The True Master of Death: An Existential Reading of *Harry Potter*

Katrin Dahlbäck
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Supervisor: Stefan Helgesson
Abstract

This thesis consists of a comprehensive character analysis of the protagonist and antagonist in the Harry Potter series, on the basis of existential psychology. It is argued that the outlook of this branch of psychology provides a thorough framework for the interpretation of characters and objects in Rowling’s fictional world. Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort are not only the protagonist and antagonist of the series, but also represent two sides of the spectrum of existential psychology. By mainly focusing on death, love, and free will Harry and Voldemort’s attempts to fulfil their true potential are explored and analysed from an existential viewpoint.

While they share similar backgrounds and qualities, Harry is argued to represent the ideal being, possessing additional qualities that Voldemort does not. Due to these qualities, Harry’s actions and choices concerning his existence prove to be very different from Voldemort’s. While Voldemort’s sole purpose in life appears to be to overcome nonbeing: to achieve immortality, Harry accepts his existence for what it is, he accepts his freedom and free will, his impending nonbeing, and does not attempt to overcome it, and he therefore also accepts his anxiety. Harry is consequently argued to act as, and become, an ideal being, while Voldemort succumbs to his anxiety in his attempt to overpower death, and is ultimately destroyed by it, indicating that his actions are not those of a complete being. Hence, Harry and Voldemort’s actions appear to represent the two sides of existential psychology: the human awareness of existence affects the individual’s choices, and actions. Harry symbolises the ideal being, while Voldemort is the deterrent example of how not to act if one wishes to fulfil one’s potentials, and preserve one’s being.

Keywords: Existentialism; existential psychology; existential philosophy; Harry Potter; J.K. Rowling; nonbeing; death; free will; freedom; anxiety; love; choice
I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul.

- William Ernest Henley, “Invictus”

With Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort as two widely different representations of the human individual’s attempt to develop, and preserve, a being, the central features of existential psychology are here argued to be present in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series. Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort are not only the protagonist and antagonist of the series, but also represent two sides of the spectrum of existential psychology. While they share similar backgrounds and characteristics, Harry is portrayed as an ideal being possessing additional qualities that Voldemort does not. While Voldemort’s sole purpose in life appears to be to overcome nonbeing: to achieve immortality, Harry proves to be the more insightful individual. He accepts the existential facts of death, freedom, and love, while Voldemort distances himself from them, dedicating his life to overcome death and achieve immortality. Within the fictional world of Harry Potter, these two characters are in other words juxtaposed in their attitudes to these existential givens.

Existential psychology is a branch of psychology that looks at how “existence” (Gebsattel 186) determines the human’s sense of self and thus affects the way we lead our lives. Existence should here be understood to mean the ability to “know that [one] is there and can take a stand with reference to that fact” (May, Discovery 96): it means to be aware of one’s presence in both space and time, and to know that one is responsible for this existence. According to Eugene Taylor, “Ludwig Binswanger and Martin Heidegger were the early voices of […] the existential-analytic movement in psychology and psychiatry” (168), and the majority of the concepts within this psychological movement therefore stem from Heidegger’s theories. By focusing on
the individual’s existence, “existential analysis was able to widen and deepen psychoanalysis” (268). A key figure in this development was Rollo May, who, according to Taylor, “chose to embark on an earlier historical comparison of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and the relation of their ideas to psychoanalysis” (269). May argued that, since existential psychology has its basis in existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are to be considered its founders. May further “concluded that ‘almost all the specific ideas which later appeared in psychoanalysis could be found in Nietzsche in greater breadth and in Kierkegaard in greater depth’” (Taylor 270), thus providing the basis on which he developed his theories. McDonald also states that “existential psychology and psychotherapy is a movement within the field of psychology that engages in a dialogue with philosophy, namely existentialism” (52). Kierkegaard and Nietzsche’s existential theories, combined with Freud’s psychoanalysis, and Heidegger and Binswanger’s existential analysis, have thus been adapted to form an existential psychological perspective that focuses on the psychological effects of the human’s awareness of his/her existence, and the need to preserve it.

Being should, according to May “be understood […] to mean potential, the source of potentiality; being is the potentiality by which […] each of us becomes what he truly is” (Discovery 97, emphasis in the original). It should, in turn, be understood as the ability to exists in the world – not “the capacity to see outside the world, to size it up, to assess reality; it is rather [the] capacity to see [oneself] as a being in the world” (103-4), and therefore to know that one has the ability to fulfil one’s true potential. Thus, to be a complete and ideal being means to completely fulfil one’s true potential, and each person is alone responsible for whom they become. It is the process of becoming, of learning to accept one’s existence and everything that it entails, that is the key to fulfilling one’s potential – to become an ideal being. If the being is lost and nonbeing is entered, the ability to fulfil one’s potential is lost: one is no longer a being who can achieve everything that one could be. The aim of this thesis is precisely to demonstrate how this attempt and success at fulfilling one’s being is explored through Rowling’s portrayal of Harry and Voldemort. Both Harry and Voldemort lost their parents at a young age, providing them with an awareness of the impending loss of their existence. This further suggests that their awareness of existence is enhanced: they have experienced nonbeing, through the deaths of others, and are therefore more aware of what it means to exist. In addition to sharing similar
qualities, they share similar pasts, and an awareness of death. This indicates that they
have rather equivalent foundations on which to build their selves. They therefore
serve as prime examples of how an individual can succeed and fail in the attempt to
develop, and preserve, his/her being. However, while their backgrounds are similar,
their actions, and the motives behind these, reveal significant differences. Within
Rowling’s fictional world, the protagonist Harry is here argued to represent the ideal
being, while Voldemort, as antagonist, represents the unsuccessful attempt to fulfil
one’s potential.

Additionally, the human “sense of being is bound up with the questions that
are deepest and most fundamental – questions of love, death, anxiety” (May,
Discovery 10) and freedom. These are also central themes in Rowling’s Harry Potter.
I will therefore attempt to accomplish a comprehensive character analysis of Harry
and Voldemort, and their juxtaposed approaches to nonbeing, freedom, and love, with
the help of concepts and perspectives from existential psychology. First, the grounds
on which the character analysis is based will be established. The thesis will then go on
to explore death, love, and freedom and the way Harry and Voldemort deal with these
existential givens and how it affects their approaches to existence and their beings.

Character Analysis
When interpreting characters, especially when analysing them from a psychological
perspective, one needs to make a distinction between how literary characters and real
human beings are perceived. According to Rimmon-Kenan, there are two different
arguments concerning the perception of literary characters. While the purist argument
“points out that characters do not exist at all except insofar as they are a part of the
images and events which bear and move them” (Mudrick, referred to in Rimmon-
Kenan 31-2), the realist argument treats characters as if they were real human beings.
This argument also “tends to speculate about the characters’ unconscious motivations
and even constructs for them a past and future beyond what is specified in the text”
(32). In accordance with the purist argument, characters do not exist outside the pages
of a novel, and do not have a life other than that specified within the text, I would
argue that characters should be analysed solely within the realm of their fictional
world, based on the information provided by the author. It is here important that Harry
and Voldemort are analysed within their magical world, thus accepting the rules,
objects, and creatures that only exist within this series. If analysed outside the
confines of their fictional world, Harry and Voldemort’s actions could not be considered logical, as the magic they perform, and the world in which they live, would not exist. If they are accepted as parts of their fictional world, their actions are accepted as real, and can therefore be analysed.

In this sense I would like to combine the realist and the purist approach: while a purist approach to characters is applied, there is a realist approach to the fictional world. Ronen further argues that literary theorists appear to “attach a high degree of realism to the notion of worlds in fiction”, further indicating that they “seem to be modal realists in their approach to fictional worlds” (50). Although fictional worlds are not actual worlds, this realist approach suggests that there is a sense of realism in the text; although the world does not in fact exist, there is a sense of possibility to it. Ronen argues that literary worlds are possible “in the sense that they actualize a world which is analogous with, derivative of, or contradictory to the world we live in” (50, emphasis in the original). Thus, although all fictional worlds are not equivalent to actual worlds, they are considered possible. Ronen accordingly argues that a “fictional world forms an independent modal system, and is, in this respect, less directly linked to the actual world than possible worlds” (52). It is further argued “that fiction is a possible world possessing an ontological autonomy not shared by other possibilities” (52). Hence, since fictional worlds are not limited by the rules and structures of the actual world, they are all possible due to their own stated rules. Since all fictional worlds are “already out there in the ontic sphere of fictional existence” (Ronen 56), I would claim that the realist approach towards fictional worlds supports the interpretation of these literary worlds as possible worlds: they can be analysed and discussed based on this assumption, even though they are not in fact real. However, since an analysis of literary characters presupposes an acceptance of their fictional world as possible, the unique rules of that world need to be acknowledged and accepted. Hence, it is only within the frames of its fictional world that a character can be appropriately analysed.

By removing Harry and Voldemort from the logical rules within their fictional world, their actions and thoughts cannot be accurately analysed, since they would be considered illogical and untrue. Similarly, magical creatures and objects that exist solely within this magical universe can only be analysed within the confines of this world, as they do not exist outside of it. Horcruxes and Deathly Hallows only exist in
Rowling’s fictional world, and can thus only be analysed as parts of it, based solely on the information provided in the novels. Due to this, the author’s intentions will have to be overlooked, as well as additional information provided by the author outside of the text. Although Rowling’s intended symbolism, and her explanations concerning characters’ intentions, might add to an analysis, the presumption that the characters are real within the novels excludes the author completely. This approach would, furthermore, exclude questions concerning the effects of the genre to which it belongs: the characters are here assumed to be real solely within their possible world, and if removed from it they would consequently cease to exist. Only by remaining in the magical world, where they are able to exist without any disturbance from the logic of the actual world, can they be accurately analysed.

This line of argument can be further developed by way of Zunshine’s discussion of Theory of Mind. This psychological theory claims that human beings possess the “ability to explain people’s behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires” (Zunshine 189). When literary works of fiction mirror these thoughts and feelings by ascribing them to fictional characters, “Theory of Mind allows [the reader] to make sense of fictional characters” (382). It is this very tendency to mistake literary characters for real people that provides a valid basis on which to analyse them, although within the strict confines of their fictional world. While literary characters are not real, they are perceived as such. By assuming that the characters, within their fictional world, possess the thoughts and feeling ascribed to them in the novels, they can be analysed based on this information. But a valid analysis can only be based on the information provided in the novels that are analysed. This is the approach that will be adopted in this thesis.

Existential Psychology as an Interpretive Approach

While there are several approaches on which to base a literary analysis, in particular an analysis of literary characters, existential psychology “looks at a person’s being, which is the totality of who they are” (Taylor 275). While fictional characters do not provide a reader with the same basis for analysis as a real human being could, this approach serves to provide a valid analysis of the characters’ attitudes towards their own existence. While not real, the characters will be analysed in the context in which they exist: within the confines of their fictional world, their whole being can be studied. All determining aspects of the characters in focus will here be analysed,
based on the information provided in the novels. Existential psychology thus focuses on the character’s entire existence, although only within their fictional world. While psychoanalysis, social-, cognitive- and developmental psychology would each focus on their particular fields of interest, existential psychology unites the different aspects, as the entire individual’s existence is the focus. An individual’s past and childhood is arguably just as important as his/her interpersonal relationships, in determining what approach s/he has to existence. All aspects of the individual’s past, present, and future are important factors to be taken into consideration. An analysis of a literary character would only be based on the information provided within the literary work/s in which the character is featured.

Existential psychology and philosophy highlight “eleven existentials” that determine the individual’s approach to existence: “freedom, responsibility, choice, alienation, temporality, Being-towards-death, depression and anxiety, the interpersonal world, dogma and the socio-cultural world, meaning and purpose, and narrative” (McDonald 211). These existentials are connected to each other through the individual’s existence. While Heidegger’s term Dasein refers to the individual’s existence, it is the desire to fulfil one’s being that is the core of this existence. Freedom, responsibility, and choice are, furthermore, determining factors of the fulfilment of one’s being: every individual is “free to make choices about [his/her] being, but not making a choice is impossible; by not choosing [s/he is] still making choices about who [s/he is], and [his/her] future possibilities” (Heidegger, referred to in McDonald 69). But with the freedom of choice and free will comes a responsibility for one’s existence, and this responsibility is one of the underlying causes for an individual’s perceived sense of anxiety. May states that “anxiety is the state of the human being in the struggle against what would destroy his being” (Discovery 33, emphasis in the original). Although love is a vital component needed in order to fulfil one’s potential and thereby to become a complete being, it is also a source for anxiety. If not experienced during the early stages of life love can, rather than aiding the individual in the process of becoming, be perceived as a threat to his/her existence. This indicates that love, in addition to nonbeing and freedom, can cause an individual to experience a state of anxiety. I would thus argue that these four existentials – nonbeing, freedom, love and anxiety – are the most fundamental ones, in the Harry Potter series.
There is, in existential psychology, also a religious influence: in *Love & Will* May talks about “the love of God for man” (*Love* 38), and Hunsinger further raises the subject by talking about a spiritual death, in relation to a bodily one. In addition to emerging in a Western cultural context, this suggests that Christianity has influenced the foundation of this branch of psychology. Cicirelli, however, argues that “[r]eligion can be used as a coping mechanism for dealing with death anxieties and preparing for death” (123), indicating that while Christianity might be the founding religion for existential psychology, any religion might be applicable, since the basis is the human need to “deal with their existential burden by creating systems of meaning that allow them to suppress the problem of mortality by adhering to belief systems” (Hart & Goldberg 110). Thus, while the presence of Christianity within existential psychology is apparent, it is arguably due to the human tendency to turn to religion, to a belief system or a higher power, when faced with the burden of existential awareness.

While it could be argued that the Christian influence lessens the validity of the theory, this influence also appears to be present in *Harry Potter*. Killinger argues that Harry is “a Christ figure” (2), and Wandler additionally claims that the novels “propagate a Christian conception of sacrifice” (27). He further suggests that “Rowling consistently uses the term *sacrifice* to mean the Christian sacrifice of self-giving love” (47, emphasis in the original), indicating that Christianity is a recurring theme in *Harry Potter*. Barber addresses this by arguing that “[t]he profusion of biblical content within Western civilization and beyond makes justifying or corroborating Rowling’s particular influences unnecessary” (183). I would argue that the same is true for existential psychology: they are both highly influenced by the Western culture, and therefore also by Christianity. This would further entail that there is a sense of Christian morality in both *Harry Potter* and existential psychology. This morality certainly affects the way the characters are both portrayed and interpreted. There are thereby cultural and moral similarities between *Harry Potter* and existential psychology. This suggests that the religious influences in existential psychology do not affect the validity of the theoretical framework significantly. This would further entail that existential psychology is applicable as a theoretical framework, when analysing these literary works.

I would further argue that McDonald’s method of using narrative inquiry is suitable for the purposes of this thesis, since it can consist of “any type of inquiry that
uses or analyses narrative materials” (McDonald 98). Accordingly, an analysis of a literary work is arguably an analysis of a narrative material. Masiach and Zillber further state that the information on which the analysis is based “can be collected as a story (a life story provided in […] a literary work)” (referred to in McDonald 98).

Since the narrative approach McDonald applies in his study “seeks to understand an individual’s experience of their life and the significant events that have shaped it” (92), existential psychology and narrative inquiry could thus adequately be applied to *Harry Potter*, as the purpose here is to analyse the characters’ differing experiences, and the way they are shaped by them.

**Existential Psychology: A Current Approach**

The purpose of a human being’s existence is to achieve a state of an ideal being, by fulfilling one’s true potential. McDonald further suggests that the process of becoming, and the fulfilment of one’s being includes the ability to form and maintain “inter-personal” (244) relationships. In order to achieve a true sense of being one needs to be present in three different modes of the world simultaneously. To be present in what existentialist psychologists refer to as Umwelt means to be present in one’s worldly surroundings, to have a relationship with the world. The presence in the Mitwelt is the inter-personal relationships that McDonald refers to, signifying that one has a sense of togetherness with others. The relationship with others is, furthermore, the mode most emphasized in relation to love: a presence in the Mitwelt indicates that one has the ability to not only relate to others, but to care for them. Which in turn suggests that love is a fundamental component needed in order to fulfil one’s potential and to become an ideal being. Finally, to be present in Eigenwelt refers to a sense of self-awareness: it is the relationship one has with oneself. Only those who are able to be present in all three modes of the world are able to fulfil his/her true potential by achieving a sense of being. It is thus not only a matter of maintaining relationships with other people, or solely possessing a sense of self-awareness. These three modes are interconnected, and “it is only by changing one’s relationship with oneself, that one is then able to change one’s relationship with others” (Golomb, referred to in McDonald 247). This would further indicate that it is only in the simultaneous existence in all three modes of the world that one can achieve a state of an ideal being.

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1 Since the terms Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt do not have suitable English equivalents, the German terms will be used throughout the essay.
It is thus of great importance that a character is analysed not just in isolation, but also in relation to other characters. A character is not the solitary focus in a literary work: it is a tool in the narrative. It exists alongside other characters, and the interactions with these are important aspects of the way the character is perceived and portrayed.

Although existential psychology and philosophy apparently ignore questions of race, gender, and sexual orientation, there are several studies where existential psychology has been applied to both genders, as well as different sexual orientations. In his study, McDonald applies existential psychology to homosexual women coming to terms with their sexual orientation, and Dobson and Wong provides a modern interpretation of this psychological branch by applying it to women who are living with HIV. Thus, while Hoffman et al. argue that existential psychology is “dominated by White, heterosexual male perspectives” (1) McDonald’s study, as well as Dobson and Wong, appear to indicate that while there is a need for more diversity within this psychological approach, the existing theories within the field are still applicable no matter what race, gender or sexual orientation an individual has. These recent studies further indicate that there “has been a renewed interest in issues of […] existential approaches in psychological and counseling literature” (Tomer, Eliason & Wong xxiii). I would therefore argue that despite a tendency towards white heteronormativity in existential psychology, it can be adapted to contemporary interpretations. One does not need to be limited by the cultural viewpoint that was current during the conception of this perspective: all theories are a result of the time during which they are conceived, but also of the time during which they evolve. I would consequently claim that despite the lack of diversity within the earlier tradition of existential psychology, it does allow for a less heteronormative interpretation.

The white heteronormative perspective that is evident in existential psychology could, moreover, be argued to be present within Rowling’s Harry Potter, as her protagonist is portrayed to be a white heterosexual male, whose best friends do not deviate the slightest from the heterosexual norm. Even though there are characters (e.g. Cho Chang, Dean Thomas, and Dumbledore) that deviate from this white heteronormative position, these are not the main characters in focus, nor are their divergences explicitly emphasised. Despite the apparent white heteronormative perspective in both Harry Potter and existential psychology, they both emerged in similar cultural contexts, although during different times. I would therefore argue that
there is a resonance between the two that provides a solid basis for an analysis with this theoretical framework.

**Psychology in Harry Potter: Previous Research**

When Rakison and Simard explore *Harry Potter* from the perspective of evolutionary developmental psychology, they argue that certain “psychological preferences are such an integral part of how we think and act that authors cannot help but express them when they write fiction” (251). This claim suggests that there are always psychological aspects present within literary works. It does not matter what the author’s intention was, certain “psychological mechanisms are so ingrained in the mind that they cannot help but be unconsciously expressed in literature” (251). While *Harry Potter* has previously been analysed from several psychological and philosophical perspectives, there seems to be a division within the field. While existential themes, such as death, freedom, and interpersonal relationships have all been analysed, they have been studied separately. While Hook provides a psychological perspective on death, her focus is solely on the grieving process and the different ways in which Harry and Voldemort deal with their bereavement. In “The Real Secret of the Phoenix”, Taliaferro provides a similar philosophical approach, claiming that death signifies a moral regeneration: Harry’s death and rebirth signifies his transformation into a complete and true self. Walls and Walls develop a Heidegger-based interpretation, arguing that Harry’s awareness of his mortality is due to him being “confronted with death right from the start” (247). Although it is not their intent, their observation mirrors the existentialist concept of “Being-towards-death” (McDonald 233). Although these scholars all focus on death as a recurring theme in Rowling’s novels, they analyse it as being completely severed from other aspects of the individual. These interpretations thus indicate that there is a further need to study the effects death has on the individual, not as a separate aspect but as a part of his/her existence.

Goodfriend, in turn, looks at the importance of parental love and care. In “Attachment Styles at Hogwarts”, she analyses the three main characters’ differing attachment styles with their parents, and how this affects their abilities “to begin and maintain normal, adult relationships – including romantic” (75) ones. Both parental love and interpersonal relationships are thus acknowledged. Provenzano and Heyman also explore parental love and attachment, as they highlight how the love Harry
“received from both his parents in infancy likely supplied him with the secure attachment” (113) protected him from the maltreatment he suffered when living with the Dursleys. They further emphasize Harry’s need and longing for parental love by acknowledging the parental figures that guide and care for him throughout the series. Interpersonal relationships are further explored in “Intergroup Conflict in the World of Harry Potter”, as Beers and Apple apply social psychology to Rowling’s novels when studying the establishing of social identities and intergroup interactions at Hogwarts. Since early attachment determines the individual’s ability to love and maintain interpersonal relationships, these aspects should be studied in relation to each other rather than as separate unities. Existential psychology would here add a new perspective, as it would study the effect interpersonal relationships have on the ability to love.

While love is argued to be one of the most essential themes in the series, the ability to love is always placed in relation to hate. Patrick and Patrick further explore the difference between love and hate as they provide an analysis of the battle between good and evil. They apply a psychoanalytical approach, as they refer to both Freud and Jung’s theories concerning the human mind. They further explore the theme of good versus evil: while “Harry is presented as a figure of good in opposition to the evil figure of Voldemort” (231), the theories of Freud, Jung, and Milgram all support the claim that the potential for evil is present within “the mind of each individual in society” (226). The evil within Harry is, of course, symbolically represented as the piece of Voldemort’s soul that exists inside of him.

Psychoanalysis is further applied by Pahel in “Harry Potter and the Magic of Transformation”, focusing on the transformational effects of trauma. The view that trauma provides a transformational opportunity is present within both psychoanalysis and existential psychology. Existential psychologists “have described trauma as a time when meaning may be created and courage found” (Tedeschi et al, cited in McDonald 27). There are, accordingly, key aspects of existential psychology that have been explored within the confines of different psychological approaches.

The most fundamental existential concepts evident in Harry Potter have thus been analysed from both psychological and philosophical perspectives, providing the field with differing approaches to these themes. An existential psychological approach would, however, unite these different approaches. What I propose, therefore, is to study different existential concepts jointly, and by focusing on a character’s entire
fictional existence, an existential approach may thus provide a more comprehensive analysis.

Nonbeing and Death

Since the individual strives to preserve his or her being, the threat of a possible state of nonbeing, such as death, will cause an overshadowing sense of anxiety, causing the individual to obsess over the possible destruction of the self. A future state of nonbeing is inevitable, and is therefore an existential fact: every living organism will, at some point in time, cease to exist, and the human being is capable of grasping the meaning of this truth. According to May, the “most obvious form of threat of nonbeing” (Discovery 105) is death. A state of nonbeing does, however, not necessarily indicate death, but a loss of being. Although the most common interpretation of nonbeing is death, it will here also be explored in terms of living without the possibility to fulfil one’s potential: to live without existing. Natural death, or bodily death, thereby refers to the state when one’s body has been destroyed. Whereas spiritual death refers to the loss of one’s soul, which in turn entails that one has lost the possibility to fulfil one’s true potential – thereby indicating that a state of nonbeing has been entered.

Due to the awareness “that his existence can become destroyed, that he can lose himself and his world, that he can become ‘nothing’” (May, Discovery 109-10) the individual will be occupied by possible destruction of the his/her existence, and the awareness of this possibility overshadows the current state of being. If the fear of nonbeing is based in the fear of death, the individual will spend a life fearing a future state of dying, and by doing so, will not be able to reach the state of an ideal being. This, since they are controlled by an “extraordinary and unspeakable anxiety. Such a […] terrifying confrontation immobilizes our normal responses and, what is most important, transforms the value of everything in life” (Koestenbaum 6). Consequently, if this state of nonbeing or death is not confronted, it “provokes us to live defensively and to receive less from life than if we would confront the issue of our existence” (Feist & Feist 349). Either one’s awareness is they key to acceptance, or it is the cause of an endless struggle with fear and anxiety. It is therefore crucial that such a confrontation takes place: by fearing a state of nonbeing, due to the need to preserve a state of being, the individual will not be able to be the complete being.
In May’s view, anxiety is characterized by “the feelings of *uncertainty* and *helplessness* in the face of the danger. The nature of anxiety can be understood when we ask what is threatened in the experience which produces anxiety” (*Meaning* 205, original emphasis). Any threat to the being, or the self, will cause anxiety, and while it can be accepted and overpowered, it cannot be removed. Anxiety is “an ontological characteristic of man, rooted in his very existence as such” (*Discovery* 109). This is the main reason why anxiety causes the individual such severe agony: in addition to being a threat to one’s being and one’s self, it is also a “threat to the foundation, the center of [one’s] existence” (109). The fear of nonbeing causes the individual to live defensively, the being does not exist in the world to the extent it would if there was no dread of not being. Being is thus sacrificed due to the fear of nonbeing: the focus on the eventual state of nonbeing causes the being to exist more in itself than in the world. Since Voldemort’s fear of nonbeing and Harry’s acceptance of it are juxtaposed against each other, this is one of the most recurring themes in Rowling’s *Harry Potter*.

**The Fear of Nonbeing**

Throughout the seven novels there are two major expressions of the dread of not being: ghosts and Voldemort. While both Voldemort and ghosts could be argued to share a fear of nonbeing they do, however, fear different aspects of it. In Hunsinger’s view, there is both a “natural death” and a “spiritual death” (33). He further states that “[n]atural death is not only the point of transition into a future life; it is also the decisive point at which one’s eternal testing becomes clear” (42-3). This claim highlights the religious aspects of existential psychology: there is a belief in souls and in an eternal existence, beyond death. While Voldemort seeks to conquer his natural, and “biological death” (33), ghosts have already suffered this and instead they spend eternity avoiding a spiritual death. Nearly Headless Nick explains why he is a ghost, stating that he “was afraid of death” and that he, for that reason, “chose to remain behind” (Rowling, *Order* 759). Instead of facing his death completely, he “chose [a] feeble imitation of life instead” (759). Due to his fear of nonbeing, Nick has to suffer a solely spiritual life for eternity. The ghosts of Hogwarts thus serve as a symbol for the fear of complete death. They do no longer exist, in the sense of being-in-the-world: rather, they live among the existing beings in the world. They have died, but
cling so desperately to the slight flicker of life left only in the remains of their souls that they manage to live alongside those who still exist.

According to Koestenbaum, “[i]n analyzing our own death, we must examine more than merely the physical disintegration of our own bodies” (6). Arguably, in contrast to the solely bodily death that ghosts have suffered, one can exist in a state of nonbeing that does not equal death: in Rowling’s fictional universe this is symbolised by “the Dementors’ Kiss” (Rowling, Prisoner 183). While a ghost has lost its natural body, the victim of a Dementors’ Kiss has lost his/her soul.

You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you’ll have no sense of self any more, no memory, no... anything. There’s no chance at all of recovery. You’ll just – exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone for ever... lost (Rowling, Prisoner 183)

A Dementors’ Kiss thus causes a state of nonbeing rather different from an ordinary death. While the body is still alive, the individual does not have a soul: s/he has lost his/her presence in the three modes of the world. A life without a soul appears, here, to be even more dreadful than a bodily death. In Hunsinger’s view, the “[s]piritual death is the death of a man as an ideal being” (35). Without a soul the individual consequently enters a state of nonbeing: although still alive the being has been destroyed. This, since the possibility of being present in the Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt has been destroyed. The simultaneous existence in the three modes of the world is a vital component in becoming an ideal being. It is further stated that the loss of one’s soul is equivalent to the loss of awareness concerning one’s existence: although the individual arguably still lives in the world, s/he has lost his/her awareness concerning it, and has consequently lost his/her being. An individual suffering from a Dementors’ Kiss would therefore lose all possibility of being an ideal being, since the inability to exist completely in the world will render the individual unable to fulfil his/her true potential.

This perception of nonbeing does not appear to be what Voldemort fears: in his mind “[t]here is nothing worse than death” (Rowling, Order 718), and this is the state of mind that follows him throughout the series. Due to his fear of an impending death, Voldemort, undoubtedly, both expresses and symbolises the dread of not being. It is this haunting fear of death that has driven his quest to overcome a state of nothingness. The fear of nonbeing consequently keeps Voldemort from living a full life: as he attempts to murder Harry, the killing curse rebounds, Voldemort is “ripped
from [his] body” and is thereafter “less than a spirit, less than the meanest ghost” (Rowling, *Goblet* 566). In Koestenbaum’s view, “any threat to your body becomes a threat to the being itself” (122). The loss of his body thus indicates that Voldemort is on the verge of nonbeing: without his body he cannot exist as a being. He has lost his body, and without it, he is no longer a being-in-the-world. Taliaferro states that “[u]ntil Voldemort can become re-embodied, his ‘life’ is parasitic on the blood and the limbs of others” (239). Since he no longer has the body of a human, he is even further away from a state of being than before: he lives as a parasite, as an animal, rather than a human being. Voldemort himself states his bodiless state, in the first four books, caused him to be “as powerless as the weakest creature alive” (Rowling, *Goblet* 566), and he had to force himself “second by second, to exist” (567). He has arguably lost his ability to exist: he is, however, still aware of his existence, but like a ghost he has lost the ability to exist as a being. Even when he, in *the Goblet of Fire* regains his body, it “does not seem to be natural; his face is snakelike, and he is able to fly without the aid of a broomstick or other magical means” (Taliaferro 239). It does not matter that he has attained the physical form of a human being: he possesses non-human qualities, even by magical standards, and he also appears to resemble an animal – a snake. By emphasizing the significance of this distinction between human and animal, a cultural perception is highlighted: human beings are different from, and superior to, animals. This distinction is also apparent in existential psychology, as only humans are able to achieve a sense of being. Furthermore, while Voldemort appears to have escaped a bodily death, his life appears to be far from natural: he is alive, but he is not completely human, and this is what keeps him from existing as a being, and therefore also to fulfil his potential as one.

**The Attempt to Overcome Death**

Voldemort’s obsession with defeating death is here claimed to stem from early experiences of death: since his mother died just after he was born, Voldemort grew up to both despise and fear death. Since “it is in [the] encounter with death that each of us discovers his hunger for immortality” (Feifel 62) I would argue that this was a determining factor in Voldemort’s desire for immortality. When Dumbledore first meets him, a young Voldemort states that his “mother can’t have been magic, or she wouldn’t have died” (Rowling, *Half-Blood* 257). He thus reveals his ideas concerning magic and death: a truly powerful wizard would, according to him, have the tools to
overcome death. Even before he arrives at Hogwarts, he has started to plan his eventual immortality. In Koestenbaum’s view,

To believe in immortality does not mean to have overcome the primal anxiety about our own death; it means that we have decided to make a strenuous effort – both psychologically and intellectually – to lead an existence which works constantly at convincing ourselves that the anxiety about our own death is unfounded and can be overcome (Koestenbaum 10)

This would entail that while Voldemort’s entire existence consists of conquering an inevitable state of nonbeing, this is, nonetheless, a sign of his constant struggle with the anxiety caused by his dread of not being. Even at the age of sixteen, Voldemort “was doing all he could to find out how to make himself immortal” (Rowling, Half-Blood 467). He eventually finds a way to overcome a bodily death: he tries to overpower his anxiety by transferring parts of his soul to objects, as he creates the Horcruxes that he believes will secure him an eternal life. This is what separates Voldemort from Harry, who realizes that the anxiety concerning his own death is unfounded – he does not try to achieve immortality to overpower death, he overcomes anxiety by accepting death.

Voldemort’s attempt to conquer death would indicate that he tries “gain power over nature” and the “natural world” (Feist & Feist 347). This by attempting to do what nature does not permit: to escape his unavoidable death. His methods for doing this indicate that this is a highly unnatural process. Since Dasein is the unity of the self and the world, and thus also nature, actions that cause the self to separate from nature will cause the individual to lose his sense of being-in-the-world. I would furthermore insist that this is depicted in Rowling’s series: Voldemort creates several Horcruxes, in his attempt to overcome his natural death. A Horcrux is “an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul” (Rowling, Half-Blood 464). By removing part of one’s soul “and hid[ing] it in an object outside the body” it will keep the individual from a natural death: “even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged” (464). In order to remove part of one’s soul, the soul must be split. Voldemort not only splits his soul once: he proceeds “to rip it into seven pieces’” (Rowling, Half-Blood 466). These different parts of Voldemort are what keep him alive. They keep him from a natural, bodily death: “Without his Horcruxes, Voldemort [would] be a mortal man with a maimed and diminished soul” (Rowling, Half-Blood 475). However, since “the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against
nature” (465). I would therefore argue that it is by committing this act that Voldemort separates himself completely from nature. By splitting his soul Voldemort removes himself from his being: for every part of his soul that Voldemort removes he is brought closer to a nonbeing similar to that a Dementor’s Kiss would cause. Voldemort has consequently lost his presence in the Umwelt: his relationship with the natural world. Since the fulfilment of one’s being demands a presence in the Umwelt – in the natural and surrounding world, Voldemort’s being is consequently lost.

In The Order of the Phoenix, we read that there are “other ways of destroying a man” (Rowling 718) than death. In order to reach a state that Voldemort appears to perceive as immortality, he sacrifices his soul. This action further emphasizes his ignorance concerning the various possible states of nonbeing. Voldemort’s perception appears to be that natural death is the only true state of nonbeing, and it is thus this that he strives to overcome, by splitting his soul into several parts, and removing the from his body. In Hunsinger’s view, however, spiritual death, “unlike natural death, […] requires a consciousness of the infinite and the eternal. To say that man dies spiritually means that that which is essentially human in man dies” (35). This is evident in Harry Potter, as it is stated that “a Horcrux is the complete opposite of a human being” (Rowling, Hallows 90). Hence, for every part of his soul that leaves his body, Voldemort’s being is damaged. Instead of closing him off from a possibility of nonbeing, he causes this state to happen. Voldemort, rather than suffering a bodily death, causes his spiritual death: even though he arguably is trying to escape one state of nonbeing, he enters another.

**Overcoming Anxiety Through Fear**

The paralysing anxiety one feels when confronted with death is one of the basic existential facts that one must accept in order to exist completely. In Rowling’s series, this is most clearly symbolised by Dementors: creatures who “suck the happiness out of a place” (Rowling, Prisoner 76) as they cause “a person to relive the worst memories of their life” (Order 33). In order for this portrayal to be effective, Harry’s reaction to the Dementors is the most powerful one by far. In existential psychology it is claimed that “[a]nxiety shows that we are in the presence of our supreme dread, anguish, angst” (Koestenbaum 126). This would indicate that Harry’s traumatized past would cause him to possess a more apparent sense of dread than his friends. Not only did he survive Voldemort’s attempt to kill him, he also witnessed the murder of
his parents. The Dementors thus cause Harry to relive memories that are more anxiety-generating than the memories his friends are forced to recall. Harry’s immediate reaction when meeting a Dementor indicates that these creatures do, in fact, cause a reaction similar to that of anxiety. Since May argues that anxiety causes one’s “perceptions generally become blurred or vague” (Man’s 39), Harry’s reaction appears to be rather literal. During his first meeting with a Dementor, “Harry’s eyes rolled up into his head. He couldn’t see. He was drowning in cold. There was a rushing in his ears as though of water. He was being dragged downwards, the roaring growing louder” (Rowling, Prisoner 66). Harry appears to be overwhelmed by the anxiety that the Dementors cause him to experience, as his perceptions are distorted. May further explores the existential concept of anxiety as he states that it “overwhelms the person’s discovery of being, blots out the sense of time, dulls the memory of the past, and erases the future” (Discovery 110). Harry’s reaction to a Dementor is similar to that caused by anxiety: it is mainly a psychological reaction, causing a perceived sense of physical pain. May writes that “[a]nxiety strikes us at the very ‘core’ of ourselves: it is what we feel when our existence as selves is threatened” (Man’s 40). I would therefore claim that Harry’s perceived sense of anxiety is due to being forced to relive the moment when his life was threatened, and his existence was disrupted. At the moment of his parents’ deaths, Harry’s only sense of safety was taken away from him, further causing him to spend the remainder of his childhood in a state of fear. It is only when this fear is faced that he can accept his anxiety, and consequently also his existence.

Differently from anxiety, fear is not that which is perceived as a threat to the centre of one’s existence, it is rather “a threat to the periphery of his existence” (May, Discovery 110). In Rowling’s Harry Potter, the possibility to objectivise fear, and the ability to “stand outside and look at it” (110), is mainly symbolised by Boggarts. These magical creatures possess the ability to “take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten [the person] most” (Rowling, Prisoner 101). The Boggarts can sense the deepest fear of the human it is facing, even if the individual in question is not aware of this fear. The Boggarts allow its human counterpart to not only discover its deepest fear, but also provide them with opportunity to confront it. In analogy with Tillich’s view that “fear can be met by courage” (39) there is a constant striving to transform anxiety into fear. It is only when this transformation is complete that anxiety can be completely overcome. I would here claim that courage is symbolised by a spell,
causing the Boggart to transform into a state that is not perceived as frightening, and the human being can move forward without being hindered by it.

Although humans have a continuous urge to transform anxiety into fear, Tillich argues that this is futile: “The basic anxiety, the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of nonbeing, cannot be eliminated. It belongs to existence itself” (39). Fear and anxiety might be different, in terms of how they affect the being, but they cannot be completely separated from each other: “[t]hey are immanent within each other” (37). There is, according to Tillich, always a “sting of fear in anxiety”, just as “anxiety strives toward fear” (37). In The Prisoner of Azkaban, fear and anxiety are intertwined with each other as Harry’s fear causes a Boggart to turn into a Dementor. Due to the Boggart’s representation of fear, and the Dementor as a symbol for anxiety, Harry’s confrontation with a Boggart portrays his attempt to transform anxiety into fear. Since the Boggart only turns into a representation of a Dementor, it does not affect Harry as strongly as a real Dementor would. Just as anxiety is harder to overcome than fear, the spell used to overpower a Dementor is more difficult to master than the one needed to conquer a Boggart. While thirteen-year-old students are expected to be able to defeat a Boggart, not all adult wizards are able to perform the spell needed to overpower a Dementor. According to May’s theories, fear allows us to “know what threatens us, […] our perceptions are sharper, and we take steps to run or in the other appropriate ways to overcome the danger” (Man’s 39). By facing a Boggart, Harry is forced to become aware of his greatest anxiety: it allows him to search for a way to overcome and accept his anxiety. If he had not faced his anxiety in the form of fear, Harry would, in May’s view, not have been able to know “what steps to take to meet the danger” (39). The Boggart allows Harry to temporarily study his anxiety from afar, and I would therefore argue that his fear provides him the tools he needs in order to accept his anxiety.

The Inevitable Nonbeing
While Voldemort’s existence consists of a desire to escape anxiety, by overcoming nonbeing, Harry “is not tempted to seek eternal life through murder as was Voldemort” (Williams & Kellner 138-9). Walls and Walls claim that since “Harry was confronted with death right from the start, so from an unusually young age he was aware of his mortality” (247). Although this also appears to be true for Voldemort, I would argue that their experiences of death are vastly different, as are
their ideas concerning the possibility of not being. Having already faced his own death, even though not aware of it at the time, Harry has less reason to fear a state of nonbeing than Voldemort does. During the series, Harry is given several opportunities to confront his fear of death, and the anxiety it causes. Voldemort is, on the other hand, controlled by his anxiety. The dread concerning his own nonbeing causes Voldemort to strive for immortality, and this is consequently also what leads Harry to accept death.

Each time Harry faces Voldemort, he also faces his own mortality: each time he becomes aware of the possibility of his impending death, Harry’s knowledge concerning the possibility of nonbeing is a result of Voldemort’s acts of violence. Koestenbaum’s existential perception is that death is not experienced; rather, everyone confronts “the anticipation of an inevitable personal death” (3). Since Harry is the only person to have ever escaped the certainty of death that follows the killing curse Avada Kedavra, he has consequently confronted his future state of nonbeing. Harry has thus been given the tools to accept that his being will cease to exist at a very young age: he knows that he will die. Despite Voldemort’s attempt to kill him, Harry never appears to have any qualms about facing him: the eventual destruction of his own being is miniscule in relation to the damage Voldemort can do to the world. Rather, the realization of his inevitable death appears to be gradual. As it is revealed to him “that one of [them] has got to kill the other one… in the end” (Rowling, Order 744), the process of acceptance has been set in motion. If he does not kill Voldemort, he will die himself. Harry either has to accept his death, or fear it like Voldemort does. It is only by accepting death that he will overcome the anxiety concerning it.

Neither Voldemort nor Harry “can live while the other survives” (Rowling, Hallows 591), which mirrors the existential claim that “nonbeing is an inseparable part of being”, and that in order “[t]o grasp what it means to exist, one needs to grasp the fact that he might not exist” (May, Discovery 105). Hence, in order for Harry and Voldemort to truly exist as beings, they must also accept their impending nonbeing. As their fates are intertwined, their states of being, or nonbeing, depend on the other. It is only when they do confront nonbeing, and the anxiety it causes, that they can truly live. It is only by fearing each other, and nonbeing, that their beings will cease to exist. Tillich’s theoretical claim is that “[i]f there were no fear of death, the threat […] of a superior enemy would be without effect” (43). I would therefore suggest that Voldemort’s apparent anxiety concerning nonbeing keeps him from his being, while
Harry appears to have been preparing for death his entire existence. In contrast to Voldemort who, rather than accepting death has spent his life in a state of anxiety, trying desperately to overpower death. Voldemort’s idea of overcoming anxiety consequently appears to be to vanquish the source of it, rather than accepting it as a part of his existence. The fear of death has therefore caused Voldemort to fear Harry, since he is the only one who can end his existence. Harry’s acceptance of nonbeing does, however, reach its culmination when he, in *The Deathly Hallows*, is informed that in order for Voldemort to die, he must die along with him. There is a piece of Voldemort in Harry, keeping them tethered together: “[a]nd while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to, and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die” (Rowling, *Hallows* 551). They are bound together, and only death will free them from each other. They therefore serve as aids in the other’s struggle with both death and the anxiety it causes. While Voldemort believes that he needs to overpower Harry in order to vanquish death completely, the constant threat of being killed by Voldemort causes him to accept his eventual death as a part of his existence.

**The Acceptance of Death**

When Harry realizes that he must die in order to vanquish Voldemort he confronts his nonbeing more intensely than ever before. As Taliaferro argues, in order for Harry “[t]o become whole once again, [he] must die to release the Voldemort link” (236). It is only when the bond between him and Voldemort has been severed that Harry can achieve the state of an ideal being. Harry must thus face his own nonbeing, and die willingly. Ultimately, Harry sacrifices himself and Killinger consequently refers to Harry as a “sacrificial lamb” (20), indicating that there are similarities between Rowling’s protagonist and Jesus Christ. As Harry walks to his own execution he is “alone the way Christ was alone when he went to the cross” (20). I would further argue that this is an indication of a deliberate exploitation of the mythical resonance of the Jesus figure: similarly to Jesus, Harry walks to his death willingly, emphasizing both his sacrifice for the world, as well as the differences between himself and Voldemort. Harry faces nonbeing to the point of mirroring his mother’s sacrifice: he dies to save the world. Thus, while Voldemort’s existence appears to be ruled by his anxiety concerning nonbeing, Harry accepts the end of his being. Based on Koestenbaum’s claim, that “[t]o accept death means to take charge of one’s life”
(27), I would insist that Harry’s willingness to die suggests that he is in far more control of his own existence than Voldemort will ever be.

By accepting his inevitable death, Harry has arguably confronted nonbeing, and the anxiety that comes with it, and is able to live life more fully than before. I would therefore argue that since Harry has seen the death that his future holds, he is able to fulfil his potential and enter a state of an ideal being. Feifel’s existential view is that in order “to completely understand himself, man must confront death, become aware of personal death” (65): while Voldemort avoids his own death, Harry accepts and faces his eventual death at a very young age. His awareness of nonbeing is symbolised by Thsestrals: a magical creature which is only visible to those “who have seen death” (Rowling, Order 394). Since it is only after Harry has seen Cedric die that he is able to see these creatures, I would claim that the death of Cedric Diggory is a catalyst for Harry’s awareness of nonbeing. In Tillich’s view “[b]eing has nonbeing ‘within’ itself as that which is eternally present” (34). This would indicate that the nonbeing in Harry’s being is emphasized by his continued confrontation with the nonbeing of others. I would further argue that the more significant a person appears to be to Harry, the more their death affects his perception of nonbeing. Therefore, in order for Harry to accept his own nonbeing, he has to lose several people close to him. The deaths of his godfather Sirius, his mentor Dumbledore, his trusted owl Hedwig, the faithful house-elf Dobby, and his friends Lupin and Tonks are therefore vital components in Harry’s awareness of what nonbeing signifies. He has to experience these losses while being aware that “[n]o spell can reawaken the dead” (Rowling, Goblet 605). However, when one accepts death, and thus the anxiety it causes, one’s existence is enhanced, rather than destroyed: one is one step closer to accepting one’s existence completely. I would consequently claim that it is Harry’s willingness to die that keeps him from reaching a state of nonbeing, and in turn also what keeps him existing. In Koestenbaum’s view, accepting death “will neutralize an otherwise completely demoralizing and paralyzing fear. This is one key to the successful management of human existence” (26). I would therefore argue that Harry, in his acceptance of death is able to overcome any possible fears concerning death, and by choosing to die he is in control of his existence. He has faced his own death on a number of occasions and his acceptance of it is evident: “it did not occur to him not to try and escape, to outrun Voldemort. It was over, he knew it, and all that was left was the thing itself: dying” (Rowling, Hallows 554). The fulfilment of his being, as a
result of his acceptance of nonbeing is further symbolised by his resurrection: as Harry sacrifices himself, he dies, but still appears to have the ability to return to life. I would consequently claim that it is due to his acceptance of his future nonbeing that his being can truly and fully exist: he accepts his existence completely and does not question any aspect of it. Death is an unavoidable part of his existence, and by accepting that Harry is able to fulfil his true potential. It is Harry’s willingness to die, to fully accept death and nonbeing, that makes him “the true master of death, because the true master does not seek to run away from Death. He accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying” (Rowling, Hallows 577).

The Deathly Hallows

The most evident symbols of Harry’s acceptance of nonbeing are the Deathly Hallows: the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Cloak of Invisibility, which “if united, will make the possessor master of Death” (Rowling, Hallows 333). The quest to unite the Hallows and become “Conqueror [or] Vanquisher” (33) of death is here a less brutal way of striving for immortality than Voldemort’s creation of Horcruxes. The ambition to unite the Deathly Hallows is, however, no different from the making of Horcruxes: any attempt to avoid nonbeing diminishes the individual’s being, as well as its Dasein. In Hunsinger’s view “an existing individual, […] must face the existential reality of [his/her] own death” (34-5). Hence, to spend one’s life running from death, striving for immortality, is to ignore the reality of one’s existence. However, conquering death by accepting nonbeing does not mean that one is naturally ready to die. In Rowling’s series the uniting of the Hallows rather appears to symbolise a process of realization: one must face the different aspects of death and nonbeing in order to truly understand the meaning of them. Insight is the only way to become worthy of the Hallows: it is only when one realizes the true significance of all three objects, and the impact these have on one’s existence, that one can be the master of one’s being. United, the Deathly Hallows would thus symbolise the acceptance of nonbeing. Apart, however, each of the Hallows appears to represent a different approach to nonbeing and death.

Each of the Hallows was originally customized for each of three brothers, according to their different priorities. The Elder Wand is “a wand more powerful than any in existence: a wand that must always win duels for its owner, a wand worthy of a
wizard who had conquered Death” (Rowling, *Hallows* 331, emphasis in the original). Due to the power it possesses, this Hallow ends up attracting those who seek power; wizards like Voldemort who are prepared to kill in order to attain the ability to overpower death. I would, however, argue that the wand is not a symbol of the conquering of death: rather, the wand represents the desperation, caused by the anxiety of nonbeing, which drives man’s desire for immortality. The wand was originally requested as proof of having conquered death, but the brother did not conquer death: he was given a proof of his thirst for power, and his ignorance concerning nonbeing is what gets him killed. The power of the wand is not that it conquers death, but that it attracts death to the owner, proving that death cannot be fooled: as an existential being, you must confront the eventual nonbeing. Hunsinger further states that “to say that death is ‘possible at any moment’ means that the coming of death is certain, but the hour of its coming in uncertain” (33). I would therefore claim that since possession of the wand appears to increase the probability of death, it would therefore also increase the anxiety of nonbeing.

The Resurrection Stone has the “power to recall others from Death” (Rowling, *Hallows* 331, emphasis in the original). Rather than being an attempt at overcoming one’s own nonbeing, the stone is an additional indication of the ignorance of death and nonbeing as it serves to override Death by recalling those who have already died. In Koestenbaum’s view “the death of others” (5, emphasis in the original) might cause us a sense of anxiety similar to that caused by the knowledge of our own impending nonbeing. Thus, the stone, rather than representing the attempt to overcome one’s own death, symbolises the anxiety brought on by the death of others. This is indicated as those whom the stone brings back are “sad and cold, separated from [one] as by a veil. Though [they have] returned to the mortal world, [they do] not truly belong there and suffer” (Rowling, *Hallows* 332, emphasis in the original). I would here claim that this is the anxiety brought on by their deaths: they are echoes of what they used to be, and they continue to serve as reminders of their own nonbeing. This indicates that there is no fooling Death: Death cannot be escaped. We see this also in how “the second brother, driven mad with hopeless longing, kill[s] himself so as to truly join” (332, emphasis in the original) the woman he had attempted to bring back from the dead. The echo of her being causes the brother to join death willingly, since a life of anxiety and loss is perceived to be far worse than the state of nonbeing that awaits him.
Finally, the third Hallow was designed for “the humblest and also the wisest of the brothers” who, due to his mistrust of Death, “asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And Death, most unwillingly, handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility” (Rowling, Hallows 331, emphasis in the original). Since the cloak is claimed to hide its owner from Death I would claim that it also provides the owner with the time s/he needs in order to confront the anxiety of nonbeing. According to May it is an “existential fact” that everyone “must alone face the fact that at some unknown moment in the future [they] shall die” (Discovery 51). The cloak thus provides its owner not with the ability to escape from death, but a chance to come to terms with the existential fact that they will enter a state of nonbeing. Correspondingly, it is stated that “[i]t was only when he had attained a great age that the youngest brother finally took off the Cloak of Invisibility and gave it to his son. And then he greeted Death as an old friend, and went with him gladly, and, equals, they departed this life” (Rowling, Hallows 332, original emphasis). I would accordingly argue that the cloak is a symbol of the process of acceptance: unlike the Elder Wand and the Resurrection Stone it cannot be obtained by killing or stealing. Rather, the cloak should here be viewed as a tool for acceptance, passed on from father to son, from mother to daughter. To be given the cloak is equivalent to be given the amount of time one needs in order to come to terms with one’s eventual death; the time to accept one’s inevitable nonbeing.

It is further stated that one has to be worthy to unite the Deathly Hallows: if they are united with the intention “to run away from Death” (Rowling, Hallows 577) the Hallows will not serve their purpose. The only way for the Hallows to fulfil their purpose for their owner is if “[h]e accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying” (577). This makes Harry the true master of death: he has been preparing for his own nonbeing since his parents died, and he can therefore unite the Hallows in the way they ought to be united. Due to the deaths of Harry’s parents, he has built his being around the knowledge of nonbeing, and this awareness is emphasized, as Harry realizes the true purpose of the Resurrection Stone: he does not use it in order to force his loved ones back into the mortal world, but rather as a tool for acceptance. Harry’s intent is not to bring them back. Rather, they are used as a final step in his acceptance of his impending nonbeing: “[i]t did not matter about bringing them back, for he was about to join
them. He was not really fetching them: they were fetching him” (Rowling, *Hallows* 559-60). The stone is in other words used to confirm Harry’s process of acceptance.

Harry is ultimately in charge of his own death, and all three Hallows play essential parts in him facing his nonbeing: when he walks to his death, all three Hallows rightfully belong to him. Harry is thus not the Master of Death because of the Deathly Hallows. Rather, they prove that he does not fear nonbeing. It is because he does not fear death that he can use the Hallows in a way only the Master of Death can: he dies willingly and uses the Hallows to achieve it. I would therefore argue that it is this action that distinguishes him from those who have sought the Deathly Hallows: Harry does not pursue the Hallows, nor does he kill to gain access to them. He does not seek to overcome death; instead, he uses to Hallows to confront his nonbeing, thereby accepting his eventual death.

**Love and Care**

According to existential psychology, children are born as “one with the universe (*Umwelt*), their mother (*Mitwelt*), and themselves (*Eigenwelt*)” (Feist & Feist 354, original emphasis). This view is shaped by a heteronormative Western perception of love, as it presumes that a mother figure is a necessary component for a successful development of interpersonal relationships. Although this would serve as grounds for criticism, I argue that this should be interpreted as a *parental* care and not necessarily a motherly one. It is the presence of a parent that is of importance, not the gender. May further states that in order to achieve the human’s purpose “to unite love and will” (*Love* 283), these three modes have to remain stable: one must be equally present in Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt. The need to be present in the three modes of the world is clearly visible in the individual’s relationship with him- or herself, but the relationship with others is, however, the mode most emphasized in relation to love. There are, according to May, “four kinds of love in Western tradition” (*Love* 37): sex, eros, philia, and agape. Sex refers to a biological function that can be described as lust, whereas eros is a traditional romantic love. Philia is the love in friendships, while agape refers to an altruistic love: a devotion to the welfare of others. These four aspects of love are all based in relationships with others, whether it is a relationship with other human beings or a relationship with a God. Although the Christian perception of a God is present within existential theories of love, this is not
the definition that will be applied: the love in focus will be that between different beings, not between humans and their deity of choice.

Furthermore, if love is experienced, these four kinds of love are all present and intertwined. Similarly to how “the term ‘world’ means at one and the same time the Umwelt, the Mitwelt, and the Eigenwelt” (Binswanger, Case 269, original emphasis), May states that “[e]very human experience of authentic love is a blending, in varying proportions, of these four” (Love 38) types of love. Thus, in order to be a complete and centred being, one must be balanced, not only in the three modes of the world, but in the four kinds of love. May further argues that “[t]he human experience of love […] cannot be adequately described within the confines of Umwelt. The interpersonal schools, at home chiefly in Mitwelt, have dealt with love” (Discovery 131, original emphasis). I would, however, claim that the Mitwelt is the more significant mode to consider in relation to love. May further emphasizes the importance of being present in all three modes of the world in order to love completely: “without an adequate concept of Umwelt, love becomes empty of vitality, and without Eigenwelt, it lacks power and the capacity to fructify itself” (131, original emphasis). Hence, neither the modes of the world or the different types of love can be separated completely from each other. In order to experience authentic love one has to be balanced and present in one’s existence. I would also argue that these four aspects of love appear in different forms throughout Harry Potter, and play important roles in the unfolding of the narrative.

The Foundations for Love

It is indicated early on that love is an evident theme in the Harry Potter series. Westman states that love is established as a “protective force” (194) in The Philosopher’s Stone, as Harry’s mother sacrifices her life in order for her son to live. The need and importance of parental love is further emphasized when Dumbledore states “that love as powerful as [Harry’s] mother’s […] leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign… to have been loved so deeply […] will give us some protection for ever” (Rowling, Philosopher’s 216). I would claim that this indicates that his mother Lily’s love for him is what determines Harry’s Mitwelt: his ability to love others the way he himself has been loved. This parental love is one of the cornerstones of Rowling’s series; “[t]hroughout the subsequent books, this embodied parental love supports Harry physically and emotionally” (Westman 194). I would
further argue that it is due to his mother’s love for him, and his early relationship with his mother, that Harry has the foundation he needs in order to be fully present in his Mitwelt: he has the tools he needs in order to form healthy relationships with others.

Harry and Voldemort’s experiences with parental love are, however, portrayed as drastically different. In contrast to Harry’s mother, who gave her own life in order for her child to live, Voldemort’s mother “refused to raise her wand even to save her own life” (Rowling, Half-Blood 246). While Lily loved her son to the extent that she was willing to give her life for his, Voldemort’s mother “chose death in spite of a son who needed her” (246). I would claim that their relationships with their mothers affected their abilities to form and maintain interpersonal relationships: due to Voldemort’s mother dying shortly after his birth, he has never experienced the sense of Mitwelt that a parent will provide. Furthermore, since having parents is part of man’s being, both Voldemort and Harry are therefore “exposed to the most serious crises” (Binswanger, Insanity 225). It is here the love and care that parents are assumed to provide that is of importance, not who provides it. I would accordingly claim that Harry finds replacements for his parents during the series. Molly and Arthur Weasley are the most evident parental figures that he appears to adopt as substitutes for his own: although they are his best friend’s parents they treat Harry as if he was one of their own children; they provide Harry with the love and support close to that of real parents. Voldemort had the opportunity to do the same: he could have found replacements of his parents; a mentor or a parental figure to help guide him through life – but refused to do so. This is the fundamental difference between Harry and Voldemort: the basis on which their remaining differences are built. Harry was, through his mother’s love, given the foundations needed build his Mitwelt. This foundation is developed further as he finds new parental figures, in the form of Sirius, Hagrid, Dumbledore, and the Weasleys, to provide him with the interpersonal relationships that he would have had with his parents, had they not died. Since Voldemort did not have any parental figures to provide him with this foundation, on which to form a sense of Mitwelt, any hope of developing an ability to love and form interpersonal relationships thus vanished as his mother died.

*Mitwelt and Philia*

As we have seen, friendship, and thus the Mitwelt, is an important theme in the series. One of the more profound differences between Harry and Voldemort lies precisely
here, in their relationships with other people and hence their presence in the Mitwelt. In May’s view, “love and will are interpersonal experiences” ([Love 276]). There is a need for Mitwelt in order to experience love. This is evident in the relationship they share with others. Harry appears to value his friendships more highly than anything else in his life, which in accordance with existential psychology would signify a constant presence in Mitwelt. Voldemort, unlike Harry, was not born into a Mitwelt, and therefore does not experience a need for interpersonal relationships. Harry’s love for his friends sets him and Voldemort apart, and this becomes increasingly apparent throughout the series. While Harry’s love for others, his sense of philia, is portrayed to become even more evident, Voldemort’s lack of love is emphasized just as clearly.

According to May, “[e]very person, experiencing as he does his own solitariness and aloneness, longs for union with another. He yearns to participate in a relationship greater than himself. Normally, he strives to overcome his aloneness through some form of love” ([Love 145]). However, while philia and friendship are some of the most important aspects of Harry’s life, it is stated that “Lord Voldemort has never had a friend, nor [does Dumbledore] believe that [Voldemort] has ever wanted one” ([Rowling, Half-Blood 260]). Voldemort does, however, appear to value his loneliness: even at a young age he “preferred to operate alone. The adult Voldemort is the same” (260). This would indicate that there are no traces of a need for friendships and love. I would further claim that Voldemort cannot love, or form meaningful relationships, nor does he appear to have a need to. Which in turn would suggest that he has no need for a Mitwelt. He surrounds himself not with friends like Harry does, but with servants. While they may believe that they are his friends, “his Death Eaters” (260) appear to be nothing more than tools: they are only useful as long as they serve a purpose to him. Voldemort’s statement concerning Bertha Jorkins is an additional indication of his perception of the value of others: “I killed [her] because I had to. She was fit for nothing after my questioning, quite useless” ([Rowling, Goblet 16]). Voldemort thus perceives his needs to be of greater importance than the lives of others: other people are portrayed as a means to an end for Voldemort; he does not perceive them to be ends in themselves. The death of his mother appears to have bereaved Voldemort of the ability to love. In view of May’s statement that love is “a reminder of our own mortality” ([Love 102]), this would suggest that young Voldemort, after his mother’s death, was left with nothing more than an awareness of his own mortality. Although this could be interpreted as though Voldemort thereby also has
acquired the ability to love, I would argue that Voldemort’s obsession with immortality prevents him from loving others. Thus, while Harry loves as completely as his mother did, “Voldemort learned from the worst his mother did, rather than from the best” (Bassham, Love 77, emphasis in the original).

While Harry’s self-sacrificing love mirrors his mother’s, Voldemort’s failure to love stem from his own mother’s egocentricity. According to Bassham, “what distinguishes Harry from Voldemort is that Harry, despite his troubled past and tragic life, never loses his ability to love” (Love 77). Lily’s sacrifice runs deep in Harry’s veins: he has the ability to love fully and completely, and that is his greatest strength. He does not fear love, as Voldemort does, even though he has experienced the negative aspects of it. In The Order of the Phoenix it is evident that he has loved and lost: the pain Harry feels after the loss of his godfather is his “greatest strength” (Rowling, Order 726). In May’s view, “[t]o love means to open [oneself] to the negative as well as the positive – to grief, sorrow, and disappointment as well as to joy [and] fulfilment” (Love 100). I would thus argue that, Harry’s capability to face the negative aspects of love, indicates that he can love without restraint: he does not fear the pain of loss, for he has suffered it, and he is also able to experience the joy and fulfilment of love. May further claims that “[s]ome – perhaps most – human beings never know deep love until they experience someone’s death, the preciousness of friendship, devotion, loyalty” (Love 102). Since Harry experiences the deaths of several friends and loved ones throughout the series, I would insist that he has a deeper understanding of love than other characters in the series. With each loss he suffers, the awareness of his love for others correspondingly increases. Harry’s philia and his presence in the Mitwelt is thus established as clearly as Voldemort’s lack of need for both.

It can consequently be concluded that Harry and Voldemort have very differing needs concerning love and Mitwelt. Voldemort chooses not to love: he does not need love or friends, nor does he want them. He surrounds himself with what he perceives to constitute a Mitwelt: he has servants who do his bidding. In this sense, Voldemort’s has a presence in the Mitwelt, according to the standards he has defined for himself. He does not want the Mitwelt Harry wants: Voldemort is not willing to open himself to the negative aspects of love, and thereby chooses not to love at all. Voldemort’s definition of togetherness with others is arguably met through his interactions with his servants, while Harry’s need to love requires more profound
relationships. Harry’s Mitwelt is therefore drastically different from Voldemort. Both characters have consequently built their own Mitwelt, by their own definitions and needs.

*Love and Hate*

Although love is a recurring theme in Rowling’s series, May claims that “love is actually a relatively rare phenomenon in […] society”, with the exception of “parental care for children and vice versa” (*Man’s* 239). I would here argue that this is highlighted by Lily’s willingness to sacrifice herself in order to save her son: her love for Harry is powerful enough to stop Voldemort from killing Harry. According to Bassham, Lily’s “love unleashes a more ancient and powerful magic than any potion can hope to imitate or Voldemort can hope to defeat or even understand” (*Love* 77). The love that constitutes the sacrifice Lily made is further stated to be a magic that Voldemort, due to his ignorance of love, “was foolish to overlook” (Rowling, *Goblet* 566). It does not occur to Voldemort that there could be magic more powerful than he is able to produce. This is further indicated by the assertion that Voldemort is assumed to “have considered the ways of house-elves far beneath his notice [and] it would never have occurred to him that they might have magic that he didn’t” (*Hallows* 161). Harry is thus “protected by an ancient magic” that Voldemort “despises, and which he has always, therefore, underestimated” (*Order* 736). I would therefore claim that his inability to imagine a magic that he himself is not capable of performing causes Voldemort to be ignorant, not only when it comes to the capabilities of house-elves, but also the magic caused by deep and profound love. In May’s view, ignorance of love has “its source in a distortion about love and trust in infancy which renders [one] forever fearing actual love ‘because it threatens [one’s] very existence’” (May, *Love* 16). I would consequently argue that this is one of the main reasons why Voldemort does not value love: he fears love the same way he fears death: they are perceived as threats to his existence and must therefore be avoided. This is, furthermore, the reason Voldemort *chooses* to distance himself from others, to no love or be loved, as it causes him the same anxiety as his fear of death. Since he cannot overcome *this* anxiety through immortality he avoids it completely, and by doing so his need for it appears to vanish and he is left with a superficial since of what constitutes a Mitwelt. Voldemort does not love others – he hates them.
According to May, “Freud […] saw that love […] always exists in polarity with hate” (Love 85). Correspondingly, Harry and Voldemort appear to represent each end of this spectrum: in order to overcome the hate that Voldemort represents, there is a need for love. We see this in the impact that Lily’s act of love has on both Harry and Voldemort. Lily’s love is strong enough for her sacrifice to have overpowered Voldemort’s hateful act. The protection in itself thus appears to represent a forceful battle between love and hate. While the protection is claimed to have saved Harry, it causes Voldemort’s curse to backfire, leaving him in a bodiless state. Smith further argues that while this love-based protection has an immense effect on Voldemort, “[l]ove is not wielded as a weapon; it simply overwhelms evil by its very existence” (88). The constant battle between Harry and Voldemort is here a symbol of the battle between love and hate, as it characterises the prevailing effects love has over hate. This is further explored in the closing novel of the series, as Harry mirrors his mother’s selfless sacrifice and therefore proves to be the polar opposite of Voldemort.

Harry’s “willingness to yield his own life to protect the ones he loves” (Smith 91) is the final proof of the power love is depicted to hold over hate. Although Harry mirrors his mother’s act of love and gives his life in exchange for the lives of his friends, his act proves to be more forceful. While Harry’s intention is to die in order to vanquish Voldemort, Smith argues that “Harry is not, in fact, killed, and his act of sacrifice offers magical protection to his compatriots” (91). Lily’s sacrifice saved the life of her son, and Harry provided the same love-based protection for everyone he cares about, everyone he loves.

You won’t be able to kill any of them, ever again. Don’t you get it? I was ready to die to stop you hurting these people […] and that’s what did it. I’ve done what my mother did. They’re protected from you. Haven’t you noticed how none of the spells you put on them are binding? You can’t torture them. You can’t touch them. You don’t learn from your mistakes, Riddle, do you? (Rowling, Hallow 591)

The magnitude of Harry’s sacrifice proves to be greater than Lily’s. I would therefore claim that he has not only inherited the ability to love from his mother, he has also learned how powerful it can be. This sacrificial act is then taken to a higher level: while Lily’s love stopped Voldemort from killing Harry, Harry’s selfless act of love appears to obstruct Voldemort from doing any harm whatsoever to those he gave his life for. It is no longer simply a matter of that power love has over the hateful act of killing a child, but rather the power it has over any act containing the hate Voldemort arguably embodies. Harry thus appears to characterize the ability for both philia and
agape, as he appears to have very few restraints concerning the love he feels for his friends; he values the lives and happiness of others to a greater extent than any other character throughout the series.

According to May, philia can only exist if there is a sense of agape: an “esteem for the other, the concern for the other’s welfare beyond any gain that one can get out of it; disinterested love” (Love 319). It is this kind of love that is at the root of Harry’s sacrifice: he is willing to give his own life in order to protect the rest of the world from Voldemort. This selfless and self-sacrificing love is evident as early on as in The Philosopher’s Stone. Harry has always had a sense of agape, stronger than most: as an eleven-year-old child he shows signs of an agape more forceful than many adults, as he puts the needs of others before himself. Towards the end of his first year at Hogwarts, Harry is placed in front of the Mirror of Erised: a mirror that reveals the individual’s “deepest, most desperate desire” (Rowling, Philosopher’s 157). It is during this sequence that his true sense of agape is first revealed: hidden inside the mirror is the Philosopher’s Stone, the object Voldemort needs in order to regain his strength, as well as immortality, and only one with a heart as “pure” (478) as Harry’s would be able to gain access to it – while Voldemort is not. Thus, even as a child Harry is able to look beyond his own desires and acknowledge that which is more important for the world: that Voldemort should not gain access to the Philosopher’s Stone. I would therefore insist that this incident alone indicates that Harry is a symbol for the altruistic love agape.

I would further argue that the Mirror of Erised is a symbol of the complete being. Although it is said that the mirror will not provide its viewers with “knowledge or truth”, as they are likely to be “entranced by what they have seen, or [are] driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible” (Rowling, Philosopher’s 157), this would only be the case if the individual facing the mirror was lacking in any aspect of their existence. It is further stated that “[t]he happiest man would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is” (156). Thus, only someone who has fulfilled their entire potential, and reached the state of an ideal being, would see nothing but themselves if looking into the mirror. In order to reach this state one has to be present in all three modes of the world simultaneously, as well as having the ability to experience the four different kinds of love. Hence, an ideal being would not only be present in, and capable of sustaining, the Mitwelt, but also the Umwelt and the Eigenwelt. In May’s
view, it is not only a matter of maintaining one’s interpersonal relationships: in order for one’s world to be stable one has to have a successful “relationship to one’s self” (Contributions 61), as well as the surrounding world.

While Harry clearly characterises a fulfilled Mitwelt, Voldemort appears to be caught in the Eigenwelt. Since Voldemort has never had the opportunity, or the tools needed, in order to explore and develop his Mitwelt, he has only focused on himself. He has never been able to relate to others, and has never felt a need to explore interpersonal relationships. Voldemort would thus not be able to look beyond his own needs and prioritize the existence of others. In addition to lacking a desire for Mitwelt, he does not appear to be connected to his surrounding world. Not being connected to one’s Umwelt would, in May’s opinion, cause a person to “lose some of their capacity to feel empathy for […] animals” (Man’s 68). I would argue that this is evident in The Half-Blood Prince, as a young Voldemort claims that he “can make animals do what [he] want[s] them to do, without training them. [He] can make bad things happen to people who annoy [him. He] can make them hurt if [he] want[s] to” (Rowling, Half-Blood 254). Hence, Voldemort’s lacking empathy is not isolated to humans, it is clear that he, even as a child, did not consider the feelings of animals; torturing and controlling both humans and animals alike. In The Goblet of Fire it is, however, revealed that Voldemort has a snake – Nagini – that appears to be his most trusted companion. This snake serves as one of the objects in which ha has placed a part of his soul. Whether is love for the snake is genuine, or based in a need to protect his soul, is unclear. It does, however, demonstrate that Voldemort has a unique and rather questionable presence in both the Mitwelt and the Umwelt. Although he feels a connection to the snake, and thereby to the Umwelt, it does not appears to be based in a love for his pet, but rather in the desire for immortality that defines his entire existence.

**Exploring the Umwelt**

The existential concept of being present in the Umwelt is also evident in the portrayal of magical creatures. I would claim that a presence in the Umwelt constitutes a good relationship with both nature and animals. This is, of course, based on a cultural distinction between humans and animals, which would here be equivalent to a distinction between wizards and magical creatures. In Rowling’s series, magical creatures, such as house-elves, goblins, werewolves and centaurs, appear to exist in a
limbo between magical beings and animals; they are not portrayed as equal to wizards, even though they arguably possess magical abilities of their own. They also appear to possess the same consciousness as wizards, but their standing in society is ultimately more similar to that of an animal. While Voldemort appears to consider “the ways of house-elves far beneath his notice” this is not an uncommon perspective: a majority of “the pure-bloods [appear to] treat them like animals” (*Hallows* 161). Not only are house-elves treated like animals by certain wizards, they are enslaved: they are “bound to serve one house and one family for ever” (*Chamber* 16), unless they are freed by the family who owns them. Their low position in society thus appears to encourage wizards to believe that they can treat them any way they like: “house-elves are used to bad, even brutal treatment” (*Hallows* 163). Since they are not wizards, or even humans, it is indicated that very few challenge the idea of the slavery of creatures other than those similar to themselves. Even Harry’s godfather perceives house-elves to be less significant than humans: Dumbledore states that he does “*not think Sirius ever saw [his house-elf] Kreacher as a being with feelings as acute as a human’s*” (164, emphasis in the original). Differently from the majority of the wizard community, Hermione appears to be very concerned with the lack of respect towards house-elves, going as far as to found an organization promoting the rights of house-elves everywhere. She perceives house-elves to be equal to wizards, in an apparent allusion to human-rights movements. Due to the nature of how the relationship between a house-elf and its master is depicted, it appears to be similar to that of slaves and slave-owners during the 18th century, further indicating that house-elves, as well as other magical beings, should be treated as equals to wizards.

Although Harry befriends the house-elf Dobby during his second year at Hogwarts, Hermione’s commitment to the welfare of magical creatures could be considered to function as a catalyst, causing a sense of awareness concerning the treatment of creatures other than wizards. Although house-elves are treated as slaves, werewolves are completely excluded from society, due to being part animal. The werewolf Remus Lupin has spent the majority of his life hiding his condition, in fear of being banished from society and forced to live outside the wizard community. On these grounds, Lupin has to resign from his position as the Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts, since the students’ parents “will not want a werewolf teaching their children” (*Prisoner* 309). Thus, while he has the physical appearance, and the abilities, of a wizard during the majority of every month, he is forever judged by “the
shadow of the wolf upon his human face” (*Hallows* 175). Lupin is forced to exist in a limbo between man and wolf, and this animal part of him is what excludes him from society.

Since a presence in the Umwelt entails a relationship with animals, any creature that is part animal would consequently have a presence in this mode of the world. Although a werewolf’s wolfish side would indicate a presence in the Umwelt, I would, however, argue that the ultimate symbol of this worldly presence is the “Animagi”: a limited amount of “witches and wizards” possess the ability to “become animals” (*Prisoner* 257) at will. To be able to transform oneself into an animal could be argued to indicate that one is continually present in the Umwelt. A presence in the Umwelt suggests that the individual has a worldly presence, an animal form would allow for this presence to be explored further than a human form would. Since this transformation would allow the individual to exist in the world as an animal, thus providing him/her with a perspective other than that of a human. It allows the individual to be part of the animal world, in addition to the human one. Furthermore, while the werewolf’s transformation appears not to occur at will, but rather by force, an Animagi has a choice concerning when to transform into his/her animal form. I would therefore claim that an Animagi chooses to explore their Umwelt, while still present in the Eigenwelt and Mitwelt, while a werewolf is torn from all modes of the world, as it is not in control of its actions or its thoughts during this time.

During his time in the wizarding world, Harry befriends a number of house-elves, a werewolf, centaurs and a goblin, thus including several magical creatures in his world. I would claim that this signifies that he is not only present in the Eigenwelt and Mitwelt, but also in the Umwelt. This process appears to start towards the end of Harry’s second year at Hogwarts, as he befriends Dobby house-elf and he sets him free from the terrible conditions that his enslavement has entailed. This is when Harry begins to explore his Umwelt: his worldly presence is explored as his empathy for creatures other than humans develops. Harry’s empathy towards a magical creature is evident following the death of his friend Dobby the house-elf: his love for Dobby drives him to dig a grave by hand, rather than by magic. He wants the house-elf to have a worthy burial, not unlike one for a human being. I would therefore argue that he is more present in the Umwelt than ever before. This is further underlined as the goblin Harry rescued in the moments leading up to the house-elf’s death, states that “[g]oblins and elves are not used to the protection, or the respect” (*Hallows* 394) that
Harry has shown both Dobby and the goblin Griphook. Due to these acts of kindness I would claim that Harry’s sense of philia and agape does not only extend to fellow humans: he cares for all beings.

I would further argue that the philia Harry feels towards Remus Lupin is the second major indicator of his presence in the Umwelt. Even though Harry is aware of his Professor being a werewolf, Harry still claims that Lupin is “the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher [he has] ever had” (Prisoner 309). It could therefore be claimed that Harry perceives Lupin’s competences to be far more important than whatever condition he may have. This would thus indicate that Harry values other people’s qualities rather than their social standing, and his ability for philia, and his presence in both Mitwelt and Umwelt, are all exceptionally strong. I would further argue that these different components aid each other: his strong sense of love for his teacher and mentor, as well as Dobby the house-elf, provides him with a greater opportunity to feel present in Mitwelt and Umwelt. His presence in these modes of the world also aids him in developing a deeper sense of love for other characters within the novels. Furthermore, Harry includes both wizards and magical creatures in his world: he loves unconditionally and without prejudice, and this reflects his presence in all three modes of the world. I would therefore claim that Harry represents the process of exploring, developing and existing in all three modes of the world simultaneously. Since this presence is required in order to achieve a true sense of being, Harry is consequently completely present in his existence and has the opportunity to fulfil his true potential and to become an ideal being if he chooses to explore and accept his existence.

**Eros**

According to Kierkegaard, the romantic love one might feel for another “symbolizes man’s relation to being as a whole” (Koestenbaum 307). The connection between eros and being is further emphasized as May states that it is “the urge […] toward higher forms of being and relationship” (Love 38). Due to the power eros has over the preserving of the being I would argue that pure eros represents the sense of happiness that can overpower anxiety. In *Harry Potter* this anxiety is brought on by the presence of a Dementor, and can only be overpowered by a Patronus. A Patronus is “a kind of positive force” that takes the form of an animal: it is a projection of […] hope, happiness”, and it thus produced “[w]ith an incantation, which will work only if you
are concentrating, with all your might, on a single, happy memory” (*Prisoner* 176). In *The Prisoner of Azkaban* it is indicated that the happiness needed in order to produce a Patronus often is based in the love one feels for another being. Since Harry is still a child, the love serving as a basis for his Patronus appears to be a paternal one, based on the memories of his parents. As a wizard explores and develops a sense of eros, the happiness used in order to produce a Patronus will be based in a romantic love, rather than a paternal one. This is illustrated in *The Half-Blood Prince* as Tonks’ Patronus has “changed its form” (319) to suit that of Lupin’s werewolf form, which in line with May’s view indicates that “[s]ome – perhaps most– human beings never know deep love until they experience someone’s death” (*Love* 102). Since Tonks’ Patronus is described to have changed in close relation to her cousin Sirius’ death, I would suggest this is what has caused her to experience a sense of eros that she has not experienced previously. Her love for Lupin was consequently born out of the ashes of Sirius’ death, driving her to a love deep enough to change her Patronus. Similarly to how Tonks’ Patronus changed to take the form of a werewolf, proving her love for Remus Lupin, Snape’s love is shown to have caused his Patronus to mirror the shape of Lily’s.

I would further argue that Snape characterises a sense of eros, and the power it holds over the being, since his love for Lily Potter drives him to great acts of courage, in order to protect her son. Even though this love is claimed not to be mutual it is one of the most significant ones throughout the series, since Snape’s eros for Lily aids Harry in his quest to vanquish Voldemort. Snape’s love is, however, shown to be restricted to Lily: he does not seem to care “about the deaths of her husband and child” (544), Harry and James rather serve as reminders of his unrequited love. I would therefore claim that it is partly due to this, that his act to protect Harry from Voldemort proves how great his love for Lily is. This is further established as Snape’s Patronus guides Harry to one of the few objects that can help him conquer Voldemort.

May’s view is that human existence “consists of a new form of the battle of the giants, Eros against Thanatos” the “death instinct” (*Love* 86). Based on this I would claim that Snape’s love for Lily conflicts sharply with Voldemort’s killing of her: Snape’s love for Lily is the Eros that is in conflict with Voldemort’s Thanatos. Due to his love for Lily, Snape begs Voldemort to spare her life, when that fails, and she dies, the battle of love against death is transferred to her son. Snape’s reaction to Lily’s death is further portrayed to be both emotional and physical: following her
death he looks “like a man who had lived a hundred years” and he is overwhelmed by a sense of “remorse” (Rowling, *Hallows* 544). Whereas Snape, prior to Lily’s death, did not appear to care about the safety of her son, Snape now has to make sure that her death “was not in vain” (544), which is why he has to protect her son. It is this act, the unquestionable protection that Snape provides Harry with, that proves the eros he feels towards Lily, even after she has died. Since Lily can no longer be protected or saved, Snape thus has to transfer his protection to Harry. Due to his love for Harry’s mother, Snape appears to mirror her act of love for her son, as he sacrifices his own life and safety in order for Harry to remain safe. His love for Lily has ultimately aided Snape in his acceptance of his existence, and he is therefore able to sacrifice his life for her son’s.

**Freedom and Free Will**

Since humans have free will, they also have the freedom of being in charge of their own choices, and therefore of their existence. May’s perception is that “[f]reedom is man’s capacity to take a hand in his own development”; it is man’s “capacity to mold” (*Man’s* 160) oneself. While man has the possibility of freedom, and thus the ability to be in charge of his own existence, “[f]reedom does not come automatically; it is achieved. And it is not gained at a single bound; it must be achieved each day” (168). Due to this, there is a sense of obligation towards the possible ideal being: free will and freedom causes a perceived sense of responsibility. The freedom that could be perceived as an advantage would then rather be experienced as a limitation: it might cause the individual to feel a great sense of guilt and anxiety towards the being that they might not achieve. In Koestenbaum’s view it is, however, “an irrefutable and irrevocable fact that man has free will” (64) and to attempt to escape it would thus be pointless. Freedom should not be avoided, it should be embraced, and man should be grateful for the opportunity to be in charge of his existence. Since the acceptance, and acquisition, of freedom may cause a perceived sense of anxiety and guilt; there is a need for courage in order “to understand, to accept, and to face fully the concretion of our freedom” (64). This acceptance is thus an important aspect in fulfilling one’s true potential: it is needed in order to become an ideal being. There are, in *Harry Potter*, several indications of the opportunity to exercise free will, as well as the escape of it. While I would argue that Harry represents the acceptance of free will, and therefore
the being’s fulfilment of his/her potential, there also appears to be a portrayal of an on-going battle between fate and free will.

The Exertion of Free Will

The first fundamental act of choice in *Harry Potter* is the sorting procedure that each student goes through when arriving at Hogwarts. Each student is sorted “into one of four houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, or Slytherin” (Pond 187). The hat is further identifies the students’ “personalities, potentials, and temperaments” and use this as a basis when “sorting them into the community that best fits their strengths” (187). Pond further argues that the Sorting Hat “appears to tap into some force of fate, acquiring the power to foresee students’ yet unformed characters” (188). The Sorting Hat could therefore be argued to be in charge of each students’ time at the school, as well as their existence and their future. While the hat is demonstrated to draw from a sense of fate when making the decision of what house each student belongs to, the hat is still responsible for the final decisions it makes. I would, however, argue the Sorting Hat symbolises the existential fact that while “we are free to choose, we are not free to choose to choose” (Koestenbaum 74-5): the hat was created for the sole purpose of choosing one of four houses for each student that attends Hogwarts. Hence, even though the Sorting Hat makes a choice based on each student’s capabilities and potential, it does not have a choice in making that choice.

By making the Sorting Hat is responsible for deciding what house each student belongs to, Pond argues that Rowling “offers her characters predetermined futures” (188). This indicates that each student is particularly suited for one house, and the Sorting Hat will consequently choose that house for him/her. It does, however, appear as though it is easier to determine the appropriate house for some students than for others: “[s]ometimes […] the hat shout[s] out the house at once, but at others it [takes] a little while to decide” (Rowling, *Philosopher’s* 90). I would therefore argue that not all students have a predestined house: in the case of Hermione Granger it is revealed that the Sorting Hat considered putting her in Ravenclaw, even though it ultimately sorted her into Gryffindor. This suggests that it is not fate that determines what house each student belongs to: the hat takes the student’s capabilities into account and makes an informed decision based on their potential. It appears to come down to whatever house the Sorting Hat believes is most suitable, and it will choose that house over the other three.
This is further indicated as Harry is allowed to weigh in on what house he prefers. I would here claim that the Sorting Hat gives Harry a choice between Slytherin and Gryffindor, as it ponders what house would be more suitable. By providing Harry with its thoughts concerning the matter, it also gives him the opportunity to choose between them: when Harry begs it to not place him in Slytherin, the hat grants his wish. It thus appears as though it was Harry’s choice, rather than the hat’s: he wanted to belong in one house more than the other, and the Sorting Hat thus let him decide. Pond does, however, argue that while Harry’s choice appears to be taken into consideration the “text does not reveal to readers if other students whose sorting takes time receive the privilege of choice from the Sorting Hat” (188). In Koestenbaum’s view, however, “[a] man who says ‘I had no choice’ (and means it) has chosen himself to be a traitor to his human nature” (75): there is always an option of making a choice; it is only a matter of whether the person chooses to acknowledge the possibility of that choice. I would accordingly argue that Harry, by choosing one house over the other, recognized that he has a choice. It is not predetermined which house he should be in: rather, by choosing to state his opinion concerning the matter, and by advocating his free will, Harry achieves his freedom. It is, in turn, this action, the courage of achieving freedom, that determines that he belongs in Gryffindor, not Slytherin.

Koestenbaum further states that “[t]o act freely is to choose” (69): to choose is to be aware of one’s freedom. Since Hermione did not mirror Harry’s action, since she presumably did not request to be sorted into Gryffindor rather than Ravenclaw, I would claim that she allowed the Sorting Hat to make the decision of what house she belonged in. In this sense, Hermione does not achieve freedom. Harry’s action appears to be a rare exception: he interferes with the sorting procedure. In accordance with Koestenbaum’s view, I would thus argue that Harry’s actions are “self-determined – they are [his] own personal, individual creation” (70). The Sorting Hat does not offer the students a choice; rather, they have to achieve their freedom by realizing that there is a possible choice to be made. Harry thereby reaches a new awareness of the range of his free will: while he cannot control what the alternatives are, he can always make a choice within the limitations he is given. By making that first choice, by choosing Gryffindor over Slytherin, Harry has achieved his first sense of freedom. This is the first step in the process Harry goes through in order to accept and exercise his freedom, by making fundamental choices concerning his life.
Moreover, May’s view is that a “basic step in achieving inward freedom is ‘choosing one’s self’” (Man’s 168). Harry’s choice to be a Gryffindor rather than a Slytherin has established the kind of person he wants to be: he has chosen his self. In The Chamber of Secrets it is further claimed that “[i]t is our choices […] that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (Rowling, Chamber 245). Thus, by requesting that the Sorting Hat should put him in Gryffindor, Harry chooses who he is and who he wants to become. Bassham further argues that this suggests that “our abilities show us what we can do, but our choices reveal most clearly our qualities of character and what we care about most deeply” (Choices 170, emphasis in the original). While Pond suggests that Dumbledore “is telling Harry that choices only ‘show’ or reveal character; they do not make or create it” (194), I would, however, argue that it suggests that Harry’s choice reveals that he is capable of achieving his freedom by exercising his free will. He chose to voice his preference, and the choice concerning his self is therefore his, and not the Sorting Hat’s.

Escaping and Accepting Freedom

With the freedom Harry achieves for himself comes a sense of responsibility. Koestenbaum’s theory states that the responsibility of freedom comes with a sense of “guilt, and with guilt comes anxiety” (64). Hence, while the achievement, and exercising, of his freedom appears to be beneficial for Harry’s development, there is simultaneously a need to overcome the anxiety that might be caused by a newfound responsibility. By making choices concerning his self, and his future, Harry is burdened with a responsibility that he has to accept, along with his free will. Since Koestenbaum states that “it is easier to repress [anxiety] than to bear it proudly” (64), I would here claim that the repression of the anxiety of freedom is portrayed in terms of “the Imperius Curse” (Rowling, Goblet 188). When placed under the curse, the victim is relieved of any responsibility for his/her actions: it removes the ability to make one’s own choices, and the individual is therefore relieved of the possible anxiety that his/her free will and freedom might cause. Since the wizard who casts the spell exerts “[t]otal control” over his victim, it is difficult to determine “who [is] being forced to act, and who [is] acting of their own free will” (188).

As Harry is placed under the Imperius Curse, in order “to demonstrate its power and to see whether [he can] resist its effects” (Rowling, Goblet 203), he is thus relieved of the responsibility of making his own choices. As long as he is under the
influence of the Imperius Curse, Harry is not responsible for his actions. This means that as long as he does not wish to exercise his free will he will do whatever Professor Moody tells him to. As Harry is placed under the curse, he is overcome with “the most wonderful feeling” (204). This indicates that the responsibility of freedom is removed from his consciousness: “Harry [feels] a floating sensation as every thought and worry in his head was wiped gently away, leaving nothing but a vague, untraceable happiness” (204). Hence, as long as he does not fight the curse, he can remain in a state free of worry: any concern he has had about his existence is gone. Although Harry feels free, due to his lack of responsibility for his life, the Imperius Curse rather appears to have placed him in a state where he has to fight harder for his freedom than before. I would attain that this mirrors “the avoidance of responsibility and commitment” (McDonald 218) that Sartre referred to as bad faith. This is further stated to be “a form of self-deception and denial of one’s existential reality” (218). Harry is accordingly given the opportunity to ignore his possible freedom: he can remain in the blissful and worriless state that the curse has put him in, and consequently escape the reality of making his own choices and his free will. The Imperius Curse can thus be used to hide the freedom from the individual on who it is placed. It is, in turn, the total escape from freedom and free will.

While the Imperius Curse allows Harry to hide from his freedom, his need to exercise his free will does, however, appear to be too strongly developed for the curse to hold. It is further stated that “[t]he Imperius Curse can be fought […] but it takes real strength of character, and not everyone’s got it” (Rowling, Goblet 189). Since Harry appears to have developed his free will, and achieved freedom, from the moment he came to Hogwarts, he has had enough time to accept the responsibility that comes with it. Furthermore, Harry does not appear to let go of his free will as easily as his classmates; as he hears “Mad-Eye Moody’s voice, echoing in some distant chamber of his empty brain” ordering him to act according to his instructions, “[a]nother voice [awakes] in the back of his brain” (204) questioning these demands. As Moody’s instructions resume, the objections in Harry’s mind grow stronger. This would imply that his free will is strong enough to object to the effects of the curse. As he tries to disobey Moody’s order, Harry jumps, while at the same time trying “to prevent himself from jumping” (204). Although he fights it, he does not appear to possess a free will strong enough to break the curse completely; instead of the previous relief, Harry experiences a “considerable pain” (204). Harry thus appears to
experience far more pain from not being in charge of his own actions, and the attempt to regain his freedom, than the responsibility to be in charge of his own choices. Koestenbaum’s view is here applicable: even though “freedom may be painful and may lead to guilt and anxiety, it is not as painful as the escape from freedom” (64). Thus, while Harry might experience a great amount of anxiety, due to the responsibilities that come with the acceptance of one’s freedom, the Imperius Curse appears to cause him a greater amount of pain. Which in turn would indicate that he experiences the escape of freedom, that the Imperius Curse provides, to be far worse than the responsibility of exercising his freedom.

By fighting the Imperius Curse, Harry’s actions represent those of an individual who resists the escape from freedom. While he does experience the pleasures of not being responsible for his own actions, his free will takes the upper hand and he fights for his freedom. I would here argue that when Harry accepts his freedom he “gets over his anxiety; he is relieved from his symptoms because he surrenders the possibilities which caused his anxiety” (May, Discovery 165). This suggests that Harry, rather than being limited by the responsibilities brought on by his free will, comes to realize that by achieving his freedom, he has gained more opportunities to make his own choices. Rather than surrendering to the will of others, he might instead be in charge of his own future. I would consequently claim that Harry’s fight against the Imperius Curse is a symbol of the acceptance of the anxiety that follows the freedom he first achieved during his sorting. Thus, by accepting his freedom, Harry is one step closer to the most fundamental decision of his life: in order to fulfil his role in the narrative he has to be able to choose to sacrifice his life in order to rid the world of Voldemort.

**Fate and Free Will**

The prophecy foretelling a future feud between Harry and Voldemort presents the most complex negotiation between determinism and free will. It is revealed to Harry that a prophecy concerning him and Voldemort was “made shortly before [his] birth” (Rowling, Order 740), resulting in the murder of Harry’s parents and the attempted murder of Harry. According to Pond, the prophecy “reveals the competition between the forces of fate and free will in J. K. Rowling’s fictitious world” (181). There is thus, in Pond’s view, an ongoing battle between fate and free will, as shown by the prophecy. The existence of the prophecy would thus indicate that both Harry’s and
Voldemort’s existences are determined by fate. Once Trelawney uttered the prophecy their fates would thus seem to have been decided for them. This would entail that both Harry and Voldemort have to accept their fate: they are not in charge of their own existence, nor their selves. I would here apply May’s claim that “Nietzsche spoke often of ‘loving fate.’ He meant that man can face fate directly, can know it, dare it, fondle it, challenge it, quarrel with it – and love it” (Love 270). By loving and accepting his fate, Harry would give up all possibility of freedom and free will: by accepting that his existence has already been determined this would entail that Harry has no responsibility for his actions or his choices. I would, however, argue that the most determining aspect of the prophecy is not that it has been made, but that Voldemort chose to believe in it. Due to believing that the prophecy was to come true, he chose to act according to this belief. It is only due to this choice that the prophecy ends up coming true. Thus signifying the importance of free will, rather than fate.

Voldemort believed that the prophecy foretold his defeat, and that the only way for him to escape was to kill Harry: the child to whom the prophecy was referring. But this appears to be an incorrect interpretation. The true meaning of the prophecy was that “the person who has the only chance of conquering Lord Voldemort for good was born at the end of July, nearly sixteen years [previously]. This boy would be born to parents who had already defied Voldemort three times” (Rowling, Order 741). This does not necessarily mean Harry: based on the provided content of the prophecy it “could have applied to two wizard boys”, and while one of them was indeed Harry, the other one was Neville Longbottom. It had thus not been decided to whom the prophecy was referring: it was not a matter of fate, but rather a matter of choice. Since “Voldemort himself would mark him as his equal” (742, emphasis in the original) it is suggested that Voldemort was the only one who could make the prophecy come true: he was the only one who could choose which of the two children the prophecy would end up referring to. By choosing Harry over Neville, Voldemort sets the prophecy in motion: he makes it come true, and he also determined his only possible vanquisher. This is further indicated by the claim that “[i]f Voldemort had never heard of the prophecy” it would not “have been fulfilled” (Half-Blood 476). I would here apply Koestenbaum’s claim that

To recognize that whatever man does is his own free choice has the salutary consequence of preventing him from blaming unfeeling and nonhuman fact. Blame makes sense only where free will exists: the
facts are not free – but man is. To blame the facts is to choose to ignore the subjective choice-aspect of the situation (Koestenbaum 82-3)

This would thus indicate that by hearing the contents of the prophecy, and by acting according to the belief that it will come true, Voldemort in fact ensures that the information that the prophecy foretells is true: his free will has caused the predictions of the prophecy to come true. It is further claimed that by murdering Harry’s father Voldemort provided him with a desire for revenge, and when Lily was murdered Harry was provided with the “protection that her love for him ensured” (Rowling, *Half-Blood* 476-7). Thus, Voldemort “not only handpicked the man most likely to finish him, he handed him [the] uniquely deadly weapons” (477) he would need in order to fulfil the task. This would consequently indicate that “Voldemort himself created his worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do!” (477). It is thus due to Voldemort’s free will, not fate, that Harry is “the Chosen One” (76) – he is chosen by Voldemort. Although this could be interpreted as a genre-specific tool to help the narrative move forward, I would argue that the establishing of Harry as the Chosen One rather indicates the on-going battle between fate and free will.

While Voldemort’s choices function as a catalyst, a belief in fate is an underlying factor in the unfolding of the narrative. Pond further argues that even though such evidence as Harry’s decisions, Dumbledore’s insistence on moral action, and Voldemort’s choice of Harry over Neville Longbottom often convinces readers of a world enjoying free will, [...] such magical tools as the Sorting Hat [...] and prophecies provide equal evidence for fate’s power as it does for free will. (Pond 182)

Despite the claim that prophecies and the Sorting Hat indicate that fate is the most determining factor in *Harry Potter*, it is, however, stated that not “every prophecy in the Hall of Prophecy has been fulfilled” (Rowling, *Half-Blood* 476). Prophecies could thus be argued to be indications of what could happen, not of what will happen: if Voldemort had not exercised his free will the prophecy would never have come true. Both Harry and Voldemort’s choices would thus indicate that it is a matter of free will; Harry chose to be sorted into Gryffindor; Voldemort chose to act according to the prophecy, causing it to come true. Harry also has to exercise his free will in order for Voldemort to be vanquished: if Harry did not feel the need to conquer him, the prediction of the prophecy would have been futile. This would thus indicate that every situation allows for the exercising of free will. Pond refers to Nietzsche’s theories concerning fate and free will by claiming that
individuals can remain inscribed by fate while exercising free will within its boundaries. To create this space, then, fate predicts based on an individual’s personality, and that individual may react to fate by fulfilling it. In this way, Harry fulfills his destiny because he would have done so even without a prophecy foretelling his future. (Pond 182)

This suggests that while the prophecy has been made, and allows for free will to exist within the boundaries of that prediction, Harry’s freedom allows him to choose whether he wants to act in accordance with the prediction. In turn, this would indicate that while Harry tries to honor his free will, Voldemort’s choices serves as a determining factor. Since Voldemort still chooses to act according to the prediction: he “continues to set store by the prophecy” (Rowling, Half-Blood 479), it appears as though Voldemort’s free ultimately drives Harry to fulfil his end of the prediction. Voldemort therefore embodies fate, while Harry still tries to achieve his freedom and exercise his free will. Harry is, however, aware that “one of [them] is going to end up killing the other” (479), and he further acts according to this knowledge; if he is not prepared to die, he will have to kill Voldemort.

We are told that Harry has to die in order to vanquish Voldemort; it is only when all the Horcruxes, and the piece of Voldemort’s soul in Harry, are destroyed that Voldemort can truly die. Pond claims that there is “no room for doubt; Harry has no choice” (Pond 187). I would, however, suggest that this is not the case, as there is always room for free will: Harry can always choose not to die, to refrain from sacrificing his own life in order to save the lives of others. In order to make this decision it is important that Harry has been allowed to test the boundaries of his free will, and his freedom. From the moment he achieved freedom during his Sorting he has made choices concerning his self and his existence. The choice of whether he wants to act in accordance to the predictions of the prophecy is his most fundamental act of free will. Koestenbaum further claims that “[o]nce it is clear that man cannot avoid responsibility, regardless of how he chooses, he is better prepared to freely accept this responsibility” (83). I would accordingly insist that Harry chooses to sacrifice his life for a greater cause than his own existence: due to the prophecy, we see how Harry conforms to the existential process of “accept[ing] responsibility for fulfilling one’s own destiny [by] accepting the fact that [he] must make his own basic choices himself” (May, Man’s 169). The choice to die determines Harry’s entire existence: while he chooses to die he does not do so because he wants to die, but rather because he is prepared to die in order to save the world. Harry’s thus
symbolises the “willingness to accept full responsibility – that is, responsibility for all the implications of [his] actions – complements the previous characterization of free will” (Koestenbaum 83, emphasis in the original).

Conclusion

Using existential psychology, I have here attempted to achieve a comprehensive character analysis of Harry and Voldemort. It is clear that *Harry Potter* engages with fundamental existential themes. As I have tried to demonstrate, existential psychology provides us with a powerful vocabulary to explore different facets of this thematic. I have further tried to prove that an existential approach provides a more comprehensive character analysis than has been achieved by previous scholarship. By focusing on the characters’ entire being existential themes, such as death, love, and free will, are united as determining aspects for a character’s existence.

Although Harry and Voldemort are argued to represent two juxtaposed ends of the existential spectrum, due to their widely different approaches to fundamental aspects of existence, their existential journeys appear to serve their beings in rather similar ways. Both are faced with an existential anxiety, due to early confrontations with death, but are affected by it in two drastically different, but equally important, ways. Voldemort succumbs to the fear of his impending nonbeing, while Harry uses his early trauma to confront and accept his fear, thereby annihilating the threat against his very existence. These differing coping-strategies are what both distinguishes Harry and Voldemort from each other, but also what determines the basis on which their beings are built. Since one’s ideal being is determined by what potential one has, Harry and Voldemort’s beings cannot be judged on the same principles. Although Harry’s approach to *his* existence constitutes a fulfilling of *his* potential, Voldemort’s potential is his own, and cannot be compared to Harry’s. According to the premises he has, Voldemort could, rather, be argued to fulfil his true potential – or, at the very least, the potential he perceives himself to have. However, Voldemort’s perception of an ideal being does not coincide with the ideal shared by those in this fictional world. When a moral framework is added a true difference between Harry and Voldemort can be detected: since morality is an apparent component in *Harry Potter* it not only influences the narrative’s portrayal of the two characters, but also determines the grounds on which this analysis was made. This morality is also present in existential
psychology, due to the Christian undertone in this theory. It is this Christian and moral framework that divides *Harry Potter* into good and evil – and it is consequently on these premises that Harry is perceived as an ideal being, whereas Voldemort is not.

I would therefore maintain that Harry *should* be interpreted as the ideal being who has managed to exist completely in all three modes of the world simultaneously. He represents a being who has completely accepted his freedom, possesses a love for others, and achieves acceptance of nonbeing, and therefore also anxiety. Indicating that the four major aspects of existential psychology are dependent on each other: they are intertwined, and provide Harry with the tools he needs in order to fulfil his potential and become an ideal being. Although Voldemort’s presence in the three modes is different than Harry’s it does however appear to be apparent – in accordance with Voldemort’s needs and definitions concerning what these modes signifies. Since they do not share the same perception of what constitutes a balanced relationship with oneself, with others and with nature, their presences in the Eigenwelt, Mitwelt and the Umwelt are somewhat different. Voldemort’s attempt to overcome death causes him to lose his presence in the world, if only temporarily. Even though a simultaneous presence in the three modes is important it is not the sole component in becoming an ideal being. Although present in the world, Voldemort fears his existence, and this is one of the reasons why he fails to become an ideal being.

Harry manages to do what Voldemort does not: he accepts existence, and therefore also overcomes, anxiety. Voldemort, on the other hand, tries to overcome the fundamental fact that everyone will, at some moment in time, cease to exist. With death as the catalyst for both Harry and Voldemort’s struggle with anxiety, it is also what connects them to each other: the reason why they are constantly juxtaposed against each other in their existential struggles. Voldemort’s existence is plagued by anxiety: he fears death, love, and freedom, and attempts to escape them all. It is this attempt and desire to overcome nonbeing and escape anxiety that could be interpreted as the potential Voldemort attempts, and to some extent succeeds, to fulfil. If it were not for the evident morality in both *Harry Potter* and existential psychology, Voldemort would have been able to fulfil his true potential. Now, rather than becoming an ideal being, he becomes himself. Harry, on the other hand, accepts his existence and this acceptance is what overpowers his anxiety. This is further evident in his acceptance of both love and freedom: they aid him in his destruction of Voldemort, and therefore also in taking control of his existence.
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