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From “Abnormal” Orphan to Celebrated Hero:  
A discussion of Harry’s development in J.K. Rowling’s  
*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*

He'll be famous – a legend – I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter Day in the future – there will be books written about Harry – every child in our world will know his name! (Rowling 20)

When these words were written fifteen years ago the author had no idea how true they would become. Now, in 2012, the Harry Potter series is well-known almost worldwide. The books took the world by storm, created a whole world of its own and were, and indeed are still, read by thousands of people around the globe. As the books have turned into a phenomenon, this essay will explore the character of one of our most beloved fictional characters, Harry Potter himself. The purpose of this essay is to investigate Harry's character in J.K. Rowling's first novel and to show that it is his character that is one of the chief reasons for the enormous popularity of the book, and indeed, of the entire series. The various differences in Harry's role are well-illustrated by close reading of significant passages in different parts of the novel.

Harry is different from other people because he belongs to two worlds; he is however, a native of neither. He does not belong in the muggle world because he has magical powers, he is an orphan who is loved by no one, and is frequently bullied. Neither does he belong in the magical world because of his lack of knowledge about magic and its powers; he does not know anything about wizard rules, laws and culture. In understanding how Harry differs from the other characters in the novel, the reader is better able to appreciate his special characteristics as well as the choices he makes, which, as this essay will demonstrate, are based on his particular personality and the various social pressures brought to bear on him. It is hoped that the following discussion will serve as a basis for a greater understanding of Harry's character as it develops throughout the series. Harry's dual belonging, i.e. to the muggle and the magical worlds, affects his personality and his relationships with others.

The term "muggle" was created by J.K Rowling to describe a non-magical race and corresponds to the definition provided by Hagrid in the novel (Rowling 62). In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "muggle" is defined as "a person who possesses no magical powers". This term was, in fact, first introduced in the *Oxford Dictionary* as a result of the great impact of the series on the literary scene (*Britannica*). Magic, on the other hand, is an abstraction that can have many different meanings depending on who the

interpreter is and how she/he defines magic, either as illusions or something completely different. This essay, however, adopts the definition of magic provided by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “a concept used to describe a mode of rationality or way of thinking that looks to invisible forces to influence events, effect change in material conditions, or present the **illusion** [original emphasis] of change” (Britannica)

While the Harry Potter series is relatively new, it has attracted some critical attention, particularly with respect to the character of the protagonist himself. Alison Lurie, Roni Natov, Julia Eccleshare and Neil Mulholland have addressed different aspects of Harry’s character and development. Natov (2001), for instance, discusses the influence of Harry’s early upbringing, and more specifically, how his status as an orphan influences his attitude and development. Initially, she argues that “like most orphans, Harry has little sense of having any power at all” (Natov 310), though at Hogwarts he prospers and he learns that he is “freer to discover his own powers” (Natov 314).

Mulholland, together with several different professional psychologists (2007) focuses on Harry’s actions and behaviour from a psychological perspective, where they cover and discuss some major areas of psychology. One such area is whether Harry’s behaviour stems from a real post-traumatic stress disorder or if he only acts as an ordinary teenager.

Eccleshare (2002) discusses the different reasons behind the popularity of the Harry Potter series; she analyses J.K. Rowling’s writing style and the purpose behind the publication of said series. She further argues that the books’ popularity is in no small degree due to the complexity of Harry’s character and the magical world he lives in. Eccleshare also relates the series to other contemporary children’s books and examines how the books both adapt to and challenges the literary conventions.

Lurie (2003), on the other hand, compares Harry’s life with that of Cinderella; both characters grow up with relatives that kept them in the dark about their biological parents and its consequences on them. Lurie also puts focus on how the conservative Christians have raised questions and concerns about the use of magic and witchcraft in different children’s’ tales, with emphasis on the Harry Potter series.

In order to investigate the enigma that is Harry Potter, some aspects of his personality will be taken into consideration, developments in Harry’s character will be analysed, how the two different worlds, i.e. muggle and magical, influence his character, and how other characters’ perceptions of him vary. One feature is the different roles

allotted Harry in the two worlds with a view to establishing which of the two suits him better.

Rebecca Lukens argues that a round character is defined by his or her many attributives such as appearance, speech, actions and by others' comments (Lukens 77-78). Harry is therefore, based on Lukens's definition, a round character as all of the above mentioned characteristics can be found on his person. He is initially described as "small and skinny for his age", with a thin face and knobby knees (Rowling 27). His appearance is a result of neglect and mistreatment by the Dursley's. His "smallness" refers not only to his physical appearance but also his personality. Until his eleventh birthday, Harry had lived in Dudley's shadow; he has been forced to wear Dudley's old clothes (Rowling 27), and though not starved, he has always been given less food than Dudley, and even had his food (as well as everything else) taken from him by his cousin (Rowling 135). While Dudley, on the other hand, is showered with love and affection by his parents, Harry is treated as a "slug" (Rowling 30) unworthy of his family's time and forced to live in a small cupboard under the stairs (Rowling 26) – a cupboard which only fits someone as "small" as Harry.

The Dursleys' maltreatment of Harry leaves him vulnerable and with a low self-esteem. This is marked by his reticence when he is around the Dursleys. He speaks rarely for fear of being frowned upon or shouted at. Nor does he expect people to believe him (Rowling 31). The primary reason for Harry's insecurities is the way his aunt and uncle interact with him. They do not address him in a parental manner (though they are his guardians) but rather as someone they strongly dislike, screeching, snapping and barking at him (Rowling 26-27). Critics such as Roni Natov argue that the behaviour of the Dursleys' towards Harry is nothing short of psychological abuse and a perfect example of how not to treat a child (Natov 312). This type of treatment leaves Harry unsure of himself and his capacities, a trend that continues throughout the series. He frequently questions his own abilities and even voices them to Hagrid, stating that he is sure to be sorted in Hufflepuff because it is the house for "o' duffers" (Rowling 90) and later to Ron when sitting on the train to Hogwarts: "I bet I'm the worst in the class" (Rowling 112). Because the Dursleys have never cared much for Harry, he has not learned to believe in himself and does not expect to excel at anything.

While living in the muggle world, Harry was taught to have low expectations in life and learned early that he is unwanted. Alison Lurie compares Harry's life with the Cinderella tale, saying it is a "classic Cinderlad situation" (Lurie 114). By this she means

that Harry is a poor orphaned child who is despised and abused by his relatives. Lurie further compares the Dursleys' reluctance to tell Harry about his parents to Cinderella's equally reluctant stepmother (Lurie 114). The lack of knowledge about his parents alienates Harry from those in both the muggle and magical world, and contributes to his feeling that he has no place in the world and will never be appreciated.

The low expectations that characterise Harry's everyday life are demonstrated by his certainty that Hagrid must have made a mistake about his being a wizard. Initially, Harry cannot see how it is possible for him to be someone other than one "clouted by Dudley and bullied by Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon" (Rowling 67). Nor does he believe that he, as a baby, has defeated the "greatest sorcerer in the world" because he notes that his cousin keeps beating and kicking him as if he were a football (Rowling 67). Harry's uncertainties are further demonstrated by his deep fears of waking up on the morning after his eleventh birthday and realising that Hagrid's visit was nothing more than a mere dream. He is confident that he is still in Privet Drive with his aunt castigating him (Rowling 71). Wind Goodfriend argues that "it is clear that the Dursley home environment has taught Harry [...] that nothing good will ever happen to him" (Goodfriend 85). For this reason, he dares not wake up in case he is in the "spider-infested cupboard" (Lurie 114) under the stairs. Even after confirming that Hagrid is indeed a real human being,<sup>1</sup> Harry still does not believe what he has experienced on his eleventh birthday as real. He contemplates whether or not the Dursley's have "cooked up" some "huge joke" on him (Rowling 78).

Having learned early in life that he is extraordinary, Harry unconsciously demonstrates this fact by searching for an empty compartment while boarding the Hogwarts Express. This action is prompted not only by his aunt's and uncle's treatment at home but also from his experiences at school, where he has neither friends nor a teacher in whom to confide (Rowling, 38). As Harry has learned to depend on himself alone, he seeks a secluded place where no-one can bother him. Goodfriend identifies this kind of action as "purposeful isolation" (Goodfriend 92), arguing that Harry tries not only to avoid making friends, but also attempts to evade people in general (Goodfriend 92). Though this trait can have negative effects on Harry, making him a loner, Julia Eccleshare argues that it should also be seen as a virtue, marking Harry as "emotionally

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<sup>1</sup> In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, it is revealed that although he is human, Hagrid is also part giant, with a giantess mother and a human father (Rowling, ch 23: The Yule Bal)

robust” (Eccleshare 20). His “fortitude and stoicism” also enable him to defend himself against Dudley’s threats and regular beatings (Eccleshare 20).

Harry’s life at the Dursleys is not only marked by the latter’s unwillingness to care for him and raise him as theirs, but also by their lack of love for him. Treating Harry as something “abnormal” (Rowling 63) and Dudley as a king further contributes to Harry’s insecurity, yet it results at the same time in Harry wanting to prove his worth.<sup>2</sup> Eccleshare argues that the parents’ indulgence of and pure devotion to Dudley leaves him “overweight and materialistic” (Eccleshare 96). Harry, on the other hand, learns that it is in fact a blessing not to be loved by his only living relatives because he is worth more than their love (Eccleshare 96). Though Harry’s self-esteem is not great, he still strives to be good at something. As he gains knowledge about his parents and their love for him, Harry understands that he does not need the Dursleys’ affection because he has his parents’ love, even if they are dead.

Upon learning that he is a wizard, Harry is confronted with a new world of which, not surprisingly, he has no knowledge. The lack of familiarity with everything magic is the starting point of a new life and a chance to leave the Dursleys behind. Though Harry has no friends or acquaintances initially, he is used to being alone and is therefore not afraid to start his schooling at Hogwarts. The introduction to the new world is the beginning of a “new” Harry. While he was the “perfect underdog” (Eccleshare 22) in the muggle world, he quickly rises to be an important figure in the magical one. There he learns his true worth and even discovers that he has some hidden talents, not least of which is being a good Seeker in the game of Quidditch.

The first time Harry enters Diagon Alley, the reader is presented with Ollivander’s praises and predictions about great accomplishments from him (Rowling 96). Analysing Harry through the wand maker’s statement that “the wand chooses the wizard”, the reader learns via J.K. Rowling’s official Harry Potter website *Pottermore* that a wand made of Holly “often chooses owners who are engaged in some dangerous and often spiritual quest” (Rowling, *Pottermore* n. pag). A Holly wand combined with a phoenix feather is also one of the rarest combinations as “the wood's volatility conflicts strangely with the phoenix's detachment” due to the phoenix’s hard-tamed qualities<sup>3</sup> (Rowling, *Pottermore*, n. pag). When these two are successfully combined “nothing and nobody should stand in

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<sup>2</sup> Harry’s need of proving his worth will be discussed later on in the essay.

<sup>3</sup> “Phoenix feather wands are always the pickiest when it comes to potential owners, for the creature from which they are taken is one of the most independent and detached in the world. These wands are the hardest to tame and to personalise, and their allegiance is usually hard won” (Rowling, *Pottermore* n. pag.)

their [the owner's] way” as the wizard's power will be great (Rowling, *Pottermore*, n. pag). The knowledge of the wand thus provides the reader with information about Harry's new life in the magical world; great deeds are to be expected from him in the future. This information also instigates Harry's new adventurous life.

The wand is not the only magical object that provides the readers with information about Harry's character. The Sorting Hat is a useful tool for analysing Harry's qualities as its purpose is to allocate a house to the students based on their personality traits. From the hat's song, the reader elicits that “There's nothing hidden in your head / The Sorting Hat can't see” (Rowling 129); the hat can read the mind of the person wearing it. When Harry wears the Hat, it is revealed that he is a very courageous and talented boy with an intelligent mind (Rowling 133). However, there is one characteristic that is more conspicuous than the others: “a nice thirst to prove” himself (Rowling 133). These different characteristics will be clarified and analysed in the following paragraphs.

The house of Gryffindor is known as the home of the brave, chivalrous and the daring. It thus comes as no surprise that Harry as a member of the House of Gryffindor is a courageous boy. Lurie argues that a character's name contributes to an understanding of the personality. She lists names of characters from earlier English literature with the name Harry<sup>4</sup> and registers their similarities, particularly with respect to their bravery and charming manners (Lurie 115). By his name alone, it is clear that one of Harry's outstanding characteristics is his bravery. A person's zodiac also contributes to an understanding of a person, argues Roger Highfield. He claims that by learning that Harry is a Leo, some conclusions about his personality can be drawn, i.e. he is confident and brave (Highfield 160).

Harry's brave nature is demonstrated even in his pre-magical days, when he defends himself against his cousin's and uncle's harassments. Even though he is bullied and beaten by Dudley and his gang, he still attempts to protect himself and sometimes even manages to provoke them. One instance where Harry's courageous manner is shown is when the letter from Hogwarts arrives and Vernon tries to take it from its rightful owner. In spite of his awareness of the fact that he might be punished for it, Harry still struggles against Vernon and even takes part in a “confused fighting” to defend his right to the letter (Rowling 47).

Although the bravery Harry displays at Hogwarts is of a different sort (as the ordeals he encounters are more dangerous than Vernon's and Petunia's rage), there are

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<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare's Prince Hal and Harry Hotspur from *Henry IV*

some circumstances where the situations are similar to those relating to Dudley and his gang. In these cases, Harry's protective manner not only concerns his own safety, but his friends' as well. He strives to defend his friends against Draco Malfoy, who constantly attempts to make Harry and his friends' lives a living hell. One episode in which Harry's bravery is clearly demonstrated is when he successfully manages to catch Neville's Remembrall at the risk of being expelled (Rowling 162-164). This act shows that Harry takes care of his friends and is willing to help them at all costs.

Despite his young age, Harry encounters many dangerous situations. By facing Quirrell (and Voldemort) "Harry shows bravery that few people can match" (Shmoop Editorial Team, n. pag). This notion can be further strengthened by Lukens's argument that the action of a character defines who they are (Lukens 81). The reader can thus recognise Harry as a brave boy on the basis of his actions.

As Harry enters a new, and up until his eleventh birthday, unknown world, he recognises his ignorance of it. Philip Nel argues that although Harry is "initially worried that his muggle upbringing will place him at a disadvantage among Hogwarts students, he discovers that he does have talents" (Nel 37). One of these aptitudes becomes evident when Harry is flying a broom for the first time. Harry learns that he has natural talent; his self-esteem grows, and he experiences something that could never be enjoyed in the muggle world. The new-found Quidditch flair contributes to Harry being more secure about his own abilities; this is a great contrast with his life in the Muggle School, where he was always the last to be chosen in sports lessons (Rowling 132). Now however, he is the youngest of the Hogwarts's Quidditch players in a century (Rowling 166), and an exceptional talent. For the first time in his life, Harry is recognised for his achievements. In addition to the credit, Harry also gains some new information about his father, as McGonagall enlightens him that James "was an excellent Quidditch player himself" (Rowling 166).

The Sorting Hat recognises Harry as a boy with "not a bad mind" (Rowling 133). This tells the reader that even though Harry is not the cleverest boy, he is not an imbecile either: he is intellectually average, with a courage that is outstanding. Having previously feared beginning at Hogwarts due to insecurity, Harry notices after only a week into the school term that he is not "miles behind everyone else" (Rowling 148). His lack of knowledge about the magical world is not a hinder to his academic studies as "there was so much to learn that even people like Ron [who have a magical upbringing] didn't have

much of a head start” (Rowling 148). Despite his muggle upbringing, Harry manages to achieve good grades (Rowling 330).

Moreover, the reader learns at the beginning of the story, as Hagrid bellows to Vernon, that Harry knows “nothin’ abou’ – about ANYTHING” (Rowling 59). Harry, offended by this outburst, defends himself by declaring that he knows “*some* things [original emphasis]” (Rowling 59). The reader thus learns that Harry’s grades at school are good enough for a pass (Rowling 59). Lurie states that a character with flaws is one of the books many attractions. She argues that though Harry excels at Quidditch, he is only an average student; it is Hermione who has the brains (Lurie 117).

There are several instances where Harry demonstrates one of the qualities given by the Hat in order to prove his true worth, not only to himself, but also to his peers and his dead parents. The Sorting Hat instantly recognises the longing to prove himself as one of Harry’s deepest desires (Rowling 133). This aspiration is a result of the Dursleys’ condescending behaviour, which has left him with little faith in himself, and for that reason, Harry tries his utmost to be successful in every challenge he encounters. His eagerness for success can in fact be the sole reason for his prosperity. Judith Robertson remarks that “the wish allows expression of the child’s ancient desire to possess distinctive strength of extraordinary proportion” (Robertson 202). She means that when wishing for something strongly, a child like Harry can be spared “grotesque disappointment” (Robertson 202) and achieve greatness (Robertson 202). Evidence supporting this fact is, for example, when Harry and his friends avoid running into Filch (and receive the inevitable detention) the night of the Midnight Duel (Rowling ch. 9).

Harry’s eagerness to prove his worth is also demonstrated by examining his actions over the course of the story. Harry is not ardent to be famous for something he does not remember doing (Rowling 97). As the magical community expects greatness from Harry, he must act accordingly. Karen Farrington explains that Harry is “reluctant to have greatness thrust upon him”<sup>5</sup> (Farrington 22); meaning that he is aware of people’s high expectations of him. Natov carries Farrington’s argument one step further and argues that a responsibility this large placed on a young boy’s shoulders makes him fear his own power and results in his being unsure of how to use his own gifts wisely (Natov 319). Therefore, without guidance, Harry strives, whether consciously or unconsciously, to

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<sup>5</sup> The quotation originates from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, spoken by Malvolio: “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them” (*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Wordsworth library collection: 2007, p.654)

excel at everything he does. This trait often aids him in ugly situations that are not suited for a boy his age.

Besides functioning as a grouping device at the Sorting Ceremony, The Sorting Hat also contributes to Harry's feeling that he belongs somewhere. Through the Hat, Harry learns that he, just like his fellow Gryffindors, is recognised for the brave and loyal boy that he is. The result of the group arrangement conveys a safe haven for Harry as he can socialise with congenial people and simultaneously have the opportunity to be himself. Melissa J. Beers and Kevin J. Apple, however, argue that the sorting of the children is not only positive as "each group is unambiguously associated with specific stereotypes" (Beers 37), killing off the individuality of the children. Furthermore, they argue that the group division creates a distance between the students and this leads to prejudices against people from the other Houses (Beers 38). Nevertheless, the shared attributes of the children makes it easier for them to get along with each other and also distributes a sense of belongingness.

Discovering that he is a wizard and moving to live at Hogwarts is a life changing experience for Harry. Danielle Provenzano and Richard Heyman argue that the move to Hogwarts qualifies as a "'life chance' that rescues Harry from an abusive home while simultaneously offering him a fresh academic start" (Provenzano 113). Besides being merely a school, Eccleshare argues that Hogwarts functions as a provider of physical and emotional sanctuary for the students (Eccleshare 49). The school gives the students a considerable freedom of "decision-making" (Eccleshare 50), teaching the students to be independent and confident in themselves. The liberty Harry experiences at Hogwarts is something new to him, as he had previously been forced to do everything his aunt and uncle demanded. Hogwarts also represents the first "home" Harry has ever had. Natov argues that Harry has "never been at home at home" (Natov 318) due to the fact that he never fitted in anywhere in the muggle world: not at home, or at school; neither has he learned to experience friendship (Natov 318).

Upon first introduction to the magical realm, Harry meets Hagrid, who is the first person who is kind to him. After that, the majority of the magical people Harry is acquainted with are pleasant, even if some are malevolent towards him, such as Draco Malfoy. The changes in Harry's life at Hogwarts are therefore many: he is appreciated for the first time, praised for his excellent Quidditch skills, makes friends and even acquires a father figure in the form of Professor Dumbledore. Hogwarts is one of the reasons why

Harry ascertains an understanding of his own worth. Without the Dursley's constant disdain, Harry's self-esteem thrives and he experiences true happiness.

The joy Harry experiences derives, among other things, from him feeling liberated and properly nourished. He is presented with a comfortable four-poster bed (as opposed to his old cupboard) and as much food as he can possibly consume. Though the Dursleys did not actually starve Harry, they did not feed him properly either and they never interfered when Dudley took Harry's food from him (Rowling 135). Robertson argues that the supplies of food "emphasize[s] the presence at Hogwarts of a child's elemental need for relationship and reassurance" (Robertson 200). Food thus represents something more profound, namely comfort and reassurance of a better life.

Among the many positive changes Hogwarts brings to Harry's life, one is particularly prominent: the discovery of the Mirror of Erised (Erised spelled backwards is Desire). The inscription on the mirror: "Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi" (Rowling 225), which is an anagram, serves a purpose if reversed: I show not your face but your heart's desire. Making sense of the inscription provides insight into Harry's character. The Mirror allows Harry to see his deepest desire: his parents, whom he has never seen before. It is initially difficult for Harry to understand who the people in the Mirror around him are; however, he gradually realises that it must be his family as they share many of his external attributes (Rowling 225-226). Never having had the opportunity to learn about his parents (due to the Dursley's disinclination to talk about James and Lily (Rowling 37)), Harry seizes and savours this treasure.

The realisation of the Mirror's significance makes Harry stare "hungrily" (Rowling 226) and press himself "flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them" (Rowling 226). The poignant description of Harry's deep-rooted yearning to be with his parents administers a "powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, and half terrible sadness" (Rowling 226). Robertson argues that "Rowling elaborates the terrible feelings of loss and sadness that attend separation" (Robertson 207), explaining that Harry is "captivated by the mirror and keeps feeding upon its image" (Robertson 207). This notion comes from Dumbledore's clarification of the Mirror's dangerous compartment that "men have wasted away before it [...] or been driven mad" (Rowling 231). According to Alice Mills, Harry displays symptoms of becoming an addict to the "mirror's consoling vision" (Mills 298); it is only through Dumbledore's interference that Harry stops his obsessive behaviour.

Besides being the home of the Mirror, Hogwarts is also the place where Harry makes friends for the first time. Due to Dudley's influence on the children at the Muggle school "Harry had no one. Everybody knew that Dudley's gang hated that odd Harry Potter in his baggy old clothes and broken glasses, and nobody liked to disagree with Dudley's gang" (Rowling 38). At Hogwarts, however, Dudley is nowhere to be found and Harry can thus befriend people who do not fear his cousin's wrath. Although some people only want to associate with Harry for the sole reason of his celebrity status, he manages to find two great friends in Ron and Hermione.

Both Ron and Hermione come from families that do not suppress their children, which is illustrated by the way the family members interact with each other. In Hermione's case, there is no direct mention of her home environment; however, the fact that she willingly goes back home for the Christmas holidays demonstrates her positive relationship with her parents. This is in sharp contrast to Harry, who is reluctant to go back to the Dursley's over the holidays as he would much rather stay at Hogwarts (Rowling 211); furthermore, he would not be welcomed by his foster family.

Ron's interaction with his family, on the other hand, is more obvious (as his brothers are students at the same school). The reader is also acquainted with Ron's mother when Harry meets her on the train platform both at the beginning and the end of the school semester (Rowling 103-109, 331-332). Ron clearly comes from a loving and supportive family. Eccleshare argues that due to Ron's caring family, he is emotionally strong, which enables him to support Harry mentally (Eccleshare 96). As opposed to his unsupportive aunt and uncle, Harry is acquainted with Ron's affectionate family and quickly becomes part of it. With them, he learns the significance of being valued as a human being.

In addition to the Weasleys' fondness of Harry, there are also teachers who care for him. Although Hagrid is not a teacher, he is indeed a Hogwarts staff member (he is the gamekeeper). He is, as already stated, the first person Harry interacts with from the magical community. Hagrid therefore becomes the first affectionate person in Harry's life.<sup>6</sup> Over the course of the story, Harry visits and socialises with the gamekeeper and their relationship thrives; by the end of the school year, Hagrid presents Harry with a most valuable gift: a photo album with pictures of Harry's parents (Rowling 326). This token is so profound that "Harry couldn't speak" (Rowling 326) to express his gratitude or to voice his appreciation.

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<sup>6</sup> Harry's parents are not taken into account as they died long before he could even remember them.

Although known as a just teacher who does not favour her own House (Rowling 148), McGonagall does in fact manifest particular fondness for Harry. Instead of punishing or expelling him from Hogwarts after his broomstick escapade on the first flying lesson, McGonagall instead appoints him Seeker of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. While doing so, she even complements him, stating that he is a “natural” (Rowling 165). Additionally, she suggests bending the “first-year rule”<sup>7</sup> (Rowling 166) in order to provide him with a Nimbus Two Thousand<sup>8</sup> (Rowling 166). The Transfiguration teacher’s affection towards Harry is made apparent when he is presented with a brand new broom from her. The gift is particularly significant to Harry, as this, besides Hedwig, is the only considerate present he has ever received.<sup>9</sup>

Having previously lacked a father figure, Harry now finds one in the Headmaster. Nel argues that Harry is “a child with few adults to guide him, a child who survives through his ability to adapt to the new surroundings [...]” (Nel 47). While living with his surrogate family, Harry had no adult who would advise and help him when in need. He was forced to depend on himself and acclimatise to whatever situation he found himself in. Even at Hogwarts, Harry has to depend on himself. Dumbledore, however, is the first person in Harry’s life who acts as a mentor for the boy.

The Professor is initially an enigma to Harry; nevertheless they establish a tentative sort of relationship by the end of the school year (Rowling ch17). From this point on, their relationship thrives and as Dumbledore claims in the fifth instalment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, that “our [his and Harry’s] relationship was [...] closer than that of headmaster and pupil” (Rowling 2003: 729).

Although he has acquired information about his parents and himself, Harry is not yet aware of the fact that Dumbledore is the one responsible for his being sent to the Dursleys. This pragmatic decision taken by Dumbledore stems from his fears of what fame can do to Harry, voicing his apprehension to McGonagall that “it would be enough to turn any boy’s head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won’t even remember!” (Rowling 20).<sup>10</sup> The Headmaster’s care for Harry is evident throughout the story as he invariably appears in moments where Harry finds no one else

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<sup>7</sup> The First-year rule states that no first-years are allowed to play on the Quidditch team, nor are they allowed to have a broom with them to school.

<sup>8</sup> The fastest broom on the market (Rowling, 82)

<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the insignificant gifts Harry receives from his relatives, such as a coin for Christmas. (Rowling 217)

<sup>10</sup> Note that the real reason as to why Dumbledore places Harry with the Dursley’s are thoroughly answered in the last three books. Please read Chapter 37 “The lost prophecy” in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* for a relatively quick explanation.

for guidance. The Professor provides words of wisdom and offers Harry answers to his unspoken questions. One such occasion is during one of Harry's midnight visits to the Mirror of Erised. Harry has no knowledge of the Mirror's powers, whereas Dumbledore discerns the danger of it. He enlightens Harry of its function and advises him not to seek for it as it will be relocated. He claims that "it does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live" (Rowling 231), to ascertain that Harry understands the seriousness of the situation and that he will be able to carry on with his every day life.

Waking up in the Hospital Wing after the confrontation with Quirrell and Voldemort, Harry finds the Professor at his side (Rowling 318). The visit is not only caused by Dumbledore's need to assure Harry of the Stone's whereabouts, but also to ensure of the boy's health. As Harry immediately takes the opportunity to talk about the event, Dumbledore instead tries to calm him down, not wanting to jeopardise Harry's recovery (Rowling 318). Harry, who has not yet fully grasped Dumbledore's intentions, believes that the Headmaster is only interested in the Stone; he cannot comprehend that Dumbledore is worried about him. The Professor must thus, in an unswerving manner, tell Harry "not the Stone, boy, you – the effort involved nearly killing you. For one terrible moment there, I was afraid it had" (Rowling 319). This notion contributes to the reader's understanding of Dumbledore's true feelings towards Harry and his concern for Harry's wellbeing.

As already established, Harry's first ten years were spent as an unwanted boy. These years are in sharp contrast to his coming to Hogwarts and gaining friends. Along with befriending people, Harry also starts receiving gifts. One such instance is on Christmas Eve, when he wakes up to find presents at the foot of his bed. Not expecting presents at all, Harry says to Ron "will you look at this? I've got presents" (Rowling 216). Ron, who is used to receiving Christmas presents utters "what did you expect, turnips?" (Rowling 216). The Dursley's gift (a coin) demonstrates their opinion of Harry: as worthless as a fifty-pence coin. This is in sharp contrast with the home-made sweets and the hand-knitted "Weasley jumper" (Rowling 217) that Mrs Weasley has made for Harry. Catherine Deavel and David Deavel argue that the Weasleys' "main role as a family is to provide a sanctuary for Harry" (Deavel 60). This is evident in the gift of the "Weasley jumper", which is a representation of the family embracing Harry as a part of their household and their unspoken promise to care for him.

In addition, Deavel and Deavel argue that the Weasleys "effectively adopt" Harry (Deavel 60); this conception is strengthened by Mrs Weasley's distress when learning

that Fred and George want to ask Harry about Voldemort and his memories of the man's appearances. She forbids them from harming him by asking questions about his troubled past (Rowling 108). Though Mrs Weasley has no relation to Harry at that point, she ascertains that he will not be hurt if she can prevent it.

The presents which Harry receives while in the Hospital, are yet another evidence of people who are concerned for his wellbeing. The large number of gifts represents the number of people who are worried and anxious for his recovery. In addition to the gifts Harry has received from his friends, there are also many presents from other Hogwarts students and "admirers" (Rowling 318) who wish him well.

Dumbledore furthermore informs Harry that Ron and Hermione have been "extremely worried" (Rowling 319) and that they will be "most relieved" (Rowling 319) to find him in good health. The use of the superlatives further demonstrates Ron's and Hermione's concern for Harry. These actions show the great changes that have taken place in Harry's life since starting at Hogwarts. Initially having no-one who cared for him changes into having a whole school, and particularly two best friends, who loves him and worry about his health.

Over the course of his first school year Harry undergoes many changes, which can be distinguished by the alterations in his personality. He is initially a reserved boy with low self-esteem and no perception of his own worth. Goodfriend describes Harry as an "avoidant" child, explaining that "avoidant children are often treated as strangers by their parents, and vice versa" (Goodfriend 84). A sign of a child being "avoidant" can be the relief they feel if the parents leave. Harry displays this trait when, with his hopes up, he asks the Dursley's to leave him alone at home while they are at the Zoo (Rowling 30). He demonstrates a fervent wish to be left alone without his aunt's and uncle's vigilant eyes on him; this would give him the opportunity to act like a normal child who is allowed to freely play on the computer or watch a television show of his liking (Rowling 30).

Additionally, Goodfriend argues that "avoidant children" do not attempt to make any strong bonds and they do not like - nor believe in themselves (Goodfriend 85). Harry shows signs of all the above traits prior to starting Hogwarts. However, soon after attending Hogwarts, Harry demonstrates a new understanding of his "personal values" (Lukens 85): he learns to befriend people and discovers that he is indeed a human worthy of love and care. Harry's changes correspond to Lukens's definition that a dynamic character "is one who changes in the course of the action" (Lukens 85), and that they are also "[...] not only affected by events, but his or her nature may also bring about various

events” (Lukens 85). The changes Harry undergoes are a result of the many ordeals he experiences: the discovery of the Mirror of Erised, gaining knowledge about his deceased parents and last but certainly not least, the strife with Voldemort. Many of the events also change because Harry himself affects their outcome, such as preventing Voldemort from gaining the Stone.

The events Harry endures transform him from a lonely insecure child to a brave and loved boy. He learns the true value of kinship and of being a part of a society where he is not frowned upon. The transformation is most notable at King’s Cross, where he demonstrates his newfound view of his relationship with the Dursleys; he no longer fears them and concludes that they are indeed more afraid of him and his magical abilities. With this knowledge, Harry leaves his friends with a “grin” (Rowling 332) on his face, ready to face the summer’s challenges.

Recognising which world, muggle or magical, is the more suitable for Harry demands an analysis of how people from the different worlds treat him. As demonstrated here, Harry is more comfortable in the world with wizards and witches. The reason for his contentment is his recognition that he is accepted and cared for. In the muggle world, Harry had no other acquaintances than his family and Mrs Figg (his usual nanny).<sup>11</sup>

Harry’s vulnerability is a result of the muggles’, and specially the Dursley’s, poor treatment of him. Natov argues that Harry, because he is an orphan dressed in Dudley’s old clothes and has a shrunken uniform, is different; he is an outsider and a perfect victim for the boys at school (Natov 312). Natov further argues that “nowhere is Harry safe. And nowhere is he loved, which only provides the urgency for a compensatory endowment of magical powers.” (Natov 312). This claim thus points to the magical world as more beneficial for Harry.

That the magical world is more appropriate for Harry is demonstrated by the way people interact with and around him. They are friendly to him and embrace him; they even divulge the truth about his birth which, until then, the Dursley’s had withheld from him (Natov 312). The revelations he acquires in the magical world are therefore all unfamiliar and out of reach for Harry in the muggle community. The largest difference between the two worlds, however, is the Dursleys’ contra James’s and Lily’s relationship with Harry. Through different people in the magical world, Harry learns of his parents’

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<sup>11</sup> Mrs Figg is not mean towards Harry: she even treats him with an (old) chocolate cake once (Rowling 40) which is in stark contrast to the Dursley’s treatment. Nevertheless, Harry “hate[s] it there” because he felt uncomfortable with her and her cats (Rowling 29).

“powerful” love for him and their dying wish to protect him from harms way (Rowling 321). This is contrasted with the Dursleys’ harsh treatment of a child whom they hate for no apparent reason.<sup>12</sup>

This essay has strived to present the readers with a broader insight into Harry’s many characteristics and the changes he undergoes. Initially a boy with no significance in the muggle world, Harry discovers the magical world and his purpose in it. Over the course of one school year Harry unfolds many truths not only about himself, but also about his family; he learns that he comes from a family of love and magic. This breakthrough makes him realise that he is not as worthless as the Dursleys’ have tried to make him believe. Harry thus gains an understanding of his own character and even manages to unearth a hidden talent within himself as he flies a broomstick for the first time ever.

Moreover, the magical world and Hogwarts contribute with many positive changes in Harry’s life. He meets people who care for him and embrace him as an equal; they appreciate his character and praise him for having outlived Voldemort. Due to the changes in his life, Harry undergoes a transformation in character: his self-esteem improves radically, he learns to befriend and love people and after having finished his first year at Hogwarts, he no longer fears the Dursleys.

Though several aspects of Harry’s features have been discussed and analysed, there are still many remaining as the focus of this essay has been on the first instalment in the series. For an overall understanding of Harry and the many changes he undergoes during the seven years at Hogwarts, an essay of larger magnitude is required. Harry’s character, as stated above, is round and dynamic: he has and will continue to change repeatedly due to the chain of events he experiences in the seven books. The six other books confirm the truth of Ollivander’s prediction in *The Sorcerer’s Stone* that the reader should expect great things from Harry Potter.

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<sup>12</sup> A possible reason for Aunt Petunia’s hatred for Harry (and his parents) is given in the later instalments. That reason will, however, not be considered in this essay.

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