Hallows* a purely Christian reading. Danielle Tumminio says that "if individuals really want to assess whether the books have a Christian worldview, then they need to probe the series with questions about sin, salvation, death, and resurrection. They need to look at the relationship between those ideas, and they need to assess how all of that relates to Christian belief" (72). I assume the role of the "individual" in Tumminio's statement, and I intend to present a Christian worldview in *Deathly Hallows*. Using examples from the final novel, this chapter will show how Harry's struggle to remain faithful in his quest to defeat the Dark Lord echoes the Christian's struggle for faith in Christ's message of redeeming love.

Many scholars have noticed the connection between Christ's life and the alchemical processes carried out in the Alembic. Linden points out that "the successive stages in the preparation of the Philosopher's Stone are likened to Christ's nativity, crucifixion, and resurrection" (201). It is no coincidence, then, that Rowling uses the Christmas holiday to capture Harry's position in the Nigredo of his transformation.

The majority of the "Godric's Hollow" chapter can be read as Rowling's own retelling of the biblical pilgrimage of Mary and Joseph. Having lost Ron during an argument among the trio, Harry and Hermione are standing "hand in hand in a snowy lane under a dark blue sky" when Hermione proclaims, "Harry, I think it's Christmas Eve" (323). Just as Mary and Joseph were both disguising a great secret during their journey to Bethlehem on the eve of Christmas, Harry and Hermione are donning one of "the best disguises possible" of an old married couple as they

travel to Harry's ancestral birthplace (321). Rowling uses Christian images as Harry and Hermione make the pilgrimage to their own Bethlehem. Much of the interaction in chapter sixteen takes place outside of a "church" where "carols" are being sung as the duo crossed the road (324). Invoking the image of a cross in the text, Rowling paints a picture of what the world must have been like before Christ with her descriptions of the "blackness" and "darkness" that encompassed the land on the eve of the Messiah's birth (327). In the Bible, John depicts Christ's coming as the light that "shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (*KJV* John 1:5). The darkness that exists in Godric's Hollow before the nativity is a result of Voldemort's control of the wizard world before their savior (Harry) enters into it. As the eve of Christmas turns into Christmas day, Voldemort is made aware of Harry's appearance in Godric's Hollow, and his reaction is similar to what Satan may have felt on the night of Christ's birth. Receiving word of Harry's coming from his own serpent messenger, Nagini, Voldemort "screamed with rage, a scream that mingled with the girl's, that echoed across the dark gardens over the church bells ringing in Christmas Day" (342). Harry is the light entering into the darkness, and Voldemort is upset because of the promise that Harry brings for the entire wizard community. Harry is a symbol of "the power of innocence" and the "triumph of good," and Voldemort– like the "darkness" present in the world before Christ was born– refuses to comprehend the power of such light in Harry (441).

In addition to Harry and Hermione's connection to the biblical Joseph and Mary in the text, Rowling structures Harry's own birth in the series as one of divine nature. In light of reading Harry as a Christological figure in *Hallows*, it is important to note that his creation shares certain similarities with that of the Messiah. Jesus was born to an earthly mother (Mary)

in Bethlehem, and his true father was, of course, God. In comparison, Harry's parentage shares the same sort of demigod dynamic with Christ because his father (James) comes from all-magical parents, and his mother (Lily) is the product of two normal (or non-magical) parents. Together, the three of them make up a sort of distorted Christian triumvirate with Harry being the son, Lily the Holy Ghost, and James the father. Rowling's careful planning of Harry's genealogy early in the series creates a hero in *Hallows* who is a combination of man and God. His Christ-like parentage, however, does not guarantee him the same traits of perfection that the earthly Jesus carried.

Harry is not the vision of a perfect Christian in *Hallows*, and his interpretation of the scripture found on the gravestones in Godric's Hollow is evidence of his struggle to believe. Rowling introduces biblical scripture into her story for the first time in the series when Harry and Hermione are traversing the graveyard on Christmas Eve. Hermione has just called Harry over to look at his family's gravestone when he notices the scripture: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (328).[25] Harry is appalled by the words on the grave and asks, "Isn't that a Death Eater idea?" (328). Hermione then explains the Christian meaning of the scripture to Harry: "It doesn't mean defeating death in the way the Death Eaters mean it, Harry … It means … living beyond death. Living after death" (328). However, Harry is in the Nigredo stage of his alchemical transformation and he immediately rejects the idea of life after death: "They were gone. The empty words could not disguise the fact that his parents' moldering remains lay beneath snow and stone, indifferent, unknowing" (328). Harry is not ready to accept a Christian understanding of death at this point in the story. His faith in Dumbledore has been broken by the

[25] This comes directly from: 1 Corinthians 15:26, *KJV.*

opinions of others and, as a result, Harry– the story's everyday Christian– struggles to believe in the possibility of an afterlife. Abraham notes that the Nigredo is "a difficult phase, but only through experiencing it can the adept gain the wisdom and humility necessary for illumination" (136). Harry becomes illuminated later on in the story therefore, his faith is only broken during the Nigredo scene in Godric's Hollow, not cast away.

It is important to note that Harry's struggle to believe in the afterlife is not just a marker of his position in the alchemical cycle, but a means of translating the author's struggle with her own faith through Harry. Speaking of *Deathly Hallows*, Rowling has said, "my belief and my struggling with religious belief and so on I think is quite apparent in this book" (Vieira). Jung says that good alchemical literature "can always be recognized by the industry, care, and visible mental struggles of the author" (316). The struggle that Harry experiences in the graveyard on Christmas Eve is proof that Rowling has entered herself into the Alembic of her story. The reactions taking place in Harry symbolize the "deeper spiritual meanings" of both *Deathly Hallows* and the author's struggle to believe (Linden 9). Allowing the audience to view the struggle that many Christians face concerning their own faith, Rowling invites readers to submit themselves into the Alembic of story along with Harry so that his cathartic journey may become their own.[26]

[26] Linden points out the importance of the personal journey in alchemy: "more important than knowledge of the natural world is esoteric alchemy's concentration on spiritual and philosophical values and ideals, especially as they impinge on the inner life of the individual life of the individual adept … esoteric alchemy became a way of life for its most devout disciples: a vast religious and philosophical system aimed at the purification and regeneration of their lives" (8). Hence, Harry's alchemical journey is also Rowling's, and the same journey becomes the reader's upon reading.

Once Harry makes it out of the graveyard and into safer surroundings, he shows that his faith has not been discarded by following the doe-patronus in the Forrest of Dean. Having seen a "bright silver light" in the forest during his shift as guardian of the tent, Harry decides to investigate when the doe turns and walks away (365). Faced with a serious decision to make, Harry decides to travel alone in search of the source of light. His faith is in the balance for a moment, but his function as the Philosopher's Stone in the story quickly redeems him: "For one trembling second he hesitated. Caution murmured it could be a trick, a lure, a trap. But instinct, overwhelming instinct, told him that this was not Dark Magic. He set off in pursuit" (366). As the everyday Christian of the story, Harry has trouble with the idea of blind trust (or the faith in God that modern Christianity asks of its believers). But because Harry's decent into the Nigredo of his journey has been completed, he is ready to believe, to accept the light that will illumine him.[27]

Further solidifying his role as a shadow of Christ (or everyday Christian) in the story, Harry experiences his own baptism as he attempts to retrieve the sword of Gryffindor. Mircea Eliade says that "in whatever religious context we find them, the Waters invariably preserve their function: they dissolve or abolish the forms of things, 'wash away sins', are at once purifying and regenerative" (152). Therefore, when Harry undergoes his dip in the pool, he is simultaneously fulfilling the alchemical Albedo of *Hallows* as well as maintaining his role as a

[27] Matilde Battistini explains why Harry is ready to accept the light as truth in alchemical terms: "darkness denotes the state of substances not yet subjected to the process of purification" (254). Light, on the other hand, "coincides with vivifying, creative energy; it is the spiritual breath that infuses perfection in bodies, allowing the alchemist to achieve his Hermetic work" (254). Harry has experienced the "darkness" of his own soul during his struggle to believe in the graveyard. Once that experience has purified Harry, he is ready to believe. His faith has grown from his experiences during the Nigredo and he is now ready to accept the light (which can be truth, God, or knowledge).

shadow of Christ.[28] The fact that Harry removes his "many layers of clothing" to retrieve the sword is also of some importance (369). Eliade explains this function:

> the baptismal nakedness, too, conveys a meaning that is at once ritual and metaphysical: it is the abandonment of the 'old vesture of corruption and sin which the baptized person has put off to follow Christ, and in which Adam had been clothed since the fall', but it is also the return to original innocence, to the condition of Adam before the fall. (155)

Stripping his clothing off in the forest brings Harry closer to his own state of Adamic purity. Like the Prima Materia in the Alembic, Harry's ablution in the pool brings him closer to his realization as the Philosopher's Stone. It is Ron, however, who fully benefits from Rowling's retelling of Christ's baptism in this scene.

Ron's enlightenment from his experience in the pool shows what baptism truly means for a Christian. In the Bible, Christ is baptized in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (*KJV* Matt. 3:15). Once John baptizes Christ, "the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him" (*KJV* Matt. 3:16). In *Hallows*, Harry (as the story's Christ figure) jumps into the water to "fulfill all righteousness," and Ron is illumined by his experience with the Horcrux in the process. The "monstrous versions of himself" that Ron conquers in stabbing the Horcrux are his own internal demons, and in slaying them, Ron is able

[28] Remember that Abraham describes the Albedo as the stage of the Great Work when the stone has been "washed to whiteness by the mercurial waters of fire" (4).

to absolve the grip that they have on him (377).[29] With Harry as "little-Christ" in this scene, Ron is able to cleanse his soul, leaving his personal evils in the dark forest.[30] As the two walk away from the scene, Ron's eyes "were no longer red at all, but their normal blue; they were also wet" (377).

As Harry reaches the end of his journey in *Hallows*, the similarities between the crucifixion of Christ and Harry's own selfless death grow stronger. Tradition says that Jesus fell three times with the cross on his back as he walked to Calvary. As Jesus walks, the Bible says that he was comforted by "a great company of people" who "lamented him" (*KJV* Luke 23:27). Harry, like Christ, understood that "he was not supposed to survive. His job was to walk calmly into Death's welcoming arms" (691). During his walk to death, Harry greets his own "company of people" by turning the Resurrection Stone over in his hand "three times" so that his gang of lost loved ones might make his walk to the cross (albeit "King's Cross") a little less terrible.

Just like Christ who was "led as a lamb to the slaughter," Harry offers his life knowing without a doubt that he must die (*KJV* Isaiah 53:7). Professor Snape even recalls Harry's role in

[29] Rowling chooses to have the monstrous soul particle of the locket-Horcrux lie deep beneath the water in this scene. Eliade explains the significance of Ron having to enter the water to conquer his demons: "The monsters of the abyss reappear in a number of traditions: the Heroes, the Initiates, go down into the depths of the abyss to confront marine monsters; this is a typical ordeal of initiation. Variants indeed abound: sometimes a dragon mounts guard over a "treasure"—a sensible image of the sacred, of absolute reality. The ritual (that is, initiatory) victory over the monstrous guardian is equivalent to the conquest of immortality" (158). The "conquest of immortality" was the aim of all exoteric alchemy, and Ron's experience in the waters highlights the Albedo stage of the Great Work that he and Harry are in.

[30] It is important to note that Harry gives Ron the task of destroying the Horcrux in the forest. As a shadow of Christ in *Hallows*, Harry takes on the job of redeeming others. Eliade explains this selflessness in Harry during the deluge: "the descent is no longer only initiatory, or undertaken for a personal advantage; it has a 'redemptive' aim: one 'dies' and 'resurrects' , not now to complete an initiation already acquired, but to save a soul" (165). As a shadow of Christ, Harry is the savior in *Hallows*; and Ron is only one of the many souls he will save.

life as one “like a pig for slaughter” (687). Christ knew that he must die to save the souls of mankind and he refused to resist this fate, telling his men to “put up thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (*KJV* Matt. 26:52). Harry echoes this sentiment of willing sacrifice as he prepares to face imminent death: “His hands were sweating as he pulled off the Invisibility Cloak and stuffed it beneath his robes, with his wand. He did not want to be tempted to fight” (703). Harry accepted that he would need to die in order to save the lives of others. His refinement as the Philosopher’s Stone had been achieved, and like Christ who accepts that “it is finished,” Harry knows that “the long game was ended, the Snitch had been caught, it was time to leave the air” (698).

Harry’s death and arrival into the “bright mist” of what he calls “King’s Cross” is an assurance that he has transcended from earthly human to an illumined soul; in short, the Philosopher’s Stone. In her discussion on the end result of alchemy, Abraham says that “when this process of refinement is accomplished, the divine spirit may illuminate the soul, creating the possibility of a new, freer, and more spiritual form or state of being” (155). This “more spiritual form or state of being” explains why Rowling has Harry depicted as a something ethereal: “He was not perfectly sure that he was there himself” (705).

As Harry contemplates his place in the “cloudy vapor” of “King’s Cross,” his function as the “Christian everyman” in the story (as well as the novel’s means of communicating Christian truths) becomes clear. Harry chose to die in order to rid himself of the Horcrux-scar connection with Voldemort, and his personal sacrifice to save others is what makes him a shadow of Christ. Jesus said that “whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my

sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (*KJV* Mark 8:35). This type of selfless death is exactly what "saves" Harry's life in the forest, and his choice to return so that he may "ensure that fewer souls are maimed" is what grants him a return journey to earth (722). In the end, Christians are saved through the blood and sacrifice of Christ just as Harry is saved by the blood and sacrifice of his own savior, Lily Potter.

With Harry's choice to revive himself and return to the fold in "The Flaw in the Plan," Rowling gives numerous references to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Harry, like Christ in the tomb, is feigning death when Voldemort asks one of his followers to make sure that he has passed. With Narcissa Malfoy reaching down to validate his mortality: "he felt the hand on his chest contract; her nails pierced him. Then it was withdrawn" (726). Here, Narcissa's nails provide a clear image of the spikes that were drove through Christ's hands on the cross. Once Harry is believed to be dead on the ground, Voldemort decides to humiliate his body by using the "Cruciatus" curse (a clear reference to crucifixion). Surprisingly, the torture curse has no effect on Harry as "it took all his determination to remain limp, yet the pain he expected did not come" (727). Having broken Voldemort's demonic grip on the wizard world by submitting himself to the killing curse, Harry has eliminated the threat of evil in the world just as Christ broke Satan's power over humanity with his death for all men on the cross. As Harry is carried to the entrance of Hogwarts castle, his body is placed at Voldemort's feet for all to see. Soon, Harry vanishes into thin air by slipping the Invisibility Cloak over his head causing Hagrid to scream "HARRY—WHERE'S HARRY?" (733). Harry's own vanishing act from the tomb is then met with a chorus of "HE"S ALIVE!" as those around him realize he has risen from the dead.[31]

[31] This is a reference to the empty tomb of Jesus in the Bible. Fearing that he is dead and had not risen, Christ's followers are answered by an angel who says "He is not here: for he is risen" (*KJV* Mark 28:6).

Finally, having experienced his own resurrection, Harry's Christ-like qualities take over, and he offers his enemy a second chance through remorse for his sins: "before you try to kill me, I'd advise you to think about what you've done…. Think, and try for some remorse, Riddle" (741). Harry has become the Philosopher's Stone, and all men are equal in his eyes because of it.[32] Even Voldemort, the man who had ensured Harry the life of an orphan before he could even speak, and maimed the lives of numerous other families along the way, is granted a chance to repent.

Unable to confront being a flawed man, Voldemort blasts Harry with the killing curse only to have his evil spell backfire and end his life.

The end result of Harry's sacrifice during the war between good and evil is the resolution of conflict: peace. In order for *Hallows* to be an alchemical work, Harry (as the Philosopher's Stone) must bring about change in the world he lives in. He must create an amicable relationship between all the opposing forces in his world: wizard and muggle; Slytherin and Gryffindor; pure-bloods and muggle-borns. Heaven and earth, microcosm and macrocosm must be joined together in harmonious union so that a new world is in place. Trevarthen says that Harry must use his "spiritual awareness" to recreate the world, adding that "the stone is the revealed diamond of the self that becomes the foundation stone of the 'New Jerusalem'" (182). Harry has revealed himself as the "diamond" of *Hallows* by book's end, and with the defeat of Voldemort, he is able

[32] Geo Athena Trevarthen explains the connection between Christ and the Philosopher's Stone: "Many European alchemists were also Christian and, unsurprisingly after all the dying and resurrecting that took place in the alchemical vessel, they sometimes pictured the philosopher's stone as Christ. Yet, attaining the stone is more a movement towards earth than towards heaven. It's called a philosopher's stone, not a philosopher's vapor, which tells us that attaining the stone is about grounding the seeker's spiritual attainment" (182). Harry's spiritual attainment is grounded through his time in the "cloudy vapor" of "King's Cross," and his willing return to earth solidifies his place as Philosopher's Stone in the novel.

to create a “New Jerusalem” in the epilogue by giving his son, Albus Severus Potter, to the world so that his sacrifice might be made fruitful through the promise of a balanced cosmos. Rowling keeps her promise, bringing her story to a close with three words: “all was well” (759).

As Harry defeats Voldemort and brings peace back to the wizarding community, it is tempting to read him as a symbol of Christ, and *Hallows* as a sort of Christian allegory, but there are certain problems that arise when attempting to make this comparison. Rowling is never writing a perfect Christian parable with Harry as Christ in *Hallows*. In fact, Harry is written as a flawed human throughout the series so that he could never stand in as a tit-for-tat representation of Christ (such as Aslan does in C.S. Lewis’ *Narnia* stories). Rowling herself says that Harry “is not, and never has been a saint. Like Snape, he is flawed and mortal” (“Webchat with J.K. Rowling”). In the text, Harry’s refusal to believe in an afterlife makes a purely Christian reading of *Hallows* difficult. As Harry catches a glimpse of what could be Dumbledore’s eye in a mirror fragment, he concludes that “he had imagined it, there was no other explanation; imagined it, because he had been thinking of his dead headmaster. If anything was certain, it was that the bright blue eyes of Albus Dumbledore would never pierce him again” (29). Harry immediately rejects the thought of a second life in this scene, and his role as a troubled believer seems to outshine his function as the Christ-figure of the novel.

Direct comparisons between Christ and Harry become more difficult as Harry battles the resentment he feels for being left in the dark by everyone: “Choose what to believe. He wanted the truth. Why was everybody so determined that he should not get it?” (185). Christ accepted his mission from God to die on the cross with a sense of blind faith that Harry doesn’t exhibit in

the early stages of *Hallows*. Harry has freewill in the novel, and as a result, he struggles to accept the mission that Dumbledore has left for him. Furthermore, one significant problem that arises when applying a strictly Christian reading to *Hallows* is the simple fact that there is no mention of God in the book. Katherine Grimes believes that Dumbledore serves this purpose in the novel writing that "Dumbledore is to Harry what God is to Jesus" (114). I believe that this comparison becomes a bit unfounded near the end of *Hallows* as Dumbledore confesses his mortality to Harry: "Can you forgive me for not trusting you? For not telling you? Harry, I only feared that you would fail as I had failed. I only dreaded that you would make my mistakes. I crave your pardon, Harry. I have known, for some time now, that you are the better man" (713). Dumbledore is not intended to be God in *Hallows*, and without a measurable God in the cosmos of Harry's world, an allegorical Christian reading seems to unravel.

The end of *Hallows*, too, presents significant problems for a strictly Christian reading. In the Bible, Jesus redeems a world full of sinners but leaves the object of freewill among his people so that man could still be sinful and evil if he chose to. Rowling deviates from this narrative thread by presenting readers with an all too perfect vision of the wizarding world as a result of Harry's sacrifice. In Rowling's book Harry has defeated the devil, and the fact that "the scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years" seems to suggest that all evil had been abolished and a Heavenly earth attained (759). The differences apparent between *Hallows* and the Bible are important to note because they create a text that doesn't submit to one simple answer or reading. In fact, these incongruities create an ambiguous novel with Christian themes and meaning without fitting the mold of a direct allegory. This gives the audience freedom to interpret the novel on their own terms, as one with a religious underpinning, or not.

Deathly Hallows is a novel that benefits from the author's combination of alchemical patterns and Christian truths. Harry is human, and with his struggle against the dark forces in life readers are able to see themselves. As Harry is transformed through his struggle and eventual choice to believe in *Hallows*, readers are encouraged to follow along with him. Ultimately, Harry's passage to personal transformation carries universal human meaning. Dumbledore tells Harry that the things taking place during his ethereal visit to King's Cross are happening in his head. "But", he adds, "why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (723). Harry's journey takes place on the page for his audience, but his readers are real, and so are their journeys.

Conclusion

Deathly Hallows is a story that fits into the spectrum of traditional fantasy literature while also blurring several different genres of writing. In fact, Rowling makes this distinction about her work in an interview with Stephen Fry:

> I've taken horrible liberties with folklore and mythology, but I'm quite unashamed about that, because British folklore and British mythology is a totally bastard mythology. You know, we've been invaded by people, we've appropriated their gods, we've taken their mythological creatures, and we've soldered them all together to make, what I would say, is one of the richest folklores in the world, because it's so varied. So I feel no compunction about borrowing from that freely, but adding a few things of my own. ("Living with Harry Potter")

Therefore, along with her employment of alchemical concepts, Rowling uses many traditional storytelling techniques in *Deathly Hallows*.

On one hand, *Deathly Hallows* is a traditional adventure tale. Harry embarks on an adventure with his faithful companions, and returns home victorious after a battle against a powerful opponent. *Hallows* also follows the pattern of a traditional quest romance. Harry's journey begins in conflict where he encounters a new landscape and receives training before experiencing a struggle with death and finally returns home to discover that he has left his old self behind. Rowling borrows from Greek mythology by including traditional characters such as

the sphinx and the phoenix. She also gives her book an air of high fantasy by creating a believable world built on specific details such as financial, political, and transportation systems unique to her created world. Together, the sort of genre mosaic that Rowling weaves with *Hallows* gives her book the ability to sit alongside novels such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, having borrowed significant elements from those texts that have become standard examples of literary tradition.

It is important to note that *Deathly Hallows* strays from the path of traditional fantasy literature in its attempt to speak to certain postmodern themes. Rowling creates a world in *Hallows* where issues such as bigotry and prejudice take the forefront. This sort of attention to modern issues allows Rowling to blend the sympathies of her modern audience with traditional elements of fantasy literature. Rowling has said that:

> Bigotry is probably the thing I detest most. All forms of intolerance, the whole idea of 'that which is different from me is necessary evil.' I really like to explore the idea that difference is equal and good … Oppressed groups are not, generally speaking, people who stand firmly together – no, sadly, they kind of subdivide among themselves and fight like hell. That's human nature, so that's what you see here. This world of wizards and witches, they're already ostracized, and then within themselves, they've formed a loathsome pecking order. (EntertainmentWeekly.com)

With the author's declaration I feel that *Hallows* becomes a book more concerned with absolving the barriers that separate our society than fitting the mold of traditional fantasy. Rowling makes a

statement with *Hallows* through Harry's alchemically conceived son, Albus Severus Potter. In this book, prejudice and racism are defeated through the sacrifice and selfless nature of Harry. With the choice to name his own son after Severus Snape, Harry proves that harmony can be achieved, and that unity among humanity can be attained, albeit in a fantastical world.

In the end, a solution to why the *Harry Potter* series remains such a popular story among readers may forever be a mystery. However, I believe that an answer may rest beneath an application of many traditional techniques. Paired with the postmodern aims of the author, *Deathly Hallows* provides a fantasy story rich with meaning and relevance to our current society. The alchemy at work may go unnoticed by many readers, but the message of harmony, peace, and unity that it leaves behind remains timeless to an audience of any age.

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